

Above : *Cypripedium tibeticum* Joan McCaughey, Ulster Group Show, 2019

> Front Cover – *Corydalis solida* In Greece – photo Heather Smith







Newsletter No.18, August 2019

Contents:-

Editorial :-

Articles

A Walk in the Val D'Anniviers - Mac and Mary Dunlop

The Western Cape – Joan and Liam McCaughey

Highlighting speakers for 2019-20

Montalto

Our Wildlife Garden – Sandra Munro

With Sympathy

Alpine Cuttings :- Garden Visits

Information :-

Programme 2019 - 2020

Editorial Contraction

Well! - it seems this is going to be a rather long swan-song but, thanks to all of you who resolutely sent contributions to me and Liam who has put them together, we still have our Newsletter all be it with the same old editor.

I am sure you will all agree with me that the officers and committee of the Ulster Group deserve our thanks and appreciation for a wonderful year of lectures and outings. Meetings have been especially enjoyable with new faces behind the tea table as new members have joined in to play an active role and get to know everyone. The Group really appreciates and needs all the members, both recent and long serving, to play an active role so don't be afraid to take on a commitment as we all help and learn from each other.

With the emphasis at present on the threats to the natural world Sandra's article on her garden is very timely and I think we will all be asking her for advice. As I write this, four young pheasants and a rabbit have appeared outside the sittingroom window – I do hope they all enjoyed my lettuce which disappeared while we were on holiday! However it does make for a more interesting garden even if somewhat depleted with flowers and produce.

Mac, who is about to retire as chairperson, has made a great recovery from surgery and found time to tell us all about his walking holiday in Austria – sounds tempting. Having just celebrated our 80th Show it is also great to have such an active input now from Montalto especially on the show benches. As it was at Montalto eighty years ago that the seed of the Ulster Group AGS was planted, it is encouraging to renew that connection. Liam has also put in some pictures from our visit to the Western Cape last year and I was so glad to be able to share some of them with Margaret Kennedy in her terminal illness.

Sadly, this year I missed the AGS outings and looking at the photos makes me very envious of all who were there and obviously having a great time. I was especially sorry to miss the visit to Margaret's garden as, while no longer with us, she still inspires me not to give up and to keep on doing and planting and enjoying life while you can.

Do read about this coming year's speakers – they really are the gardening world celebrities and all will both inform and entertain you.

PS : and please someone come and help to edit and put a new slant on next year's Newsletter!

Joan McCaughey, Ed.

A Walk in the Val D'Anniviers

Mac and Mary Dunlop

Somehow mountains have a magical attraction to draw you to explore and be overwhelmed by their magnificence and beauty, so it was for us as we set off on our adventure into the Val D'Anniviers in southwest Switzerland. We arrived, having flown into Geneva and then by train and bus, both of which are always on

time, at our first hotel in the small mountain village of St. Luc which was the starting point for our selfguided walking holiday.

Having arrived in the evening, it was dinner and then bed after the day's travelling. Next morning we awoke to blue skies



After breakfast, our first walk was a "breaking in" circular and fairly gentle one, visiting *en-route* Chandolin, the highest permanently occupied village in Europe, and with plenty of time to enjoy both the views and numerous flowers



We returned in the late afternoon to the hotel for perchance a beer and dinner followed by a wander through St Luc.



Up bright and early next day with breakfast on the terrace and complimentary outlook, we were going much higher today with our target as Monte Bella at 3025 metres. To begin, we took a cable car and then set off following our walking notes

with flowers and mountains with us all the way.

We reached the summit of Monte Bella to have it to ourselves and took in the fantastic 360 degree vista. Then after a stop, we set off down but late snow still present obscured the path and we instead





Ranunculus glacialis

followed a ski lift line to rejoin the track further down, but it had its bonuses as we found some super Ranunculus glacialis on the scree slopes below the ski lift.

Further down a Golden Eagle hovered above and it was so close as to clearly see its colours and immense size. Back at the hotel it was our last night in St Luc, and next morning having left our luggage at the reception for it to move to the next hotel, we again took the cable car up to the start of our journey to Zinal, our next stop. Again we followed clear paths and were soon immersed in the beauty of the mountains with gentians, primulas and many other species to admire.



