

THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2009

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APRIL

WEDNESDAY 1ST – SUNDAY 5TH Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, Exhibition Gardens, Melbourne

TUESDAY 7TH COMMUNITY DAY AT THE RHODODENDRON GARDENS. (See flyer in newsletter)

MONDAY 13TH (Easter Monday): SOCIAL OUTING. Visit B & T Ferns and another wholesale nursery. Meet at the Olinda Hall Cnr The Georgian Rd & Olinda Monbulk Road. 1.30pm. BYO afternoon tea.

FRIDAY 17TH General Meeting Nunawading.8.00pm **SPEAKER: Neil Webster Gardens in Southern England.**

SATURDAY 18TH 2.00PM Vireya Group at Simon Begg's 12 Mernda Rd Olinda. A combined meeting with the Ferny Creek Rhododendron Group.

MAY

SATURDAY 9TH, Vireya Group. **No May meeting**; held early, on 18th April.

FRIDAY 15th 8.00pm General Meeting Nunawading. **SPEAKER: ANDREW RAPER –SASANQUA CAMELLIAS. Andrew will bring plants to sell.**

JUNE

FRIDAY 19th 8.00pm. General Meeting at Nunawading. **SPEAKER: PETER RALPH. Peter had a wonderful trip to Bhutan and has fabulous photos to show. **Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading****

EDITORIAL

Our President is in North America so you get an Editorial instead of a Presidents column. Mike hopes to get to Butchart Garden on Vancouver Island at the end of his work duties. I am sure he will bring us photos of that fabulous place.

I bring good news and bad news. Being an optimist I start with some bad news.

February was a momentous month in Victoria. “Black Saturday”. 7 February 2009 ensured that on its own and I am sure you will join with me in thinking of all the victims of those bushfires; the 211 people who died; the loved ones of those who died or were injured; those who lost houses and gardens or businesses and those whose properties were spared but whose businesses were ruined. The Society will do its part in helping those who need help in saving or replanting their gardens. The Volunteer Group will see what the NRG shade house can provide and members, also, can help

The extraordinary heat of the last week in January and early February affected gardens in and around Melbourne as never before. Not even 12 years of drought and 5 years, or thereabouts, of stage 3, then stage 3A, water restrictions were as damaging. The effects of these climatic occurrences were reflected in Members gardens: such as the scorching of conifers at Rockbank (where they had thrived for years), the die back of azaleas, vireyas and even grevilleas at Warrandyte and the sunburn damage to a wide variety of cool climate plants at Olinda. Similarly, the well maintained gardens at the Mt Waverley Community Centre when we visited there in early March had also suffered extreme damage. These conditions together with tightening watering restrictions mean that gardeners in Melbourne will need to consider how they intend to cope with the present variation in Melbourne’s climate, and present availability of water and make their plans accordingly.

Some good news to finish? AQIS has written to me to say that the seed of every rhododendron species [or natural hybrid] known to be in Australia but not already on the ‘permitted list’ in the database maintained by AQIS [ICON] will, in the near future, be added to the permitted list. This ‘known to be in Australia’ list took a lot of research but, in the end, our President was able to write a letter confirming the list. In addition further lists were compiled detailing rhododendron species and natural hybrids, vireya and non vireya, not on the ‘permitted list’ and not known to be in Australia. These are very big lists. Biosecurity Australia is assessing the ‘weediness’ of these. As they get a ‘non weedy’ tick they, too, will be added by AQIS to ICON’s ‘permitted list’ so their seed can be imported without a permit. Biosecurity asked me to prioritise these. I chose, first, those species George Argent was hoping to collect in West New Guinea. They have all, now,

been assessed ‘non weedy’ and I have a letter from AQIS that they, and quite a number of other species besides, will be added to the ‘permitted list’. My next priority is the species from Sabah. Ben Wallace is leading a group there in April. I hope these will be processed by then. As species are the subject of an AQIS letter that ‘they will be added to ICON’s ‘permitted list’” but before that list is actually updated a permit is required to bring seed in, in hand luggage or to post it. I have a permit covering the letters I have received so far. Any potential importers should contact me for details. I expect that, by the end of this year, all species and natural hybrids not presently on ICON’s ‘permitted list’ will be added to it or, at the least, be the subject of a permit. Members can now look at RHS or RSF seed lists with the expectation that they can order, or will soon be able to order, everything listed.

Simon Begg

THE SPECIES COLUMN.

wardii -Subsection *Campylocarpa*. [photo page]

Rhododendron wardii is one of the most beautiful species and is popular in gardens in Europe, but requires a cool climate to be grown successfully. It can be grown in the Dandenongs in a shady position, but is virtually impossible in Melbourne... This species is quite an attractive compact plant with bright yellow flowers which appear very late in the season (Mid-November at Olinda)

Name:

Named after Frank Kingdon Ward, 1885 – 1958, English plant collector and explorer. Author of several books on plant collecting including “The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges”—Essential reading for rhododendron enthusiasts.

Distribution:

SE Tibet, NW Yunnan, SW Sichuan at 2700 – 4300 metres. On open hillsides, thickets and forests..

Characteristics:

There are only four species in the *Campylocarpa* Subsection, namely *callimorphum*, *campylocarpum*, *souliei*, and *wardii*. Both *wardii* and *campylocarpum* have yellow flowers, but *wardii* differs in its more saucer-shaped flowers, in its larger calyx, and its style which is glandular to the tip.

This species is split into two varieties, namely

Variety. *wardii* – Flowers pale to deep yellow, sometimes with a small red blotch.

Variety *puralbum* – With pure white flowers.

All forms of *wardii* have attractive foliage which is glabrous, orbicular to ovate, with a pale green or glaucous underside.

