



# **ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY**

## **Dublin Group**



**NEWSLETTER NO. 50 - SUMMER 2008**



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Front cover illustration is of *Saxifraga porophylla* - p. 12 (Photo: Billy Moore).

## EDITORIAL

An interest in gardening is widely considered to be an enviable trait because of the obvious enjoyment that those with that interest obtain from their hobby; the more passionate the interest the deeper the satisfaction and pleasure that it brings. Growing plants is therapeutic because of that pleasure and satisfaction and because it puts the grower into close contact with nature. How many of our members are passionate alpine growers? Not as many as is desirable considering the number who exhibit at the annual Show. This year only eighteen members did so. There is no suggestion that showing is the only, or even the main criterion to be used in deciding whether someone is a passionate plantsperson or not - some growers dislike even the idea of showing - but it is a significant one. A major objective of the Group must be to encourage members to grow alpines; whether they show or not is secondary. As you will see in the News and Views column the Committee has decided to make a special effort this year to spice up the autumn show by having a members-only plant sale and practical workshops on growing. Should the Committee go further? In the June 2008 Bulletin, *Castilleja* mentions (on pp 151/2) two letters sent recently to Pershore which touch on the topic of encouraging “new and improving gardeners”. Arising from both letters is the suggestion of introducing a mentor scheme through the local AGS Groups “in order to enthuse younger members”. *Castilleja* invites a response from readers to this idea. Here is an opportunity for the Dublin Group to respond positively by introducing such a scheme. A first step would be to ask for volunteer mentors and mentees. Assuming a reasonable response a number of mentees could be allocated to a mentor based on location etc. There should be some clarity as to what would be expected from the various parties and guidelines as to how the scheme would work. The bones of such a scheme could be presented to members at the Autumn Show when a broad range of views could be canvassed and the level of interest assessed. I sometimes think, and I may be wrong, that the Ulster Group has a greater number of serious growers than we do. A scheme such as this could help to redress any imbalance.

## NEWS & VIEWS

The next issue of the newsletter will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Group and should, therefore, be a bit special. I will do my best but I appeal to you to help me out. A selection of reminiscences from members of events over the twenty-five years would be nice, so, if there is memory that you think might be worth sharing please let me know. Humorous contributions would be most welcome. I would also like to hear any suggestions you might have for any other items you would like to see included. My contact details are on the back cover.

### In this Issue

Our featured article is very generously contributed by **Helen Dillon** who has been a member of the Group since 1984 and has always been tremendously supportive. She judges at the annual show and welcomes our overseas speakers to her wonderful garden, irrespective of the time of year. When **Martin Walsh** asks our visitors if there is anything in particular they would like to see while in Ireland they almost invariably put the Dillon Garden at the top of their list. The Group owes a huge debt of gratitude to Helen for all she has done for us over the years.

**Liam Byrne** once again writes about cultivation, on this occasion extolling the virtues of *Primula veris*, an easy, commonplace but very beautiful plant.

**George Sevastopulo** and **Frank Tindall** (President of the AGS) write about the two 2008 Irish Shows. They were each the official AGS reporter for our Show and the Ulster Group Show respectively.

I have an article on the rock garden in Maynooth College and George reviews two important new books.

Finally we have reviews of all our fixtures for the first half of 2008 written by various members to whom I offer heartfelt thanks. I am delighted with all the contributions but I feel I must mention in particular **Anne Nolan's** astonishingly comprehensive report on Martin Walsh's talk.

## Fixtures

We have another top class programme for the remainder of the year, unequalled, I would say, by any other society in Ireland – see page 42.

Our first meeting is on Thursday, 18 September, in Glasnevin when **Finn Haugli** will talk on ‘Growing Asian Plants at Tromsø Botanical Gardens, Norway’. Finn is the recently retired director of the gardens. I heard him give this riveting talk in Prague. This is a unique opportunity to learn something about these amazing gardens which featured in the recent BBC series *Around the World in 80 Gardens*.

At 2.30 pm on Saturday, 4 October, there is a visit to **Dargle Cottage Garden**, Dargle Road (N 11 end), Enniskerry. This is an excellent private garden which is not open to the public so you should take this opportunity to see it. It was formerly the garden of the late **Sir Basil Goulding**. Members are asked to be there at 2.30 sharp as the electric gates will be closed after we enter.

On Saturday, 11 October at 2.30 pm the Autumn Show will be held in Stillorgan. This event should not be missed as, in addition to the show element, competitive and non-competitive, there will be a special **Plant and Bulb Sale** which is intended to encourage members to grow more alpines both for their gardens and for showing. There will be lots of plants and bulbs available at reasonable prices. There will also be a **Cultivation Forum** covering all aspects of alpine growing as well as some advice on making the most of the seed list. Please try to bring some plants for the sale but more importantly please be there.

Thursday, 16 October is an important date. **Henrik Zetterlund** will talk on ‘Alpines in Gothenburg, Sweden’ at NBG, Glasnevin. Anyone who heard Henrik at Termonfeckin in 2006 will know what a wonderful speaker he is, and how important from an alpine point of view the Botanical Gardens in Gothenburg are. Henrik has an international reputation as an author, lecturer, and plant explorer.

**George Sevastopulo** will take us on ‘A Cretan Odyssey’ on Thursday, 13 November in Stillorgan. George’s talks are always full

of interest, delivered with great aplomb and illustrated by excellent slides. I am looking forward to it.

From Friday, 21 November to Sunday, 23 November our **24<sup>th</sup> Alpine Weekend** takes place, as usual, in Termonfeckin, and what a line-up we have this year. Our speakers are **Peter Korn**, **Robert Rolfe** and **Martin Walsh**. Peter is from Sweden and is well known for his innovative approach to growing. His lecture at the SRGC Discussion Weekend a couple of years ago was a sensation. Robert is Assistant Editor of the AGS Bulletin and also a major contributor to it. He gave two talks in Prague last year and has to be heard to be believed. For me, he was the best speaker in a stellar list at the Czech Conference. He rarely gives talks so we are privileged to have him at *An Grianán*. As I write this Martin is in Bhutan following in the footsteps of Ludlow and Sherriff in an area that is underexplored, leaving open the likelihood that some new species may be found. He will talk to us about his adventures at the Weekend, and will in no sense be overshadowed by his illustrious fellow speakers.

Our weekends are becoming more and more popular, and no wonder, given the calibre of speakers that we continue to have, so when I advocate early booking I don't do so lightly. See Programme and booking documentation.

We finish the year in Stillorgan on 11 December, with a 'Christmas Miscellany'. This will be a festive, social evening with a *pot-pourri* of members' slides and some seasonal chat. See you there.

### **75th birthday of the Scottish Rock Garden Club**

From **Rose Sevastopulo**

Congratulations to the Scottish Rock Garden Club on their 75th anniversary. The occasion was celebrated at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh with a lunch for some 200 guests. The pre-lunch speeches were led by the President, Ian Christie, resplendent in a kilt, and included contributions from the President of the Alpine Garden Society, Frank Tindall, and from the Show

Secretary of the Ulster Group, Pat Crossley. The latter both presented trophies, a painting and a quaich respectively, which will be competed for at SRGC shows. After lunch, there were guided tours of the gardens, which were looking splendid, followed by a lecture on future plans for the gardens by the Horticultural Director, David Rae.

*The SRGC have invited George to speak at their discussion weekend in early October, the first time that anyone from this part of Ireland has had that distinction. He will talk about the Burren. Well done George and good luck in October. Ed.*

## **2009 Show**

From **Val Keegan**

We had the early show this year, our 23<sup>rd</sup>, and still filled our benches quite well. We had 251 plants on view, 181 visitors through the door plus members, and an excellent plant sale! It was a good show for the visiting public and an interesting one for members to enjoy. How Liam produces the number of excellent plants that he does is a mystery to me!

