



# Alpine Garden Society

## Hampshire Group

### Newsletter: September 2022



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Page 14	Fifty Years Ago (September 1972) – A.G.S. Bulletin Volume 40 No. 3 p.222 <i>Phyteuma comosum</i> (now known as <i>Physoplexis comosa</i> ) by M. Northway	<a href="mailto:lobs@mac.com">lobs@mac.com</a> Deadline for the next edition is 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2023
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### Chairman's Message

Here we go again. April we had our AGM at Chilworth with a talk from Tim Ingram of Compton Ash Nursery on 'Gardens of the Czech Republic'. A fascinating incite into the re introduction of crevice garden design through Czechoslovakian eyes. We saw photos of some fantastic gardens.

We finished last year off with the May meeting and on that night we announced the photo competition results and viewed all the entries. I would like to thank Steve and Angela Lobley for organising the entries and creating the viewing format. many thanks to everyone who entered and especially the winners, well done. So get snapping ready for the next one.

The winners were:

- 1<sup>st</sup> - Common Spotted Orchid taken by Victor Humphrey
- 2<sup>nd</sup> - Echiverria – taken by Ange Lobley
- 3<sup>rd</sup> - Erythronium 'White Beauty ' taken by Jo Whitfield

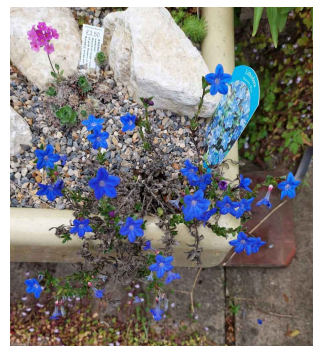
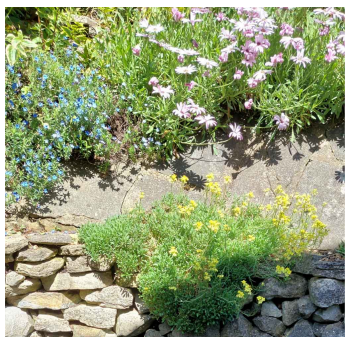
Once again we have a full and interesting programme of talks and slides, many thanks to Paddy for arranging them. Some meetings will be face to face and some (December, January and February) will be via zoom.

It has been a strange Spring and Summer this year, very dry and warm which resulted in lots of problems for many plants unless you constantly water. We have been watering very sparingly, partially to conserved water but also to ensure only those plants who absolutely need it get it. You may recall I potted up some Belfast sinks with various alpiners. Most have done well but one or two plants have given up the fight. I will have to replace them once the weather settles down. Some plants have enjoyed the dryness and have performed brilliantly.

I would like to thank all of the committee members and officers on your behalf for their continued enthusiasm. Anyone wishing to join the committee please contact myself or Ben you will be welcomed with open arms.

I look forwards to seeing you at our next meeting in September.

Here are a few photos from our garden taken this spring and early summer.



## Group Officers

<b>Chairman</b>	Malcolm Calvert	<b>Treasurer, Hon. Group &amp; Membership Secretary</b>	Ben Parmee
<b>Vice-Chairman</b>			
<b>Newsletter Editor's</b>	Ange & Steve Lobley	<b>Teas</b>	Jackie & Mike Gurd
<b>Committee</b>	Dorothy Searle	Jo Whitfield	Terry Raisborough
	David Hanslow	Paddy Parmee	

