

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria BC Canada V8R 6S4

March 2009

Twenty-ninth Year of Publication

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JOINT MEETING with members of VIRAGS
7:30 p.m. Monday, March 2, 2009
Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria, B.C.
Speaker: Pam Eveleigh, "Tibetan Alpines"

Pam Eveleigh is an intrepid traveler, a superb photographer, and runs the primula species website, www.primulaworld.com

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MARCH REFRESHMENTS

Thurston Lacalli, David and Agnes Lynn, Carolyn and Tony Marquardt, Bruce and Anne Maycock, Peggy McCarter, and Bill and Theresa McMillan are asked to bring wrapped refreshments to March's meeting.

Please phone Johanna Massa at 250-642-5491 to confirm.

Help for Johanna and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

VRS ANNUAL SHOW and PLANT SALE

Set-Up April 24; Show 25th Apr 2009

VOLUNTEERS SIGN-UP SHEETS WILL BE CIRCULATED AGAIN AT THE MARCH MEETING.

This year, we will be returning to the Cadboro Bay United Church on Arbutus Road.

We will need volunteers for cashier duties and the kitchen, because teas will be sold to members and guests.

We will also need donations of food for volunteers and our teas. Thank you!

ODDTHOUGHTS 1: WALLACE AND THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

(Oddthoughts is a continuing series of ideas that come into Joe Harvey's fevered brain.)

By Joe Harvey

Every year we celebrate anniversaries of famous people and their accomplishments, and rightly so. It so happens that 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his book, *Origin of the Species*.

Of course, for every famous person there are many obscure losers, some of whom invented an object or concept that was ignored or laughed at during their lifetimes but which is now part of our everyday lives. I could mention people such as Professor Swan, who invented the light bulb (didn't market it), Alfred Wegener, continental drift (forget it Fred, Africa and South America fitting is just coincidence) and Gregor Mendel, genetic (Greg, your peas are delicious) among neglected scientists. But one particularly ignored person and one I have a soft spot for is Alfred Russel Wallace whose claim to fame passed its 150th anniversary last year on 5th of July and, as I expected, was completely unremarked on. So here is the story of A.R. Wallace.

Wallace was a zoologist who, failing to get a post he wanted in Britain, decided to go to the Far East, mostly the Malaysian region, to collect bird and mammal skins for the burgeoning taxidermy trade.

This needs some explaining, so take your mind back to the early Victorian period in

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Britain with its increasing industrialization and the emergence of an affluent middle class.

Imagine you have a posh house with a drawing room in which to entertain guests. Nothing would impress your friends more than, say, a stuffed owl under a glass dome, or for the socially ambitious, a case of tastefully mounted parrots with dried fern leaves and a jungle diorama painted on the back panel. This was the

market that Wallace set out to satisfy, as well as the demand from museums, scientists and illustrators like artist John Gould who produced illustrated books of bird and mammal species.

So you live in the tropics for a few years and you get, guess what—malaria, and Fred Wallace got some really bad attacks. Malaria produces periodic bouts of fever leaving the victim sweating away with hardly any energy to move. But the brain still works.

While thus immobilized in his tent, Wallace got to thinking of the amazing differences between the plants and animals of his native Britain and those around him. Why was this so?

Maybe, his fevered brain thought, since everything is eating everything else, there is some selective process going on. Since only a few members of any given species live to produce offspring, then the offspring should have their parents' survival skills passed on. To cut the story short, Wallace thought up the entire hypothesis of natural selection.

When he recovered, there was of course no one to discuss his ideas with so he wrote them down and sent them to England to see what people thought of them and get them published. Nowadays the first person to publish a new idea gets credit as the originator. So he sent his paper to a person who he knew was interested in these ideas. This person, an obscure scientist living in the countryside because of bad health, was called Charles Darwin. Big mistake.

The letter panicked Darwin. He had already formulated an identical hypothesis but had been hesitant to publish it because he thought it might be controversial. He had spent several years compiling evidence to be published in a multivolume compendium. We know this because he wrote his thoughts down each day at his specially designed desk-chair in school exercise books and these still exist—hundreds of

them.