Unfortunately, we got some Northern Ireland weather at the end of the walk and were a little bit water logged on arrival at the hotel but regardless another great day was had.



Geum montanum

Next morning we were moving again to the lovely old village of Grimentz. The obligatory cable car took us up and our guide notes led us towards the Moiry Reservoir and then to Grimentz. Numerous flowers were along the route and many photographs taken with the usual cull applied before bed that night. Grimentz was so picturesque. Each evening we wandered and explored the little streets with their wooden houses. We had two days based here and on the first, the local bus service transported us to the reservoir wall from where a circular walk took us to the far end and the source of the water supply, the Moiry Glacier. Sadly, it was suffering the same fate as other glaciers worldwide and was slowly retreating back

up the mountain. On a more cheery note, the path back presented us with many soldanellas, primulas and also some proper edelweiss. We had seen some "tame" examples in the village and these had to be photographed but when we had the real thing, these were



quickly deleted. Aren't digital cameras great? Again, we arrived back at base via the bus and after our evening meal and explore, bedtime was there again. Tomorrow the Cabane de Becs was the aim at 2983 metres.

Today we were going high, and again snow which should have

been gone made life either more exciting or difficult, take your pick. It certainly meant we were unable to reach the Cabane de Becs, as along the way we met a

voung man who, having just snowboarded down a snowy slope on a flat stone, reckoned it wasn't advisable due to the snow and pointed out the path we needed to aim for to allow us to use the walking notes for the rest of the day. Cabane de Becs or no Cabane de Becs we still had another superb walk with flowers and views by the bucketful.

Back down at the hotel it was again time to move on the next morning.



Our move to Vercorin, our next and final stop, offered two alternative routes, one high and one low and as the high was a ridge path potentially covered in snow we opted to stay down. Of course we met a couple the next day who had taken the high route and had no problem but the lower way had its own rewards and became



known as the butterfly walk. No prizes for guessing why, but there were plenty of them and even the odd flower thrown in in. Vercorin gave us another lovely hotel.

Next day our only problem was we really needed to be out earlier than we were. The plan was for the usual transport up to the Crêt de Midi and then onwards to the Lac de Louche. Not this time! It just wasn't going to happen, so we ambled along, had a leisurely picnic, enjoyed the flowers, views and just the tranquillity of the mountains.



Large Ringlet (Erebia euryale)



Convolvulus

Thus we reached our last night in Switzerland and the end of a truly unforgettable adventure. Although we had walked many miles, St Luc and Vercorin were only a stone's throw apart!! We would have loved to have stayed longer but it was back to Geneva and then home to normal life.



The Western Cape

Joan and Liam McCaughey

At the south-western tip of South Africa lies the smallest of the six floral kingdoms of the world, the Cape Floristic Region. In an area roughly the same as Ireland are 9,000 species (Ireland has 800), of which two thirds are endemic, occurring nowhere else. The underlying geology is the ancient sandstone of the Cape Fold Mountains, and the sandy plains running down to the coast. Roughly half of the area is fynbos (meaning fine-leaved bushes) - a scrubby habitat rather like the Mediterranean maquis, but dominated by completely different plants - proteas etc., though many have erica- like leaves or indeed are ericas. Under and with these are the flowers that appeal to the rock gardener, including 1500 bulb species. It is a region of dry summers and winter rains, and the rains are followed in a good year by the famous displays of spring flowering. We went there with 'Greentours' last September, and were fortunate that this was indeed a good year. Arriving in Capetown in the morning, we settled into our accommodation and then



spent the afternoon visiting the Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden, where sunbirds of

various varieties were flitting about and feeding from the proteas and other flowers.

Next day was south and included a visit to a colony of African penguins (Spheniscus Demersus), and our first day fossicking for flowers. Then on our third day we began to go north, along the Atlantic coast. Over the remainder of the fortnight we noted 861 different



species, so this brief account will not be comprehensive !



Among the commonest were Iridacea (129 species noted). Geissorhiza monanthos and Babiana rubrocyanea were the stars of our stop at Waylands NP. Babiana get their name from the Dutch word for baboon, baviaan, as their corms are a favourite food of these animals.