Why do we do it?

1. To enable ourselves and the general public to enjoy seeing the range of different plants grown by members.
2. To raise funds and advertise the society to others.
3. To meet our friends with similar interests.
4. To enjoy the competition and get new ideas.
5. To enjoy the artistic section.
6. To avail of the opportunity of buying new plants from specialist growers.

Needless to say there is a lot of work done by many people in running our Show, and I want to say a big thank you to all of you who take on any job, large or small – no prima donnas here thank goodness!

Next year the Ulster Group is having their 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday and we have agreed to their request to let them have the later show, which is 25 April. Our Show therefore will be on Saturday, 4 April.



Please try to produce at least one or two plants to exhibit. Remember it is for all our members, so why not give it a try. The old hands are always there to help. Many societies have had such difficulty in getting members to show plants that they no longer run a show – help us to keep ours going for many years to come. To help members get started or continue showing the Group will help in many ways.

1. Advice – regular exhibitors are only too happy to give advice.
2. Supply of suitable plants – we will have some easy show plants to sell at the Autumn Show.
3. George Sevastopulo is ordering bulbs for members to grow. They will also be on sale at the Autumn Show.
4. Billy Moore is making a list of suggestions of seeds to order. Hopefully we will have some seeds for members at the Show.

I have now been Show Secretary for 17 years. Whilst I have enjoyed the job I feel that I need a deputy who would be in a position to take my place should the need arise. Any offers?

## **Our Website**

From **Jamie Chambers**

Our website ([www.alpinegardensociety.ie](http://www.alpinegardensociety.ie)), you'll be glad to hear, is still being used, indeed more than ever before. With the usual warnings to concentrate on the movement of the numbers rather than the actual meaning (the web can be a mysterious place), the number of Hits in June was 6,182 (compared with 3,592 last November) with 790 Sites visiting us (661). Just before the Show, in March, the numbers were even bigger at 8,601 and 1,300. Images of plants are still the most popular, but now people are downloading the newsletters too.

Of course I'm pleased if our members find our website useful, but even more pleased when others use it to find out about us, and that's happening more now as well. The Dublin 15 Environment Group found us on the web and sent me an email in May, asking if we would give a presentation about alpine gardening in

Blanchardstown. This group aims to raise people's awareness of environmental issues, so Val Keegan and I went out one evening in June and Val gave an excellent lecture for beginners. Not a big crowd, but a good way I thought of moving beyond our usual audience.

As ever, let me know if you have any requests or suggestions for the website (email me at [agsinfo@eircom.net](mailto:agsinfo@eircom.net)) or contact any committee member.

### **Mrs Audrey Dillon-Mahon**

I am sorry to have to record Audrey's death earlier this year. She had been a loyal member since 1986 and regularly attended meetings until she and her late husband moved to Galway. She was a lady of great charm and I always appreciated the little notes she jotted on her subscription form each year.

## THE SHOWS



*Lewisia tweedyi* (Photo: Billy Moore)

### **Dublin AGS SHOW 2008 – 5 April 2008**

In my report of the 2007 Show, I paid tribute to all those who provided the ancillary features (catering, cleaners-up, commercial plant stalls, group plant sale, raffle, show secretary, stewarding, etc.) which make our show such a social and financial success. Once again, the efforts of these helpers were much in evidence, even if the helpers themselves were difficult to identify in the hustle and bustle of the show. The show is more than the sum of the plants!

However, this year it is the turn of the exhibitors, without whom there would be no show. An exceptionally early date, coupled with miserable weather during much of March, might have been expected to result in a dearth of plants on the benches. In the event, exhibitors north and south rallied round and the Community School hall in Cabinteely was well filled with a colourful display. Several genera of plants were not represented, however. Notable among these were *Androsace* (except for a single

*A. [Douglasia] montana*) and *Gentiana*. There were very few *Narcissus*, perhaps as a result of the high rainfall and lack of sun in the previous summer. The Open section was well supported but we badly need new exhibitors in B and C sections to maintain a reasonable level of competition and to slow down the progression of relatively inexperienced growers upward to the Open section, where they may be deterred by the large pots and the standards expected.

A great feature of the Irish shows is the mutual support provided by exhibitors from the north and south (perhaps they will be joined next year by some of those excellent growers from the Cork Group). So it was a cause for double celebration that **Raymond Copeland** from Newry, County Down won his first Farrer Medal with a fine *Saxifraga porophylla* (pictured on Front Cover). The plant was acquired several years ago as *S. sribnyi*, from which it is clearly distinguished by its unbranched inflorescence and dominantly sessile flowers. It had made its debut at the Ulster Group's Local Show a few weeks earlier, where it similarly had been judged best in show. Pictures of this plant and others from the show can be seen on the Group's website.

Now to two of our foremost exhibitors: **Harold McBride**, Lisburn and **Liam Byrne**, Dublin were in competition in the class for 'rare in cultivation' with plants that were appearing for the first time on the bench in Dublin. Harold had coaxed a small pad of *Eritrichium nanum* into flower and Liam introduced us to *Thryptomene saxicola*, a south-western West Australian native. It is a small leaved shrub in the Myrtaceae with masses of small pink flowers and has been used as a cut flower in Australia. It is reported to come from granitic areas and to be moderately frost hardy. It grows to a metre high and is certainly a plant that should be tried in Dublin gardens.

Dublin and Ulster shows are almost always graced by large pots of *Lewisia tweedyi* in rude good health and bursting with flower – the

output of our Dublin show grower *par excellence*, Liam Byrne. This year they did not disappoint. The ancestor of the current crop was grown from seed. The plants get well fed and are moved on into larger pots twice or more during the growing season. This year's best specimen received an award of merit.

Another winner of an award of merit was a magnificent plant of the pale yellow-throated, white *Primula marginata* 'Casterina' shown by Harold.



*Primula marginata* 'Casterina' (Photo: Billy Moore)

Between them Liam and Harold made inroads into the silverware in the Open section. Harold won The Ulster Group Trophy (3 pans rock plants distinct raised from seed) and Liam the ACC Cup (most 1st prize points - Open) and an AGS Sewell Medal (6 pans rock plants distinct).

Plants grown for foliage are commonly eclipsed by those in flower in the confines of show reports. **Billy Moore**, another of our stalwart exhibitors, showed a most attractive form of *Astelia nivicola*, which has a pleasing silver sheen on the upper surface of

the leaves and a bronze tinge on the reverse. It received an award of merit, as did another of Billy's plants, a well flowered, dome-shaped cushion of *Dionysia aretioides* 'Phyllis Carter', which also won the David Shackleton Trophy (best pan *Primulaceae*).

Apart from Pleiones, orchids have not featured strongly in previous Dublin shows but a much admired *Anacamptis longicornis*, exhibited by **Bob Gordon**, Portglenone, led to several enquiries as to where such a plant could be acquired.



*Anacamptis longicornis* (Photo: Billy Moore)

The Jacki Troughton-Smith Trophy (best pan *Ericaceae*) was won by **George and Pat Gordon**, for *Cassiope* 'Kathleen Dryden' and the Margaret Orsi Bowl (best plant from North America) by **Susan Tindall**, with x *Kalmiothamnus* 'Sindelberg', a most attractive bigeneric hybrid between *Kalmiopsis* and *Rhodothamnus*.