What should I do? Darwin asked his friends. Write a joint paper was the solution and so on 5th July 1858 the first public announcement of the Wallace-Darwin hypothesis was read to a few members of the Linnean Society of London in their meeting room in Burlington House, Piccadilly, London. Neither author was present and the event passed unnoticed. Incidentally the same room is used to this day and, I might add, the seats are mightily uncomfortable.

Darwin then immediately put together an abbreviated account of his ideas, which was published as *Origin of Species* in 1859, and it is this event we will be celebrating. Wallace never did make much money (neither did Darwin but he married it). He was deeply upset by the opposition to his and Darwin's ideas that erupted. He drank a lot and spent the rest of his life regretting what he had done. Today of course the concepts that Wallace and Darwin pioneered, immeasurably expanded by geology, genetics, mathematics and DNA, form the central core of biology.

So has this any relevance to gardening? Yes, we now classify organisms based as best we can on their evolutionary relationships. For instance, a few years ago Cox and Cox produced *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species* based as much as possible on evolutionary relationships. The book produced some grumbling in the Rhododendron Society because it deviated from the old and familiar, but its ideas seem to be generally accepted now. Popular gardening books tend to use alphabetic order for convenience. But monographic books now hitting the library shelves such as *Cyclamen*, *Epimedium*, *Hellebores*, *Snowdrops* and *Peonies* are striving for an evolutionary relationship treatment.

Many modifications to Darwin and Wallace's

theory have occurred over the past 150 years, among them the idea that evolution invariably takes place incredibly slowly. We have seen pesticide resistance in insects in a matter of years and of course bacteria and viruses can change in a matter of days.

So when we celebrate the anniversary of the publication of Darwin's little book, give a thought to Alfred Russel Wallace, the non-famous scientist and his ideas that changed the world

Review of February's talk

By Theresa McMillan

On a dark winter's night, Patty Brown talked to us about Winter Interest in the garden. She has worked for six years in the Winter Garden at the HCP, now Glendale Gardens. Patty divided her talk into winter flowers, berries, leaves, fragrance and bark. In the fall clean up, gardeners should not prune too harshly. We should consider whether spent flower heads, like hydrangeas, would provide winter decorative interest and leave them be. We should also be aware of window interest, or the views of the garden from our windows on dull winter days, or in the low sun on those days. Somber tones of grasses look wonderful contrasted to a field of early blooming snowdrops. Other winter flowers are deep rose cyclamen coum, yellow winter aconites, some forms of



pulmonaria, witch hazels in shades of yellow, orange or deep almost red-orange, and yellow blooming mahonias. There are white early spring trilliums, mauve irises, and pink nerines blooming in November. Hellebores start blooming in January, and can be in different tones of white, pink, even shading to wine red, almost black.



Berries provide more winter interest, and attract wild life. Clematis can produce freckled flowers and berries. Arbutus unedo trees can produce strawberry-like berries in yellow and orange. There are also berries produced by the beautifully leaved arums and skimmias. Fragrances come from various winter-blooming verbenas, daphne odorata, and winter jasmine.

Paint roses have beautiful red rose hips and bark so densely and finely thorned that it looks like velvet. The paper bark maple is a tree that should be in every garden because of the way the light plays through its beautiful bark. There is variety of stem and branch color in cornuses, from red to orange to yellow.



low.

Foliage changes as winter deepens. Bergénias, epimedium, heucheras provide examples of this change. Epimedium, when the leaves are pruned in late winter, reveal pale yellow, white, pink or red daffodil-like blooms in early spring. Patty's excellent pictures reminded us of the pleasures of adding winter interests in our gardens.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS!!!

FROM PAUL FROST

While I'd dabbled before that, I became interested in gardening only about 10 years ago. I was still at sea then, Captain of a research vessel based at Ocean Sciences in Pat Bay. We worked a regular schedule then but I was still away much of the year so I decided to concentrate on growing perennial shrubs as they could mostly look after themselves while I was away. I'd always liked Rhodos and somewhere along the way someone told me about Norm Todd, as the man to see on that subject. Since then I've acquired more Rhodos, many from Norm (and had some long and interesting talks) and continue to look for ways and places to add even more. I particularly want to get one of the big leaf varieties, as I just like the look of them, whether or not they flower in my lifetime.

My house is on a somewhat oversize city lot. Probably like all gardeners there is a constant struggle over where to put all the plants one would like to have, so they all can get along, yet not wanting to become a total slave to the garden.