Rather different is B. ringens, 'Rat's Tail', growing in sandy soil. This has an infertile main stalk on which pollinating sunbirds perch and reach down to the flowers.

Gladiolus (23 species seen) and Moraea (33) contributed to the colour display. These gladioli are small and delicate in comparison to the usual garden varieties, most being around 10 – 25 cm in height.



Babiana ringens



Gladiolus meliusculus

Gladiolus carinatus

Then there were the Moraeas !



Depending on whom you read, there are over 220 species of Moraea in sub-Saharan Africa, 116 in the fynbos habitat in the Western Cape. Even with a very knowledgeable guide, we could not keep up with the profusion and variety, but the panel above gives a taster – and hopefully the names are correct. Also depending on where you source your information, they are named for an English amateur botanist, Robert More, a friend of Linnaeus – or for Dr Johan Moraeus, father of Linnaeus' wife Sara. The corms of some of them, including M.fuqax (above) formed an important food source for the indigenous people.

(If you want to grow them, we noticed five species in 'Desirable Plants' recent plantlist).

Before leaving the iridaceae, there are two more pictures on the next page, Sparaxis tricolor which formed part of the most dazzling displays we saw, and the Spider Lily, Ferraria divaricata. Spiloxene capensis, on the right, is not in the same family, but is very photo-worthy.



Sparaxis tricolor

Ferraria divaricata

Spiloxene capensis

A few times we saw dazzling displays of colour, and in the best of these the asteraceae were prominent - well-known names like Gazania, and others less familiar like Gorteria or Felicia.





Gorteria diffusa

Gazania rigida



An initially drab looking scrubby hillside revealed a sundew, Drosera pauciflora in leaf much like that in our bogs at home, but with a beautiful flower two cm across. Earlier we had found the spider lily, and now hiding in the scrub was the Spider Orchid, Bartholina burmaniana.

Finally, on our trip, we were looking not only for the botany, but also the animal life. None of the 'Big Five' are in this area, but there were eland, warthog, bontebok, zebra and other big herbivores, spectacular sunbirds, unfriendly ostriches and mischievous baboons. Weaverbirds gave us a display of their art, and we had just a glimpse of southern right whales off the coast.



Speakers for the coming year –

We have, as usual, a carefully chosen list of very good speakers coming from all over the British Isles, speaking on a wide range of topics of interest to Alpine Gardeners. Here is some more information on each of them so please do tell your friends and neighbours and feel free to invite them along – they will not be disappointed and it's no use telling them after the talk is over!

September – Ian Young from Aberdeen will start our season. He and his wife Maggi really need no introduction. Maggi moderates the SRGC Forum, while Ian's weekly bulblog is essential reading. He is also an accomplished artist, with an environmental aspect to much of his work, and a collector of tribal masks !

October – We first met **Joanne Ryan** (then Everson) on an AGS trip to Oregon many years ago when she was a student at Kew. Then in 2012, we joined Joanne and her partner and now husband, Chris, on the long trek up the Marsyangdi valley in the Annapurna Himalaya. She spent fifteen years in charge of redesigning and building Kew's magnificent rock garden, the subject of this talk, and also was in charge of the AGS Merlin applications.

November – and **Assumpta Broomfield** will give her intriguingly titled talk. Knowing that she is an obsessive galanthophile will give a clue to what she will be speaking about. But this will be a fascinating mix of history, personalities and of course flowers. We had the pleasure of her knowledge and expertise on our trip to Birr in 2018 when we also visited her garden and those who heard her at the Carlow Snowdrop Gala know how entertaining a speaker she is.

December – our own **Don Patterson** will take us to the gardens of the South-West of England. Don, an enthusiastic and capable gardener is well known to us all. He is a stalwart of the Bangor Horticultural Society as well as of our Group.









January - **Julia Corden** has a wide portfolio, being Garden Manager of the Explorers Garden at Pitlochry, leader of many flower-hunting expeditions to the mountains of the world, and is currently President of the Scottish Rock Garden Club. She would like to tell us a bit about the SRGC, and will also give a wide-ranging talk about places she has been, flowers she has seen and interesting people she has met.

