



# The Victoria Rhododendron Society Newsletter

4821 Townsend Drive, Victoria, BC V8Z 5P2

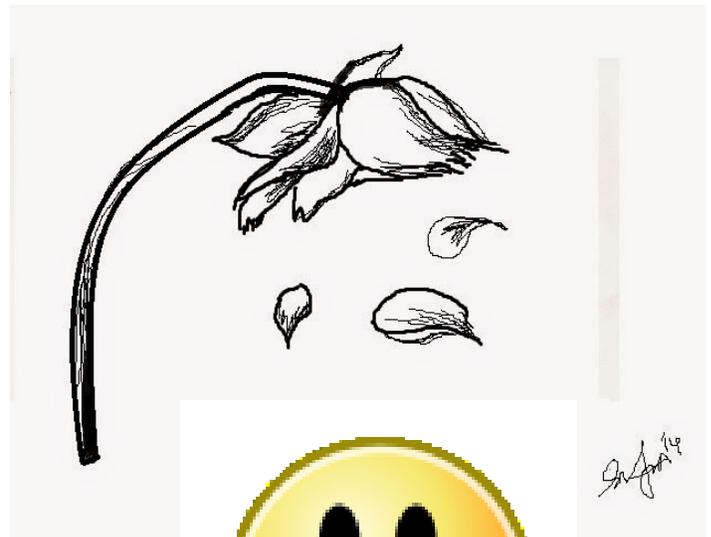
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## April and May General Meetings CANCELLED

### In This Issue

- ◇ Upcoming Events-----2
- ◇ President's Remarks -----3
- ◇ Editor's Notes -----4
- ◇ A Lighthearted Look -----5
- ◇ Joe's Jottings----- 6-8
- ◇ Board Members -----8
- ◇ Key Contributors -----8



## Upcoming Events

2020	Event	Details
SPRING	SPRING GARDEN TOURS contact <a href="#">Brenda Macdonald</a>	<b>CANCELLED</b>
Apr 6	General Meeting Rosemary Prufer	<b>CANCELLED</b>
Apr 19	PLANT SALE at the Webbs'	<b>CANCELLED</b>
Apr 20	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	<b>CANCELLED</b>
Apr 29- May 3	<a href="#">ARS Annual Convention - 75th Anniversary</a>	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 4	General Meeting Truss Show	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 9	PLANT SALE at the Marquardts'	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 18	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	<b>CANCELLED</b>
June 28 ? Noon	Sunday VRS Summer BBQ Picnic <i>Please note this date may be postponed</i>	TBD

# President's Remarks, March 2020

## Club Business

Well, this really is an extraordinary time.

There is little I can add to the wealth of information and misinformation available out there regarding COVID-19. It is interesting to me that the profound inter-connectedness of our modern world can be both its blessing and its curse. Curse, because it has allowed the global spread of this virus at unprecedented speed and extent. Blessing, because it has allowed the essentially instantaneous transmission of information about rates and locations of infection, what steps various levels of government are taking to combat the spread and care for those already ill, and what measures communities are taking to maintain order and preserve morale.

One need only compare our current situation to the great influenza pandemic of 1918 to see that we are in a much better situation now. The spread of this current virus has been exponentially faster, but our ability to react, to treat, and to share information has also increased. These current inconveniences are a small enough price to pay to ensure that this virus does not take three years and the illness of one-third of the world's population to run its course.

What this means for our club is that all activities have been cancelled for the next while. Our April meeting is cancelled, as well as the truss show we usually have at our May meeting.

We had hoped that we might be able to arrange some outdoors communal activities, such as a walk-through of the gardens at the HCP as well a look at our progress in the Norm Todd Propagation area there instead of our usual April meeting, but just received word that this is not going to be possible.

For the same reason, we have decided not to proceed with any member's open garden tours.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have decided to cancel both of the Annual Sales scheduled for mid-April and mid-May. This will, of course, affect our financial well-being – basically, it is income from the annual sales which funds our club during the year. But, unlike many small businesses suffering from similar shut-downs, we do have money in the bank and can draw upon it if need be, so our future is assured.

We are very hopeful that these health concerns will have abated by the end of June, so keep your calendars open for Sunday, June 28, when we all are able to get together again.

Stay healthy, stay safe, and happy gardening to all.

Brenda Macdonald



# Editor's Notes

Theresa McMillan



Doug Justice's talk on the Asian Garden part of U.B.C.'s Botanical Gardens was a refreshing break from the dark, wet winter weather.

The Asian Garden is doing very well, getting new funding that will help for several years.

The Garden focuses on wild plants grown from seed collected in Asia.

