



# Rhododendrons South Australia

Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch

Issue 116-June 2018

## President's Message

At this month's meeting we can look forward to a presentation from Milton Bowman who will be enlightening us more with a talk relating to the history and development of the Whibley Hybrid Rhododendrons here in the Adelaide Hills. I mentioned this in my message for the April newsletter in the context of developing a more rigorous and enduring record of these plants which play an important role in developing more comprehensive and reliable records of all hardy Australian hybrids. This will be beneficial for not only us but for future rhododendron enthusiasts, and even more broadly on the world stage of rhododendron collections.

It is rather fascinating to gain an appreciation for plant, and more specifically Rhododendron, hybridising practices, and should be of particular interest to our newer members who no doubt will have had their curiosities roused with frequent references to Whibley Hybrids at meetings and other functions. This will hopefully be combined with more recently acquired knowledge and insight from our Bremen conference attendees who no doubt will have been exposed to similar historical anecdotes from our European counterparts.



Whibley Rh. Mr Rosenthal

Continuing on an international theme, those attending the last meeting were most fortunate to be entertained with a wonderful photographic presentation by Ann and David Mattison and Lianne Healey on their trip to Japan last autumn. Coincidentally they all found themselves booked on the same "Australians Studying Abroad" tour hosted by award-winning landscape designer and gardening media personality, Jim Fogarty. The tour focussed on both traditional and more contemporary Japanese garden landscaping styles and techniques, along with the building structures and settings they are associated with. A wonderful visual feast for us to enjoy and be inspired by!

# Last meeting



Ann with her raffle prize



Ann and Lianne – 'Trip to Japan' presenters



Milton's report on rhododendrons from Red Dragon nursery

## Next Meeting

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This will be held at the RSL Hall Stirling on Tuesday, June, 19th at 8pm. Presentation about the history and development of the Whibley Hybrid Rhododendrons in the Adelaide Hills.

*Please remember to bring a plate for supper and something for the “pot Luck Stall”.  
Friends and new members are always welcome.*

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## Autumn in the Adelaide Hills gardens

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## Bloom of the Month – Rhododendron Schneeflieder

Rhododendron Schneeflieder is a new release of Hachmann's nursery in North Germany.





## From the Propagating bench *by Richard Illman*

### Striking cuttings the European way

Whilst they take their cuttings at about the same time as we do, that's where the similarity ends. Their striking medium is pure, shredded, coarse Swedish peat. Cuttings are inserted directly into this in either a closed box as we do or a misting unit that can provide 100% humidity. They say the cuttings strike in 4-6 weeks and when growth starts the flower bud or vegetative bud on the top of the stem is removed to promote branching and the cuttings are treated with weak liquid fertiliser. After 3 months they are transferred into individual 100 mm pots, again in pure peat, fertilised regularly and can usually be pruned again within 6 months, producing a plant ready for sale within a year.

In Germany, the majority of Rhododendrons are struck as cutting grafts. Here a cutting of both a suitable root stock and a desirable scion are grafted together using a simple oblique cut across each stem, leaving about 1 cm of the understock protruding at the base. They are then treated exactly as above. The main nursery in this area of Germany produces over 1.5 million plants by this method a year. This process of grafting onto an understock, generally Cunningham's White which is tolerant of slightly alkaline conditions, enables rhododendrons to be grown where the soil conditions are not suitable to growing plants on their own roots.

We observed in most of the gardens rhododendrons were grown on the surface of the soil in a raised bed of shredded coarse Swedish peat. In some places we saw plants growing from seed directly in these beds.



Mega scale production

## Grey Currawong

### *Strepera versicolor*



Grey Currawong, sub-species *versicolor* has variable grey to grey-brown plumage, white tail-tip, under-tail coverts are white; flight feathers have white tips; white patches on the wing (which may be visible in the folded wing). Black around the eye. Mid-grey in south-east Australia becoming gradually darker westward with less white in the wing. Very dark grey in the south-west of Western Australia and in an isolated population in Central Australia.

