



Edinburgh and Lothians Rock Garden Group

Affiliated to the Scottish Rock Garden Club

Newsletter, Autumn 2011

Welcome to the autumn newsletter.

I hope that you've made the most of what now passes for a Scottish summer – oh, how we long for the summers of yesteryear! Anyhow, we've got a great programme of talks to see us through the coming winter and I look forward to meeting fellow members over refreshments after the talks. For the club to continue to thrive it needs more members – so please encourage your gardening neighbours and friends to come and experience our talks and, of course, our annual show. The show this year was a great success; thanks are extended particularly to Carole and Ian Bainbridge as well as all those that helped with the catering, welcoming visitors at the door, plant sales, raffle, show stewarding and, importantly, the setting up and the breaking down. And finally a plea for committee members - it really would be great to have a broader range of club members participating on the committee, so if you can spare just a few hours over the course of the year please contact me or the club secretary, Liz Cole.

Convenor

Kirsteen Gibb 1921 - 2011

The group is sorry to inform members of the death on 6th August of Kirsteen Gibb at the age of 89. Kirsteen was an Honorary Vice President of the SRGC, in recognition of her work Club Secretary and a much longer period as Club Membership Secretary. In days past she was a regular attendee at group meeting and the Edinburgh Show. A sports teacher at St Margaret's school, Kirsteen gave very many years of dedicated service to the SRGC.

Ian and Carole Bainbridge

Forthcoming Events

2 – 4 September: Dundee Food & Flower Show
Camperdown Country Park, Dundee
Huge show classes, including Alpine classes, entries welcome
Monty Don lectures, trade stands, events, cooking and plant theatres etc
1000-1800 hrs each day
Details: 01382 434940

3 September: SRGC Late Bulb event
Lecture Theatre, RBGE
Talks by Lady Christine Skelmersdale
'Using bulbs in the garden' and 'The fascinating world of the Iris'
Ticket only event (£12) includes talks, coffee, lunch and
private guided tour of the Alpine nursery.
Attendees invited to bring flowering plants for show or 50:50 sale.
Broadleigh Plants will have bulbs for sale.
Details: Rachael Brown or Kerstin Price 0131 248 2844

23-25 September: Discussion Weekend, Dumfries
Details: Gill Lee, Inglenook Cottage, The Neuk, Belford,
Northumberland NE70 7NF, 01668 213925

29 September: 'All the world's our garden'
Illustrated lecture by Alan Bennell on the conservation work of RBGE
33 Melville Street, Edinburgh
Free, but small donation welcome
Starts 1930hrs
Details: Quintin Blane 01968 670017

8 October: SRGC/AGS Newcastle Show
Memorial Hall, Ponteland, NE20 9NX
Details: Alan Newton 01661 871974 or Alan.newton@agsgroups.org

12 November: SRGC AGM
Perth Airport, Scone
1200-1530hrs
Grand Picnic, AGM, plant sale, book stall, photographic/art competition
Julia Corden talking on 'Bhutan Revisited'
Details: Carol Shaw 01309 641405 or carol@findhornpress.com

Members are advised to check details in advance with relevant contacts in case of
last minute alterations due to weather etc.

Lamberton Nursery

This specialist nursery run by Ron and Susan McBeath in Berwickshire will be closing for good at the end of September.

On 10 and 11 September there will be a special plant and bulb sale from 0900-1600hrs each day.

On Saturday, 10 September renowned Swedish plantsman Peter Korn will be giving a talk and on both days Rob Potterton will be in attendance with over 300 varieties of dwarf bulbs and other plants. Orders can be placed with Rob for collection over the weekend. Contact Rob via www.pottertons.co.uk or rob@pottertons.co.uk or 01472 851714.

For more details about the weekend events contact 01289 308515

Help Wanted

If you fancy producing the newsletter, helping with advertising events, assisting with catering at our talks or the show, or generally want to get stuck in with helping run your club successfully then we'd be interested to hear from you.

Sadly there's no pay, but you will receive the admiration of fellow club members, which, as we all know, is worth so much, much more!

We need at least three folk to help us, so please if interested and you can spare a couple of hours or so (per month on average) please contact either the Chairman or Liz Cole who'd love to hear from you.

Plant Sales

Plant and bulbs will be available for sale after club talks in October and April.

Members are asked to bring stock which can be donated or offered on a 50:50 basis (which means you receive 50% of the selling price). If offering on a 50:50 basis please insert two markers in each pot – one with the plant name and the other with the price and your initial/name (failure to insert the latter means that you won't sadly receive any monies!). Contact Frazer Henderson for a more expansive explanation.