Congratulations to **Noelle Ann Curran** for her large entry in section B, which gained her the Barney Johnson Trophy (most 1st prize points) and an AGS Spoon (6 pans rock plants distinct). The Waverley Trophy for the best plant in section B was won by **Pat Kennedy** for *Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf'.



*Anemonella thalictroides* 'Oscar Schoaf' (Photo: Billy Moore)

**Paddy Smith** won the Termonfeckin Trophy (most 1st prize points - Section C), the start of a successful career in exhibiting. **Michael Byrne** won the Brian Wood Trophy (1 pan rock plant raised from seed Section C) and the Millennium Cup (best plant - Section C for *Cyclamen repandum peloponnesiacum*).

The artistic section was excellent and is always thoroughly enjoyed by the general public. The most 1st prize points in the Open Section were gained by **Jon Evans**.

**George Sevastopulo**

## Ulster AGS SHOW – 26 April 2008



Jim Price, the Editor and Frank Tindall (President AGS) judging at the Ulster Show. (Photo: Liam McCaughey)

As usual the people of the Ulster Group made everyone feel welcome in the superb surroundings of Greenmount College in County Antrim. The grounds were in excellent condition despite a prolonged dry period.

You always see different plants when you go to the Irish shows. I will mention some that particularly caught my attention. One of the first was **Jim Price's** pan of *Narcissus obesus* 'Diamond Ring' with its large flowers and long glossy foliage. I had seen this plant for sale in a nursery last year and was impressed by it then also.

*Pleione aurita*, exhibited by **Liam Byrne** of the Dublin Group in the small pan class, was another outstanding plant. Many members of the Dublin Group travel north to support the Show in Greenmount and members of the Ulster Group reciprocate for the Dublin Show. I liked *Thryptomene saxicola*, also Liam Byrne's, which is in the Myrtle family and is hardy in Dublin and the south



coast of England. It comes from Western Australia and can grow to about a metre high.

**Harold McBride's** dwarf *Aquilegia*, *A. grahamii*, hails from the USA and looks as though it might be a crevice plant; how long lived it is I do not know - flower colour is red and yellow. Harold also showed the pink-flowered *Androsace idahoensis*, which grows in three small sites in the state of Idaho. It's not an easy plant in cultivation. I have tried several times to visit its home but have had to turn back on each occasion because of snow melt. I have grown it in a north facing crevice built from slate. I have taken considerable trouble to get information on *Ranunculus delavayi*, also exhibited by Harold, but without success. It has a nice yellow flower and looks as though it would be dwarf. In the three dwarf conifer class, small pan size, **Jim McKnight's** *Abies koreana* 'Silver Kugel' really did look dwarf and deservedly received an award of merit. I left Ulster after a very busy and enjoyable two days, meeting lots of old friends and I hope, making some new ones.

**Frank Tindall**

*To add to Frank's report I thought the Ulster Show this year was excellent with many fine plants on the benches, although attendance by the public seemed to be down. It is becoming increasingly clear that the later of the two shows, whether it is north or south, tends to be the bigger, and so it was this year.*

*The Farrer Medal was awarded to Harold Mc Bride's very fine pan of *Pinguicula grandiflora* (pictured on the back cover) and, in addition to the exhibitor mentioned by Frank, Awards of Merit went to Liam Byrne for *Pleione aurita*, Susan Tindall for *Daphne petraea* 'Grandiflora' and to Harold for *Anemone trullifolia* 'Pradesh Seedling'. Liam Byrne won the Open Section, Mary McAllister of Castlewellan, Section B and Kay McDowell of Limavady, Section C. The artistic section was well supported with many fine exhibits. Our members did well with Liam, on top of his other prizes, winning the Cowan Trophy and the Alpines '96 Award; Pat Kennedy the award for the best plant in Section C; and Miriam Healy the AGS Spoon for her six pan entry in Section 65.*

**Ed.**

## ALPINES, GAMBLING AND DOLLY THE SHEEP



A spring view of the canal in the Dillon Garden (Photo: Billy Moore)

My first experience of alpines took place when I was about nine. My younger brother and I each had our own patch of garden, facing east, behind the bothy at our home in Perthshire, Scotland. Our teacher, Mr Penny, the headmaster from the school in the village, arrived one day with a present of mauve aubrieta, yellow alyssum and white candytuft, all bare rooted. We rushed to dig out a piece of the grassy bank opposite my patch, in which the plants were quickly installed. Much thought went into the arrangement of large stones around them. Most of the spring holidays were spent going back to check up on the plants before I went off to boarding school for the summer.

Coming home to the damp sun and midges of late July, I found that the rock garden had completely disappeared in a sea of waving grasses. My gardening then went through many different phases, starting with a passionate desire to grow cucumbers and for a garden frame to grow them in, and my on-going pelargonium and fuchsia collection. Aged around fifteen I had over forty different pelargoniums, and I still like them (but have given up the

cucumbers). Discovery of *My Rock-Garden* by Reginald Farrer, sometime in my teens, was hugely exciting. This book resulted in my taking over a triangular bed in full sun at the corner of the lawn behind my parents' house.

My mother was repeatedly nagged to drive me up the high mountain road from Perth to Inverness to Jack Drake's nursery at Aviemore to buy rock plants, in particular some autumn gentians such as *Gentiana farreri* and *G. sino-ornata* cultivars. It never occurred to me that these gentians might be fussy. Holes were dug and the plants shoved in to make great carpets of astonishing, dazzling, September blue. The Knox Finlays (much admired plantspeople of the last century of nearby Keillour Castle) came to visit. They looked at my gentians. 'Ah' they nodded to each other, 'Virgin soil'. Half a century later I know too well what they mean. Fresh soil has an extraordinary, irreplaceable magic – however much compost, manure, leaf mould or tender care you distribute to your plants, there's no equal to soil unruffled by human interference.

Next in my alpine career was a visit to Joe Elliott's nursery, Broadwell in the Cotswolds, where I bought a stone trough, which had to be transported by train to Perth, involving many tips to porters and bribing of guards *en route*. Then, in my early 20s, living in London with a 3m x 120cm sunny balcony, I simultaneously joined a London AGS group and won £120 playing poker. The following day, I persuaded a boyfriend of the time to drive me to Will Ingwersen's nursery in West Sussex where, much to my driver's annoyance, all the money was spent on two troughs and dozens of plants - the boot was so low on the way back to London it nearly scraped the road. The only plant I can definitely remember (I still have it) was known then as *Saxifraga elizabethae*, an easy Kabschia with lemon flowers in early spring. But the plants soon displayed their dislike of London pollution and had to be removed to the clean air of central Scotland. [Gambling winnings have been the great catalyst of my life – it was an each-way Tote

bet on Foinavon, who won the Grand National in 1967, that provided enough money for me to set up an antique stall in Chelsea Market, through which I met my husband Val, and eventually came to live in Ireland.]

Meanwhile, I got a job on *Amateur Gardening* (in those days owned by *Country Life*). Wonderful people worked there at the time, such as Anthony Huxley (nephew of Aldous) who was editor-in-chief of the big RHS Dictionary, and the prolific writer and gardener Arthur Hellyer. The publishers, Collingridge, were part of the same group and I'd often see legendary gardeners such as Margery Fish and Percy Thrower in the office. It was during my time there that I learnt how important it was to get botanical names correct, and where to look them up to check.