The grey currawong does not move far from its home range but may move to lower, milder areas in winter.

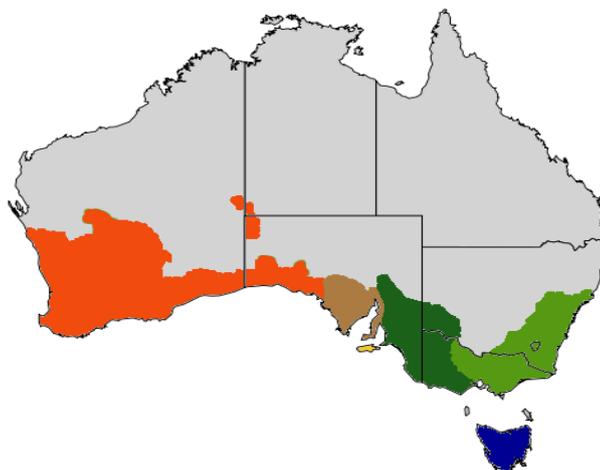
Like the others of its species, the grey currawong is an omnivore eating insects, seeds, fruits, carrion and small animals such as rodents, birds and bird eggs. They feed both in trees and on the ground, often using their beak to prise bark off tree trunks in search of insects.

#### Breeding

A large, rather flimsy nest of sticks is constructed for a nest, usually 5 to 15 metres from the ground. The nest is shaped like a bowl and lined with dry, soft grasses. The female incubates the eggs and both parents contribute to raising the young. The breeding season stretches from August to December and two to three eggs are laid. The incubation period is 21 days.



South Australia has 4 species of Grey Currawong. All have a distinctive high pitched, clear, ringing, clinking call.



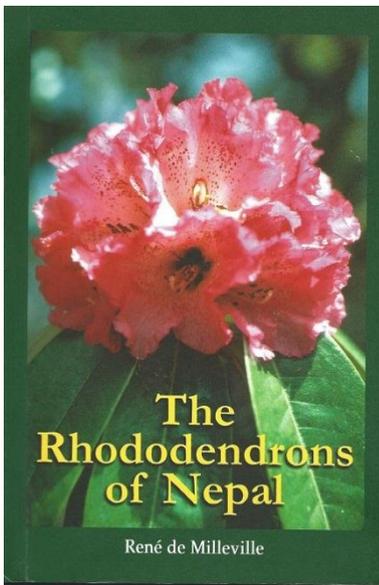
## Librarian's Report *by Ann & David Matison*

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We recently acquired an interesting little book named *The Rhododendrons of Nepal*, by René de Milleville. As he says in the preface, he wrote the book for two reasons. Firstly when he was trekking in Nepal he could not find a guide to the indigenous Rhododendrons, so this book has been designed to fulfil that role, hence the small size. But René de Milleville also wanted his book to be suitable for others, and it is.

It starts with a history of the Rhododendron. It never fails to amaze me that the species Rhododendron has been identified in ancient geological nooks and crannies as being up to 50 million years old. They emerged at a similar time as the Himalayan Mountains.

In the first chapter "the Rhododendron Story" he writes about the plant hunters, before he goes on to the core of the book itself. Thirty Rhododendron Species have been identified in Nepal and Melleville has given a detailed and easy to follow guide of each of the species. That is where the trekkers guide would come in very handy. He mentions where they could be found, size, distinguishing features and uses. If you were an experienced mountaineer you could find dwarf species of rhododendrons at 5000m. One wonders if the mountaineers at those heights would have the energy to dip into their back pack and pull out the guide.



I might sound facetious, but I did enjoy the book and Melleville has provided excellent pictures to help identify the plants and diagrams to help find them.

