



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY
ULSTER GROUP



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Newsletter No. 11 August 2012



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Editorial

Through the year-

Since the last issue your editor has been on her own Olympian travels, both around the world and climbing mountains, and now finds herself busy catching up with all the home tasks, especially the Newsletter. As a result it will have a slightly different format this year. We ended last year looking forward to the late summer picnic and so this time we will travel from Late Summer picnic 2011 to Late Summer picnic 2012.

While we did not have our long trip together this summer, many of our members visited places and gardens both at home and abroad, seeing many plants, and now sharing their experiences with everyone. Here I feel I must pay tribute on behalf of everyone to Margaret and Kay for the many pleasant memories they gave us all over the years with their dedication and organisation of the many garden trips.

Time always brings changes and at the AGM the committee will see some different faces while others will take a well earned rest - but not too much as we will still be relying on them to continue to help with their expertise and experience. We have always tried to make our local group as inclusive as possible so that everyone can play their part and all share the burdens. However this does not diminish in any way our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to both our outgoing Hon. Secretary, William, who has given us sterling service over the past years and to Kay, whose enthusiasm and humour never fails to surprise and add to the overall enjoyment - somehow I both hope and feel they will both continue to be active and enliven our meetings. Our Hon. Treasurer, Margaret, who over the years has contributed and played a major role in the group, continues as treasurer but the committee is trying to make her job a little easier by sharing the responsibility of membership so please **read the Information page.**

Heather has excelled with this year's programme having listened to Harold and concentrated more on the Alpine aspect of the society but also including great gardeners and plantsmen such as Keith Wiley and Karl Wright. Having heard both speak and also visited Karl's Caher Bridge garden, I can assure you that the group is in for a treat and please bring friends and other gardeners for a really enjoyable afternoon - but that happens every meeting!

Obituary Robina Margaret (Robin) Smiley 1921 - 2012

While unable to attend meetings in recent years Robin continued to take a keen interest in the group and I shall always remember both Robin and her late husband , Lex, as two of our most reliable members, often last to leave after clearing up after lectures. Robin was a very knowledgeable gardener with an impish sense of humour and we send our sincere sympathy to the family circle.



Caroline Logan Our sympathy also goes to the family and friends of Caroline who sadly passed away this month.

We would be very grateful if fellow members could let the Hon. Secretary or committee know of illnesses or deaths in the group as we like to remember all our past members.

2011 Late Summer Picnic. Saturday 20th August found AGS members and friends making their way to Margaret Glynn's garden in Ballymena. The weather was kind and it was interesting to see Margaret's wonderful collection of plants in a different season. Needless to say plant sales, hospitality and social picnic were all enjoyed in a beautiful setting as the pictures show.

This is a garden that repays a second and third walk around as Margaret has choice plants all year round as the keen plant hunters in the photo know.





Argentina; The Unnamed Oxalis - Joan McCaughey

In January 2011 Liam and I had a surprise email from Ger van den Beuken, a Dutch nurseryman, inviting us to join an international party visiting Northern Patagonia and Mendoza in Argentina in January 2012. To be honest, we were flattered to be asked to join names such as Erich Pasch from Germany, Anne Spiegel from New England, the Birks from Norway along with plantspeople from Russia, Poland, Holland, England, and led by Argentinian botanist, Marcela Ferreyra and, while feeling totally inadequate, I thought we might learn



something from all the experts.

The beginning of January saw us leaving cold Northern Ireland to arrive in a heatwave in Buenos Aires and join the party for 19 days, travelling along the Andes on the border with Chile, from Neuquen to Mendoza. It is easy to forget how big a country Argentina is and we seemed to spend a lot of time travelling, but the scenery was magnificent and a geologist's dream with every colour of rock

imaginable. We could imagine some of the world's largest dinosaurs in this landscape wandering among the araucarias - their bones are now on display in many museums. At first flowers in this arid land seemed less plentiful than further south but only now, as we review our photos, do we realise what a vast flora we experienced and most of it new to me.