I retired in 2004 and there are other things I like to do as well.

For a couple of years past my Monday evenings were taken up but that changed this year so I took the opportunity and joined the society.

FROM SHARON JOSEPH

I have worked part-time for VRS member Norm Todd at Firwood Nursery for over 5 years. That is how I became interested in rhodos. My current "garden" is a northeast facing apartment balcony comprised of annuals, a few of which persist over-winter. And I have a dozen or so house-plants huddled by the northeast facing sliding doors, poor things. My favourite rhodos are the small-leaved ones; I especially like campylogynum's tiny dusty rose bells.

I missed the last meeting due to the film festival but will see you at the March one.

FROM GILLIAN RHODES

I basically love rhododendrons as a plant family. You can have books galore - but sometimes it's just best to be with people who share the same passion. So often, I'm skimpy on knowing exactly what I'm looking at, which, while not detracting from the pleasure of enjoying these plants, could be enhanced by greater understanding!

I'm lucky to have spent many a Saturday afternoon in my youth helping Mac McGill dead head his crop...and felt the magic of Albert deMezey's garden - two men who were great rhododendron growers.

I'm in the planning stage of redesigning my own garden this Spring - I've been living off the benefits of the former owner being a Dutch horticulturalist...and after 20 years, it needs a bit of a refresh! Rhododendrons will be a large factor in my redesign.

I work in the Public Service as a Communications Manager, so I'm mostly a weekend gardener, except when the days grow longer.

GLENDALE GARDENS THANKS THE VRS

Dear President and Board,
Thanks you to the Victoria Rhododendron Society for your generous donation to the bursary fund of the Pacific Horticulture College.

It is through the generous ongoing support of organizations and individuals that we are able to provide our excellent college program. Warmest thanks for your donation.

Joanna Drewry,



ERROR in the article, “Glendale Garden and Woodland” in February’s issue of our VRS Newsletter.

The renovation of the heavy clay soil in the Rhododendron Garden in 1994 was supervised by Ted Irving, not Norman Todd as written. A granite plaque rests in one area of the Rhododendron Gardens. It refers to “Rhodo” Ted Irving, and was made for him by his hard-working soil amenders.

We’re sorry that this error was not corrected before last month’s Newsletter was printed.

NOTICES

With sorrow we note the passing of renowned rhododendron expert Edmund de Rothschild.

Edmund de Rothschild, a merchant banker from the renowned banking family’s British branch who led the development of a major hydroelectric project in Labrador while helping his firm expand globally and opening it to people outside his family, died Saturday at his home. He was 93.



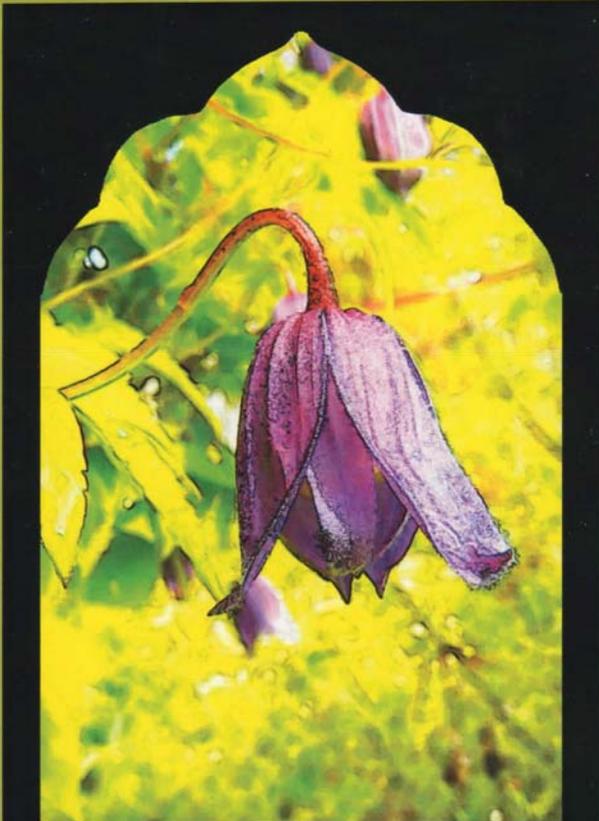
Pool photo by Alistair Grant

Edmund de Rothschild and France’s first lady, Bernadette Chirac, after whom he named a rhododendron hybrid, in 1996.