The next big influence on my gardening was when Val and I, on one of our twice monthly buying trips to Scotland, made our first visit to Branklyn, the National Trust for Scotland's garden in Perth. It must have been about March, because I had my first sight of two great gardening beauties, *Primula whitei* and *Helleborus torquatus*. Branklyn's head gardener of the day, Stewart Annand, a great big fellow never out of his kilt, showed us several large groups of luminous pale blue primulas with farinose leaves. As for the hellebore, these days we are spoilt for choice by all the brilliant new cultivars, but then the effect of a colour I can best describe as like that of the rare glass, *gorge de pigeon*, was astonishing. With much generosity, Stewart gave me a piece. In those days there were probably only one or two clones in cultivation, and already, the few examples around had been propagated by division for some time. Distressingly, my plant grew weaker every year, and never set seed, until it seemed kinder to throw it out. Last year, walking round the garden with a knowledgeable visitor, we looked at some ailing plant in the garden, which I announced I was going to propagate and try to rescue. Then he remarked 'But it's an old plant, isn't it?' How right he is. It makes me think of the cloned sheep, poor

Dolly, who appeared to die young – but if you think about it, she had just been propagated from a bit of an older sheep.

I don't know where I'd be without plants and gardening, and all the terrific people I've met who love plants, especially on trips with the AGS, and especially here in Ireland.

**Helen Dillon**

## **A SINGLE RED AMONGST THE GOLD**

When I was a boy in the nineteen forties the meadows were full of cowslips, but, alas, today with modern farming methods, and especially the use of herbicides this is no longer so. The cowslip, of course, is *Primula veris* and is of the *vernales* section. It is a semi evergreen perennial up to twenty five cms tall. The stems are sturdy and upright, carrying umbels of ten to twenty sweetly scented flowers having petals of rich yellow with an orange base. It is one of the most widespread primulas found in Europe and Asia and is native to Ireland.

The cowslip is a low maintenance plant. A group of three or five at the front of the spring border makes a wonderfully bright and cheery impact. Grow them in well-drained soil, alkaline or acid, in sun or semi-shade and they will thrive. If you show plants why not grow some in pots. Just because it is a fairly common plant don't think it will not get a first. In the Dublin Show this year I won the Asiatic Primula class in the open section with a very common garden plant, *Primula denticulata*, the popular drumstick primula which I had dug up from the garden two weeks before the Show. Both clay and plastic pots are suitable but less watering is needed with the plastic variety. The compost I use is two parts John Innes no. 2, one part peat and one part grit. I leave the pots in the open garden and only take them into the alpine house just before the flowers open. Aphids can be a serious pest on cowslips and if infestation occurs I spray with a systemic insecticide. If root

aphids are a problem I stand the pot in a systemic insecticide until the compost is well drenched. Fungus can cause brown spotting on the foliage; if this occurs simply remove the affected leaves.

Propagation is by seed, or division of the rosettes. Sow the seeds as soon as ripe and they will germinate in six to eight weeks. The compost I use for seed is a fifty-fifty mix of John Innes no. 1 and sharp sand. For divisions I use the normal potting compost.

And so I come, at last, to the explanation of the title. In spring 2002 I sowed *P. veris* seed which I got from the AGS seed distribution. When the resulting plants reached flowering size I found that one of them had red flowers. It was exactly the same as the yellow flowered plants, carried the same umbels of flowers but with red petals having the same orange base. I have checked the websites of the AGS and the RHS; the *AGS Encyclopaedia of Alpines; Primulas of Europe and America* by Smith, Burrow and Lowe and others of my books that refer to primulas but could find no reference to a red cowslip. This is the mystery and joy of growing from seed. In the last newsletter we had a wonderful article on growing from seed (*thank you Liam. Ed.*) and if you are not already doing so you should follow the guidelines in that article and start growing from seed yourself.

**Liam Byrne**



Monsignor Patrick J. Horan (centre), Tom Fahy and Bernie Farrell in the Maynooth College Rock Garden. (Photo: Billy Moore)

## AN ALPINE DELIGHT IN KILDARE

The Maynooth College historian, **Monsignor Patrick J. Corish**, has been a member of our group since January 1984. He joined the parent body in the ‘seventies and got seed from the annual distribution each year from which he has been growing plants for the College rock garden. The rock garden is part of the large walled garden on the College grounds and originally belonged to **Dean Craddock**. The land was acquired in 1795 for the establishment of the College.

Nothing much happened on the gardening front until the 1930’s when at the direction of the then President, **Monsignor D’Alton** (later Cardinal), **Jimmy Murray**, a trained horticulturist, was recruited to oversee the development of the gardens, which included the establishment of the rock garden. Mr Murray was very keen and even lectured the students of the time on gardening. Development more or less ceased during the war years and the rather depressed 1950’s until, in the following decade, despite his onerous academic duties and “as a help to preserving [his] sanity”, Monsignor Corish took on the rock garden. He populated it with his seed-raised plants, abandoning any that would not grow outside

- managing an alpine house would not have been realistic. He retired from lecturing some twenty three years ago, but produced a history of the College for its bicentenary in 1995. This required sorting out the archives and naturally led to his being appointed College Archivist. Although he still raises plants from seed for the rock garden he describes his current role as “akin to a consultant”, because he believes that when one can no longer get down on one’s hands and knees to tend to the plants one “loses local knowledge”. The job of looking after the rock garden is now the responsibility of **Tom Fahy’s** ground staff, principally **Bernie Farrell**. She is doing a fine job.

Only very recently I learned of the existence of the rock garden in Maynooth and being aware of Monsignor Corish’s membership of the Group contacted him last March to see if a visit could be arranged. He was most accommodating and suggested late May as a suitable time. So, on 23 May **George Sevastopulo** and I called by appointment and were given a guided tour by the Monsignor with Bernie Farrell on hand, perhaps to provide “local knowledge”. The garden is impressive being quite extensive, something in excess of quarter of an acre, with a number of mature ‘dwarf’ conifers and acers which provide structure, character and substance to the planting. It has a wonderful atmosphere greatly enhanced by the delights to be encountered around every corner. Among the many fine plants a few that merit particular mention were *Paeonia broteroi* with lovely pale green foliage; an excellent form of *Ranunculus gramineus* with, it seemed to me, much larger flowers than the type; *Moltkia x intermedia*; and several good stands of *Aethionema* ‘Warley Rose’, a plant that was a staple of everyone’s rock garden twenty years ago but which is seldom offered today. The eye-catcher for me was a stunning group of *Tulipa sprengeri*, grown from seed of course by ‘the consultant’, and, surprisingly for a plant that is normally recommended for a woodland situation, growing in full sun and clearly enjoying it. These highlights were growing among many other delightful species including *Geranium*, *Daphne*, *Genista*, *Saxifrage*, *Gentian*, *Primula*, all allowed ample space to give of their best. Monsignor Corish had difficulty when asked to name his



favourite alpine, but said that *Tulipa sprengeri* would be a candidate, as it would be for most of us.

The rock garden in Maynooth College will, I hope, continue to be maintained to the current high standard. It is well worth a visit, May probably being the best time, and Monsignor Corish assures me that members would be welcome to call. After our tour George and I were treated to lunch, at his insistence, by the Monsignor in a local hostelry where we chatted about alpines and life, bringing a most interesting outing to a very pleasant close.

**Billy Moore**



Paul Cutler in Altamont last February – p. 29 (Photo: Billy Moore)

## REVIEW OF RECENT GROUP EVENTS

### AGM and 'A Walk through Altamont' by Paul Cutler

The Annual General Meeting got our 2008 season off to a good start. The Secretary, **Joan Carvill**, outlined a very successful year in 2007 – the visit to the Burren and the annual weekend at Termonfeckin being the highlights. The Treasurer, **Tessa Dagge**, reported on the year's finances. The Chairman, **Val Keegan**, reported that the excellent website, created and maintained by **Jamie Chambers**, is being reviewed constantly with new links and suggestions from members added. The newsletter continues to grow and improve while the numbers attending the first-class lectures has risen.

