

International Rock Gardener

ISSN 2053-7557



Number 65

The Scottish Rock Garden Club May 2015



We have read in past issues of the IRG about the construction of large crevice beds, built for public gardens, utilising tonnes of rock to produce impressive gardens that can be enjoyed by masses of people. This month we will learn how one person has achieved a project to build a crevice garden in a domestic setting, on a scale appropriate to that and using materials that are more readily available to the private gardener. Matthew felt he learned a lot from the SRGC Forum about how to plan and tackle his scheme and was inspired to share the process with us, to help others. Another way to learn from others in the Club is to attend lectures or our special events. One such is the SRGC "Summer Event" held in Dunblane. This year's event is on August 22nd - the speaker will be Susann Nilsson. Her subjects will be 'Pulsatillas' in the morning and "Treasures in Mongolia and Eastern Russia" in the afternoon. All details of the talks and displays for the day can be found in the [SRGC Show Schedules](#). Last year the Speaker was [Olga Bondareva](#) and [Tim Ingram](#) reports on the day and how he and his wife made a weekend "expedition" to Scotland from Kent for the event – perhaps you will be tempted to join the event this August?

Cover picture: Pollinator at work - common carder bee, *Bombus pascuorum* approaching *Fritillaria imperialis*, photo taken by Mark Smyth on 22nd April 2015 in Northern Ireland.

---Mountains in the Garden---

Newbie makes a small crevice garden text and photos by Matthew Stuttard.

So, with some trepidation amongst so many experts, this is a story of a small garden. I made it because some old railway sleepers (railroad ties) came into my possession. The project began in January 2014: cutting and fixing the sleepers to make a planting space about 1.8m by 90cm with a height on two sides of 25cm and two sides at the back of 50cm.



The beginning

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The bed is positioned in the sunniest spot in my garden in Surrey. After cutting out the turf, the sleepers were bedded on coarse gravel and fastened together with a combination of long screw bolts and angle brackets. Then old roof tiles, clay and bigger concrete ridge tiles were sunk vertically into our local clay to make root runs.



Well, it was just going to be a sloping soil bed in two halves. Left half alkaline, right half acid. After a lot of googling the recipes were as follows:

Acid bed: 140L JI3, 70L Grit, 70L Sand, 140L ericaceous compost, 4L bone meal.

Alkaline bed: 90L JI3, 45L limestone chips, 45L sand, 90L Irish moss peat (guilty conscience), 6kg lime, 2L bone meal.

It was surprisingly hard work mixing that lot up! At this point my wife thought I was digging a shallow grave and was not too keen!

Then I started reading more into the subject, including the wonderful SRGC!

My main sources were:

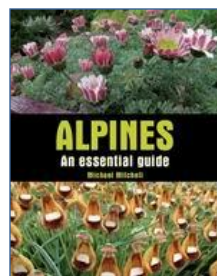
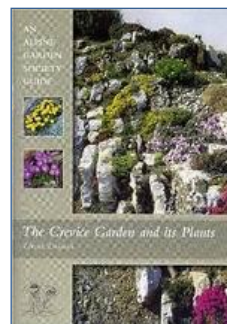
Zdeněk Zvolánek's ["The Crevice Garden and its Plants"](#)

John Good's "Alpine Gardening for Beginners"

Michael Mitchell's "Alpines an essential guide"

Plus I had a visit to the alpine garden at Wisley - in February - not much showing in the way of plants but great to see the crevice [garden structure](#). So ideas developed and I clearly had to get my hands on some rock!

I found a local supplier with a good range of rock and after a bit of



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agonising went for rough Cotswold stone (a yellow oolitic Jurassic limestone). I really liked the waterworn limestone they had, but in addition to ethical concerns thought it would look too busy to have limestone on the alkaline side and sandstone on the acid side. At first I got pieces which were too small, but after reading Zvolánek I went back for bigger bits, including trapezoids for the ends and squarish pieces for the middle.

I set them out as you can see in the pictures. I kept to Zvolánek's rules about the profile, but broke those in spacing the different vertical strata more than 1inch (2.5cm) apart.



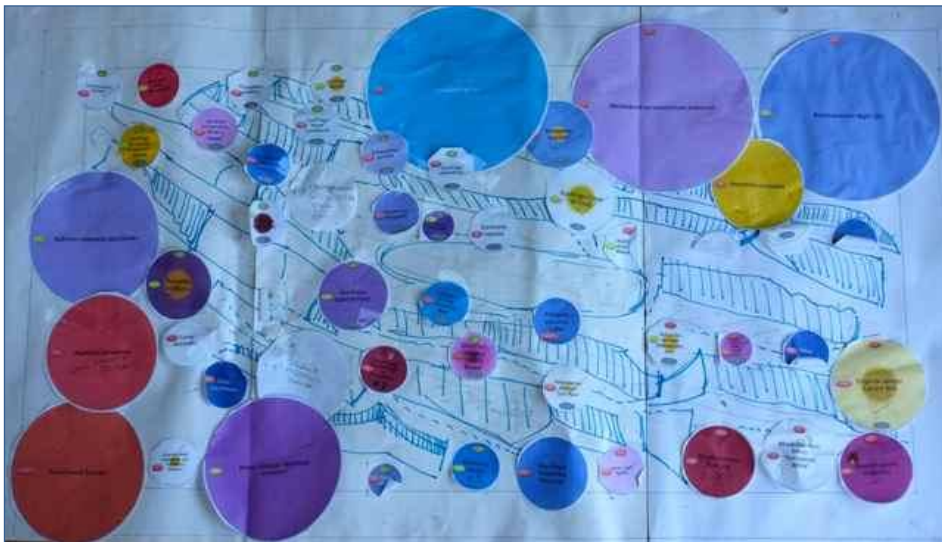
The rocks and soil provided a range of environments: Alkaline and acid; Crevice and flat; Sharp drained and less sharp though still well drained.

As the rock makes a curved stickleback ridge facing south there is also sunny and shaded. This means that in this small area there is a huge amount of variety in plant micro-climates. Research was carried out on plant selection using the RHS plant database + the books mentioned + SRGC + the really great websites of Alpine growers.