Hybrids:

This species has been widely used overseas in the production of mid – season to late yellow hybrids. Unfortunately none can be recommended for Melbourne, but they can be grown in the Dandenongs in a suitable location. Only a few of these are available here.

Ightam Yellow (*wardii* x *decorum*) –Pale Yellow.

Prelude (*wardii* x *fortunei*) -yellow

Crest (*wardii* x Lady Bessborough) A clear lemon yellow- Excellent!

Idealist (*wardii* x Naomi) Pale pink fading to yellow.

Where to See These Plants:

Our data-base shows a total of 43 *wardii* have been planted in the Garden. Unfortunately we can only find five plants and we must assume that the remainder have been killed by heat and drought. It seems clear that unless we can provide a proper watering system most of our species could disappear.

There is an old plant of *wardii* (litiense group) growing in the centre of the Maddenia Walk which flowers in mid-November, and is quite beautiful with its pale yellow flowers. There are also two plants in the main rock garden, and two near the trial garden.

Alan Kepert.

VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN

R nervulosum [photo page] Section VII Euvireya Subsection v [according to the classification propose by Dr George Argent *rhododendrons of sub genus vireya* RBGE 2006] At 90 members this Subsection is the largest. It includes species from Borneo to Australia.

Source and Name

The name derives from the Latin for abundant development of small veins in the leaves. It was discovered by Joseph and Mary Clemens on Mt Kinabalu in 1933 at an altitude of from 2500-3000m. It was introduced into cultivation in 1980. The main habitat is in the upper montane forest zone with some plants in the fringes of the lower subalpine forest zone

Description

[taken, though not completely from Agent Lamb and Phillips *The Rhododendrons of Sabah Malaysian Borneo* Natural History Publications Borneo 2007]. The shrub is mostly terrestrial, rarely epiphytic, and grows, in its natural habitat, to 1.5m. It has smooth, almost glabrous twigs. Its **leaves** are in pseudowhorls of about 5 together. They are very narrowly elliptic to almost linear; the apex acute; the margin entire; slightly revolute in the basal half; the leaf base narrowly tapering; 56-80 x 7-14mm; mid vein slightly sunken above in the basal half of the leaf, minutely raised below throughout the length of the leaf; lateral veins 4-6 pairs diverging at an acute angle. Petiole 1-2 x 2.5 mm, rather indistinct, grooved on the upper side.

Umbels are one or two flowered [but the photos, and Susan Phillips' painting, in Argent *et al* figs 242 & 3 show more], the flowers horizontally held. Corolla opening orange going red with age, 30 x 25 mm, tube 16 x 7 x 11 mm.

Where to see these plants

R nervulosum has proved easy to propagate and grow. My plants came from the collections made by Murray McAllister and Bill Taylor in New Zealand in 2003.

Specifically from Richard Currie. I think a number of members have them- if not I can certainly help. My plants must be close to flowering, but have yet to do so.

Verdict

Argent *et al* says the plant is of lanky growth and intermediate in appearance between *R stenophyllum* and *R exuberans* and might still prove to be a hybrid between them. They say it does not have the charm of either of the other two. To me it seems to be an attractive shrub with the merit of good health and, so far, freedom from rust and other pests.

Simon Begg

A QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH KRISTIN JACKSON, MANAGING CURATOR, DANDENONG RANGES GARDENS

Editor: Our publication date is coming up very soon. Anything of interest would help. Management plan? What now after fires and economic crisis?

Kristin Jackson: *The only thing I can say about the new Strategic Directions Statement (Management Plan) is that the preparation of the draft is progressing and we still hope to have the draft on two months public exhibition sometime between April and June. When the draft Plan is on public exhibition the ARS will be sent a copy for formal comment and we would be interested in having a workshop with the ARS members to discuss their comments on the draft plan and answer any questions etc.*

The other thing to put in your Newsletter would be to promote the Autumn Festival from 10 to 19 April. Parks Victoria will be participating in this at both the National Rhododendron Gardens and William Ricketts Sanctuary. Maureen Irvin has more information on how Parks Victoria is being involved. [see page for information from Maureen]

Editor: It is plain to see that no one would rationally play golf at Olinda at the moment. What now for the course?

Kristin Jackson *Parks Victoria is still working to find sustainable long term water sources for the Olinda Golf Course.*

Editor: I have a quite practical matter about this years' Show season. Will there be a Hall in which to hold them in this year?

Kristin Jackson: *The Show Hall will be available for the ARS show and display this year ie. 2009. Even if Parks Victoria puts out an EOI to redevelop the show hall in the next few months, this will not impact on the use of the show hall for Spring 2009.*

Editor: What is known about improvements at NRG, fires and recession [depression?] and all.

Kristin Jackson: *In terms of capital works improvements, there is the allocation from the LFS funding which will be spent at the NRG and Ricketts over the next two financial years. At this stage we don't know exactly what projects this funding will be spent on but some capital improvements will have been made to the NRG prior to the 2010 ARS conference.*

Editor; You said Parks was interested in participating [in ARSV and NRG 50th Anniversary] Now is the time to ask what does Parks have in mind? It is NRG's 50th as well as ARSV. With that in mind we were contemplating an afternoon at NRG and showing the garden to distinguished guests. This will be in mid October- peak time. But mid- week. Monday Tuesday or Wednesday- not set in stone yet- so far as I know. Issues for us include transport around; clearly not just a 20 minute run. Much more 'get out and look'. Mike [Hammer] has been talking to a local celebrity who is taking a keen interest. There is a big marketing opportunity there for NRG. We, of course, are assuming that Parks' contribution will include free access for delegates and either transport or allowing our transport to be used. Parks' bigwigs might want to be there to bask in the glory. All on the agenda. Best for everyone if the Garden is a glory to bask in. With 18 months still to go before D day there is time for a freshen up plan. Be nice to be all singing from the same page. Who does what? What budget do we have etc? Could you give the 2010 conference some thought and, when you are ready, I'll find someone with ARSV authority to go through it with you.