## 2022 Autumn Programme

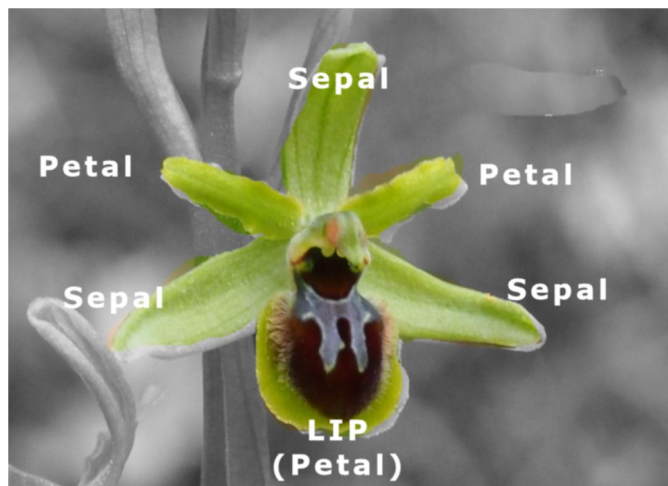
<b>Dates – all Thursdays 7 for 7.30 pm</b>	<b>Speakers</b>	<b>Topic</b>
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September 2022</b>	Raz Chizu – Horticulturalist and AGS Digital Manager	<i><b>Autumn bulbs in the Peloponnese and the last of the summer flowers</b></i>
<b>27<sup>th</sup> October 2022</b>	Christopher Bailes – AGS Immediate past President	<i><b>The Dry Garden: adapting to a changing climate</b></i>
<b>24<sup>th</sup> November 2022</b>	Dr Timothy Walker – Oxford Botanic Garden	<i><b>A Rockery in the Garden</b></i>
<b>8<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – via Zoom</b>	Short presentations by Malcolm Calvert, Christine Hughes and AN other, interspersed by the annual quiz.	<i><b>Various</b></i>



## My Family of Orchids/ part 2 of a series

DAVID DICKENSON [naturescene.net](http://naturescene.net)

An exceptionally early hot dry growing season in the Cévennes left many of our orchids in 2022 thinking 'I'll just stay down underground this year, with my comfy fungal fleece, skip the sex, and pop up for a spot of breeding next year'. Even so, a 70% drop in floral spikes still left a display that any British person would die for.



My quest is to make you all experts in our local Cévenol orchids by personalising each flower with a face or a body. I am sure that none of you readers have forgotten that every orchid has 3 sepals and 3 petals, one of which (the lip) is highly specialised

### Group THREE: *OPHRYS*—the INSECTS

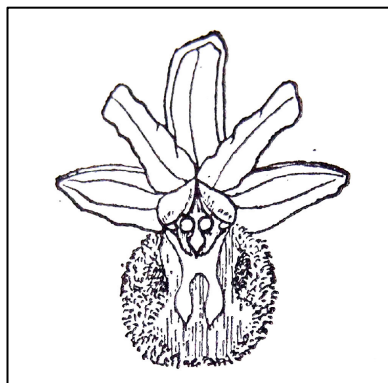
We are assured that the genus *Ophrys*, of which we boast 10 species in the Cévennes, use their charms to persuade a hapless insect that their lip is the lover of their dreams. A head-on collision with a couple of sacs of pollen is all the satisfaction they are likely to get, which they carry off to fertilise their next misguided assignation.

Botany and entomology are not natural bedfellows, and please bear in mind that it was not me who named them after a supposed resemblance to spiders, bees or flies. Both you and the insect will need to let your imagination run wild to see these as suitable mating partners

#### 1. Early Spider Orchid *Ophrys sphegodes* (*O. aranifera*)

Plentiful on short-cropped pastures in early spring, its simple form serves well as a reference for identifying other *Ophrys* species.

A very drab fellow, but boasting a big fat belly typical of any spider you may wish to squash.



The two little stumpy legs at the top of the lip are called gibbosities, and their form can be useful in determining the species



## 2. Small Spider Orchid *Ophrys virescens*

An Early Spider with anorexia. The former Latin name is *Ophrys litigosa*: the French name is still *Ophrys litigieux*, or litigious orchid, because many orchid lovers spend their springtime arguing about whether it is a Small Spider or an Early Spider.



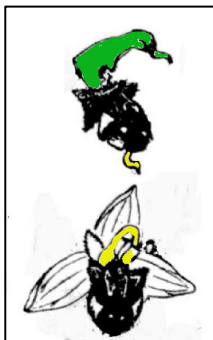
If its belly is shorter than the lower sepals, insist on it being the Small Spider. Anything bigger, take it as an Early Spider and tell your contentious companion to get a grip.



### 3. Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*

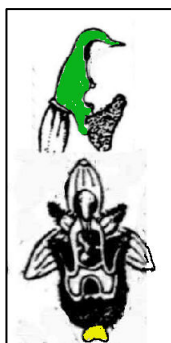
The most photogenic, and thus most photographed *Ophrys* across Europe. Its fat belly kind of resembles a bumble bee, and importantly its yellow sting is tucked up under its belly.

Look closely at its gynostem (green in the design). It has a double hook, and if you are lucky and no insect has yet tried its chances, you will see the pollen sacs dangling from the base, like a pair of wrecking balls.