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A spreadsheet was necessary to absorb and process the vast amount of information, in particular I wanted to ensure 12 months of flowering interest.

The upshot of all the research was a planting plan, based on plants I knew were available. Zvolánek's booklet was an inspiration in this effort, but he mischievously mentions a lot of plants which are not available!



After a lot of study, it was possible to make a scaled planting plan. I was worried about the huge number of plants for such a small area, and also had Zvolánek's message to avoid the 'goulash' in my mind. But I gave into my desire for specimens, form, variety and year-round interest traded against harmony and planting rhythm.

You can see in the planting plan that I just went for a dog's breakfast. I suppose you wiser heads will tell me it will be a terrible mess in two years' time.

NB. My wife, who is much more artistic than I am, drew the rocks brilliantly on the scale drawing so we could stick down the plant models. These were just made as circles to scale of spread after 5 years showing the flower colour, and codes for soil type, crevice or not, shade or sun.

At this point in my forum report, members remarked on the advantages of growing from seed generally and also using small cuttings to plant up a crevice bed while offering congratulations and support of my efforts, which I appreciated.

A month after planting

I felt at that stage that I have many mistakes ahead of me (and some behind already!), but that's all part of the fun. I certainly do intend to experiment with growing from seed and cuttings soon. My priority this year was to get my hands on some good plant material so - leaving the bed to get wet and settle for a while I ordered most of the plants on my list from [Pottertons](#), [Craigiehall](#) and [Slack Top](#) nurseries. So exciting to get the deliveries! All these suppliers provided a first rate service, the plants grown hard

and well rooted in mineral soil - so different from those floppy types with lots of top growth and little root I saw in garden centres. They were all really well packed too. I planted the first batch in late March and the final delivery in early April, being quite brutal spreading out the roots on some that were to go in the narrower crevices. The rocks had been bedded on the vertically sunk tiles and then packed with coarse sand, so I dug out planting pockets with a very small 'houseplant' trowel and then backfilled with J13+grit+sand, one third each. I followed the advice in the books about ensuring their necks were above the soil and then dressed and supported the stems with small gravel. I used a bamboo stick to pack the soil around the roots trying to get rid of air pockets. Then it was about waiting



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and occasional watering. I looked anxiously for signs of new growth - the first flowers arrived very quickly but that's just stored energy, I wanted to see new leaves. Overall early establishment has gone well, two failures: an *Edraianthus niveus* in a crevice (probably my fault - it was a good plant) and a *Rhodohypoxis* Tetraploid which was not well on arrival and for which a refund was made without quibble. I thought I had lost a *campanula* (Dickson's Gold), but I think something ate the leaves as it is now re-sprouting protected by slug pellets. A *Sisyrinchium* became a bit unwell - yellow leaves - but it has responded to a little NPK top dressing, and a *Leontopodium* looked very weak when planted but is now OK.



One month after planting there was a new delight every day!



Oxalis 'Ione Hecker'



Corydalis 'Kingfisher'

Forum members also shared their experiences of shaking existing soil off the roots or washing off all soil before planting in crevices. Some did this for all bought-in plants, regardless of where they were to be planted because they "may not be in a growing medium that is conducive to long term growth or to successful transfer to one's own soil". There was good advice from Anne Spiegel to sprinkle some sand on the roots to keep them from clinging together too much.

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Which bulbs?

I did have a few spaces left, but was waiting a while before sticking in rooted plants - I would remember those tips for next time. My thoughts were now turning to selection of a few bulbs in order to ensure flowering interest from October to March. I impose a constraint of max. 15cm height so they are in keeping with the scale of the other plants. As you can see in the general pictures posted earlier the bed is pretty small with a flatter area along the front which should be OK for growing bulbs between/through the other plants (*Aubrieta*, *Zauschneria*, *Campanula*). I'm thinking of *Colchicum corsicum*, *Crocus laevigatus* 'Fontenayi' (Dec to Jan), *Crocus pulchellus*, *Crocus fleischeri*, *Narcissus romieuxii*, *Scilla siberica* 'Spring Beauty', *Fritillaria aurea* 'Golden Flag'.

Is this too many if I plant 3 bulbs of each? Of course it is! But: how to reduce the selection and get the flowering span? Child in sweet shop problem here!

Cyclamen coum, in the slightly shaded area just behind the rock ridge but near the top of it, seems to be a must. A few tips suitable for a beginner were very welcome - I realised from [Ian Young's Bulb Logs](#) that this is a huge topic.



Saxifraga 'Cloth of Gold'



Delosperma alpinum 'Sani Pass'

Just to share my 'newbie' enthusiasm - isn't there something wonderful in the way these have developed since they were put in only a few weeks ago? In particular how the crevice plants have gently flowed and moulded their forms to the rock contours.



Phlox subulata 'Nettleton Variation'



Erodium 'Spanish Eyes'

Late May 2014 update: All going well so far. I have only had to do a bit of dead heading and the slugs seem to dislike climbing up the railway sleepers so no losses to them. I like the way the *Erodium* flowers are held high on bendy stems so they nod in a breeze, but it is quite a sprawling plant which might need a trim soon. The *Corydalis* posted previously finished its first flush of flowers a couple of weeks ago - I was expecting more as it is supposed to have a long season.

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This *Ramonda myconii* picture (left) was taken through the trellis at the back of the bed, it seems happy enough in its shady nook.

Potentilla eriocarpa (below) may be rather ordinary but it gives a lovely splash of yellow, especially after rain.



In contrast *Saxifraga* 'Winifred Bevington' (left) looks very neat and sturdy in a shadier spot.

The *Pulsatilla vulgaris* picture (below) was taken in April - just one flower but a lovely one, I tried sowing the seeds it produced in a tray a couple of weeks ago following the advice on the *Pulsatilla* forum pages - no seedlings yet! Possibly showing my ignorance but I wonder if the seed is viable as I only have one plant?



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A question posed in the forum was quickly answered: What's the species of moth here? Found in the garden on 1st June. They are just beautiful.



Chris Johnson supplied the answer: "A great find, Matthew, a mating pair of **Eyed Hawkmoths** (*Smerinthus ocellata*). If you get to see the lower wings you will see a pair of dark 'eyes' on a reddish background."