Kristin Jackson *Parks Victoria is definitely still interested in participating in the 2010 conference. It will be a chance to showcase the NRG and the other nearby Parks Victoria managed properties.*

We will need to work out transport around the garden so people can get out and have a look on your tour. This will need to be worked in with the normal garden explorer service assuming it is operating. But I am sure there is a way we could work this out. Particularly if it is on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday when visitation to the NRG is lower than on the busy weekends during Spring..

I thought the NRG was established in 1961, [the grant (lease) of land was in 1960 Ed] therefore it is not the NRG's 50th Anniversary too? Am I wrong with this? Either way, I am sure there is scope for a combined PV/ARSV event to celebrate the ARS's anniversary and their establishment and ongoing involvement in the NRG.

At this stage Park's Victoria's operating budget for 2009/2010 is the same as for this year. There is no additional allocation in either staff or operating funds leading up to the 2010 ARS conference. I suggest that Glenn will look at the NRG work's program for the 2009/10 FY and developed this with the 2010 conference in mind.

Also, by then, the roll out of the new interpretative signage within the NRG will be completed.

WORKING IN THE RHODODENDRON GARDENS

Glenn Maskell, Team Leader, Parks Victoria

Like all gardens we are a little parched here at the Olinda gardens. There has been quite a bit of damage done by the 40+ heat but no rain for the past 9 weeks is really starting to effect many of the younger plants in particular. It is interesting to walk around the gardens and see what plants have survived the heat and dry unscathed. Some of these plants may be the plants we should be considering for the future of our private and public gardens.

Some of the Rhododendrons such as the Yaks and Rhododendrons with thick indumentums have survived quite well and look great.

The ARSV has been busy as usual cleaning up collections, weeding the Vireya bank and recording new plantings and checking current records. The staff here are grateful for their contributions to the gardens.

The Lace Bug war continues

We are releasing another 80000 Lacewing into the gardens again this year as part of our Integrated Pest Management program to control Lace Bug. Overall it looks like the Lacewing are making a difference as we are seeing less damage than we would expect especially on the Azaleas. The ARSV has once again joined with us helping to supply 30,000 Lace wing. While we are still not sure that the Lacewing are going to be a sustainable solution to Lacebug problems, we are confident that even the small numbers we are releasing into this large garden are making an impact. The damage from Lacebug is reduced considerably in areas of the release especially on Azaleas. Last year we found that Lace bug damage was contained until we had an explosion in population during the hot weather during March.

We are still working on increasing plant diversity in the gardens to accommodate the adult stage of the Lacewing that feed on nectar by planting lots of paper daisies, Chrysanthemums, Salvias and Pentstemon. The added by product of this is the flower colour during summer.

Sensory Garden, feel the vibe

We managed to access a grant from urban parks unit of Park Victoria to help us develop this garden because it is an innovative recreation space. (We will call it whatever if there is money attached). This has enabled us to put on a stone mason to build the stone walls and steps. They are looking fabulous, I do believe this project is innovative and will be a step towards diversifying the visitor demographic by attracting families. We are hoping to finish the garden enough to have an official opening on April 7 the community open day.

Wedding Car Park

A 40 car carpark at the Camellia gate is being installed this will make a big difference to the operation of weddings, leaving guests with more freedom and less Ranger input with a safer environment for guests and visitors. When we get the carpark finished and landscaped it should not be to imposing on the landscape.

Interpretation in the garden

The signs have been designed and we are hoping to install three signs in the middle of the gardens to iron out the bugs in the next couple of months and then it will be full steam ahead till we run out of money. I am hoping to put together a hierarchy of signs with a style manual that will tidy up our sign systems from temporary signs through to large information signs, these will be accompanied by templates and new stands etc. (that's the dream anyway).

Ay we didn't strike water

As part of our water strategy to ensure the water supply of the golf course and gardens we have been trying to put down a bore. Unfortunately I am now the official record holder for the longest drop dunny in Parks Victoria at 100m of solid granite. We are now in the

process of looking at other locations to drill (this does not look promising) and scoping other options such as storm water runoff capture and modernising the reticulation systems.

An application for capital money to replace our irrigation water main is being considered at the moment by Parks Victoria which would give the gardens a constant pressure system and many more options to automate the system and bring the gardens into the 21st century.

MARCH GENERAL MEETING

JOHN ARNOTT was the guest speaker and his topic was 'A Journey Through Four Great Gardens', which turned out to be a journey through John's working career.

As an apprentice in 1980 he joined the Horticultural staff at the Melbourne Zoo eventually becoming the Curator of Horticulture. He was there for 18 years during a time of great transition which had started in 1960 with the development of the Lion Park Project and continued in his time with the Butterfly House, Gorilla Rainforest and the Elephant Walk Project being some of the most notable. Until the '80's horticulture and animal husbandry had run parallel to each other but with the building of the Butterfly House these two areas had to work together for the benefit of the wildlife. When the Gorilla Rainforest was established in the '90's incredible changes occurred in the behaviour of the gorillas. From being aggressive and bored they became family involved, foraged for food and built day nests. They did of course trash the vegetation! To resolve this electric fenced areas provided controlled access to vegetation.