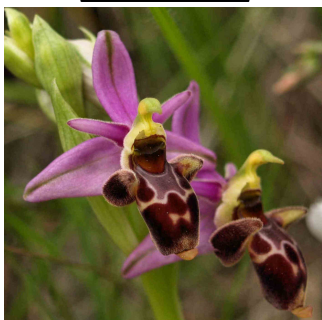


### 4. Woodcock Orchid *Ophrys scolopax*

Often mistaken for a Bee Orchid, the Woodcock is clearly quite a slim-Jim. Its yellow appendage is always visible without the need to inspect its underparts.



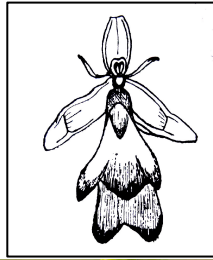
To remove all doubt, there is only a single loop on its gynostem, which to the hunting fraternity supposedly resembles the beak of a woodcock.





## 5. Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera*

No prizes for identifying this one, as it really does resemble a fly

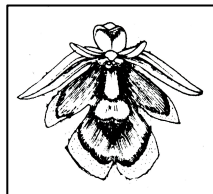


Note the colour of its antennae (the tiny upper petals) though. These are always a matching brown. This will come in handy when you are arguing about some regional look-alikes.



## 6. Early Fly Orchid *Ophrys aymoninii*

The most sought-after orchid in our region. Apart from its beauty, this endemic is found nowhere else in the world.



This is a Fly Orchid all dressed up with nowhere to go. It has a yellow skirt, and a bright silver-blue buckle around its waist.

It is not uncommon on the rocky slopes and pastures of the Causse Méjean, our principal limestone plateau.



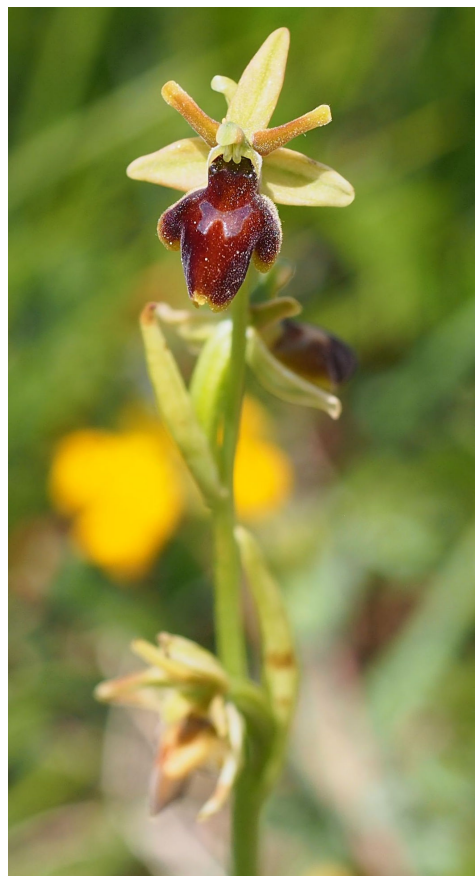
## 7. Orchid of Fabre *Ophrys* ×*fabrei*

This *Ophrys* was designed quite simply just to confuse orchid hunters. It is a vigorous hybrid cross between *Ophrys aymoninii* and *Ophrys virescens*, and is furiously variable in form. Mostly, though, it sports large antennae which are yellow streaked with brown.



Our most famous botanist in the region, Christian Bernard, described and named this orchid after his father-in-law, his inspiration and mentor.

There is little chance that you will be perplexed by coming across this orchid, although at the rare sites on the Causse Méjean where it is to be found, it can be quite numerous.





## The INTRUDERS

In recent years, three more *Ophrys* species have been discovered in Lozère, that are usually represented in the neighbouring department of the Aveyron. It is tempting to put this down to global warming, but my suspicion is an influx of orchid-hunters from this similarly rich area carried their tiny seeds and companion fungi on their boots, or perhaps they dropped off their camera lens.

### 8. Yellow *Ophrys* *Ophrys lutea*



Little chance of being mistaken with the identity of this bright yellow orchid with its turned up apron, but little chance of finding it either.

Commonplace over the Mediterranean divide, there are just a four known sites in Lozère; including a single spike that our botany group found at Nîmes-le-Vieux in 2021.