However after hearing a comment from David Ledsham on 'plants you will never see let alone grow', I am not going to give you a long account of places and plants but illustrate the frustrations of seeing plants in the wild.

If there is one person who can grow

oxalis it is Harold McBride in Northern Ireland, and we found a new and beautiful oxalis! So far I have not found a name for it - is it new to science ? - Marcela



didn't know it, so it may well be, but it grows in the Lago del Diamante National Park and perhaps elsewhere. After a long day we found it on our way down after camping at 3000m the previous night, on the edge of the lake below the still active Volcan Maipo. The oxalis was just coming into flower among the rocks near the entrance to the park and our time was short. Its speckled peach flowers blended in with the bronze leaves and it nestled among rocks of a similar colour , well camouflaged. Liam and I



Chaetanthera spatulifolia

only bring back photos but I just hope somebody someday will legally collect seed and Harold may yet have the pleasure of growing it.

Mindful of David's remarks I have included photos of a few plants that might be grown here, given protection from frost and wet - *Calandrinia affinis* and *C. caespitosa* were found growing together giving a floral display of every hue and colour- *Chaetanthera spatulifolia* - definitely one for the alpine house as is the *Rhodophiala*



Calandrinia caespitosa and *C. affinis*

rhodolirion on the cover. In our travels over the past 12 months I have seen so many plants that might be grown here and while very aware of conservation, I do hope that there is still room and permission for some seed to be collected that people may have yet the pleasure of seeing the flowers at home as we can't all travel to far away places. In the meantime I trust that Liam and I will give you some pleasure by sharing our photos. Did I learn anything? - the art and patience in taking photographs from Erich Pasch and again the patience and work in naming all the plants from Kees Jan van Zwienen - I just haven't put it into practice yet.

Snowdrop Gala Kay McDowell

On Friday 3rd of February, having set the sat nav, June Dougherty and I set off for Sandbrook House in Co. Carlow. This was to be the location for Ireland's first Snowdrop Gala organised by Hester Forde and Robert Miller from Altamont Gardens. We were a little unsure of what lay ahead of us, especially the driving conditions at that time of year but fortunately we had a very pleasant and uneventful journey. We were impressed when we drove up the avenue to



Sandbrook House. It is a large and elegant period country manor built in the early 1700's in Queen Anne style. We were welcomed by the housekeeper and shown into the kitchen for a very inviting cup of tea and freshly baked scones. Before dinner we all met for drinks in the drawing room, where a large log fire was burning. The atmosphere was warm and friendly with everyone anticipating a great weekend to come. We were joined for dinner that evening by Robert and the guest speakers. Dinner was very informal and consisted of delicious home cooked pies served around the large kitchen table and washed down of course with excellent wine. The next morning after breakfast the day started with registration and followed with our first lecture in the adjoining barn. Alan Street from Avon Bulbs gave a very interesting talk on snowdrops starting with their history. In Victorian times Snowdrops were a symbol of hope and therefore placed on graves. Their history is tinged with the sadness of those who died. Our next lecture was by Richard Bramley from Farmyard Nurseries in Wales. He also gave a very informative talk on the different types of Hellebores and how to grow them successfully. An excellent buffet lunch was served in the house to a large group of enthusiasts. After lunch we had a superb talk by Jim Almond on Special Snowdrops and how to keep them. His first rule was "give some to a friend!" Following this there was a fast exit to the highlight of the day "**Snowdrop and Hellebore Sales at Altamont**". At registration everyone was given an entry ticket to this sale but as usual we had to queue to get our choices!



After the mad scramble, with our purses and wallets a lot lighter, the day culminated in a tour of Altamont's Snowdrop Collection with Head Gardener Paul Cutler. It was wonderful to wander round the grounds seeing all the treasures that had been buried on our visit last June. By the time this was over

the light was beginning to fade and the rain had started. June and I drove back to Sandbrook for another delightful evening among new friends and more food! We had a wonderful weekend, it was a well worth the trip and our congratulations go to Hester and Robert for having organised such a successful event and hopefully the first of more to follow.