**Mary Glennon** had signified her desire to retire from the Committee and was thanked warmly for her contribution. **Barbara O'Callaghan** and **Mary O'Neill-Byrne** were elected.

After the formalities **Paul Cutler**, who is in charge of Altamont, took us on a tour of the gardens. He started with a brief history of the house and gardens illustrated with some old photographs from 1870 and it was interesting to see the development of the trees over the years – many of them are still there and are large specimens at this stage.

The house was bought by **Feilding Lecky Watson** in 1923 and he was responsible for planting many of the azaleas and rhododendrons. It is rumoured that when he was reminded by a nanny that he had not yet named his daughter, he looked out the window and decided to call her **Corona** after one of his favourite rhododendrons. When his widow, **Isabel**, died in 1985 at the age of 102, the property was inherited by her daughters, Corona, who had by then married **Gary North**, and **Diane**.

The entrance to Altamont with its wonderful avenue of beeches is a splendid introduction to the garden. New plantings of beech have been made and the daffodils make a terrific display in early spring. Corona liked an informal style of gardening and there are many old varieties of *Narcissus* (unnamed) growing among the hellebores and snowdrops in the garden. Altamont has a large

collection of *Galanthus* all clearly labelled and Paul drew our attention to many of the finer cultivars and their distinctive characteristics. I was very pleased to see *G. 'Lady Elphinstone'* among them. It is my favourite as it is the only one I ever recognise because of its yellow colouring!

A walk around the lake surrounded by large weeping willows, pines, *Embothrium coccineum* and acers leads to the ice age glen. Here bluebells and ferns grow happily among the boulders that take you down to the Slaney River. A short walk along the bank brings you to the 100 granite steps up to the lower lawns covered with daffodils and snowdrops.

In summer the roses and clematis take over. The many climbers and ramblers have the space to show off what they can do – the 'Rambling Rector' is there in all his glory and there are fine specimens of 'Raubritter', 'Eddie's Jewel' and *Rosa moyesii*. The borders in front of the house with their clipped yews are filled with shrub roses and *Lilium regale*, filling the air with wonderful scent.

In recent years new herbaceous borders, planted in memory of Corona, are now maturing nicely and look spectacular.

In autumn and winter, colour is provided by colchicums, numerous cyclamen, *Leucojum vernum* and *Sternbergia lutea*. I was surprised to see cyclamen and snowdrops thriving together in the driest of conditions at the base of an enormous *Wellingtonia*.

There are wonderful trees everywhere –specimens of *Sorbus*, *Quercus*, *Acer*, *Nothofagus*, *Cedrus* and *Cornus*. I particularly liked *Cornus 'Paula'*, pink in bud, white in flower and fading to dark pink and *Sorbus 'Chinese Lace'*. Corona had planted *Davidia involucrata* and *Liriodendron tulipifera* in 1950 and these are now very large specimens.

Paul has been at Altamont for twelve years and his approach to the garden is influenced very much by Corona's thinking and aspirations. He emphasized that this is a garden of year-round interest and I was convinced by his talk that it merits a visit in all seasons. Admission is free. See [www.altamontgarden.com](http://www.altamontgarden.com).

**Ricky Shannon**

## Annual Lunch

Keeping with tradition, this year's Annual Lunch was again held in the Royal St George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire organized by **Joan Carvill** on Saturday 9 February. Also keeping with tradition it was again a beautiful sunny spring day –a great temptation to stay at home and potter around the garden. But some 43 members and guests, including members of the Ulster Group, gathered in the yacht club to enjoy a drink and chat in the bar followed by an excellent lunch –the delicious avocado and melon starter perfectly reflecting the freshness and lightness of this spring day.

After lunch **Valerie Keegan** presented **Miriam Healy** and **Janet Mathias** with their Bronze Medals for their efforts in Section C. **George Sevastopulo** received his Gold Medal and last but not least there was a Certificate for his 7<sup>th</sup> Gold Merit Bar for **Liam Byrne** – an amazing achievement. Congratulations to them all - may it inspire the rest of us.

After a short break we settled down to an interesting and informative talk on 'Botanic Gardens Worldwide and their Role in Conservation' by **Peter Wyse Jackson**, Director, National Botanic Garden of Ireland, Glasnevin. PWJ is well qualified to speak on this subject. He has impressive credentials and vast experience in this area and has written many academic papers on plant conservation, botanic gardens and endangered island flora conservation. It came as a surprise to most of us to learn that more than 50 % of Botanic Gardens in the world have been created in the last 50 years! There are some 2500 of them worldwide and up to 440,000 plant species in the world (the exact figure is not known). But by the end of this century up to two thirds of these plant species could be threatened, and it seems very clear that Botanic Gardens have a big role to play in conservation and in national and international cooperation in this matter. In Ireland, due to global warming, our arctic alpine plants are very much under threat due to competition from the lowland plants moving up and taking over. *Saxifraga nivalis* on Ben Bulbin (three plants left) and *Poa alpina* on Mount Brandon are examples of this trend. One of the rarest Irish plants *Saxifraga granulata* is well

established in Glasnevin with approx forty three plants and *Carex buxbaumii*, although extinct in the wild, is grown there also. Much more information on climate change and native plants can be obtained from Glasnevin's excellent website at: [www.botanicgardens.ie](http://www.botanicgardens.ie). Also, a date for your diary: in June 2010 Glasnevin will host the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation Conference.

We continued our tour around the Botanic Gardens of the world looking at China where there are strong links with **Augustine Henry**, Singapore, and Vietnam, in particular the project in Tam Dao which is examining the sustainable use of plant resources with the involvement of the local communities. Travelling on to Novosibirsk and the Central Siberian Botanical garden where a team from Glasnevin collaborated with their colleagues in Siberia on botanical matters. On to the Middle East where there are the fewest botanic gardens to Latin America where Columbia is a treasure house with 51,000 native plants alone - Europe has 12000! All these facts and figures left me amazed but I was delighted to learn there is so much effort, collaboration and co-operation going on, nationally and internationally in ensuring that we preserve our plants worldwide. And what better mission to leave you with than PWJ's challenging task as director of National Botanic Gardens that '*no plant in Ireland will become extinct in our time*'.

**AnneMarie Keoghan**

### **Snowdrops in Altamont Garden**

Early in February each year dedicated snowdrop lovers make their way to Altamont Gardens, Ballon, Co Carlow during 'snowdrop week'. There, they can appreciate on bended knee the extensive collection of snowdrops started by the late owner **Corona North** and since then increased by **Paul Cutler** who manages the garden.

This year on Sunday 10 February, the day before the start of 'snowdrop week', our AGS Dublin Group was privileged to be taken on a conducted tour of the garden by Paul. The day was dry,

crisp and calm with intermittent sunshine and the thrushes sang heartily to help set the scene.

Before our walk to view the cultivars, Paul outlined briefly how the late owner, Corona North started the garden collection in the early 1980s. By the time of her death in 1999 she had up to thirty five cultivars. After a brief period, *Duchas* took over the management of Altamont under the leadership of Paul. Since then he has built up the collection to approximately 100 by exchanging and buying in noteworthy cultivars.

On our way into the garden by the Nuns' Walk we passed a line of impressive beech trees with *Cyclamen hederifolium* at the base interspersed with *Galanthus nivalis*. As we passed under the trees we saw several clumps of various snowdrop cultivars, the most notable one being *G.* 'Ballintaggart'. This led us into the main part of the garden. It is divided by a central passage outlined by a neatly trimmed box border. There are continual plantings of different snowdrop cultivars on both sides leading down the gentle slope to the picturesque lake extending over two acres, and surrounded by a variety of evergreen and deciduous specimen trees.