From the zoo John went to the Geelong Botanic Garden which is the 4th oldest botanic garden in Australia. His arrival in 2000 coincided with the innovative 'Twenty-first Century Garden' which gave the garden a new lease of life and world-wide recognition. Until then the garden had been barely maintained. The new garden of nine hectares has two themes covering indigenous plants and dry gardens and much propagation of protected and endangered species is carried out. Visitor numbers have increased and many garden groups base their activities there.

A short period at the Wilson Botanic Garden in Berwick as Co-ordinator was a huge contrast to the previous two positions. John's main interest are native plants and Wilson Botanic has none. In spite of this there are over 75 species of bird and wild life. One of Australia's oldest quarry sites from 1857 it covers 100 acres and is 68 meters from top to bottom. There are areas of paleontological significance with fossil evidence of Wollemi Pines (live ones only discovered in 1994), early Eucalypts and Casuarinas. There is a magnificent water feature at the entrance and delightful walks. It has become a community focal point in Casey.

He has been at Cranbourne since April 2008 where he can extend his primary interest of native plants. Cranbourne covers 1,000 acres and was an old defence site purchased in the

1970's. Also in Casey it is a rapidly expanding urban area and by 2027 it is estimated that the Cranbourne Garden will be surrounded by urban development. Stage one has been completed and the design for stage two has just been released and was shown at our meeting. Both stages have exhibition gardens. Among these are – The Home Garden, Dry Garden, Productive Garden and Children's Garden. All the gardens use only Australian plants. Stage two has North and South display gardens using plants en masse in patterns. These gardens will be updated frequently as new varieties become available in the nurseries. The 'Continental Edge garden' also has a 'Weird and Wonderful Garden'!

Marcia Begg

FEBRUARY GENERAL MEETING

The new committee has decided to invite a wide selection of speakers to the general meetings this year. Topics will include a talk on Bhutan, Camellias, Botanic Gardens and Liliams. Our first meeting for the year was well attended as members flocked to hear Dr. Greg Moore with his topic of 'Trees and Garden Management During Climate Change'. Greg is the former Principal of Burnley Horticultural College (now part of Melbourne University), member of several committees including Greening Australia, Sustainable Gardening Australia and the National Trust Significant Tree Register Committee.

Though his theories were not agreed with by all members present he was given a good hearing on the possible effects of climate change in Victoria. These included – warmer winters and hotter summers, fewer frosts and more days over 30c, summer storms with easterly winds, snowline will rise by 100m, change of crops to be grown, minor flooding of low lying areas, change of building construction, energy demands and patterns of use will alter. Australia has warmed up 1C in the last 50 years and the northern hemisphere is warming faster than the southern.

From there he went on to explain the value of trees and the function of parks which were originally designed to benefit the working classes. When they were given 'a day of rest' the working classes used the parks to promenade, picnic and play sport. Many parks such as Royal Park in Melbourne and Kings Park in Perth had zoos and other forms of 'entertainment'.

Trees in parks and gardens need to be chosen carefully. Many exotic trees, for example elms and planes, have been selectively bred over many years and are proven to be successful urban trees. Native trees are still on trial. Some of the benefits of trees are – shade, they save energy by the cooling and heating they effect, they lower wind speed and temperatures, reduce pollution and smog. By pruning trees we lose carbon absorbers.

Tree roots are not deep and stress can be reduced by shallow watering. They should be planted in large well designed and mulched beds. Drippers or a 'leaky' pipe under the mulch are the best ways to water. Mulch should be of mixed particle size 75-100mm deep. Over time it will break down and form better soil structure, facilitate aeration and aid infiltration. Every few years it will need to be topped up.

Following the talk Greg was subject to some stimulating discussion before supper was served. All enjoyed the evening and look forward to the next meeting.

Marcia Begg

VOLUNTEER GROUP

The volunteer group have been busy weeding the vireya bank for the last 2 weeks. While working on the bottom section, one of the team saw something floating in the dam on the opposite side. It looked like a body. So two of us walked around to the other side and climbed down through the hydrangea jungle. Not a body, just a flat rock exposed by a drop in the water level of the dam!

We have also weeded the species bed down near the trial garden and some of the German bed. Other work has been done in the glasshouse, potting on and moving the bigger plants to the open sided shade house. Mike Hare has sorted plants in the trial garden. Where plants have been lost we were able to find replacements out of the stock to fill the gaps.

Alan Walker

WALKER'S GARDEN

THE weather has not been good for our gardens. A lot of plants have been burnt and some have gone too far and will not come back. There will be a lot of gaps. Many have not suffered and I have found that my collection of daphnes have enjoyed the weather. I think it is because the leaves are more like succulent leaves. Some of my rhododendrons I have now cut back to where the timber is still green and hope they will re-shoot. Here in the suburbs we have been more affected than at the Rhododendron gardens.

Alan Walker

JANUARY HEATWAVE

Andrew wrote this piece before the 'daddy of them all' came along on Saturday February 7, 'Black Saturday' as it will come to be known when history is written. 47.4 C in the city. 43.8 at Olinda. The January days, of which Andrew writes, burnt a lot at Olinda but nothing fatally. February 7 burnt a lot more. Few fatally. But I did notice, to my surprise some days later, species in my species shade house were burnt. I was out there in 40 C + temperatures until 11 am trying to carry Andrew's message into effect, but watering the foliage of plants in the shade house never occurred to me! I just can't say whether my efforts helped. I did spend a lot of the time watering roots with a water gun. Ed

At the time of writing, Melbourne has just experienced one of its most severe heat waves, with maximum temperatures for the three day period (28, 29 & 30 January) of 43.4, 44.3 and 45.1 Degrees Celsius. Relative humidity on the 29th was as low as 17%, with the only saving grace being that we were spared strong, hot winds that can accompany a high pressure system.