The National Tree Collection of Scotland

For the first time the finest of Scotland's specimen tree collections are being brought together as the National Tree Collections of Scotland: to increase public awareness of and access to these collections, and to protect this aspect of our national heritage for future generations.

Scotland has some of the world's finest collections. Their diversity reflects the role that individual landowners have played over the centuries collecting and planting specimen trees from around the globe.

Our mild, damp oceanic climate is conducive to tree growth. Scotland has relatively few native tree species, and for centuries others have been introduced from across the world which can thrive in Scotland's conditions. Well over 50% of the world's conifers can be grown easily outdoors in Scotland.

For this reason, Scotland's tree collections have a vital role to play in securing the survival of species which are threatened by habitat destruction and climate change impacts in their own native lands. The long history and culture of tree collecting, and the expertise we have in Scotland in managing such collections are a national asset to be celebrated and cherished.

People have cultivated exotic trees for a long time. The Romans brought new species like sweet chestnut, and possibly sycamore to Britain and orders of monks introduced fruit trees to Scotland probably in the middle ages.

The drive for agricultural improvement in 18th century Scotland, the time of the Enlightenment, led to the first great wave of tree planting here, designed to put large tracts of "unimproved" land to productive use. Specimen trees, arboreta and pineta were planted around great country houses – like those at Blair Adam and Inverary Castle – to enhance the landscape. If they thrived, specimen trees like larch were then planted out. Interestingly, these were the first ever attempts to create large-scale plantations of conifers in the world – yet another example of Scotland leading the world.

Over a hundred years of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Dukes of Atholl planted 21 million trees on some 15,000 acres of ground. They and other landowners pioneered large-scale commercial planting in the highlands. Estates in lowland Scotland – notably Drumlanrig Castle – similarly took up the fashion.

The Great Plant Hunters

During the 19th century, gardeners and naturalists searched the world for new plants and brought back exotic specimens. Some of these intrepid plant-hunters departed

from Scotland Archibald Menzies, David Douglas, Thomas Drummond and John Jeffrey.

Archibald Menzies, perhaps best known for bringing the ‘monkey puzzle’ tree to Scotland (after slipping some seeds presented to him as a dessert into his waistcoat!), paved the way for others.

David Douglas - now immortalised by the fir named after him (though its scientific name *Pseudotsuga menziesii* pays tribute to Menzies’ role in its discovery) - as a young gardener at Scone Palace, was sent out to explore the plants of the world. After many adventures, he brought back over 240 new species. One of the original Douglas firs can still be seen at Scone, raised from seed he sent home in 1826. He also introduced Sitka spruce, which has become the mainstay of the Scottish forestry sector, thanks to its ability to grow in poorer conditions and produce quality timber.

The legacy of these great plant hunters has shaped the Scottish landscape. The culture and skills they left behind continue to play an important role in forestry here and in international tree conservation. Today forestry accounts for 1% of Scotland’s GDP and Scotland continues to be a world leader in plant research and international conifer conservation.

Trees from around the globe

During the 19th century, there was feverish excitement in anticipation of the arrival of new ‘exotic’ species, such as the magnificent giant redwood from the Sierra Nevada in California. These truly awesome trees were first introduced to Perthshire in 1854, and have retained a special affinity for Scots due to links to John Muir, the pioneering Scot who became a key figure in the National Parks movement in the United States.

One of the original redwood specimens still stands tall at Cluny House Gardens near Aberfeldy, with a girth of over 11 metres. The stunning giant redwood avenue at Benmore Botanic Gardens shows clearly why this particular tree inspired such enthusiasm among the early collectors.

Eucalypts from Australia and Western hemlock from North West America were planted at Kilmum, Argyllshire, in the 1930s – not individual specimens, but entire forest plots.

The collections at the RBGE gardens contain many fine exotic specimens grown from seeds collected in the Himalayas, Chin, Japan and South America.

What are the national tree collections of Scotland?

These are the highest quality tree collections in Scotland, whether in public, private or charitable ownership, brought together under a single banner:

- to promote information sharing and secure long-term stewardship of the collections

- to raise awareness of the value and importance of the collections and
- to encourage the sharing and promotion of Scotland's tree collection knowledge, skills, expertise and culture.

To be a National Tree collection a site should:

- be accessible to the general public
- support conservation of threatened tree species
- be willing to support education on trees and related topics
- have a viable long-term plan for conservation of the collection and
- be willing to share best practice and data.

The National Tree collections currently comprise Benmore Botanic Gardens, Kilmun Arboretum, Glenbranter and Puck's Glen, Glasgow Botanic Gardens, Royal botanic Gardens Edinburgh, Dawyck Botanic Garden, and the Scone Palace Pinetum. The network of sites will gradually be expanded to include all nationally important tree collections.