Here there were several clumps of *Leucojum carpathicum*, a close relation of the snowdrop, in full bloom. Close by, we admired groupings of *G. elwesii* 'Drummonds Giant' a cultivar discovered locally by keen observant gardener **Stasia O'Neill**. This cultivar has large broad mid green leaves.

The garden has a fast draining and slightly acid soil and moisture retention is improved by generous mulches of leaf mould and coconut shell.

A short distance down, there were impressive drifts of an excellent form of *G. elwesii* with striking glaucous leaves and large pure white flowers. Nearby there was a thriving drift of *G. plicatus* 'Hill Poë', an Irish cultivar found in a Tipperary garden ninety years ago.

For the March visitor to enjoy there was a considerable clump of *G.* 'Pusey Green Tip' breaking through the generous mulch and promising to delight later.

One had to stand and admire the base of a very large Lawson Cypress tree, where there was a happy combination of groupings

of the double *G. nivalis* 'Flore Pleno', *G. Drummonds Giant* and *G. Lady Beatrix Stanley*. These were interspersed with *Cyclamen coum* including the light pink form *C. coum caucasicum* and were displayed on a natural bed of lightly shed brown needles.

At the bottom of the passage on the same side there were two impressive drifts of large doubles, *G. Ophelia* and *G. Lavinia*. On the opposite side there was a clump of the rare *G. nivalis* 'Wendy's Gold'

We then proceeded to the bank of the pond and looked back up the lawn to view a beautiful drift of *G. nivalis* naturalized in the grass. In a few weeks this area will be populated by many *Fritillaria meleagris*.

Further on among shrubs there were several drifts of *G. plicatus* with its tall broad leaves. In close proximity along the pathway there were several distinctive cultivars – the most notable, and my favourite, being *G. Diggory*.

On our return to the car park by the front of the house, the view of carpets of crocus under two weeping ash was so fitting as to imprint a lasting impression of Altamont on me and to induce the feelings of anticipation for all gardeners that spring is just around the corner!

**Paddy Smith**

### **Jim Jermyn – The Challenge of Growing Alpine Plants**

Jim Jermyn is a renowned nurseryman, plant hunter and the author of two fine books on growing alpine plants: *Alpine Plants of Europe: A Gardener's Guide* and *The Himalayan Garden: Growing Plants from the Roof of the World*. For those of you who have yet to read them, I recommend that you do so immediately as they are by no means just gardening reference books; they form comprehensive and entertaining guides to the habitats and cultivation of alpine plants. So popular are Jim's books that the copies that he brought to the meeting in Stillorgan on 21 February, 2008 were snapped up (and signed) long before the beginning of the lecture. The European book is available from our library.

Anyone who has read Jim's books will know about the quality of his photographs and would not have been disappointed by his first slides of *Eranthis* 'Guinea Gold' and *Corydalis solida* 'Dieter Schacht' - the latter Jim himself bred and named after his friend and mentor from his days in the Munich Botanic Gardens. The quality of the slides continued to impress but soon Jim's overwhelming enthusiasm for seeing his favourite plants growing in the wild captivated the audience most. This enthusiasm was by no means limited to rare and unusual finds on his travels. He displayed equal excitement at finding *Helleborus niger* or a large patch of hepatica growing in a boggy backwood in Bavaria as he did at seeing the common primrose or an oxlip on an Alpine slope. As a relatively inexperienced grower of alpines, I noted that far more gardening pleasure can be gained from growing easy plants well in an environment they enjoy, than by dragging a fickle rarity through a continuous near-death existence in an inappropriate environment. Jim expanded on the importance of understanding a plant's natural habitat by stressing the relevance of geology as well as our usual considerations such as soil pH and moisture. His point was reinforced by spectacular slides of *Primula allionii* and various dionysias growing in an orange, tufa-like rock near Nice, and an enormous specimen of *Daphne petraea* in full bloom in a rock crevice near Lake Garda.

The remainder of the lecture was packed full of indispensable advice for both the novice and experienced grower. Jim mentioned some 'must have' plants for every alpine garden such as *Rhodothamnus chamaecistus*, *Geum reptans*, *Potentilla nitida* and *Campanula raineri* – although you may want to grow the latter on a twelve-foot high tufa column to thwart slugs and snails! All of these plants will grow happily outdoors in Ireland given the right conditions. Jim concluded his hugely entertaining and informative talk with the advice that one should not be put off by a plant's demise; the important thing is to understand the cause of the casualty and try again.

**Gavin Moore**



## **In Search of Tibetan Plants – From Lhasa to the Gateway to Hell by Martin Walsh**

The title was very enticing, and Martin's talk on 13 March did not disappoint. Tibet, to most of us, is a remote and mysterious place, inaccessible because it is surrounded by some of the greatest mountain ranges in the world, such as the Himalayas and Karakorams. The capital, Lhasa, is at an altitude of 3595m. The country was annexed by the Chinese in 1950 and Lhasa is now just another Chinese city, and Tibet an autonomous region of China.

This was the first AGS Expedition to Tibet, and took place from 6 July to 2 August 2005, visiting the mountains east of Lhasa and the Kangshung Valley on the eastern side of Everest. The flora is remarkably rich with 803 species being recorded. Two new species were recorded by the expedition – *Meconopsis tibetica* and *Corydalis milarepa*.

The expedition was led by **John** and **Hilary Birks**, with **Harry Jans** as Tour Manager. There were twenty two members on the expedition from seven countries, with ten Sherpas and a helper, fifteen yak handlers and forty two yaks!

Martin's talk included a video of the sightseeing and travelling aspects of the trip. Sightseeing included a visit to the iconic Potala Palace in Lhasa, which up to 1959 was home to the Dalai Lamas. The 9 storey White Palace was constructed in 1645 and subsequently the 4 storeys of the Red Palace were built above it. Situated on an eminence with a backdrop of high mountains, it is very impressive. The palace is now a museum and is currently being restored by the Chinese. The Jokhang temple was also visited. This is the holiest of all Tibetan temples and dates from the seventh century. Lastly, the fifteenth century Drepung monastery was visited.

As part of the acclimatisation process the group spent a day exploring the mountains east of Lhasa and here they discovered a spectacular poppy - *Meconopsis integrifolia* with its lovely yellow colour, which Martin said was easy from seed, but dies after flowering.

The tour wasn't without incident or sometimes amusement. One of the sherpas' trucks ended up in a ditch and had to be rescued

with assistance from local ladies and children, inter alia! The group were very lucky to witness a colourful horse-riding competition at Rachu, near Dingri. This competition is a fairly rare occurrence and it was a serendipity that they were botanizing in the area at the time. At Dingri an amusing episode involved a large group of drunken Tibetan ladies wearing traditional Chuba dress and performing a time-honoured circle dance and song when the expedition arrived at their first campsite. A 2-gallon drum of Tibetan beer was being passed around!

The expedition spent three days travelling from Lhasa to Kharta along the Friendship Highway in order to begin their trek into the Kangshung Valley. *En route* they travelled along the shore of Yamdrok Tsho, a sacred lake of blue water surrounded by steep mountains which the Chinese are using for hydroelectric power thus reducing the water level. We saw *Incarvillea younghusbandii* named for **Col. Francis Younghusband** who led the British military invasion of Tibet in 1904. *Clematis tibetana* subsp. *vernayi* grew prolifically along the lakeshore.