I thought it great to have the identification. Their wing shape - especially the trailing edge - looked fantastic.

I did not want to disturb them so did not get to see the undersides or sides. They stayed like that for over an hour.

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Early June in the crevice bed and the Edelweiss, *Leontopodium alpinum* (below, right) is developing. I'm not much of a fan of this plant but couldn't have an alpine garden without it.

Edraianthus pumilio has lovely colour, but a very short season - this pic was taken last weekend and the show is almost over now. Not helped by the heavy rain in the week.



Rhodohypoxis milloides (below) is the first of these to flower – a really brilliant colour.



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Centaurium scilloides



Sisyrinchium idahoense var. *macounii* 'Album'

Centaurium scilloides with its petite flowers is coming on and finally the *Sysirinchium* has flowered quite well - now nearing the end, it has more than doubled in vegetative mass. Some of the leaves are not looking happy though. I'm trying a slow release fertiliser.



June 22nd 2014 Solstice update: "Side view" and "front view" and below, "overhead"

"Side" pic shows *Aubrieta* 'Bressingham Red' (front left) has made a lovely cushion- it is still flowering, which is a pleasant surprise, it seems very well-behaved.

"Front" pic reveals one of the *Oxalis* 'lone Hecker' plants has got a very bad dose of rust (I can't bring myself to post a close up!). I did not have time to treat it when it first appeared and it has now really taken hold and the leaves look very unwell. I have sprayed Dithane. The plant is still flowering gamely.

"Overhead" pic shows how the plants have filled out compared to the end early May (page 5). Some have grown a bit too much. The *Erodium* at the far end has now had a trim.

The little stars newly in flower are *Sempervivum arachnoideum tomentosum* and *Campanula* 'Dickson's Gold'.

Two weeks ago I took offsets from the Semps for another little project and they rooted very quickly in a tray kept in the greenhouse, they will be ready to plant out next week.



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Left: *Sempervivum arachnoideum tomentosum*

Below: *Campanula* 'Dickson's Gold'



Mid July update 2014:

Well I seem to have lost two *Oxalis* lone Hecker to rust - all the vegetation is dried and brown - there are some tiny new leaves appearing but I am not optimistic.

Corydalis 'Kingfisher' has put out some new lush

leaves after looking unhappy since it flowered in May. *Erodium* 'Spanish Eyes' is very (too?) vigorous and has had several trims - but it continues to flower prolifically, responding well to dead heading. I cut dried seed heads from *Gentiana verna* and sowed the minute seeds in a tray placed in an open frame covered with fine net to stop other seeds having a go - fingers crossed! *Aubrieta* 'Bressingham Red' is still flowering, but this must be the last few.



Campanula 'Lynchmere' (above left) is prolific and looking great. The greatest joy this month for me though is the *Physoplexis comosa* (above right) - this was a 'must grow' plant as I have failed over several years to see this rarity in its natural habitat on cliffs in the Dolomites. The plant seems happy in its shady, well drained, steep crevice. The single magnificent flower is rather small and its complex structure is almost best appreciated as a photo displayed on a big screen!

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Zauschneria 'Pumilio' has formed a good sized mat/cushion but is so far is only flowering at the periphery.

July 22nd 2014 - Regarding mid-summer blooms: I mentioned previously that my aim is to get year-round flowering - so far only 4 months of flowering achieved and in the easy part of the year - but there has always been something! If things go bloomless soon I will ask for expert tips. Fortunately *Erodium* and *Erigeron* just go on and on and *Dianthus* comes back again. The *Physoplexis* finished very quickly after working exceeding hard to make its one small but magnificent contribution.

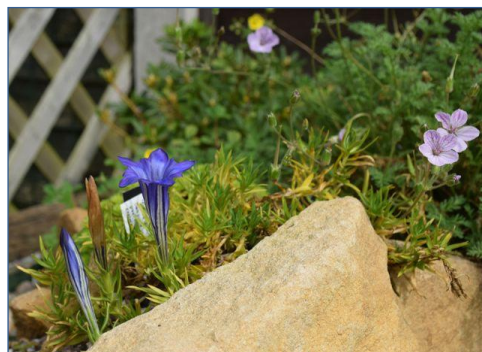


Early September and the return of mild weather - The general view below emphasises how several plants have filled out and formed good cushions or mats.

The silvery leaved mat on the left is *Antennaria dioica* 'Alex Duguid', front and centre is *Aubrieta* 'Bressingham Red' forming a lovely dense cushion, *Zauschneria* at the front right is now spreading over the edge and still flowering freely (see detail above right). Behind it is *Phlox subulata* 'Nettleton Variation' with interesting red/green variegation. These two now crowding out a *Sysirinchium* which I might move in Autumn - apparently it won't like that but it has

not been very happy where it is anyway. Behind the *Aubrieta* is *Pulsatilla vulgaris* which has grown quite bushy - it only produced one flower (but a cracker) as a small plant this year - hopefully many more next spring!

This week's star plant is *Gentiana* 'Shot Silk' - the name of this variety perfectly describes its stunning flower which looks great at the top of the ridge. In the background of this pic *Erodium* 'Spanish Eyes' continues a long season - it has been continuously in flower since the end of April and seems to thrive on being cut back regularly - it is just a bit too big and vigorous but such a great performer it has earned its place.



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December 2014 – after a lull in posting when I was too busy with winter jobs in the garden. There have been crocus in flower since October but I missed them. I just had to get the camera out today though because *Crocus laevigatus* 'Fontenayi' (right) looks so lovely fully opened out, straining for the weak winter sunshine.



Not much else in flower but there are perhaps a dozen very small single flowers scattered on *Lithodora diffusa* 'Heavenly Blue'



(left) and a couple on *Corydalis* 'Kingfisher'. For both these plants, the winter flower colour is noticeably more purplish than in spring. It will be interesting to see if they revert to a lighter blue next year.

The next picture is a general view showing a canopy I put up a few weeks ago to protect plants from winter wet - some of them are a bit susceptible to this. As you can see I just went for the blanket approach rather than putting up individual ones. Hopefully this is good enough - fingers crossed.