An unfortunate aspect of gardening is being able to contend with extreme and atypical conditions that stress gardens and gardeners alike, and in Melbourne it is extremely high temperatures.

Like many people, my garden took a hammering over these three days. Green grass is a distant memory and plants such as camellias that rarely show signs of heat stress have badly damaged foliage. Vireyas exposed to direct sunlight, even if for only a short period in the morning, are completely scorched where I was unable to provide temporary shading or misting.

Some members may challenge this, but one method I use to reduce damage on these extreme weather days, is to spray a mist of water on those plants in unprotected locations in the garden. This 'misting' is to reduce plant stress and leaf burn by lowering the temperature (and increasing the humidity) in and around the plant foliage. Nothing technical about it - I simply walk around the garden, hose in hand with a thumb over the opening to fan out the water which is applied to the foliage of the plants. One of the main reasons I put in tanks was so I had access to water to mist during these very hot days - so far this summer these three days are the only time I've needed to mist. Unless the relative humidity is very low, I don't mist unless the temperature gets above 38 Degrees Celsius.

A common response when I mention misting is 'doesn't watering foliage during the heat of the day burn the leaves?'. Albeit a widely held view, I am unaware of any study that shows that water application in hot conditions actually burns foliage, and from my experience, it greatly reduces foliage damage to vireyas caused by hot weather. So for those with access to non-mains water, it is worth considering as an option to help sustain plants whose foliage is susceptible to leaf burn in hot weather, particularly where these plants are exposed to direct sunlight.

Thankfully, we were not a household affected by power blackouts, and the evaporative cooler in the glasshouse did a fantastic job of keeping the temperature under 30 degrees Celsius. There must have been a considerable temperature gradient in the glasshouse, as leaves very close to the underside of the glass were slightly scorched, but apart from that, no other signs of stressed plants.

Andrew Rouse 1st Feb 2009

WHAT YOUR PUBLICATIONS COST

An ordinary full membership costs \$25 per year. For that the member receives the ARS Journal, *The Rhododendron*, and 6 bi monthly *Newsletters*. And, of course, lots of other benefits besides! For each full member ARSV pays an accreditation fee to ARS, currently \$17.50. This fee covers the current cost ARS incurs producing *The Rhododendron* for ARSV members as well as their share of ARS' other expenses. 6 hard copy *Newsletters* presently cost ARSV \$15 per year per member covering printing and posting within Australia. Overseas postage costs a lot more- a \$10 surcharge already applies. A number of members have elected to receive *Newsletter* by email. Sending an email *Newsletter* costs ARSV **nothing**.

Members will see that for a \$25 membership receipt from an Australian member who wants a hard copy *Newsletter* in the mail ARSV incurs a direct cost of \$32.50. Put another way ARSV loses \$7.50 for every such member!

Committee has on its agenda the determination of fees for 2009-2010. I suggest that members will soon find it to their financial advantage to receive *Newsletter* by email. I already have a substantial email mailing list. The email edition has many more colour photographs. What about it folks?

Simon Begg



Graeme and Lesley Eaton and grandchild



R wardii
Alan Kepert photo



R nervulosum
Chris Callard photo taken at RBGE



**Mary Hare's Vireya cuttings
Inge Hammer photo**



**Vireya surviving summer at Mike
and Mary Hare's house
Inge Hammer photo**



**Vireyas to the shaded South of Mike
and Mary Hare's house
Inge Hammer photo**



**Happy in summer!
Bottle Tree at Mike and Mary
Hare's house
Inge Hammer photo**

THE BUSY PERSON'S GUIDE TO GROWING VIREYA CUTTINGS

Mary Hare

I saw Mary's propagation system in production when I visited Mike and Mary's house in South Warrandyte with the Vireya Group in early March. Just after all that nasty hot weather that reached 48C there. The cuttings, including rooted and potted up ones, were in mint condition. I resolved to try the method myself. I now have 5 jars of cuttings **Ed**

Okay, I love vireyas and want to grow as many varieties as I can, species and hybrids. Each new one I see, a greedy desire to acquire lurks in my mind. I love them perfumed, I love them with large heads of multiflowered trusses, I love the dainty littlies and the hanging baskets of "Coral Flare". Each vireya show I go to I see more that are so beautiful. Anne O'Connor paints one and, in the painting, I see subtle colours that escaped my eye when I looked at the plant itself. I know there is a limit and I have to be rational, but they are *so* attractive. Many are not commonly available commercially.

I work full-time away from the house; I don't have a shade-house or misting/watering system and besides there happens to be a drought anyway (in case you haven't noticed). Solution?.....EASY

I grow the cuttings in water



The Laundry window sill.

I take the cuttings whenever. They work best if I can take new growth just as it hardening but, if it's a matter of taking a cutting from a plant that is dying, you don't have the luxury of choosing the time which is most suitable. Take the cutting as best you can, dip it in a hormone rooting powder/solution, place it in a labelled jam jar and place it on a window sill where it will have good light. And wait. Depending on the plant and the season the roots may grow in about 5 weeks (the quickest) or it may take a year. The longest a cutting took was 2 years but more of that later.

Are there variations that work best? Yes there are.

CUTTING CHOICE

If you have the luxury of choice then take the cutting from new growth just after it has hardened sufficiently. However this technique has worked just as well with broken off bits that have been lying on the ground and it works well with very dehydrated growth from dying vireyas. If the cutting is dehydrated I immerse it in water in a basin until it has rehydrated- one to two days, no longer until the water penetrates the intercellular spaces in the leaves replacing the oxygen and carbon dioxide and the plant effectively ‘drowns’.