On to the Kharta valley, birthplace of **Sherpa Tensing** of Mount Everest fame. At Kharta there was a dramatic transition from dry steppe type vegetation to moist sub-alpine vegetation. A beautiful *Pedicularis longiflora* var. *tubiformis* grows here in damp meadow grass. The expedition was lucky to have the expertise of John Birks, an acknowledged expert on louseworts. In fact thirty seven different species of lousewort were recorded on the tour.

The trek started at Kharta, and two beautiful, diminutive alpine lilies were seen – the purple *Lilium nanum* var. *nanum*, and the pale yellow-flowered *Lilium nanum flavidum*. Both were 4-6 inches high. Near the Tsho Shau campsite a new species of Meconopsis – *M. tibetica* was discovered. It is a beautiful plant about three ft high, with many maroon coloured flowers along its stem. It was growing in association with *Rhododendron lepidotum* in open heath. Several different species of primula were seen during the expedition including the exquisite *Primula kelattii*, with cut edges to its pale pink petals. The trekkers were at an altitude of 4,500 m at this point, and one of the group required oxygen; the tour leader collapsed at the top of the first pass. It was no cakewalk!

The habitat of *Primula sikkimensis* was seen, and a glorious stand of this beautiful plant in flower growing in a damp meadow surrounded by misted mountains was quite spectacular. At the Valley of the Lakes the choicest plant was the Himalayan forget-me-not, *Chionocharis hookeri*. Also seen was *Anaphalis nepalensis* var. *nepalensis*. A pretty rosette forming plant, *Swertia multicaulis* with inky blue flowers was really garden-worthy.

The highest pass that had to be crossed on the trek was the 5437m high Langma La. One of the commonest plants found in this area was *Corydalis cashmeriana*, with brilliant blue flowers. However, there were many other spectacular alpine plants to be found growing on this pass including *Corydalis meifolia*, *Saussurea gossipiphora* and *Saussurea bhutkesi*. *S. gossipiphora* turned out to be the favourite plant of the expedition!

At Guitar Lake (so-called from its shape) *Meconopsis horridula* snuggled into rocks, and close to Shomale campsite – a much drier region – *Incarvillea himalensis* with deep rose-pink flowers, very prostrate, grew in sandy conditions. Martin showed us a small village close to Kharta consisting of a group of flat roofed Tibetan stone houses. At Gyau La a pretty *Cremanthodium* cf. *purpureifolium*, about four inches high, with an outsize yellow daisy flower growing in the scree, caught my eye.

Our final view was of the eponymous Gateway to Hell, which turned out to be a deep river gorge at Nyalam, which in Tibetan means ‘Gateway to Hell’! There is a rich flora here, and particularly nice was an *Arisaema jaquemontii* with palmate leaves and a delicate light green striped spathe.

Martin left us with a lasting impression of a beautiful country, smiling people, happy children, stupendous mountains, endless vistas of desert, lake, and rocky terrain, with a fabulous flora.

**Anne Nolan**

## **Local Show**

Our Local Show in St. Brigids, Stillorgan was held on the Saturday of St. Patrick’s week-end, 15 March. This did not pose a problem to us healthy alpine enthusiasts who battled the heavy rain to get

there. We had more plants in show than last year but it was suggested to me that we should increase the number of classes. Our esteemed judges were **Liam Byrne** and **Billy Moore**. **George Sevastopulo** won overall with 19 points and **Noelle Anne Curran** was second with 15. The quality of plants was high and I was impressed by George's corydalis which won class one. Other outstanding plants were *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, *S. iranica*, *Cyclamen persicum*, *Trillium kurabayashii* and a *Raoulia sp.* each of which won in the various classes. We also had tables of plants just brought in for people to admire. Amongst these a small, dark *Clematis columbiana tenuiloba*, *Dionysia aretioides* 'Phyllis Carter', a dainty *Primula* 'Joan Hughes' and a *Pinus mugo* 'Mops Midget' all showed the high quality of plants grown by our members. George gave us a demonstration on how to cover a polystyrene box to make it into a hypertufa trough. A lot of interest was shown in this and for those who did not manage to get to the event I give the ingredients required for the hypertufa: two parts sieved peat, one part sand and one part cement – all as dry as possible. Adhesive - any brand of PVA. George promised that we would see this trough as one of the raffle prizes at our Cabinteely Show (and we did). A great number of plants were donated for the raffle with each person going home with at least two. We also had a most successful plant sale. To add to this really pleasant afternoon tea and coffee were available all the while.

**Tessa Dagge**

### **Patagonia – the Last Place on Earth by Liam McCaughey**

On 10 April we were due to have a talk from **Ger Van Den Beuken** but due to unexpected commitments at his nursery Ger was unable to travel. This caused some disappointment in the ranks mainly because Ger was to BRING PLANTS. Despite the fact that he came *sans* plants **Liam McCaughey**, who had agreed to step in at short notice, delighted the attendance with a superb talk on the December 2000 AGS trip to Patagonia. His wife Joan introduced the talk and added comments in the course of it. The trip was ably led by **John** and **Hilary Birks** but was beset by travel delays and problems at the outset. Despite this, or perhaps because

of it, the nineteen intrepid travellers formed a cohesive and mutually supportive group making the trip highly successful in every respect.

Many of the alpines of South America are only marginally, if at all, in cultivation, so for most of us the only opportunity we have to see them is at talks such as this. Liam's slides were terrific (he is a regular winner in the AGS photographic competition) but he also made maximum use of technology to communicate his story clearly and comprehensively to his audience. This was the most high tech talk on alpines that I have ever attended and sets the bar very high for anyone who wants to emulate Liam's achievement. The technology was not in any way intrusive, but the overall effect I thought was to fill with movement what was, after all, a presentation of still images. In short, from a technical viewpoint this presentation could hardly have been bettered. But aesthetically it also scored very highly. Liam provided us with a wealth of information on the plants, the fauna, the geography and the geology of the region. His use of maps, including images from Google Earth, kept us firmly orientated throughout the lecture. But I must come back to the pictures. Liam's shots of the majestic landscapes were stunning and those of plants no less so. We first saw the plant in its habitat, then a close-up of the plant followed by a close-up of the flower where appropriate, usually by way of pictures within pictures. In addition all plant images were accompanied on screen not only by the name of the plant but also by its family. And what plants! As is usual in talks on alpines from this part of the world rosulate violas featured strongly with *Viola cotyledon* being perhaps the most striking followed closely by *V. coronifera*. The sweetly scented *Jaborosa volkmannii* was also much admired as was *Calandrinia affinis*, the familiar *Oxalis adenophylla* and other species of junellia, ourisia etc. as well as several orchids. But the plant that most delighted the audience was the ethereally beautiful *Ranunculus semiverticillatus*. It was no coincidence that the travellers also voted this the plant of the trip.

The variety of Liam's talk with pictures of wonderful plants, gorgeous landscapes, sinister volcanoes, maps and satellite pictures was further enhanced by shots of the local wildlife including magellanic penguins, elephant seals, guanacos and armadillos. By

the end of the evening nobody felt in the least bit deprived because the advertised speaker had not turned up. Our grateful thanks to Liam and Joan who had to drive back to County Down after the talk and had to be up before dawn the following morning to catch a flight to Spain.

