



**CORNWALL GROUP
NEWSLETTER FOR
April 2020**

Dear all

New measures, announced at the start of the week to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak included the need to 'Avoid Social Contact' and specifically in places such as Pubs, Clubs, Theatres and Restaurants. I feel that we at CHPS fall into that category with our indoor evenings at Ladock Hall.

The health and wellbeing of our members is our utmost priority and as such I have taken the decision to cancel the meeting due on Wednesday, 1st April 2020. The situation with our Garden Visits and Plant Sale is less clear at this stage and we will review them on a month by month basis according to how the situation develops and the current advice at the time.

Remember we have both a website (<http://cornwallhardyplantsociety.org.uk/>) and facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/333068437419161/>) to keep in touch.

Kind regards

Phil Gadd. Chair

Who would have thought things could change so rapidly. This Newsletter has been written from the depths of my Covid-19 bunker and it looks as though there will be considerable uncertainty for some while yet. Events have been cancelled until further notice and we will wait for the government to decide on the right time to lift restrictions on meetings.

In the meantime I will continue to try and produce a monthly newsletter. With very little content I am hoping that you will all help me out by sending pictures and notes from your own gardens. Anything would be very welcome.

Material can be sent to me by e-mail or why not post it on the Cornwall Hardy Plant Society's Facebook page? We cannot meet, but we can all stay in touch electronically. I hope you all stay well through these challenging times.

At Home with Cornwall Hardy Plant Society.

It seems likely that many of us will be choosing to spend more time at home in the coming months but perhaps we can continue to keep in touch through the newsletter. Please do send in pictures of anything you are doing in the garden, or anything you have that you are particularly enjoying. We may not be able to get out and about as much as we would have done but I am sure there will be plenty of gardening going on.

A few lines to explain what the pictures show are always useful to readers. If you don't have time to write anything please at least let me know what the pictures show and I will write some explanatory text to go with them.

So I suppose I should start the ball rolling!



Camellia 'Donckelaerii'.



Camellia 'Lipstick'.



Camellia 'Benten Kagura'.

During the 1980's there were still a number of nurseries in Cornwall that specialised in camellias. Mostly they were associated with, or got cutting material from, the large traditional Cornish gardens. As a result I acquired a number of cultivars, often obtained as rooted cuttings, that were growing in pots around the place. As the decade drew to an end I got fed up with their increasing size and number and they were all planted out in the garden more out of desperation than design. In my haste to get them into the ground the labelling was rather neglected. It is one of those small jobs that can always be completed another day isn't it? Big mistake, another day never seems to come. As a result the first big wave of *Camellia* planting has occasionally mystified me.

C. 'Donckelaerii' was one of the early ones. I think that I have two large plants of it in the garden, but this is the only one that I have managed to find a label for, buried in the soil beside the trunk.

The second wave of planting started about a decade ago. I tried to be very careful with the labels but it hasn't always worked out well. Fortunately in recent years I have been planting the more distinctive cultivars so I am hoping that the confusion will be easier to untangle - another day! *C.* 'Lipstick' was an impulse purchase last year. I couldn't resist the small red flowers with their boss of white petaloid anthers in the centre. I bought it last spring, it sat around through the hot summer last year and I finally got it into the ground a month ago.

C. 'Benten Kagura' straddles the two groups. I bought five rooted cuttings from Trewithen when the gardens still had a nursery producing plants. I grew them on and sold most of them, but I kept one for the garden. I have no idea where it went, but I don't have it now. Although Trewithen no longer have a nursery, their original plant can still be seen growing on the outside of the walled garden.

Several years ago I was able to replace it, and this time I found a favoured corner in the garden to grow it. It has been unexpectedly vigorous and the combination of double red flowers and white variegated leaves is a constant surprise.



Primula allionii 'Daniel Burrow'.



Primula allionii 'Pink Aire'.



Primula allionii 'Sapphire'.

In recent years my infatuation with small alpine *Primula* has developed into a minor obsession. Alpine Garden Society shows have been cancelled and I am grumpy about it. It was exactly the right thing to do, but that doesn't stop me feeling grumpy.

For those of us in Cornwall more used to Candelabra *Primula* and primroses, *Primula allionii* is a strange little thing from limestone rocks in the mediterranean region between France and

northern Italy. I went looking for it once. I didn't find it. A friendly local cycling down the road knew the plant well and waved in the general direction of a cliff and some caves on the other side of a broad torrent of spring melt water. As he cycled away I could hear him cackling with laughter.

No matter, I have been killing them for decades. More accurately, Vine Weevil have been eating them for decades. A quick munch overnight and there's nothing left in the morning. Then I discovered limestone chips. For two years I have been growing them in pure limestone chippings and the Vine Weevil seem to be under control. The *Primula* love it, everything in the garden is rosy - did I mention that the colour range is pink, from pale to dark, a veritable rainbow of possibility?

There is even a chance that I will finally manage to collect seed this year and raise a few of my own. Giddy gardening aspirations indeed!



Pleione formosana 'Clare'.



Pleione forrestii .



Pleione Masaya.