The cover did blow off once but it did not take the rather spindly framework with it because the horizontal bamboos were cunningly lashed to the quite sturdy trellis behind the bed. The failure occurred because the cover was only held down with stretchy brown plastic garden tie. Next winter I must remember to fix horizontal bamboos on top as well as underneath.

Looking again at the December photo just now it is striking how the variegation of the *Phlox subulata* has changed. It was almost all green in December and now it has got the lovely reddish tints back. It looks very attractive just now at the front of the bed, just hanging over the edge.

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March 06, 2015 - Such a lovely sunny afternoon. The protection was removed last weekend. Now it will be fascinating to see what has survived the relatively mild winter (hmm, could be more to come) - there are some very unpromising looking twigs in places as you can see in this picture - patience needed!



The low afternoon light caught *Saxifraga oppositifolia* (above) looking great.

Below:

Scilla siberica 'Spring Beauty'

March 2015 -

A dull wet day today, brightened considerably by *Scilla siberica* 'Spring Beauty' which is a deep blue - an uncommon colour at this time of year. The flower buds emerged low on the ground last weekend and then popped up on delicate stems in just one week. Starting on the ground is hazardous - something had nibbled a good few of the first buds - possibly mouse or bird. Nodding down they modestly hide great beauty inside the bell flowers.

I started off with all white labels on the plants but there were comments that these were not very attractive - suggestions were made about making detailed planting plans, or taking photographs to "fix" the

placings on the various plants. A tip about black labels did appeal to me. I had thought of getting rid of labels as there is quite a forest of them, but do like to have the names right there (my memory often needs refreshing!) and I know I would not keep a sketch up to date.

I have gone with Mark Smyth's solution of black labels (he also uses a silver pen) and will remove the suppliers' labels this year. For permanent labelling in the garden I have been making engraved labels for a while (sold as 'scratch-on' labels but the scratching tool supplied with them is not great to use).



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This picture shows the engraving tool and a label that has been through 5 winters and it's as good as new. It's a bit of a faff of course so if I'm in a hurry I just use a white label and pencil until I have time to write a black one. I don't use a wire attachment in the crevice bed, but pushing them into my gritty soil mix is tricky so I use an old blunt carving knife to make a deep slot for them.



The photo (left) shows what has happened to some of my rock slabs over the winter: with the bedding plane exposed vertically water has got in, frozen and expanded causing splitting. So the Cotswold sandstone I selected is not very weatherproof when set on edge like this - could be a costly error - at this weathering rate it is possible that in just a few years I'll have to rebuild. On the other hand, I really like the natural appearance of the shattered stone: geomorphology in action!

Sunny today and *Scilla siberica* 'Spring Beauty' is now in full bloom - the bells of last week have opened up to stars. After the previous discussions I am now noticing those intrusive labels - a campaign is needed! I must make progress with making black ones and burying them.

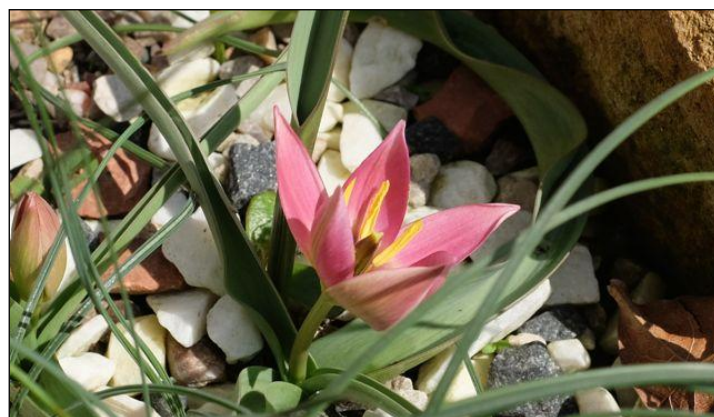
Right: *Saxifraga porophylla ferdinandi-coburgi* 'Drakula' - a long name for a very small plant with a tiny but beautiful yellow flower - of course everyone who sees it says "shouldn't it be red?" - next to it is *Saxifraga* 'Jenkinsiae' (*x irvingii*) with a few new blooms.



April 6th: Easter weekend was dull until today (Monday) which was brilliantly sunny all day - I got lightly sunburned. I went to [RHS Wisley](http://www.rhs.org.uk) yesterday; interesting to see their *Pulsatilla vulgaris* in an open bed fully in flower yet mine, only 20 miles away, is still making flower buds and probably a couple of weeks from blooming.



The sunshine brought out *Tulipa aucheriana*'s lovely flowers held on very short stems (right).



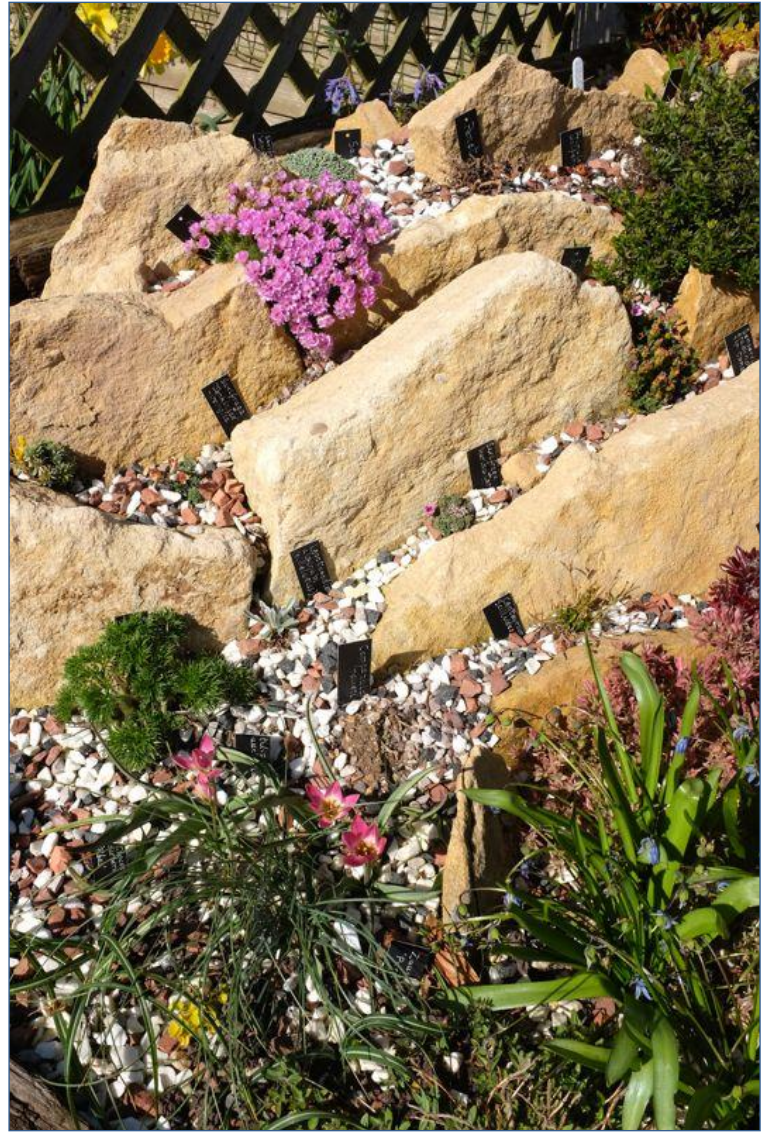
Armeria juniperifolia (above left) contours itself nicely around the crevices and is starting to bloom.