Thanks to some very welcome helpers we have moved the Library to the RSL Hall, and members are invited to borrow the books once again. We have changed the means of borrowing slightly. As before, please take the card out of the book and write your name and the date in the Borrowed column, then place the card in the box provided. When you return the book we will have a basket in the cupboard in which to place the book. We will then replace the card and reshelf the book.

Shifting the books gave us a wonderful opportunity to do a comprehensive stock-take, finding three books missing. If they happen to be in your bookshelf could you please return them at the next meeting? The books are:

*Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker Traveller / Collector* by Ray Desmond

*Rhododendrons and Camellias Hamlyn Care Manual* by Kenneth Cox

*Greer's Guide to Available Rhododendrons* by Harold Greer.

We have placed the books into four categories. As to be expected the biggest category is Rhododendrons. This includes all books relating to Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Vireyas.

The next category is Exploration. These books relate to Plant Hunters and the History of Rhododendrons.

The third category is Plants. This our collection of books about specific plants other than Rhododendrons eg Hellebores and Camellias.

The final category is General. These are books of general interest to gardeners and travellers e.g a history of the National Trust in SA, the Gardens of Edna Walling and The Story of the Dunedin Botanic Gardens.

Each section is shelved in alphabetic order according to the author or editor.

Enjoy your reading.

## **Tales from Forest Lodge** *by Milton Bowman*



This last month has continued to Autumn theme of being relatively dry and warm, with 91mm for the month and many lovely days where being outside has been pleasant.

We have finally planted out one new garden bed with many young rhododendrons, camellias, and hydrangeas and we are looking forward to spring when the colours should be spectacular. All that needs to be done to that bed is to put mulch on the soil and install an automatic watering system before summer.

Meanwhile the autumn colours have been good, albeit a little late, and the Japanese Maples have been a picture. The copper beech on the front lawn have started dropping leaves which are being mown up and mixed with chicken litter to make a very active compost heap.

I have been wondering for years how to develop a rational lawn watering schedule, and my efforts so far have been hit and miss. A recent book has shown the way. The idea is to either buy or make an “evaporimeter”. This is a simple device that collects the rain, deducts the amount of water that either evaporates or is transpired, allows a bit for infiltration and removal of excess salts, and tells you how much water is needed for irrigation. This all sounds complicated but really is simple, and I will get it set up in the near future.

I have noticed that a few plants in containers have been very dry and in need of a good drink and this reinforces the need to get more regular and logical with all of the watering.

The first consignment of Red Dragon rhododendron cuttings has arrived in good condition and will be in pots for another year or two before they are planted out. The plants are very small but it is the only way to get these varieties, and I hope that they all survive and go on to be spectacular bloomers.

Happy gardening

Milton Bowman



## European gardens – sneak preview *from the travellers correspondence*

“...We have been so lucky with the weather with temperatures over 22 degrees since we arrived in Europe...”



“...We have seen some amazing sites and the tulips at Keukenhoff were spectacular...”



Rhododendrons at Hachmann's nursery in Germany



“...We have just returned from another garden filled day. The gardens they are taking us to are mainly private and just get more interesting and breathtaking. We visited a garden entitled Zen Garden...”



Wandering amongst beds of deciduous azaleas



Meconopsis in all their glory



“...The gardens and blooms were all at their peak and really spectacular...”



At the International Conference in Bremen – Happy 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary Robyn & Ian



Bressingham in Norfolk

## Notice Board

### Maple grafting workshop

Expressions of interest are sought to participate in maple grafting workshops that will be held in late August or early September. Please let Bronwyn or Richard Illman know if you are interested in participating in the workshop. If you have suitable maple root stock growing in your garden it is now time to lift and pot them in preparation for grafting.

### Notice of our Treasurer's resignation

Peter Wiadrowski indicated last year that 2018 would be his last year as Treasurer and all members are requested to give some thought to taking on the position. Peter has given our society many years of valuable service and he has generously offered to mentor any member who would be prepared to take on this role. Please speak to Peter if you have any questions about the nature of the position.