Snowdrop Day

Once again the Ulster Group was indebted to our three County Antrim gardeners, Margaret, June and Bob, for opening their gardens in mid February.



There were to be found snowdrops, both rare and common, from the expensive to the wonderful mass display at June's, enough to delight any galanthophile!. But the rest of us could also enjoy the many shrubs and early spring flowers just coming into bloom. The colour and variety of hellebores brightens up the early garden and all the gardens had some real beauties while Bob's display of *Narcissus cyclamineus* was coveted by most of us.

With the present climate changes it is becoming more difficult to predict the optimum time for viewing snowdrops but they are always welcome whatever the month.



Flowers in Central Crete - Anne McCaughan

We visited Crete in April 2006, and stayed on a hillside overlooking the village of Plaka, above the beach at Almereida, on the north coast of Crete, east of Chania. On a piece of scrubland just above our villa, we saw a most wonderful collection of wild flowers. Those featured here are not the best that we saw, but the ones for which we have reasonable photographs.



Walking through the scrubland flora



Muscari comosum

Tragopogon hybridus (opposite) - an unlikely member of the daisy family, as its leaves, which are about 10cm long, resemble grass. The flowers are about 25mm across, born singly. They are at their best in the morning.

The Tassel Hyacinth - *Muscari comosum* - is a member of the lily family. The channeled leaves are about 20cm long and the flower stalk somewhat longer. The flower head can be 20cm tall and the tassels at the top are infertile. The fertile flowers are widely separated and brown.

Dracunculus vulgaris (the name means 'little dragon' and in Greece the long spathe is traditionally seen as a small dragon hiding in the spathe). This smells of rotting meat when in flower to attract the pollinating flies. The cluster of male and female flowers are at the base of the spathe. The fruit is an orange red berry. It is up to 100cm tall.



Dracunculus vulgaris



Tragopogon hybridus

I think this is a Tongue Orchid, *Serapias*, but don't know which one (probably *Serapias vomeracea* ed.).



Latvia:- A Visit to Jānis Rukšāns' Nursery

Some members of both the Ulster and Dublin AGS , along with the N.I. Daffodil group, had the great privilege of visiting Jānis Rukšāns' Nursery in Latvia for the last weekend in April. This was very smoothly arranged by Brian Duncan and Janis himself for what proved to be a most pleasant and educating experience for all.

Friday was spent visiting Jānis' nursery where we saw how bulbs are grown by an expert. We admired and coveted the many



tulips, fritillarias, corydalis, muscari, iris, etc., all in perfect condition and soon appreciated the amount of hard work and care involved in achieving this. While most plants are grown in bulb houses, designed and built by Jānis, many are also grown outside protected by snow in winter. There was a visit to his small forest and some members saw some of the rare arums that are being grown on the edge of this area. Jānis has also restored a stone building where he treated us to lunch followed by a short lecture on his work.

The following day we visited the nursery run by Guna, his wife. While she concentrates more on summer plants such as hostas and phlox, there was plenty to admire and after we drooled over a single form of *Sanguinaria canadensis*, spades were produced and plants given to whoever wanted them.



Like Jānis, Guna is a person of many talents, again treating us to a delicious outdoor homemade meal. This was followed by afternoon tea in a striking 16th century Russian Tea House, part of a Russian Manor House, where both our hosts are involved in restoration work.

Not only did we have the pleasure of seeing rare plants being cultivated but Jānis also organised our visit to show us some of the countryside and beautiful castles and historic buildings of Latvia.

On our last day his daughter took us round an interesting outdoor folk museum on the edge of Riga, where we spent the afternoon walking the cobbled streets of the old city with its historic churches and buildings.

The weather was exceptionally kind, the hospitality even more so and I think we were all amazed and surprised at the beauty of both the country and buildings of Latvia.

But above all we have to thank Jānis who, with his many commitments, found time to put such care and thought into arranging our weekend and also to Brian, whose friendship with Jānis allowed us all to share this special visit - one of the most enjoyable weekends I have ever spent - in the company of two great names in the world of bulbs!