Sometimes I scrape back the epidermal tissue on the base of the stalk to expose the cambium layer before I dip it in the rooting hormone, other times I don’t. When I do then I find that the roots grow from where I have scraped away the surface tissue, but if I don’t then the roots grow just as fast from the bottom of the cutting. The roots grow just as rapidly either way – the only difference is where the roots form.



Starting roots



More root growth

ROOT-GROWTH HORMONE

There are a number of these on the market, try what suits you best. I started using a powder that Yates had on the market about 20 years ago. Nowadays I use “Clonex Purple”. It works quite well but the jar of water does tend to grow an algal slime very quickly so I have to change the water more frequently.

CONTAINER

As long as it's glass so that you can see the roots it doesn't matter. I daresay that if interior decoration on window-sills matters to you then you could buy a matching set of lead crystal vases but I find the odds and ends of jars from the Scout's Bottle dump work quite well – but then I use the window-sill in the laundry which my visitors do not frequent.

LABELS

This is CRUCIAL!! I will admit that on the occasion when our vireyas were devastated by *Colectrichum* and we lost 45 of them over 3 weeks, we grabbed cuttings as soon as the next plant started to go brown and wilt. We ended up with 4 unlabelled unknowns and now have to wait until they flower to be sure of their identities. Do the label before you put them into the water. I use a sticky label on the outside of the jar (waterproof ink).



POSITION

Light is, of course, essential. My Laundry window-sill faces south and has good light all day with only oblique direct sun on the jars early on summer mornings. I would not like to expose them to full sunlight in summer or they would cook.



That's **How**, now **How Successful?**

The success rate is over 90% of all cuttings live, grow roots in varied times and transplant into soil successfully and live for at least a year outside. I stop counting after that as all the usual living hazards exist. So yes, it is a most successful method with the minimum of effort.

I do top up the jars of water each week and change the water when the look of the algal growth is annoying me. I have to move them once a week to dust the windowsill. If the weather is very hot (over 40°C for 2-3 days in a row) I change the water completely because it has warmed up and would be likely to be low in oxygen-which, as far as I know, the plant stems/roots need.

TIME

The roots grow at very varied rates. One set of cuttings I acquired at “Emu Valley” in Tasmania were carted around Tasmania for about 2 weeks in a little water in a plastic bucket in the car. It was summer so they were stressed somewhat. When we got home I set them up as usual though and none of them died but they did take 2 years to grow roots. I have noticed that when a cutting is fresh and placed into water, the water level drops quite rapidly for about 2 weeks and then slows considerably and the cutting uses much less water from then on. I have a suspicion that the cuttings become somewhat dormant, a resting phase rather than growth, and that is why the marked change in transpiration rate. (I have checked that it is not due to evaporation rate from the water surface but that transpiration from the leaf surface definitely slows.) The roots start to grow- they often match the growing season of the garden plants. Once the roots have appeared they grow quite rapidly.

I also suspect that plant cuttings in the same jar have some hormonal influence on each other. I am not so organised that each cutting has its own jar of water. My window sill is limited so I will put a new cutting in a jar with an older one already there. Once roots start to appear on one cutting in a jar it seems to me that other cuttings in the same jar do speed up their development of roots also. So when the time comes for them to “leave the nest” I usually have about 8+ plants to transplant out into pots in the “nursery”(a sheltered spot with little direct sunlight where I will remember to water them through the hot days



New Babies-just planted out at the end of summer



The one year olds

From 2007 and 2008 I have 100% success rate and good growth.

The only problem is where to plant the 50+ vireyas in pots when there is a severe drought with draconian water restrictions!

VIREYA GROUP

THE March meeting was held at Mike and Mary Hare's home in Warrandyte. Fifteen members were impressed by some large vireyas growing in very difficult conditions. Their proximity to the swimming pool may provide them with some humidity and the eucalypts give them some shade. The soil is thin over shale and clay. The site is quite steep which makes it difficult to keep the mulch in place so many of the vireyas are kept in pots. Asiatics had not fared well during the heatwave as is the case in most gardens. An impressive Bottle tree stands proudly above the house, not at all worried by the conditions. Mary showed us her innovative way of propagating which can be read in another article in this newsletter.

During morning tea Simon explained the importation procedures for import of seed he had been working on. See Editorial.

Our next meeting is at 2.00pm on Saturday 18th April 2009 at 'Beechmont' 12 Mernda Road Olinda. At this meeting Simon will take the Group through the species in flower at RBGE in May 2008- almost 100 species. The Ferny Creek Rhododendron and Camellia Group asked for this meeting and selected the date. Simon has also asked the Royal Botanic Gardens friends propagation group to come. It will be a good opportunity to compare notes. There may be some plants for those who want them including some **very** small species grown by Andrew Rouse for those who are confident they can keep them alive. Simon will have some species in flower, notably *rhodoleucum*, *konori*, *laetum*, *javanicum* and, perhaps, *tuba*. There are bound to be hybrids in flower.

Marcia Begg

JOTTINGS

Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show Wednesday 1st April – Sunday 5th April at the Exhibition Building. This is an event well worth attending. The Rhododendron Society will take part in the Royal Horticultural Society display on the first floor. Any members who would like to help on the stand can ring Marcia Begg 9751 1610 ASAP. All that is required is to hand out material about our Society and chat to the public.

Tesselaars Garden Expo 14th and 15th March. A few thousand people attended this event. The keen gardeners were there early on Saturday wrapped in raincoats and carrying umbrellas unlike me in sandals and tee-shirt. There is one thing to be said about gardeners they go prepared for any eventuality. The rain encouraged people to spend up and the marquees were packed to the gunnels during the downpours. The begonia display in a large marquee was spectacular and most stalls were busy all day including ours. Andrew Raper supplied us with a good range of vireyas and we had enquiries about many others. Andrew was once again on stage giving an inspiring talk about vireyas to a large rapt audience.