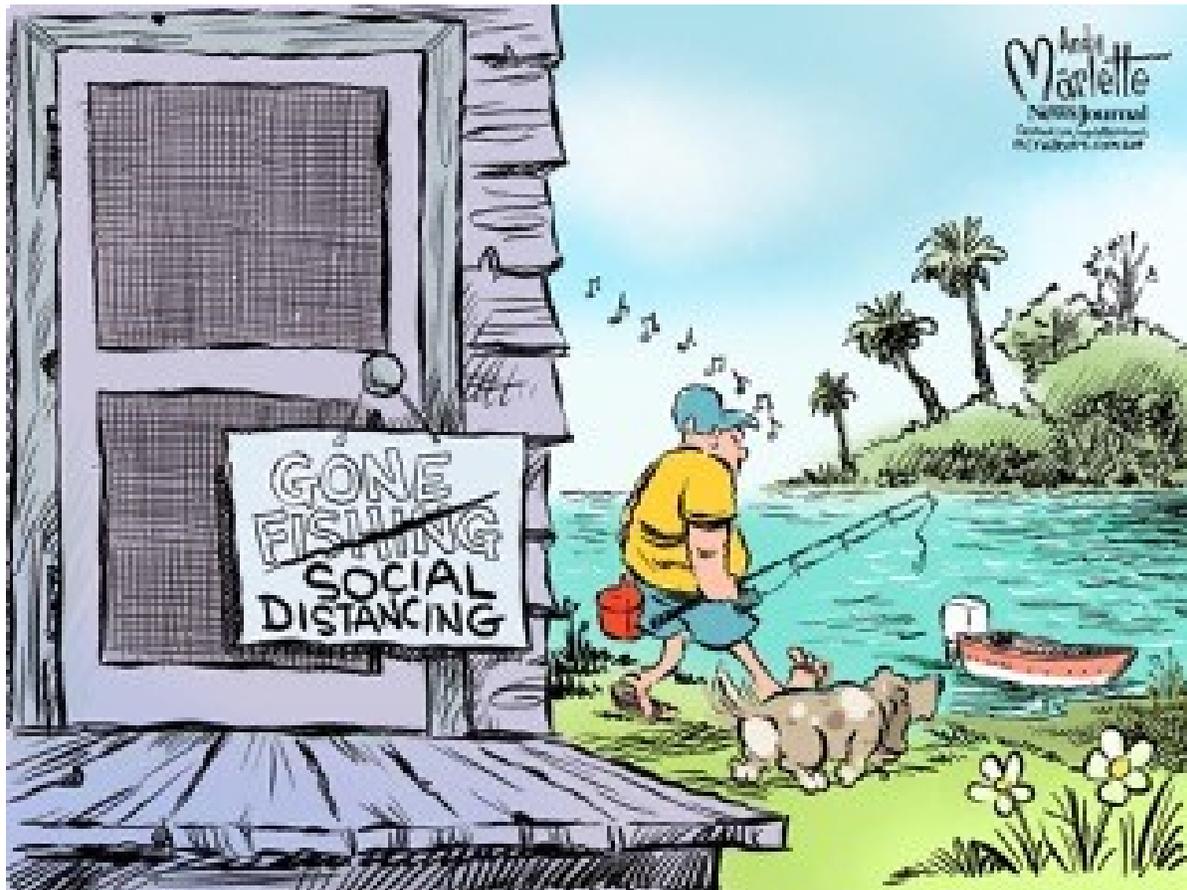
People asked about pest animals such as rabbits and deer. Doug replied that U.B.C. is on Point Grey, mostly surrounded by Burrard Inlet, and the land side is filled by a strip of forest and the city of Vancouver. Therefore, there are no areas for deer or rabbits to live.

The gardeners found that new plants grew best when planted shallowly, with native soils piled on top and no extra watering.

Doug's talk was enlivened by touches of humour, and many beautiful pictures of rhododendrons, cedars, maples, hydrangeas and magnolias.

My husband and I visited the Asian Gardens at U.B.C. a few years ago. We plan to go back. I want to see if a few of the magnolia trees still have huge pink flowers bigger than my hand... an extraordinary sight.





## A LIGHTHEARTED LOOK AT A VERY SERIOUS ISSUE

Lois Blackmore

Our VicRS agenda for April and May has come to a sudden close. Our world is dealing with an epidemic of major proportions. Our April and May meetings have been cancelled; and as this part of the year usually brings us more social events, a light-hearted look is needed to keep up our spirits. Our picnic, although scheduled for the moment, may still have to be postponed.

As one who has purchased our picnic salmon for the past many years, I thought I would add a little humour as all of us try to cope with the sudden stop to our social activities. As we no longer will be having our plant sales this year, which happen to be the major source of our operation, we will have to “tighten our belts and save our pennies as much as possible. As we are now “social distancing”, it will give me time to save money, if and when our picnic takes place.

### #6: The Lizards are Coming! The Lizards are Coming!

By now most Vancouver Island gardeners will have seen or at least heard about the invasion of the European Wall Lizard. Here I summarize its history and implications.

#### Native Lizard versus Introduced Lizard

We already have a native lizard, the Alligator Lizard; how do you distinguish the one from the other? This is technically difficult since they are both small lizards about the same size and colour that sun themselves on a warm rock and vanish as soon as you move.