### 9. Furrowed *Ophrys* *Ophrys funerea*



Looking more like a cuddly toy than an insect, this orchid has now been spotted at a handful of places, sometimes in dense colonies.

The deep furrow where his blue jacket does up is hard to see in a photo, but makes an easy point of identification in the field.

### 10. Aveyron *Ophrys* *Ophrys aveyronensis*



A single spike of this stunning rare endemic of the Aveyron was discovered on the Causse Méjean in 2013, and has flowered every subsequent year.

It is fast disappearing from the Aveyron, and we would be more than pleased to give it a new home *chez nous*.

## Growing Meconopsis in the South of England by Ben Parmee

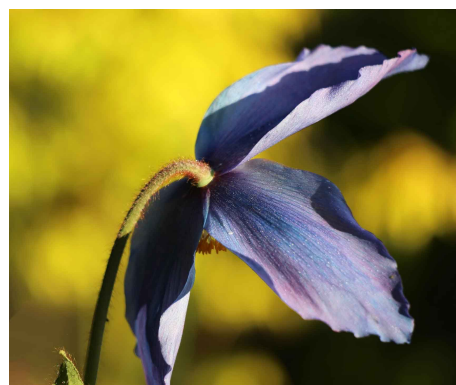
### The Himalayan 'Big' Blue Poppy



As with most alpine plants, my introduction to Meconopsis is thanks to Paddy as I had never even heard of them before we got together in 2009. My earliest recollection was during a visit to RHS Harlow Carr, where I was transfixed by the vivid blue of these statuesque perennials. The second was when Paddy took me to Forde Abbey Gardens in Somerset. This second experience gave me some hope that I might actually be able to grow them in our Hampshire garden as all I had read and heard was that they are notoriously difficult to grow this far south.

#### Background

Whilst I have titled this article 'the Himalayan 'Big' Blue Poppy' Meconopsis come in a variety of colours, blue, white, yellow, red and pink and feature the 'big blues' that can reach 6-8 feet in the wild, indeed in the garden we have grown them to over a metre tall, to the more diminutive species such as *M. punicea*, *M. quintuplinervia* and the hybrid *M. cookei* 'Old Rose', all of which we have grown (and lost!) at some stage. Most books and websites on the subject talk about Meconopsis being short-lived in cultivation and so a regular supply is essential.



#### Sourcing and Propagation

I have to confess to buying my first plants, *M. betonicifolia* (now known as 'Lingholm' one of the more commonly offered varieties), from RD Plants (Rodney Davies) who Paddy has known for many years and he supplied Forde Abbey Nursery with many plants. For those who may not know Rod, he is the kindest person and so encouraging to an absolute alpine novice as I was in 2010 (and Paddy would probably say I still am!).



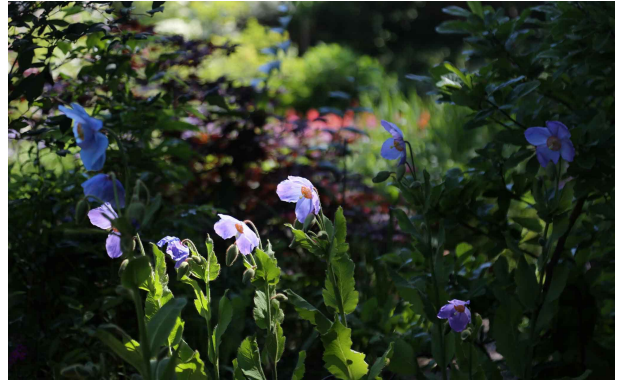
Most years we will look to buy a small number of new plants to supplement the perennials that do return, and most do, and show themselves during March-April, always an exciting time of year when the buds break and the furry leaves reveal themselves.

My first plants flowered successfully to the extent that I was able to collect and sow seed, and indeed I managed to germinate a number and raise them to flowering. Seed collection can be hit and miss and does depend on the variety as some do not produce seed (*M. × sheldonii* 'Slieve Donard' as an example) however, these can be propagated by division after flowering. I use a humus rich mix including plenty of leaf mould as these are hungry plants. Others such as *M.*

horridula are monocarpic and therefore seed collection is essential to keep this variety going, sadly our one experience with a flowering *M. horridula* died as it failed to set seed!