February – **Derry Watkins** beautiful garden, the 'Special Plants Nursery', near Bath was visited by the Ulster Group a few years ago, and lots of plants were purchased.. She has introduced many plants from her plant collecting trips to South Africa and elsewhere, so has an extensive plantlist. She will be speaking to us about one of her trips, to the mountains of Kyrgystan, which she terms the 'Switzerland of Asia'





Annual Luncheon – Mark Smyth – our after-lunch speaker will be Mark, former member of the Group, and still an enthusiastic grower, especially of bulbs, and with a wide interest in nature.

March – Kevin Hughes, who in 2018 moved from the South of England to take over the famous Cally Gardens in Gatehouse of Fleet will be bringing plants ! He too has travelled widely, and will be speaking about many of the unusual plants which he and his predecessor at Cally, the late Michael Wickenden have introduced – currently over 4,000 rare and unusual species and varieties









Montalto has botanical connnections going back to Sir Arthur Rawdon (1662-1695) who made a famous collection at Moira, and was known as 'The Father of Irish Gardening". His descendant, Sir John Rawdon, built the mansion at Montalto circa 1765 and many of Sir Arthur's plants were transferred to Montalto. The Clanwilliam family owned Montalto Estate from 1912 to 1979. Lady Clanwilliam was involved in setting up the Alpine Garden Society – Ulster Group.

In May 1938, Montalto Estate was the stage for an exhibition of alpine plants at a garden fête. During this event, a founding member of the Ulster Group took names of people interested in becoming members of the Alpine Garden Society and in the spring of 1939, those new members organised the first Belfast Show, under the Society's rules and regulations. The current owners of the estate, the Wilson family, have built a new alpine house to facilitate this group to once again be a



part of Montalto.

Earlier this year some of our members joined Gordon Finch and the Head Gardener, Peter Harris, to help plant up an Alpine area – here we are hard at work. As well as this and the small alpine house, there is a beautiful rock face (above)

which would be the envy of any alpine gardener.

Peter Harris has a great interest in alpines, and entered a considerable number of excellent plants for competition in the Ulster Group show in April, these being attributed to 'Montalto Estate'. He was appropriately rewarded, carrying off three trophies – the Diamond Jubilee Award and the CH Hammer Trophy for the plants shown



below, and also the Malcolmson Cup (Best novice aggregate) – and also an entry in the Lisburn Advertiser !



Enkianthus cernuus f.rubens Diamond Jubilee Award Leontopodium pusillum CH Hammer Trophy

Our Wildlife-friendly Garden

Sandra Munro

I've always liked bugs! Long before I became interested in gardening itself, I was fascinated by all the creatures big and small living there.

Then I started to garden - first an edible garden – then an ornamental one and I quickly learned that the two are essentially linked. Butterflies and bees delight me as much as flowers and fruits, but also 'lesser' creatures can be stunning and are a vital part of the natural food chain.

Peter and I have lived in our present garden, developed from scratch, for almost 26 years and it has been 'organically-managed" from its inception.



It is 1.8 acres with an adjacent 5 acres wood. Our first rule was to use no chemicals – no pesticides, no artificial fertilisers. These stop wildlife doing the job it was designed to do. Yes! Chemicals kill pests but they also kill the natural predators.

We also agreed to use no peat-based compost. Initially we used horse manure, only to discover that it was likely to be contaminated with veterinary medications.

To begin with we often felt we were losing out to slugs, snails, leatherjackets, aphids, etc. but gradually a balance began to happen.

Several things are essential such as:

• Soil fertility which is greatly enhanced by the use of home-made compost.

• Encouraging pollinators such as bees, hoverflies, moths, butterflies, etc.

• Pests and Predators – without which we cannot keep the natural systems alive.



In designing the garden, we wanted like many others to have different areas such as a Spring Garden, an Autumn Garden, an herbaceous border, etc. but there were also three other areas that were very important to us.

• A Pond: Ours is 20 x 50ft. It is a vitally important area of the garden and is home to frogs, dragonflies, newts and many other creatures. It is also a relaxing haven for us as well.

• A Compost Heap: When people visit our garden Peter always waxes eloquently about the benefits of the compost heap (or I should say "heaps" as there are several of them). The creatures that live there (the de-composers) are doing an amazing job. They eat things we don't want, and they are also food for other

creatures. Our compost provides all the goodness our soil needs without the use of artificial chemicals.