Married bliss: A man, 82 and a woman, 79 met in a retirement home, soon becoming firm friends. Within a short while it was more than friendship, and after consulting with their families it was announced that they would soon be married. Relatives and friends were thrilled, and arrangements commenced.

The couple then went to the local pharmacist, and asked him certain questions. "Can you help with gout?"

"Yes", was the reply.

"Good. How about incontinence?"

"Of course".

"Arthritis? Asthma?..." and the list went on, each time he agreed he could help.

Finally, the pharmacist said, "Excuse me asking, but it sounds as though you've both got a lot wrong with you. I'm happy to help, but you should go to see a doctor."

"Oh, no, it's not like that," they both chorused, "you see, we're getting married soon, and we want to be able to put our preferred gifts and supplier on the invitations."

The Atheist: An atheist was walking through the woods.

"What majestic trees"!

"What powerful rivers"!

"What beautiful animals"!

He said to himself.

As he was walking alongside the river, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look. He saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge towards him. He ran as fast as he could up the path. He looked over his shoulder & saw that the bear was closing in on him.

He looked over his shoulder again, & the bear was even closer. He tripped & fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw that the bear was right on top of him, reaching for him with his left paw & raising his right paw to strike him. At that instant the Atheist cried out, "Oh my God!"

Time Stopped.

The bear froze.

The forest was silent.

As a bright light shone upon the man, a voice came out of the sky. "You deny my

existence for all these years, teach others I don't exist and even credit creation to cosmic accident." "Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer"?

The atheist looked directly into the light, "It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps you could make the BEAR a Christian?" "Very Well," said the voice.

The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed. And the bear dropped his right paw, brought both paws together, bowed his head & spoke:

"Lord bless this food, which I am about to receive from thy bounty through Christ our Lord, Amen."

'Spend a Penny' . The saying came from the days when we were charged a penny, later 5 and 10cents, to use a public toilet.

A gentleman needed to use the conveniences on a cruise ship where for some unapparent reason he needed to pay a penny. On his arrival at the facility he realised he did not have the appropriate amount of cash. On seeing the Purser nearby he asked if he might loan him the required amount. 'Goodness no', said the Purser, this is Sitmar line not the 'P and O'!!

Marcia Begg

VALE GRAEME NEVILLE EATON 1936-2009

[A photo of Graeme with Lesley and grandchild appears on page 12 Ed]

Graeme and Lesley Eaton were very happily married for forty seven and one half years. Lesley had hoped to make the magic fifty, but they had a wonderful time doing everything together throughout that period. Four happy healthy children, Deborah, Russ, Amanda and Brian, were raised and have grown to fine adults. 'Kalbar', that stunning garden in the Dandenongs, was created and now 'Alcheringa' at Swanpool is looking good. We will always remember Graeme's friendly and sociable manner and he was also a very generous and caring man. Graeme was not only generous with material things, but with his time and energy to support others. He was a genuinely loyal and caring person dedicated to what he believed was right and he put his heart and soul into whatever he did.

Graeme was born 9 December, 1936 at East St. Kilda and he met Lesley at teachers' college. They became teachers, were married and raised their family at 'Kalbar' in the Dandenongs. Graeme rose to the position of principal and finished his teaching career as the principal of Wandin Yallock Primary School. Lesley was the president of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society and then National President of the ARS. Graeme supported her and gave fully in his positions of National Secretary and Registrar of the ARS. These are time consuming jobs and while in the position of registrar Graeme attempted to get photographs of all Australian registered hybrids. He knew that this was never going to be fully achieved as some hybrids have no doubt been lost over time, but during his time as registrar through perseverance, patience and good detective work he was able to get images of most.

Graeme and Lesley loved the ARS social events held annually and it was one Saturday evening at 'Kalbar', during Lesley's time as president, that we came up with the idea that there should be an annual event associated with the Annual General Meeting of the ARS at

the peak of the rhododendron flowering season. The Eatons also played a major role in getting me to join the International Dendrology Society, to which they belonged. Again we have had wonderful times on these trips. Graeme liked to travel.

Who can forget 'Kalbar'; their previous home and garden? I met Graeme and Lesley in 1988 and stayed with them. Here was a dream rhododendron garden. I was quite overcome. The landscaping was superb, the plantings of rhododendrons were mature and wonderfully placed and the whole was complemented by companion plantings. The home nestled peacefully into the garden. All the elements of good design were there, but 'Kalbar' was more than this. You could sit or stroll and gaze around all day, because there was an atmosphere and feeling that defy words. This was a rhododendron enthusiasts paradise. Who did all of this? They both did it from scratch, but it was a family affair too, as the children had their own little plots. Graeme was a most meticulous and industrious person who put his heart and soul into everything and did it well.

The move to 'Alcheringa', at Swanpool near Benalla, was made in 2002. A new life in the country is not for everyone, but I could live there and be most happy. The combination of home garden, open spaces, view and country atmosphere, this place has it. 'Alcheringa' is not an easy sight to work, but in the short time that Graeme and Lesley had been there the progress had been remarkable. The trees are becoming established and the soil is being built up. They knew how to garden, both from a practical angle to make it work and from an aesthetic angle to make it look, feel and smell good.