His family announced the death in a notice in The Times of London, but specified only that he died at home. His most famous home was Exbury House near Southampton, England, where he developed 800 rhododendron hybrids in his family’s garden.



THE HARDY PLANT GROUP
of the Victoria Horticultural Society
presents



de Vine Visions

A HARDY PLANT STUDY WEEKEND
June 19-21, 2009

at The Mary Winspear Centre,
Sidney (near Victoria), British Columbia, Canada

Speakers to include:

Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries

Philip MacDougall, *plant explorer*

Julie Moir Messervy, *landscape architect*
and author of *The Inward Garden*

Dr. Mary Toomey of the *Ranunculaceae Society*
and *Clematis expert*

For more information, visit our website:
www.islandnet.com/~voltaire/HardyPlant.htm

or contact:

Registrar - Ann Widdowson (awiddowson@shaw.ca)
Carmen Varcoe (cmvarcoe@shaw.ca)

UpComing Sales & Garden Visits

Plant Sale & Garden Open. Saturday
April 18th 10 a.m. at Evelyn Weesjes'
10629 Derrick Rd. (left off West
Saanich to Downey, left off Downey to
Derrick)

Plant Sale & Garden Open. Sunday
April 26th 10 a.m.-3 p.m, Carmen Var-
coe & Friends 5450 Old West Saanich
Rd. Parking available next door at the
Gazebo B & B.

Plant- a- Holics Sale. Sunday May 17th
(9a.m. -12p.m.) ABKHAZI GARDENS-
A Plant sale extravaganza, 1964 Fairfield
Rd. Parking at Margaret Jenkins School.
Gardens are open Free 9:00 to 12:00
Tearoom Open from 10:00 on. For more
info call Abkhazi Gardens 250-598-
8096

WORLD ROSE FESTIVAL

The World Rose Festival's doors open in
only 4 months! It is a one-time indoor
flower event. Buy your tickets and get
planning your week of being surrounded
by beautiful roses!

Mark your calendar now to attend the
World Rose Festival 2009, from June 19
to 21 at the Vancouver Convention and
Exhibition Centre, Vancouver, BC, Can-
ada!

To buy tickets, visit their online ticket
sales site or go to any Garden Works
store

World Rose Festival www.worldrosefestival.com
World Rose Convention www.worldrose-vancouver2009.com

BUS TOUR IN WASHINGTON STATE

On May 14 to 17 or May 21 to 24, 2009 the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society is hosting a 4 day bus tour of 7 gardens in coastal Washington. The cost is estimated to be \$600 double and \$700 for singles. Booking deadline is Feb. 28.

Contact Bill Dumont at 1-250-743-9882 or wedumont@shaw.ca .

WINTER DAMAGE

By **Bill McMillan**

Many of our rhododendrons are showing leaf browning from the ravages of our winter. At first I blamed the sudden onset of the cold weather after a prolonged, warm fall. But a second factor may be even more causative— the drying wind.

The long cold dry spell led to frozen ground that combined with outflow winds from the interior to desiccate leaves. As Harold Fearing in the latest issue of “The Yak” said: “When the sun warms the leaves a bit they give off moisture. If the ground is frozen that moisture cannot be easily replaced through the roots. If the wind is blowing, the moisture is carried away more rapidly and the leaves are literally freeze-dried, which kills them.” Wind chill added to the problem.

Most of the dried leaves will fall off and the rhododendron may even be denuded but be patient, it may recover or regenerate from the roots. As you can see from these photos, I may have some casualties!

Saturday, April 25

9:30 am to 12:00 noon

Government House, 1401 Rockland Avenue

The Friends of Government House Gardens will be holding their annual plant sale the last Saturday in April.

This sale is their main fund-raiser with the profits going towards maintaining the gardens around Government House. There will be over 3000 plants for sale including roses, shrubs, perennials, grasses, ferns, herbs, rock and alpine as well as specialty plants. All of the plants are grown here in Victoria with a significant number being grown right on the grounds of Government House. They provide well-rooted plants at reasonable prices.