**Billy Moore**

### **Sylvan Delights – the smaller woodland plants**

**Tim Ingram** is the proprietor of Compton Ash Nursery in Kent, author of a Hardy Plant Society booklet on Umbellifers and an expert on woodland plants, especially those that will grow in dry conditions. His talk on 14 May at the National Botanic Gardens was called ‘Sylvan Delights –the smaller woodland plants’. He compared the conditions at Knighthayes Court in Devon with an annual rainfall of thirty six inches with **Beth Chatto’s** Essex garden where only twenty two inches of rain fall each year – yet in both places, woodland plants thrive. Trilliums, thought by most of us to need moist rich acid conditions, can, he maintained cope with low rainfall and some are subject to baking in hot summers in their native habitats. He is especially fond of cyclamens. He described *Cyclamen repandum* as the loveliest of them all, and he felt that the variation in the leaves and the flowers of *C. hederifolium* make it an ideal candidate for growing in and coping with dry shade. He showed some beautiful combinations of plants none better than that of brunnera, *Arum italicum* and celandines populating a wood in Kent. We saw the curious flowers of the trillium relative, *Scoliopus bigelowii*, and marvelled at the beauty of the unique and difficult *Paris polyphylla* at a well-attended and informative talk.

**Carmel Duignan**

### **Visit to Lissadell**

The end of May had arrived and still there was not much sign of summer as thirty of us left the shoreline of the Irish Sea at 8.30 on the 24th, and after a coffee stop and a drizzly drive, arrived at Lissadell on the Sligo shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean at 12.30.

What a magnificent spot to build a grand house. Most of you know its history up to the present time, but the official tour of the house and the **Countess Markievitz** exhibition recalled that history in some detail

Enough of that – our purpose was to visit the newly restored Alpine Garden. There had been a rock garden at Lissadell for hundreds of years, but somewhere along the line, Nature reclaimed her own. Thankfully, the present owners understand the need for restoration and the bones of the original rockwork were uncovered. Along the avenue leading to the walled alpine garden, a wide border was filled with brilliant red and yellow mimulus, plus the more architectural shapes of libertias. There is something special about a walled garden, and this one was no exception providing a background to literally thousands of flowering alpine plants.

Initially we were greatly taken with lewisias and delospermas and other succulents in the vertical faces of dry stone walls.

An area of this size - about one and a quarter acres- can look quite messy and unorganised, but shape and structure were given by large clumps of helianthemums, osteospermums, geraniums and so on. White cistus were especially large flowered.

Some personal favourites must be mentioned – little clumps of globularias, three very tight cushions of *Phlox douglasia* ‘Eva’, a deep crimson *P. caespitosa* ‘Ziggunerburt’, *Muscari plumosa*, *Sisyrinchium* ‘California Skies’, *Saxifraga* ‘Southside Seedling’ and *Erysimum* ‘Moonlight’.

Other delights include a small café, a retail area selling French wines and expensive toiletries, country clothes and pretty china. Then there is the two acre vegetable garden which is a model of perfection. Everything that can be grown in the Irish climate is there. Instead of the usual rather sleepy lot on a return journey, we were kept awake and entertained by the radio, giving us a blow-by-blow account of the famous Munster v. Toulouse match. A fitting end to a good day.

**Joan Carvill**

*Following a revisit Joan sends a PS: “Still plenty of flower power in mid-July”. Ed.*

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Buried Treasures: finding and growing the world's choicest bulbs* by Jānis Rukšāns. 2007, Timber Press, Oregon. ISBN 978-0-88192-818-1 £30.00**

Participants at Termonfeckin 2007 will remember Jānis Rukšāns for his two outstanding lectures on bulbs in the wild and the cultivation of bulbs in his nursery in Latvia, and also for his lively involvement in the activities of the weekend. This substantial book consists of two parts: bulbs in the garden (ca. 60 pages); and bulbs in the wild (ca. 275 pages). The first part covers propagation from seed and by division, cultivation of bulbs in the greenhouse and the garden, watering, fertilizers, and maintaining bulbs in good health. Even though the conditions in Latvia and Ireland are very different, these chapters contain a mass of information that is of practical use to growers in Ireland. There are all sorts of interesting observations, such as the efficacy of powdered charcoal as a dressing on cut surfaces of bulbs.

The greater part of the book describes the author's travels over forty years in search of bulbs in the western part of the former soviet bloc, the Caucasus, Turkey, central Asia, Siberia and eastern Russia. As well as giving vivid accounts of the bulbs themselves and their native habitats, Jānis provides interesting insights into life in these regions during the latter half of the twentieth century. A tantalizing selection of the bulbs that he found is illustrated by good quality photographs. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book, which is excellent value for money.

***The Genus Roscoea* by Jill Cowley with contributions from Richard Wilford and Roland Bream. 2007, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. ISBN 13: 9781842461341. £33.00.**

Roscoeas, with their flowers composed of two large lateral and a narrower dorsal petal, always remind me of elephants. I like elephants and I also like most Roscoeas. Jill Cowley, formerly of Kew, has provided a great service to gardeners in writing this monograph, because the naming of these plants in cultivation is commonly inaccurate, due, in part, to the range of colour forms – typically soft yellow, white and purple or magenta – that occur within a single species. The genus belongs to the ginger family and



is distributed along the length of the Himalayas and into Sichuan and Yunnan, with outliers in Assam and the Chin hills in Burma. Several of the species are known to grow well in Ireland.

The main meat of the book is an unashamedly botanical monograph, but there are also chapters on the history of study of the genus (Irish readers may take issue here with the description of Augustine Henry as a Frenchman), on its geographical distribution, phylogeny, ecology and conservation. Richard Wilford has contributed a useful chapter on the cultivation of Roscoeas.

There is also a fascinating chapter, fondly written, on William Roscoe, after whom the genus is named. He was an archetypal Victorian, who rose from humble beginnings to riches and influence, and was one of the great benefactors of the City of Liverpool. Amongst many other achievements, Roscoe, a talented self-taught botanist, wrote a much admired monograph of the ginger family.

The illustrations of the species of *Roscoea* in this monograph consist of good quality photographs by various contributors and delightful water colours by Christabel King, which will prompt gardeners to seek out some little cultivated forms, such as *R. humeana* forma *lutea* and *R. purpurea* var. *rubra*.

This is a book that may be too specialized to warrant purchase for the average gardener, but one that is an outstanding reference for an attractive group of garden plants, which grow well in Dublin gardens.

**George Sevastopulo**

## FIXTURES

**Thursday, 18 September, 8 pm.** Joint with IGPS. **Finn Haugli**, 'Growing Asian Plants at Tromsø Botanical Gardens, Norway'. NBG, Glasnevin.

**Saturday, 4 October, 2.30 pm (Sharp).** Visit to **Dargle Cottage Garden**, Dargle Road (N 11 end), Enniskerry.

**Saturday, 11 October, 2.30 pm.** Autumn Show, Plant and Bulb Sale and Cultivation Forum. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Thursday, 16 October, 8 pm.** **Henrik Zetterlund**, 'Alpines in Gothenburg, Sweden'. NBG, Glasnevin.

**Thursday, 13 November, 8 pm.** **George Sevastopulo**, 'A Cretan Odyssey', St. Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

**Friday, 21 November to Sunday, 23 November. 24<sup>th</sup> Alpine Weekend**, Termonfeckin. Speakers: **Peter Korn**, **Robert Rolfe** and **Martin Walsh**. See Programme and booking documentation.

**Thursday, 11 December, 8 pm.** 'Christmas Miscellany'. St Brigid's Parish Centre, Stillorgan.

## **OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE**

<b>Chairman &amp; Show Secretary:</b>	<b>Val Keegan</b>
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<b>Hon. Treasurer:</b>	<b>Tessa Dagge</b>
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<b>Committee Members:</b>	<b>Arthur Dagge</b>
	<b>Michael Higgins</b>
	<b>Barbara O'Callaghan</b>
	<b>Mary O'Neill-Byrne</b>



*Pinguicula grandiflora* – p. 17 (Photos: L. McCaughey).

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Printed by Kwikprint. Tel.: 295 4444.