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A few combinations are emerging now, this profile picture (far right) shows *Tulipa*

aucheriana at the front with *Armeria juniperifolia* (below) fully flowered in its crevice and *Corydalis* 'Kingfisher' (above) on the mini plateau behind the crevice. Colour graduations in the *Corydalis* flowers are beautiful.

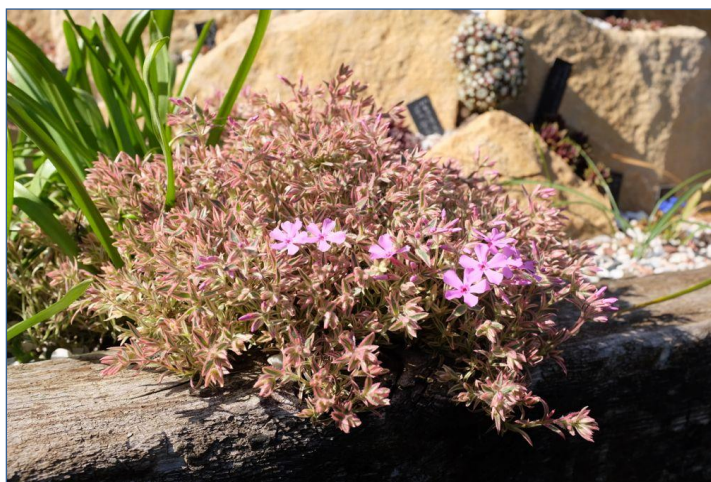


The *Sempervivum* have thrown off their winter tiredness, they are looking glossy again and fulfilling their name as cobweb plants, looking as if they are providing perfect homes for small spiders! One is even called 'Red Spider'. I was delighted to see the first small leaves of *Physoplexis comosa* - I was worried I had lost it.

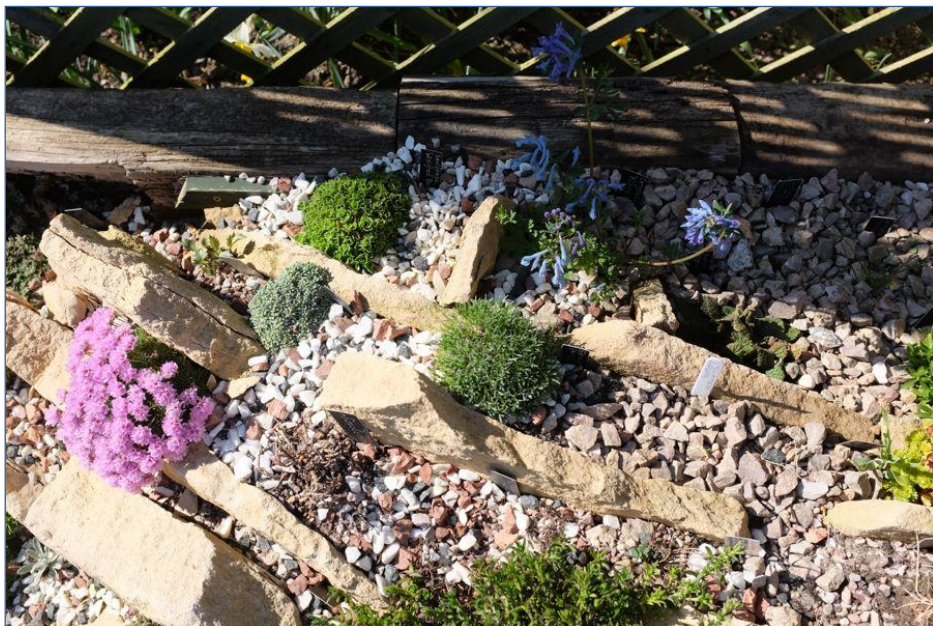


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This general picture shows that the campaign for black labels is almost completed - you can hardly see them now can you! 😊 At the top right hand corner of the bed is *Rhododendron* 'Night Sky'- seen below right. In bright sunshine.



Phlox subulata 'Nettleton Variation' (above) begins to flower again as good old *Erigeron aureus* 'Canary Bird' (above right) has started its outstandingly long flowering season.



The [story](#) continues in the SRGC Forum: so far – so good!

M.S.