Picnic at Timpany

Early in May Susan and Colin Tindall kindly provided the setting for a picnic at their nursery and garden in The Spa, Ballynahinch. While Susan's alpines tempted everyone, it was lovely on a glorious day to wander through their woodland garden and arboretum. There was a wonderful collection of trees looking their best with the new spring growth and something for future generations to look forward to.



Caucasus 2012, 29th June -14th July - Heather Smith

A visit to the north-west Caucasus, in Russia, produced beautiful scenery and lovely plants. This mountain range runs between the Black Sea and the Caspian



Sea and includes many countries that were part of the Soviet Union (such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), and others still part of the Russian Federation (such as Chechnya and Dagestan).

Here I intend to talk about a favourite Genus of mine – **Pedicularis**.

There were many *Pedicularis* big and small growing in different conditions and all but one were new to me. All had deeply cut leaves and somewhat variable flower colour.

The first area where they were found was in undulating sub-alpine upland meadows which were rather wet. Here, amongst *Geranium*, *Primula* and *Daphne* was the ubiquitous, bi-coloured, pale yellow *Pedicularis condensata* which had a slightly pyramidal shape. We soon became very familiar with it. How tall it grew depended on where it was growing and the competition, varying between 6 in. and 12 in.



In the same sort of areas and everywhere else as well was the small deep pink *Pedicularis nordmanniana*. This is a Caucasus endemic and is present, according to the books, in other places including north-east Turkey. It can grow at 2,000 metres in altitude, but seems to be equally happy at 3,200 metres on a ridge with *Gentiana pyrenaica*. The leaves generally became an attractive deep red

when the plant was in the open - as those of *P. verticillata* do in Switzerland.

Driving uphill in jeeps on a rocky track we stopped at a lake and found the tall, amazing *Pedicularis atropurpurea* which could be seen and recognized from a distance. It is always growing near fresh water and is variable in height from about 1ft 8in to 3ft 6in though by the lake it was closer to 4ft tall. The flowers are a deep red and the white hairs on the stem of the inflorescence form a spider's web-like effect. I am sure many people would like to grow it but it has been tried and proved 'difficult' as indeed most *Pedicularis* seem to be.



In the sub-alpine meadows could be found also the rather lovely *Pedicularis wilhelmsiana*. This species is much smaller than *P. atropurpurea* at 6in to 12in high. The flowers are bicolour pink and yellow with bracts growing out from between the flowers in the manner of *P. foliosa* in the Alps. It also has the thick white hairs on the inflorescence stem. While this species grows throughout the Caucasus and into north-east Iran it did not seem at all common where we were.

The only species growing in the meadows that I know from the Alps is *Pedicularis comosa*, a yellow species the flowers of which present a spiral form when viewed from above which is a good recognition attribute.

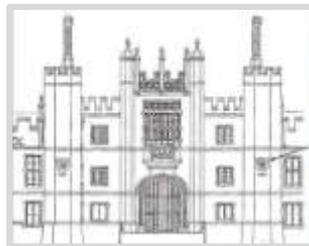
Up high at over 3,300 metres with the very common *P. nordmanniana* is the equally small, pink *Pedicularis subrostrata*. This name is not yet fully accepted but is being used for now. The little plant was to be found in the high screes, on a steep exposed ridge and is a high alpine. When *P. nordmanniana* and *P. subrostrata* could be seen together the differences were quite obvious the latter being another species with the white hairy stem of the inflorescence, albeit on a much smaller scale. I have not seen one quite like it before.

There are many species of *Pedicularis* in the Caucasus including at least one new to science (are there more to be found?). I was only in the north-west part of the Russian Caucasus but the plants were excellent.

Hampton Court Flower Show, July 2012 - Kay Dunlop

Ulsterbus re-introduced a visit to Hampton Court Flower Show for their programme 2012. It is a well planned tour.

The first stop was a visit to Blenheim Palace, a highly successful and well organized attraction.