### Where we Grow

For those of you who have visited our garden at 'Meconopsis-time' will have seen that we have tried to give them the best conditions possible. We have a damp ditch running from our pond to the stream which is in shade most of the day with just some late afternoon sun. In the wild *Meconopsis* grow close to the tree-line in the high Himalayas, either in the woods or just below in wet meadows and they receive plentiful summer rainfall. By growing them on the banks of the ditch, they receive constant humidity and being on the slope, they are reasonably well drained.



### Growing Success



Despite *Meconopsis* being a short-lived perennial, we are pleased if we manage to keep individual plants for 3-4 years. So for the past 12-13 years I don't think we have been without our 'Big Blue' friends (or the smaller varieties) and with seedlings coming along and others ready for splitting we hope that our visitors can continue to enjoy our little bit of the Himalayas each May.

This year was exceptional when the Mec's Himalayan cousin, *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the Giant Himalayan Lily, flowered at the same time and was spectacular. This is a monocarpic species taking about 7 years to flower, but thankfully puts out offsets so seed germination is not quite so essential!

*All photos by Paddy Parmee*



## Keith & Ros Wiley - 'Wildside' by Paddy Parmee

I first met Keith at the AGS 50th Anniversary weekend at Darlington Hall, I was 28 and he spoke with such passion. I'd never heard anyone speak so enthusiastically about growing plants and how to use them in a garden setting; I was hooked.

For my mother's 60th birthday I took her to the Garden House where Keith was Head Gardener; what a wonderful time it was seeing just what he'd done, his planting skills, lifting the skirts of shrubs & trees, under planting in drifts with so many plants giving a beautiful feel to the whole garden; what joy.

In 2004 Keith & his wife Ros located to some land not far from the Garden House where they built together 'Wildside', to what we see today.

They lived in a wood cabin for many years until a house was built, but even today it is still not totally finished!



They both worked hard, Ros propagating and growing plants while Keith developed the garden into his vision of what he'd seen on his many trips to South Africa and other countries replicating how plants grew in drifts in the wild. You can't believe a flat bit of land could be turned into gullies and slopes, ponds and crevices. He has planted so much I've never been disappointed when visiting, his planting skills along with his development of the land is magical; with Ros by his side capturing its beauty on canvas her art was an escape to be the

creative woman she was.

In 2019 Ros was diagnosed with cancer and she sadly died later that year.

Keith was devastated, he'd had a vision of growing old together surrounded by all that they loved and had created.



So Keith took it upon himself to make her a Tribute Garden full of all she was, in one of the 'canyons'. So far the landscaping and planting are almost finished. One of the last parts of the landscaping being completed, hopefully this year, is the cascading series of ponds and waterfalls and the installation of pumps to circulate the water.

Visitors, groups and other benefactors have helped fund this part of the project, including Hampshire AGS.

## Our Donations

Ben and I open our garden several times a year selling plants & providing refreshments. Historically, funds raised have been used to support Hampshire AGS Group however in 2021 we were inspired by Keith's vision to create the Tribute Garden and so we decided that the donations for refreshments should go to support Keith's project. You all have helped with your generous donations over the last two years to help Keith make his vision a reality; we as a Group, plus donations received from our 'lockdown' Zoom guests, have donated over a £1000 so thank you.



## The Respite Centre



Now to the last phase which I hope you will continue to support us again when we open in 2023. Overlooking the Tribute Garden Keith has erected a beautiful cabin and when fully fitted out the intention is that this will be used as a Respite Centre for cancer sufferers to enjoy the peace and tranquility the garden offers. The pictures show the wonderful planting and position of the cabin with an amazing view over the garden and cascade of ponds and waterfalls. The inside of the Respite Centre needs furnishing with equipment for people with end of life care to come and stay to enjoy all that Keith has made happen and this is what we hope to support next year.

**A memory of his loving wife Ros.**



## Fifty Years Ago (September 1972) – A.G.S. Bulletin Volume 40 No. 3 p.222

### *Phyteuma comosum* (now known as *Physoplexis comosa*) by M. Northway

Under the title *Plant Portraits*, M. Northway chose to first write about *Phyteuma comosum* 'as one of that small, select group of plants – *Calceolaria darwinii* and *Campanula zoysii* are other examples which spring immediately to mind – which manage to be at the same time distinctly odd and remarkably beautiful. Like the other two, it comes from places, which would seem to guarantee its difficulty in our gardens – narrow, lofty crevices in a few hot limestone cliffs in the Southern Alps and the Dolomites'.