Matthew Stuttard

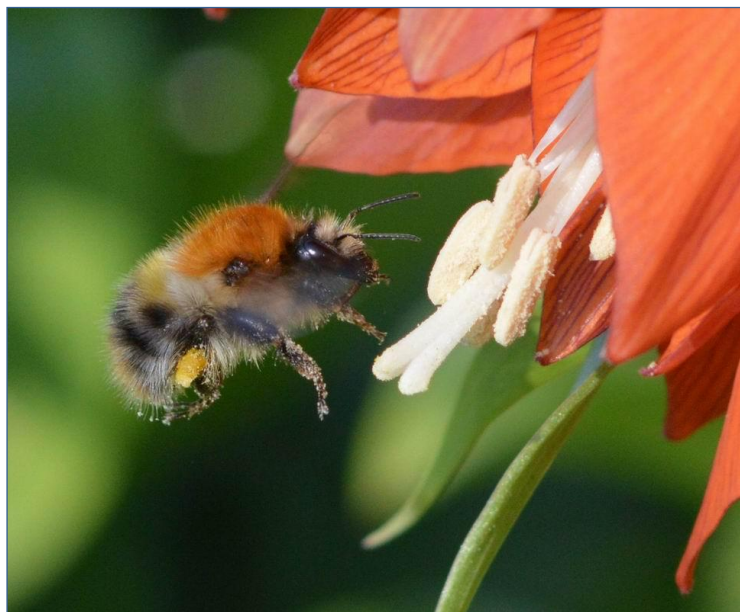
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--- The Importance of pollinators ---

Bombus pascuorum – common carder bee

The IRG Team hope that the cover picture this month, of a common carder bee, *Bombus pascuorum*, approaching a *Fritillaria imperialis* blossom will spur our readers to pay attention to the [vital importance of pollinators](#) in our lives, for the provision of the food crops for humans and animals as well as for our decorative gardens.

There are many threats to pollinating insects of all kinds and many campaigns are being fought now to reduce the [number of pesticides](#) being used which kill as many helpful creatures as pests. There are organisations which seek to help pollinators; in the UK, for instance; the [Bumblebee Conservation](#), the [British Beekeepers Association](#), or the [Scottish Beekeepers Association](#).



The following excerpt is quoted from the [Michigan State University website](#):

“Why are bees important?”

It has often been said that bees are responsible for one out of every three bites of food we eat. Most crops grown for their fruits (including vegetables such as squash, cucumber, tomato and eggplant), nuts, seeds, fiber (such as cotton), and hay (alfalfa grown to feed livestock), require pollination by insects. Pollinating insects also play a critical role in maintaining natural plant communities and ensuring production of seeds in most flowering plants. Pollination is the transfer of pollen from the male parts of a flower to the female parts of a flower of the same species, which results in fertilization of plant ovaries and the production of seeds. The main insect pollinators, by far, are bees, and while European honey bees are the best known and widely managed pollinators, there are also hundreds of other species of bees, mostly solitary ground nesting species, that contribute some level of pollination services to crops and are very important in natural plant communities.”

--- Report on the SRGC Summer Meeting 2014 ---

Report on the SRGC Summer Meeting - 23rd August 2014 by Tim Ingram Photos Tim Ingram and Olga Bondareva

Voronezh, Vladivostok and the Caucasus.

Who would travel 500 miles (and another 500 miles home) to listen to four talks on alpine plants? When the talks are by an adventurous Russian botanist and gardener at perhaps the second smallest city in the British Isles, not far from an area of outstanding natural beauty (with one of the most charming tea shops you could find anywhere), and close to a remarkable small garden devoted to alpine plants, amongst much more, then there is no debate. Add to this detours to Edrom Alpine Nursery, to Dunbar - the birthplace of John Muir - and to the 'Botanics' at Edinburgh, and you have an experience to remember.



The botanist is Olga Bondareva, the city Dunblane, the natural beauty Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, and the garden, [Branklyn](#).

Olga Bondareva (left) has contributed over some years both to the SRGC Forum and in the pages of the IRG.

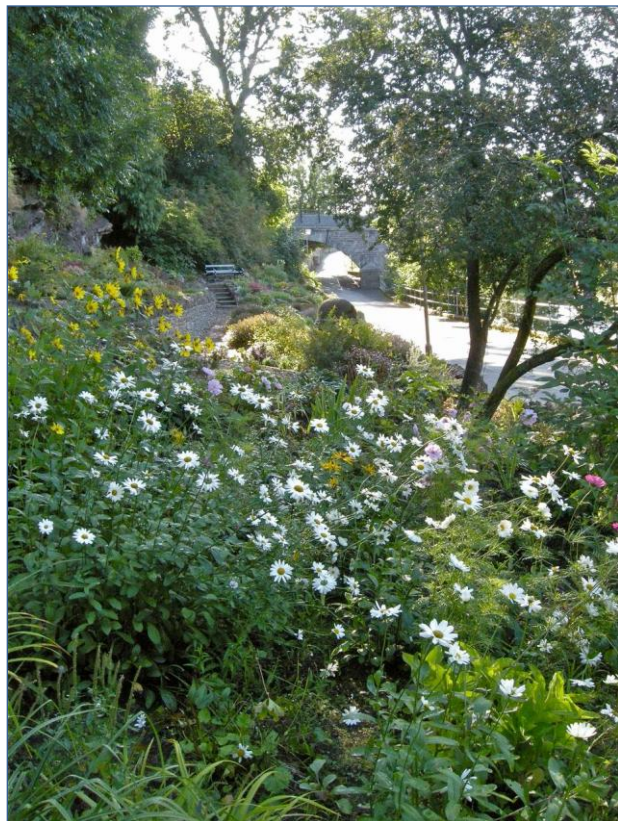
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Olga was invited to Scotland by the Scottish Rock Garden Club to speak on her exploits botanising in the Caucasus and far to the east near to Vladivostok. She is not only widely travelled and a fine plants-woman and photographer, but talented in presenting her knowledge of plants to an audience in a language not of her own, and was received with the highest regard.

Dunblane Cathedral

Before describing something of Olga's talks I should mention the venue, [Dunblane](#), which is strategically and centrally located for gardeners in Scotland. Dunblane, like the plants we have come to be so fascinated by, is small and perfectly formed: a 'city' - because it has a cathedral - which is more like a village, close to both Edinburgh and Glasgow but closer still to the natural beauty of [Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park](#). It would be hard to find a better place to learn about and celebrate the alpine plants of the world.

Appropriately, for the alpine gardener, the little rock fern, ***Asplenium trichomanes***, (below left) also grows in profusion in the wall alongside the cathedral.