We took a buggy ride through the grounds, which are still basically as designed by Capability Brown from 1764 onwards. He flooded the valley of the river Glyme to create a grand serpentine lake nipped at the centre to retain the noble bridge designed by Vanbrugh. To the north of this, he left a great avenue leading to the column of Victory. We saw the Italian Garden with fountain pool, and the Water Terrace. A very pleasant visit.

The visit to Hampton Court Flower Show left me with mixed feelings. It was a hot day, which made it exhausting. It was expensive, crowded, people wandering aimlessly. There were great distances from one area to another - more difficult if you were carrying bags of flopping plants. However the great marquee was an Aladdin's Cave, a treasure trove of plants - colourful, exotic, vibrant. A golden opportunity to acquire the plants from your wish list - succulent *Dudleya* like a silver water lily, dramatic black leafed *Colocasia*, and *Salvias* new on the market, 'Wendy's Wish' (awful name) but I think going to prove very popular, with brown calyx and maroon flowers. *Salvia curviflora* 'Tubular Bells' is a recent discovery, really beautiful, deep magenta in colour and originating in Mexico. As ever, many plants were bought. We were fortunate that our coach driver was Dirk, known so well to us from AGS tours, and very understanding of our weakness for plants.

I went with Sheila Price to Kew Gardens - or rather was led by Sheila who is an expert guide. I thought Kew was glorious, beautifully landscaped and maintaining an important rôle in the conservation of plants. The Princess of Wales Conservatory with its different environments is very striking. The rock garden is very well designed, easy to walk through and showing Alpines to best effect. There were two very long borders of salvias, bursting with colour and ranging from tender to hardy. I was very impressed.

We went to Chelsea Physic Garden, the second oldest Botanic Garden in Britain, and founded in 1673 for cultivation of medicinal plants. Hans Sloane had a great influence on its creation. It is a charming oasis in its walled seclusion by the river Thames. Divided into quadrants, with 5000 plant specimens, it reflects a renewed interest in natural medicine.

It seemed to me that these two gardens exuded a great sense of pleasure and contentment. They were the highlight of my trip.

2012 Late Summer Picnic

The August picnic this year found the members in Dorothy Brown's garden in Ballymoney. Even the damp weather couldn't detract from the many beautiful and rare plants to be found here. Dorothy obviously has real skill in growing rare alpines and I envy the artistry she has in displaying them. While I appreciate most of it is due to sheer hard work, especially in such a wet year, I think we could all learn something from her - so I hope she will pass on some knowledge to us all in this space next year.

While the weather wasn't conducive to outdoor eating, the plant stall, gallantly manned by Kay, Kathleen and David, proved popular and successful.



Information, Shows, Website and Programme

Venue St.Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast - 2.30 p.m.

Dues - Local current subscription rates are £9.00 single, £14.00 family, due at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. To help **please put your subscription into the envelope provided with your name, title, address, postal code, telephone number and email, also add "A.G.S." if you are a member of the parent body, all clearly written on the outside or on a slip of paper.** A limit of one year's grace is given.

****Please give or send subscriptions this year to the Membership Secretary, Mrs. Joan McCaughey who will update the records before forwarding the money to the treasurer.****

With the increasing cost of postage it would also be helpful to have as many email addresses as possible.

This subscription is for the local Group only and subscriptions to The Alpine Garden Society must be sent direct.

The Membership Secretary would also be grateful to be told of any news such as illnesses etc. as well as happy events among our members.

Once again an appeal to ALL members to help and volunteer for all the many little tasks that ensure meetings run smoothly and the group stays viable - plant stalls, teas, show duty etc.

It is also a good way for newer members to get to know everyone and is much appreciated - and a sincere BIG Thank you to all the stalwarts who have kept things running so far.

Shows - This year it was lovely to see some new exhibitors on the Show bench and congratulations to Mac Dunlop who showed for the first time with some beautiful plants, including the *Cyclamen persicum* shown opposite, which took the Hammer Trophy. It would be great if some more members could surprise everyone. And support from everyone is really

needed at Show time as this is an opportunity to introduce the AGS to the public and share the pleasure that growing alpines can bring.