The National Tree Collections will be working closely with the International Conifer Conservation Programme (ICCP), administered by the RBGE, which aims to help save some of the world's rarest and most remarkable trees by creating safe havens for them. In support of the ICCP the seeds collected in native forests around the world will be planted on National Tree Collections of Scotland sites.

If you are intrigued by the National Tree Collections of Scotland you can obtain more information by writing to Forestry Commission Scotland, ALGO Business Centre, Glenearn Road, Perth, PH1 0NJ or telephoning 01738 442830 or emailing info@ntcs.org.uk or viewing material at www.ntcs.org.uk.

Showing trees

There are always classes for dwarf trees at SRGC shows and these classes can provide a useful introduction to the showing of plants. Dwarf trees can be readily obtained at local nurseries – a particular specialist, having a wide range being Barbauchlaw Nursery, Armadale, West Lothian 01501 732347.

Some good specimens which can cost between £2-£5 for future showing are: *Abies balsamea*, *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* 'Forsteckensis', 'Gimbornii', 'Minima', 'Nana', *C. obtuse* 'Intermedia', 'Kosteri' or 'Pygmea', *Cryptomeria japonica* (of which there is vast selection), *Picea mariana* 'Nana', *P. pungens* 'Globos' and *Pinus mugo* (the Mountain Pine which can also be one of the best pines for the rock garden). *Podocarpus* from the southern hemisphere are also very attractive. *Pseudotsuga menziesii* 'Fletcheri' (note its scientific name remembering Archibald Menzies) is blue-green, flat-topped dwarf of about 80cm at maximum height. So there we are, some trees to at least consider – and good showing!

In conversation with ...Struan Harley

What is the attraction of gardening?

I used to work in a laboratory at the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen - I soon realized it was not for me! I like working outside, and get great satisfaction from propagating and growing things.

Favourite Scottish garden?

That would have to be Leith Hall, near Huntly, where I did my practical experience before going to college. It was a traditional walled garden which had a bit of everything from vegetables to alpines.

As a plantsman have you any tips to share with others on growing/ nurturing?

Try to understand the plant's needs and if at first you don't succeed, try again. Persistence pays off!

What's the best gardening advice you've (a) received? And (b) given?

- a) Always try to take cuttings of your plants, rare plants always have a tendency to die unexpectedly.
- b) Cut it down (especially old conifers!) and put something nicer in!

How would you describe your interest in plants?

Never ending - plants are my work and my hobby. I am especially fond of Daphnes and South African alpines.

On holiday do you botanise or do you manage to take a break from plants?

Holidays are an excuse to botanise in the sun, but also to enjoy the food and drink!

What are some of your favourite destinations?

I tend to head for the Mediterranean Islands and the sun, but the Drakensburgs mountains, South Africa, are my all-time favourite! I have been there on two collecting expeditions and intend to go back again.

Do you have any plant ambitions? Like having a plant named after you or discovering a new species or bringing into cultivation a new plant strain?

Having a plant named after me is not important to me; I would much rather find a new species or introduce a really good plant into cultivation.

What are your other interests?

I find it hard to make the time for other interests but I do like good food and wine, films and music. Whenever I have a free weekend I like to go to my isolated cottage in Glenlivet, for a peaceful change of scene and some hill walking.

What is your candid view of plant shows?

I enjoy the plant shows and the quality of the plants shown. Exhibiting is something to which I aspire - perhaps when I retire or find the garden space for an alpine house!

What does the SRGC mean to you?

It is very nice to belong to such a friendly group of enthusiasts and meeting everybody at the shows. The baking at the shows is a great attraction yet I am still waiting to taste one of Vera's divine meringues!

Photographic Competition

Time to get your cameras ready: the annual photographic competition is open to all members of the Group and will be held after the AGM in January 2012. There are two categories:

**“Portrait of an alpine plant in cultivation”
&
“Mountain wildlife”**

Members can enter either or both categories. This year entries can be in the format of slides, digital images or prints. Digital images must be submitted as jpeg files (1280x960 pixels max) and must not contain any text. Slide entries can be made on the night. Prints should not be larger than A4. As usual the winners will be chosen by popular vote. Please note that an essential element in the competition is artistic merit. We are allowing 2 entries per person per category.

Club Challenge - everyone is to enter at least one picture. Go on have a go!

Hearty congratulations to local nursery *Kevock Plants (David & Stella Rankin)* on their award of a Silver Gilt Medal at the RHS Chelsea Show and *SRGC and Kevock Plants* for their staging of a joint show garden which was awarded a Gold Medal at Gardening Scotland.

Well done to all.

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