In cultivation, *P. comosum* offers few problems but several surprises. Starvation and attempt to restrict the roots – measures which natural habitat would appear to suggest – result in very slow growth and poor flowering. At least, this has been my experience. Both in troughs and pots, well-drained, gritty soil, with the crown planted between a couple of pieces of limestone and with plenty of other walnut-sized lumps around the roots, will do far more to ensure steady growth and free-flowering. However, this cannot be guaranteed, since seedlings appear to vary greatly in vigour and will to bloom. I have not made any systematic attempt to observe the characteristics of the most free-flowering forms, but it does seem that the greyer-leaved types appear most frequently and successfully on the Show benches.

*P. comosum* seems to differ little in stature or flower size-heads 4 cm. across on 7 cm. stems are normal- but colour is a different matter. The range is not great, but some forms have flowers of a delicate milky-blue, while in others a slaty tone predominates, or the blue is drained totally away. The photography in T. P. Barneby's *European Alpine Flowers in Colour*, plate 85/3, shows this tendency at its worse. It is understandable, when even the poorest forms are fascinating in shape, that the owner of a plant that has taken three years to flower from seed will be reluctant to discard it. Nevertheless, selection of the best colour-forms is well worthwhile, and fresh seed germinates rapidly.

There is one habit of *P. comosum* that can be rather alarming. Fairly soon after blooming the top-growth goes suddenly dormant, remaining so until late spring. There is no need to worry about this, even though no surface signs of life appear. One point may be worth attention: cut dead stems away. If they are pulled off, they may bring live crowns with them.

Every reference to this plant seems to warn against the dire perils of slugs. Certainly the danger is there, but I have always found the belly-footed mobs far keener to assault other plants, such as *Cyananthus lobatus* when it starts into growth in late winter. No-one ever seems to mention this danger with *Cyananthus*, however. Certainly the problem with phyteumas is not as excessive as we are led to believe, at least in pots and troughs. Perhaps when I put out a few plants in the open ground I shall have reason to regret these words.'

This article reminded me of a trip that my husband, Trevor and I made to the Dolomites in July 2003. We intended to take the cable car to the top of the Marmolada, the highest mountain in the Dolomites. It was cloudy when we arrived so we decided to walk down the nearby gorge, only to meet Kate and Dr John Page and their friends. Dr Page regularly gave talks to our Hampshire Group and he and his wife stayed with us. Needless to say, we were all there to enjoy the walk and to photograph *Physoplexis comosa*.





*Physoplexis comosa*



Kate & Dr John Page on the right, with their friends Louise and Mike

## Peter Watt's Obituary

Peter and Penny Watt were both doctors by profession - they met at medical school - who in their spare time grew alpine plants and also frequently went to see them in the wild. In 1994, when I first became interested in alpinism, I joined the Hampshire Group where Penny Watt was chairman. I first remember Peter when he gave a quite humorous talk as a sort of obituary for Lionel and Joyce Bacon. There was also the occasion when Brian Mathew gave a talk and the Watts put on the display table a very good form of what is now called *Cyclamen maritimum* - they subsequently kindly let me have a few seeds (4). I suspect that that was all it produced. I now have a very good plant, which is about twenty years old and has yet to produce a seed! The point I am making is that they were very generous giving seed from their high quality collection of plants. They had some very good *Crocus* including the one that was named after them, *Crocus wattiorum*, which occurred on the same site as the above *Cyclamen*, now beneath the Kemer bypass.

Peter and Penny were great travellers. They used to take two holidays every year, usually in the Eastern Mediterranean and walk into the mountains to look at plants. As a result they had an encyclopaedic knowledge of sites to visit. This was often very useful when I was planning a holiday!

Latterly I used to see them frequently at both AGS and *Cyclamen* Society shows, where a frequent topic was the naming of plants. Peter was essentially a 'lumper', and bemoaned the practice of unnecessarily splitting a species into several new ones, when there was very little difference between them.

Peter and Penny were always very hospitable and enjoyed showing visitors round the greenhouses and garden at Morcombelake. Like many others I suspect, I will miss my visits there and chatting to Peter.

Our thoughts are with Penny and her family.

*Ian Robertson*