A view of the path of the walkway along the riverside, Dunblane

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The Scottish Rock Garden Club has also had an influence here by part sponsoring the [Riverside Rock Garden](#), made by local gardeners in 2012.



Some wild variations in *Daphne juliae* flower colour

In her talks Olga took us first 500km south of her home in Moscow to the dry continental lowlands of Voronezh near to the Don River (which runs into the Black Sea), where winter temperatures can drop as low as -40°C. The region is mainly soft limestone and is home to many familiar garden plants from *Anemone sylvestris* and *Primula veris* to amazing meadows of *Paeonia tenuifolia*.

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There are the irises *I. aphylla* and *I. pineticola* and several species of *Stipa*, including feathery awned *S. pennata*. Amongst these grasses of *stipa* and *festuca*, which grow and flower later in the season, the springtime hills are covered in places with the low pink mounds of *Daphne juliae*, a species close to *D. cneorum* and first described in 1921 but only recently studied in greater detail in its native habitat by Olga. [Ed.: Olga wrote of *D. juliae* in [IRG #5 of May 2010](#)] The typical flower colour varies from soft to deep-pink, but in such large populations occur forms from 'Appleblossom' to pure white. Much of the variation seen in daphnes in cultivation is evident in these natural populations, with variegated and purplish leaved plants and some with 'starry' pink and white flowers. It is a good plant in the Moscow climate, only subject (like all daphnes) to occasional fungal dieback and to 'sunburn' in early spring when the soil remains frozen and restricts transpiration as the ambient temperatures rise. In nature, along with the more familiar *Adonis vernalis* and *Genista tinctoria*, it grows with other interesting species such as *Onosma simplicissima* and [Polygala cretacea](#). Though rarely cultivated this species has been successfully grown in gardens at least since the 1970's and looks to be potentially of equal horticultural merit as its relative *D. cneorum*.

Olga's
photo of
Scottish
hills



Outdoor concert
encountered
by Olga on her trip to
Scotland

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Squirrel sharing a snack and a view of the [Forfar Botanists' Garden](#)



Bedsocks and a hot water bottle – in case the visitor from Moscow found Scotland's summer too cold!

An informal breakfast – all these photos by Olga Bondareva



Sandy Leven, Susann Nilsson and Olga Bondareva – photo by Ian Christie.

[SRGC Summer Meeting 2015](#) [Flowers of the Hills and Mountains](#)

22nd August 10.00am to 4.00pm

Two talks by Susann Nilsson

This event celebrates the fact that the SRGC is a garden club and the plants which members grow. It will illustrate the beauty, diversity and garden worthiness of the widest range of rock and woodland garden plants, bulbs, shrubs and trees, to encourage their cultivation in gardens and to encourage the exchange of plants and knowledge among gardeners.

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Corydalis in the far east

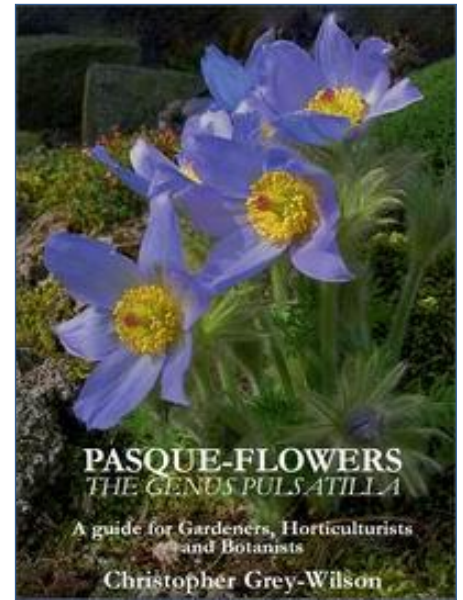
Olga's second talk was based thousands of kilometres to the east in the hills close to Vladivostok and near to the borders with N. Korea and China. This is a wonderland of temperate plants with a relatively mild maritime climate of dry winters and wet summers and innumerable species suitable for European gardens. One thousand and five hundred vascular plants have been recorded here including a wide diversity of woody and woodland forms, and with real gems like cypripediums, corydalis and the beautiful (if fleeting) *Jeffersonia dubia*. The hills are volcanic, old and not so high (up to 2000m) and clothed in a woodland mix of *Quercus*, *Acer* and less familiar genera such as *Maackia*, *Kalopanax* and *Phelodendron*, which develop superb autumn colours. There are many coniferous species and a number of rhododendrons, but the real interests for the alpine gardener are the rich assemblages of woodland and higher meadow plants. *Eranthis stellata*, a white winter aconite, and rare in cultivation, grows everywhere in woodland glades, as do mixes of corydalis, anemone and fritillaria, and the curious composite, *Syneilesis aconitifolia*.

Learning to garden with such plants in a natural way is surely one of the great thrills of gardening, even if in an infinitely smaller space, but seeing them described in the wild in this way is truly exciting. Quite a few species are well known in British gardens and have been long cultivated - for example *Lilium pumilum*, *Jeffersonia dubia* and *Paeonia obovata* - but others would no doubt make equally good garden plants, in particular the corydalis which are often seasonally dominant parts of the woodland floor. *Corydalis ambigua*, *buschii* and *remota* (botanically correctly known as *turtschaninovi*) are all known to specialist gardeners and most successful in the cooler north of the UK. Many have been introduced to cultivation by the renowned plantsman in Latvia, Jānis Rukšāns, and scientifically studied at Gothenburg Botanic Garden in Sweden. Olga showed a most striking form of *C. remota* [sic] with deep-purple lips and sky-blue spurs, and it is as variable and fascinating a plant as the much more widely grown *C. flexuosa* and its allies, and suitable for similar conditions in the garden.

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In dry grassy meadows near to the Suifun River grow three species of *Pulsatilla* - *P. cernua*, *P. dahurica* and *P. chinensis* - often together and showing no obvious signs of hybridisation. This genus has been closely studied and grown by Olga in her Moscow garden and, for the alpine gardener, is one of the most appealing of all. Field studies like this will most likely lead to more species becoming better known and grown in cultivation and add significantly to the recent monograph on the genus published by Christopher Grey-Wilson (2014 ISBN: 978-0-900048-76-6).