• A Natural Area._This may not sit easily with a lot of people who see it as an untidy mess that needs fixing. We have patches of nettles tucked away. We have several log piles quietly rotting away but we also try and have a garden that looks maintained. Our two small wildflower meadows are a hive of activity and a pleasure to look at. Bob Flowerdew says: "A well planned wildlife garden that looks appealing and natural and attracts wildlife is a great achievement rarely wrought by mere neglect!"



Some people have a garden that is at its best at one particular time of the year. Ours is not like that. I try and have plants, shrubs or trees in flower over as long a period as possible to provide food for the birds and insects. My little Alpine Garden brightens my spirits at a time of year when many other plants are only thinking of awakening, but the insects appreciate it as well. People might say I am quite an untidy gardener, but I try to not prune back everything in the Autumn but rather leave places for overwintering wildlife. Trees are Peter's particular favourite. I can't tell you how many we have in our garden and woodland but it's a lot! They give shape and structure to the garden as well as providing protection from the elements, resources to use (e.g.: pea sticks, fruit) and a home for wildlife. They are also very beautiful.

The Vegetable Garden is large and productive. The fertility has gradually been improving over the years. I use a crop rotation which leaves roots and leaf residue behind to increase fertility. Plus, green manures are used in the overwintering raised beds which are then dug in or composted in Spring. The only additional nutrition comes from a liquid comfrey feed to increase potassium and a liquid nettle feed for nitrogen.



People sometimes think that a wildlife-friendly garden should only have native plants growing in it, but I don't think wildlife know if a flower or leaf is native or not. If they can use it, they will. My principle is to have as many different flowers and plants as possible, flowering at different times of the year. I also try and grow mostly single flowers rather than doubles – best for pollinators.

In gardening, the elements of nature are connected. In our garden, we like to think we are giving nature a helping hand and in doing so, we get great enjoyment and satisfaction.

In Memoriam -

Margaret Kennedy

Margaret was an ardent botanist who created a wonderful garden in Holywood. Any one who visited, will know how she brought you round the garden, trowel in hand, in case there was a plant you would like. She was equally generous with her time and expertise.

She was a founding member of All Children Together, responsible for the introduction of integrated education here. Everything she did, she

did wholeheartedly and with great enthusiasm and Northern Ireland education has very much benefited from her input

Her wide range of interests included music, theatre and travel. A keen walker, she and John went on many adventurous expeditions together, with which she combined botanising whenever possible.

She was generous and warm hearted and unfailingly kind. She is very much missed by her many friends.

Anne McCaughan

Shirley Taylor

While not able to be with us in recent years Shirley was a longstanding member with a fund of memories of the earlier days of the Ulster Group. Always pleasant and with a twinkle in her eye I am only sorry I didn't record her accounts of past people and events.

With both Margaret and Shirley you felt happier for having been in their company and they will be missed.



Anne also very generously opened her own garden and a farewell visit was made to Margaret Kennedy's where Danny McCaughan captured some photographic memories for us.







Garden Visits 2019

As the picture above (taken by Heather) shows, Garden Visits 2019 were greatly enjoyed by our members and here are some more pictures and words to bring back memories.



Kilquade, County Wicklow, which was visited on June 27th was a special privilege, as it is not normally open to the public, and members were taken around this by Martin Walsh, who designed the walled garden there.

Snowdrop Day in February began the season, first visiting Ballyrobert Garden and Nursery where Maurice Parkinson showed us around, and then after lunch going on to Bill and Moyra McCandless.



The pergola at the McCandless' garden



G. Sam Arnott at Ballyrobert

In June, a coach trip to two Co. Antrim Gardens.



'Our day started well, with dry weather and with the excellent Dirk for a driver. Our first and, for me, the high point of the trip, was the visit to Dorothy's...worth a journey for the delicious baking alone! The garden is a visual delight and, for us gardening obsessives, there were so many interesting and unusual plants, that the notebooks were constantly required, mine anyway! The attention to detail and that old adage, 'right plant right place' so perfectly illustrated, is I think, what makes this garden so special. There was also an excellent plant stall

and I don't think anyone left empty handed.

Our next stop was for lunch at the garden centre at Galgorm Manor, with yet more purchasing opportunities.