However, the distinction is laughingly simple: the lizards in your yard are Wall Lizards. Now this sounds like junk science but bear with me; it is based on sound behavioural ecology.

Alligator Lizards are adapted to the country life and tend to shun sites with regular human disturbance. I have never had a gardener complain that his garden is overrun with Alligator Lizards. It just doesn't happen.

Wall lizards, on the contrary, thrive in areas with human activity, especially the walls and patios that we

construct. They are Italians, gathering together in groups and enjoying the sun and the food. Their diet consists of anything that moves such as flies, beetles, bees, caterpillars, butterflies and moths, worms, baby garter snakes, even their own young – which may explain the rapid spread of the hatchlings escaping parental voracity.

Whether the Wall Lizard will displace the Alligator Lizard is an interesting question. From 1990 to 2008 I lived in Sooke and during that time the introduced grey squirrel displaced the native red squirrel on that property. Whether something similar will happen with the lizards is being

investigated at the Royal British Columbia Museum where Dr. Gavin Hanke is the vertebrate zoologist.

Dr. Hanke is recording the spread of the Wall Lizard and would like to receive your address and the date on which you first saw a Wall Lizard in your yard, together with, if possible a photograph.

This information will be entered on his master map. Email [ghanke@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca](mailto:ghanke@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca).

I am indebted to Dr. Hanke for the reliable information about the lizard; the speculative bits are my fault. He asks that you never, ever, move lizards around the region, and he has sufficient specimens, thank you.



European Wall Lizard (*Podarcis muralis*)[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

#### Alligator Lizard | Reptiles of BC



*(Continued on page 7)*

(Continued from page 6)

### **Rudy's Pet Park**

Following World War 2 people got civilian jobs, made money, had kids, bought a family sedan (remember those 'land yachts'?), shopped at the new 'supermarkets' and went on The Sunday Drive. How better amuse the kiddies than drive into the wilds of Saanich and stop at the little zoo that the Rudy family ran on their farm at the end of Durrance Road. Rudy Road is now named for them.

The zoo closed in 1967 and the lizards were either released or escaped. They are born escape artists who can even run up a vertical wall, and this is reflected in their wonderful scientific name, *Podarcis muralis* – pod-ARK-kiss, swift-foot; mew-RAY-lis, of walls. In other words, the fleet-footed wall-climber. Bang on!

My first sighting of them, not far from their release site, was at Brentwood Bay Nursery where they skittled over the hot asphalt.

### **Spread of the Wall Lizard**

They got a boost in 1986 when some were relocated to Triangle Mountain in Colwood. My current house in Oak Bay was apparently lizard-free in 2018 but in 2019 was crawling with them – slight exaggeration – but there were plenty. Moss Rocks in Victoria is well supplied with them.

### **Life without Ants**

There were early reports from gardeners that when the lizards arrived, the ants vanished. This was easily dismissed as random fluctuations or poor observations.

As this sequence is reported by more and more observers, it looks as if there is a direct connection (maybe not the more nocturnal carpenter ants).

"Woo-hoo, no ants!" is a common reaction to the news, but be careful what you wish for. Remember the basic axiom of ecology: everything is connected to everything else. Ants are important ecologically; they eat other insects, farm aphids for honeydew, move seeds around, excavate holes and act as food for other animals. Here are a couple of anecdotes.

### **Pavement Ants**

On warm days I have afternoon tea outside and, among other things, watch pavement ants doing a random walk on the patio tabletop.

They appear to be searching for microscopic drops of honeydew excreted by aphids on the oak leaves above. On the first warm, windless day in summer, colonies of the several species of ants swarm except, in 2019, none of them did in my yard. I think the colonies were not large enough.

Pavement ants are another European introduction; they are the minute ants, about 1mm body length, that evacuate galleries underneath patio blocks, producing characteristic little piles of sand by their entrances. I have always had them underneath my favourite chair but in 2019 the sand piles were smaller and by the end of summer were down to a single heap. It occurred to me: are pavement ants baby-food for young lizards?

### **Peonies with Paid Police**

Peonies produce fat flower buds that, to certain insects, represent nutrition for their larvae. I have occasionally had a grub eat out the center of a peony bud and I presume that the grub hatched from an egg laid by a moth.



(Continued from page 7)

Deciduous peonies have extra-floral (outside the flower) nectaries. You can see glistening drops on the bracts of the flower buds and these sugar droplets usually have an ant feeding off this treat. Now I suspect that peonies don't just 'leak' sugar; it is speculation but it looks, from an ecological view, as if the peonies are 'paying' ants to 'guard' their flower buds and clean off any tasty eggs they find. Look at your peonies this summer and report any increase in bud damage that may result from an ant shortage.

### The Future

Ecesis is the term used to describe the introduction, establishment and spread of an organism from another region. Frequently the organism has escaped the parasites, predators and climates which control its populations in its native habitat, and it can expand its numbers exponentially until something catches up with it. We appear to be observing the exponential phase for our new little inbred lizard.

What happens next? We live in interesting times.



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