Ulster Group Webpage and E-mail communication

The webpage, www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk is an important avenue of communication to members, and a way of advertising ourselves more widely, especially to potential new members. There is a new 'Plant of the Month' every month, contributed by members, and **the webmaster is always in need of new contributions, so please think of a favourite, in the garden or in the wild, and get out your camera and pencil (or keyboard)**. An archive of show pictures and information from events is building up, there are links to interesting websites, and you can also download past issues of this newsletter.

The webpage is useful in posting information such as date and venue of shows and also updates about changes in the programme. The Hon. Secretary would like to be able to email members about events within the Group, especially notification of illnesses etc. which we would not necessarily wish to place in a public forum such as the website. They would therefore be grateful if members who use email would let the Hon. Secretary know their email address, to update the address book. The simplest way to do this is to send an email to secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk - including your name !

For those who don't visit the Web, you're missing



Alpine Garden Society

Ulster Group

Plant of the Month, May 2012

Jeffersonia dubia - by George Gordon

Alpine Garden Society Shows are a good way to come across unusual plants. It was at an Ulster Group Show many years ago that I first came across *Jeffersonia dubia* in flower. It had been grown by Rev David Lapsley and I was immediately impressed by it and set out to acquire it. Fortunately it is readily available through seed exchanges (Scottish Rock, Alpine Garden Society and North American Rock all had it in 2011/12), as well as nurseries (the Plantfinder lists twelve in Britain and who do mail order).

My seed was sown in January 2001 and I eventually was able to grow on three plants (I have lost one through my own carelessness about watering). There appears to be no great problem growing *Jeffersonia dubia* as long as you use a humus-rich compost.



It is a spring flowering woodland plant of North-east Asia. With me the first leaves appear in March and have a very pleasing purplish tinge that sets off the lavender blue flowers nesting underneath them (the leaves later turn green). Indeed I have put the plant in the section for foliage plants at AGS Shows with good results.

I have always kept it in a pot in a partially shaded greenhouse the better to appreciate it - if outside the flowers would only be a few inches off the ground. Later on the leaves will elongate to about 12 inches.

Appreciate the flowers when you can as they only last a short time - you are talking about 5/6 days before the petals fall !! There is a white-flowered version but I like the lavender blue. *Jeffersonia* is a small genus. The only other (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) comes from North America and I will have to try it next.



Programme 2012-2013

2012

September 15th **Ulster Group A.G.M.**; Members Plant Sale.

Harold McBride, Lisburn "seed Sowing - a practical guide.

October 20th

Dr. Mollie Sanderson Memorial Lecture

Keith Wiley, Wildside Nursery, Devon

"A Walk on the Wild Side"

November 10th **Margaret and Henry Taylor**, Invergowrie, Dundee.

"Lilies for All"

November 16th-18th **Termonfeckin Weekend – Dublin Group**

December 15th **Karl Wright**, Caher Bridge Garden, Fanore, Co. Clare.

"Creating a Garden"

2013

January 19th **Billy Moore**, Dublin.

"Alpine Addiction"

February 2nd **Luncheon**

Susan Tindall, Timpany Nurseries, Ballynahinch

"Not More Alpines !! "

February 23rd **Vojtěch Holubec**, Prague, Czech Republic.

"Plants and Nature of the Far East :

Kamchatka, Sakhalin and Kuriles"

March 16th **Members' Show**

Heather Smith, Bleary, Co. Armagh

"Flowers of the small Mediterranean island of Samos"

April 6th **AGS Dublin Group Show, Cabinteely, Dublin 18**

April 27th **AGS Ulster Group Show, Greenmount**

Please feel free to bring friends and visitors along to any of our meeting





Back Cover : *Primula wollastonii*, from seed, by David Ledsham

Front Cover : *Rhodophiala rhodolirion*, (Photo : Joan McCaughey)