Graeme's achievements speak for themselves, but what of the man himself? I, and at times the whole family, have stayed many times with the Eatons. I have been made most welcome and Graeme has always found the time to make the stay enjoyable. Just before Graeme became seriously ill, I stayed at 'Alcheringa' and we did a trip up the Ovens Valley to Bright. We had a great day. Graeme loved nature and became an active member of Landcare at Swanpool. He was at home in the garden and loved the foliage and structure of plants as well as the rhododendron flowers. He was an outstanding propagator and meticulous in his work. Everything had its correct Dymo label! Graeme was instrumental in getting a lot of new genetic material available to members of the ARS. He loved a joke and had a vast repertoire of humour, but he was appropriately serious or humorous as was fitting for the occasion.

I have said *they* throughout, because that is how it was with Graeme and Lesley. Everything was teamwork.

Graeme finally lost the battle with liver failure 10 March, 2009 after a long and determined fight. He was his usual optimistic and positive self throughout the illness and Graeme's parting was most untimely for a man who lived a very healthy lifestyle and did not consume alcohol. We always had Graeme as the designated driver.

None of us will forget the tall, friendly and likeable man with the Akubra hat, shorts, long socks and broad smile who gave us so much over the years.

Barry Davidson

Hobart

Free Community Open Day

National Rhododendron Gardens

Enjoy this magnificent garden in all its autumn splendour and join in the interesting activities on offer



Parks Victoria is inviting the community to enjoy the health benefits gained from exploring and enjoying the wonderful natural and cultural assets in the Dandenongs

- Appearances by
- Ranger Roo
- Interpretive walks & talks
- Face painting
- 2 Wildlife shows
- The Possum Lady
- Storytelling
- Children's Puppet Show
- Interactive activities and games for children
- Plant growing demonstrations
- 10% discount at the Gardens Gift Shop



Date: Tuesday 7 April 2009

Time: 10am to 3pm

Venue: National Rhododendron Gardens

**The Georgian Road, Olinda
(Mel Ref 66 K6)**

PROGRAM 2009

APRIL – **MONDAY 13TH (Easter Monday) : SOCIAL OUTING.** Keep this date free to have a picnic and visit a couple of wholesale nurseries.

FRIDAY 17TH 8.00pm General Meeting Nunawading. **SPEAKER: Neil Webster**

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

SATURDAY 18TH 2.00pm Vireya Group. This is a combined meeting with the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Rhododendron and Camellia Group at “Beechmont” 12 Mernda Road Olinda to see species Vireyas growing and a presentation of Dr George Argent’s RBGE Vireya collection as at May 2008. Some 90+ species in flower.

MAY - **SATURDAY 9TH**, Vireya Group. No May meeting; held early, on 18th April.

FRIDAY 15TH 8.00pm General Meeting Nunawading. **SPEAKER: ANDREW RAPER** –SASANQUA CAMELLIAS. Andrew will bring plants to sell.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

JUNE – **FRIDAY 19TH 8.00pm. General Meeting** at Nunawading. **SPEAKER: PETER RALPH**, Peter had a wonderful trip to Bhutan and has fabulous photos to show.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

JULY – **SATURDAY 11TH**, Vireya Group Ring Simon Begg to confirm. 9751 1610

FRIDAY 17TH 8.00pm General Meeting Nunawading.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

AUGUST – **FRIDAY 21ST** General Meeting – LESLIE EATON?

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

SEPTEMBER – SALE DAY TO BE ADVISED

SATURDAY 12TH, Vireya Group Ring Simon Begg to confirm. 9751 1610

FRIDAY 18TH 8.00pm General Meeting at Nunawading.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

OCTOBER – **FRIDAY 2ND, SAT 3RD & SUN 4TH ABC GARDEN SHOW @ CAULFIELD RACECOURSE.** The ARSV will probably have a stand to advertise our society. Volunteers will be needed. Ring Marcia Begg 9751 1610.

SATURDAY 3RD & SUNDAY 4TH AZALEA SHOW in Hall at National Rhododendron Gardens. Saturday is also members day at 2 pm.

FRIDAY 16TH 8.00pm General Meeting at Nunawading.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

FRIDAY 16TH TO SUNDAY 18TH ARS CONFERENCE AT SOUTH AUSTRALIA

NOVEMBER – **FROM SAT. 31ST OCTOBER TO TUES. 3RD NOVEMBER, RHODODENDRON SHOW in Hall at National Rhododendron Gardens**

SATURDAY 14TH – Vireya Group Ring Simon Begg to confirm. 9751 1610

FRIDAY 20TH 8.00pm AGM at Nunawading. Speaker to be advised.

Committee meeting 5.00pm at Nunawading

DECEMBER – **SUNDAY 6TH CHRISTMAS FUNCTION**

FRIDAY 11TH – **Committee Meeting** at Olinda 8.00pm

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ARSV COMMITTEE 2009

The new committee was elected in November 2008 for the following year. There are vacancies on the committee and members who would be interested to be more involved would be made very welcome. The committee meets at Nunawading at 5.00pm before the Monthly General Meeting on the 3rd Friday.

PRESIDENT: Michael Hammer Ph: 9755 2176

VICE PRESIDENT No 1: Vacant

VICE PRESIDENT No 2: Vacant

TREASURER: Neil Webster, Ph: 9859 3622

SECRETARY: Michael Hare, 9844 2232

Simon Begg (Editor) & Marcia Begg, Ph: 9751 1610

Inge Hammer, Ph: 9755 2176

Valerie Marshall, Ph: 9803 4434

Cynthia Sladen, Ph: 9561 8874

Alan Walker, Ph: 9726 8836

Elizabeth Xipell, Ph: 9859 9934

SOCIETY PICASA WEB SITE

Visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/ARSVic> for the latest pictures.

Additions since the November 2008 Newsletter are :-

* Heat ravaged gardens in and around Melbourne

* Vireya group visit to Mike and Mary Hare's house

For the "Beechmont" Picasaweb site visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/simonwbegg>