Finally, we headed to Glenwherry. It is a tranquil garden, beautifully situated. The Raffertys have created a verdant woodland, through which wind inviting paths. It must be breathtaking in the spring when the rhododendrons are in bloom. We enjoyed a lovely walk around the lake in glorious sunshine, with varied and



colourful herbaceous planting to tempt us along the way.

As usual, our trip organisers provided a great day out, for which, many thanks. All in all, a grand day out'

Anne McCaughan

A special word of thanks is due to all who so kindly open their gardens as we appreciate only too well the effort and work involved – many thanks!

Information

Thanks - to the outgoing Chairman Mac - to outgoing secretary, Cilla, who has given sterling service and will continue to shadow Anne, the whole committee, the plant stall workers, the 'tea providers and helpers and all who make our meetings such smooth – running and enjoyable events and, of course, to all of you who come along –

Venue <u>NB</u> St. Bride's Hall, Derryvolgie Avenue, Belfast - 2.30 p.m.

Dues - Local current subscription rates have increased to ± 15.00 single, ± 20.00 family, due at the A.G.M. or before the end of the current year. Cheques should be made out to 'Alpine Garden Society Ulster Group'.

** Please give or send subscriptions this year to the **Membership Secretary, Mrs Sandra Munro,** who will update the records before forwarding the money to the treasurer, **Mrs. Hilary McKelvey.**

This subscription is for the local Group only and subscriptions to The Alpine Garden Society must be sent direct. A limit of one year's grace is given.

With the increasing cost of postage, it is helpful to have as many email addresses as possible and this year, to update our records and have accurate information, we ask everyone to fill in the membership forms (also see below). It is hoped in the future by either emailing or texting to be able to keep members in touch with both events and unexpected news. If you are not receiving emails, please send one to the secretary (secretary@alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk) so that she is sure of having the correct email address or let her know your preference for keeping informed.



Showtime

The first Ulster AGS Show took place in 1939 so this year we celebrated our 80th Birthday.

The wonderful splash of colour and perfect plants at the shows never fails to amaze me and a special thanks is due to the Dublin Alpine Garden Society who so faithfully support us and give friendly competition – this is reciprocal and long may it continue.

Please start thinking and planning now for both members and main shows to ensure their success and here are some pictures from this year to inspire you with more photos and reports of all the shows on the web pages.

GDPR

With the introduction of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)2017), organisations, including ourselves, are required to have specific permission from members to hold their information. You will therefore be asked when you renew your membership of the Group, to agree (or not) that this information is held, for the purpose of informing you of Group and related events.

A fuller statement on the Group and GDPR was included in last year's Newsletter. If you do not wish your personal information to be held by the Society please inform the Honorary Secretary or our Data Protection Lead member of the Committee, who will arrange for it to be removed from our administration files.

Web

Programmes and Newsletters can all be found on the website where 'Plant of the Month' is also archived since 2006 - Contributions are always needed, so if you have a plant and a picture - in the garden or in the wild, please send it in. The website is visited from all over the world, so you can be assured of an appreciative audience. To visit the site, go to www.alpinegarden-ulster.org.uk

We do not currently have a Facebook page, so if any of our members have expertise in Social Media please share your opinion and advice on its use with the committee.



Notes

Programme 2019 - 2020

2019

September 21 st	lan Young "Highland Gathering"
October 19 th	Joanne Ryan "15 years hard labour on Kew's Rock Garden" Annual General Meeting
November 9 th	Assumpta Broomfield " Fantasy, Myths and Frilly Knickers"
November 15 th -1	17 th Termonfeckin Weekend – Dublin Group
December 14 th 2020	Don Patterson "Gardens of the West of England"
January 11 th	Julia Corden "What Alpines mean to Me – Plants, People and Travel"
February 8 th	Annual Luncheon Mark Smyth – "Spring into Summer"
February 15 th	Derry Watkins "Botanizing in Kyrgystan – The Switzerland of Central Asia"
March 21 st	Kevin Hughes "Spring Garden and Cally Plants" Members' Show
April 4 th	AGS Ulster Group Show, Greenmount
April 25 th	AGS Dublin Group Show, Cabinteely, Dublin 18.