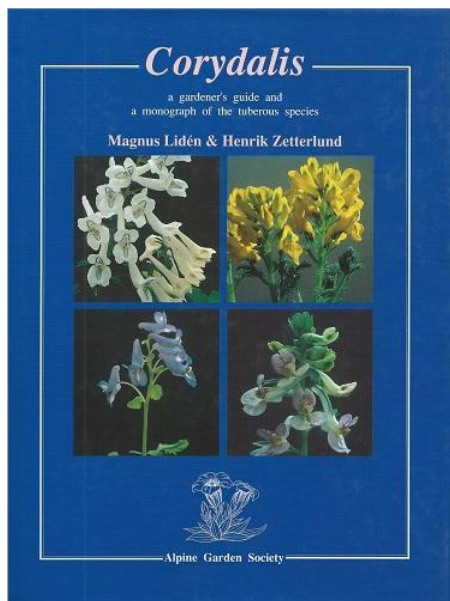
One of the most enlightening aspects of learning about plants is gaining a sense of their origins and distributions around the world. Olga's final two talks compared the floras in the immensely varied and dramatic terrain of the Caucasus, from the higher and continental interior to the almost sub-tropical Black Sea coast, where in places tea is cultivated commercially. The fact that certain species from each of these places are successful and valued plants in our gardens says a lot about the adaptability of plants in general, and leads to the great fascination that such places instil in the minds of gardeners.



Caucasus Mountains

The Caucasus contains some of the highest mountains anywhere in the world, reaching to over 5600m, and stretching north-west to south-east from the Black Sea to the Caspian. As a geographical and cultural divide between Russia in the north and Persia (in its widest sense) in the south, it can almost be compared with the Himalayas, and as a floristic region equally exciting.

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The genus *Corydalis* is again very notable and Olga showed a woodland floor composed of a wonderful mix of *C. caucasica* and *C. marshalliana*. The latter, closely discussed by Magnus Lidén and Henrik Zetterlund in their monograph on the genus (1997, ISBN 0900048662 / 9780900048661) is highly variable across its range and intergrades with *C. cava*. All can be excellent garden plants. The Caucasus is truly rich in endemic and near endemic species of snowdrops. For the Galanthophile Olga showed *Galanthus alpinus* and *G. angustifolius* from her travels in the north, and the amazing range of species, *G. krasnovii*, *G. panjutinii*, *G. platyphyllus*, *G. plicatus*, *G. rizehensis* and *G. woronowii* from nearer the Black Sea. Several of these are exceptionally rare in cultivation and it is very valuable to see and hear more of their natural situations. *Galanthus woronowii*, one of the easiest and most widely available of snowdrop species, shows variation in the wild that immediately appeals to the gardener, from greenish forms to a poculiform which Olga had specifically searched for over several years.



Galanthus woronowii poculiformis

Almost as exciting, if not more so, is the rarely cultivated (and recognised) *Erythronium caucasicum*, usually white with a yellow or brown central marking but sometimes pink, and even more strikingly, spotted. The brownish-orange flower stems of this species also mark it out rather beautifully. It is hard to choose from the many other plants that Olga showed: the variety of flower colour from white, through pale to the typical deep-yellow of *Epimedium pinnatum* subsp. *colchicum* shows that

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new forms of this easy and useful plant could come into cultivation; and the pure yellow form of *Pulsatilla alba* is a delight. The highlight, though, is undoubtedly the amazing variation found in *Paeonia tenuifolia*, highly attractive already for its tidy and neat habit and finely cut leaves, but here with flowers varying from white through pale-pink to orange and deep-red, albo-roseum and semi-double. The horticultural potential of this species is considerable.



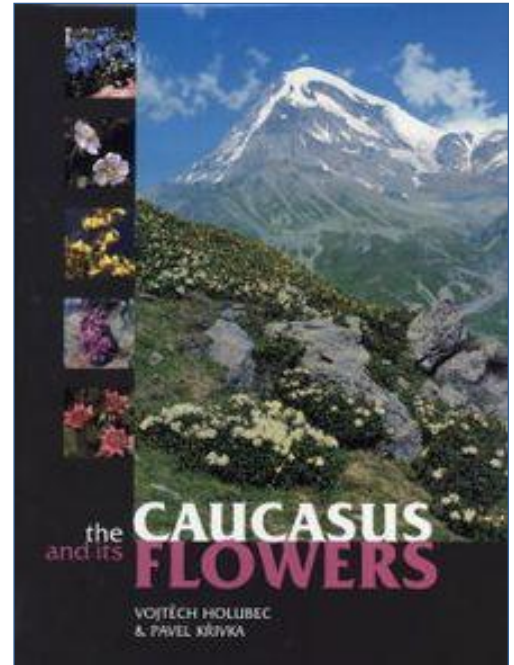
Paeonia tenuifolia alboroseum



Paeonia caucasica forms

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The high Caucasus is home to so many true alpine plants such as the unique yellow form of *Gentiana verna oschtenica*, *Pulsatilla violacea*, *Campanula biebersteiniana* (which we obtained from Edrom Nursery) and an interesting small mountain *Rhamnus*; *R. microcarpa*. I would like to grow *Gentiana djimilensis* - which sometimes occurs in pink and bicoloured forms as well as blue - and Olga described *Daphne circassica* as having the best scent of all, a high recommendation, and a good excuse to grow more of this wonderful genus to compare! This, along with the purple and well scented *Viola somchetica* and so many other plants, illustrates the great botanical and horticultural fascination of the region, which has been so finely documented by Vojtěch Holubec and Pavel Křivka in 'the Caucasus and its Flowers' (2006, ISBN 80-902541-3-6). It was a privilege and a joy to see them described first hand in their natural habitat.



(I would like to express our thanks to the Scottish Rock Garden Club, and to Sandy Leven, for organising such an enjoyable day, and to Olga for her charming and enlightening talks). [T.J.I.](#)



Above: Some of the plants on display at the SRGC Dunblane Summer Day 2014. You can read Sandy Leven's report on the day [here](#) – and you are most welcome to join us on 22nd August 2015.