Pleione have a similar fascination for me though I have had success growing them for much longer. Like most orchids, they are fussy about where they will grow, but once you get the conditions right they are easy. I keep mine in the greenhouse, though I have seen a number of people trying them outside. The secret seems to be to keep them moist during the growing season. If they have access to water they will put up with almost anything. I keep promising myself that this will be the year I grow a few more of them in the garden. Perhaps with some extra gardening time I will actually get there now.

Pleione formosana comes from Taiwan and a number of vigorous clones have been imported. Usually pink with a white lip, there are one or two pure white flowered cultivars of which 'Clare' is probably the most vigorous.

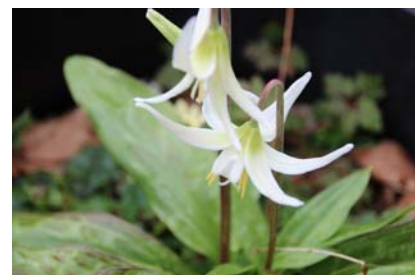
Yellow flowered *Pleione forrestii* caused a sensation when it was first imported, though it is now known that the early plants were actually hybrids. The true species has bright canary yellow flowers and has been widely used in the production of new hybrids. When combined with the pink colours of other species yellow, red and orange flowered hybrids have been produced. *P. Masaya* has been quite vigorous with me. My clone is primrose yellow but there are pinker forms in circulation. It has *P. forrestii* as a grandparent and although the other grandparents are pink, the yellow colour has been retained.



Erythronium 'Spindlestone'.



Erythronium hendersonii .



Erythronium 'Minnihaha'.

The *Erythronium* started to open in the middle of March. It is a pivotal moment in the garden, a point in spring that no longer looks like a burst of warmth in winter. Suddenly the azaleas are full of bud, the birds are singing, summer is lurking in the wings.

Erythronium come in yellow, white and pink. In recent years they have become very popular as a few breeders have released new hybrids. I have a small collection but a few years ago I started to sow seed and with any luck the first of them will flower this year. I will show pictures if they do. I doubt I will get anything particularly wonderful, but they will all be unique and I will be very proud of them.

So please, take a moment this summer and share some of your garden with us. Together we can enjoy the company of our fellow gardeners.

LAST MEETING

"Gardening with Jane Austen". by Penelope Townsend.

Jane Austen was born in Hampshire on 16th December 1775. The winter was so bitter that she wasn't christened till the following April, when she could be taken to the local Steventon Church where her father was the Church of England rector. She lived for the first 25 years of her life in Steventon.

Jane's first famous romance, with Tom Lefroy, came before her first recorded visit to Bath. He was fair haired and good looking. He had just completed his degree in Dublin and was studying at the Bar in London. He was staying with his aunt and uncle at Ashe parsonage. The film "Becoming Jane" is a costume drama based on what happened, though it doesn't reflect events with much accuracy. I'm sure Jane might have enjoyed it!

The first of Jane's surviving letters to her sister Cassandra in January 1796 is an account of the ball at Manydown Park where she obviously flirted with her 'Irish friend'. They only got to know each other over three balls. There is a sense of Jane's own awareness of her power to attract but without any marriage settlement her choice of husband would be very limited. Five older sisters, a profligate father and being dependant on his great-uncle for his education ensured that Tom's 'boyish love' was doomed. There is a theory that she then invented Mr Darcy as the hero who behaved as Tom could not.

Jane paid two visits to Bath in her early twenties, the first to stay with her mother's brother, Uncle James Leigh Perrot. He came to Bath for half of every year. Jane Austen stayed with him and his wife, Jane Leigh Perrot at 1, Paragon, Bath in 1797. Mrs Leigh Perrot was rather inclined to patronise the Austens as poor relations. In 1799 Jane came to Bath again and stayed at 13 Queen Square with her mother, elder brother Edward, his wife Elizabeth and two of their older children.

In 1799 Aunt Jane was accused of shoplifting a card of lace worth more than a shilling. This would have been grand larceny, punishable by death or transportation to Australia for 14 years, which amounted to about the same thing. It was blackmail, she had to wait for the assizes in Taunton. She and Mr Leigh Perrot were lodged with the prison keeper Mr Scadding, at Ilchester. She spoke for herself and had many testimonials to her good character. The jury acquitted her in ten minutes. It cost her more than £2,000. Mr Leigh Perrot was unwaveringly loyal. In 1801 Jane came to live in Bath and stayed for five years, her parents and Cassandra were with her. Rev Austen had retired and had an annuity of £600 per year. The rent on 4 Sydney Place was £150 p.a. and the landlord was bound to redecorate under the terms of the lease. The Austens went off for the first of several excursions to Devon and Dorset.

Jane's life was precarious after Rev Austen's death until she and her mother and sister were offered a cottage at Chawton and moved back to Hampshire. During the last eight years of her

life Jane saw four of her books published anonymously and enjoyed a little success. She died on 18th July 1817 at the age of 41.

How to be Eighteenth Century in the Garden.

What an ideal cottage garden should contain: - An Encyclopaedia of Gardening, 1822.

A well, a water closet (in a hidden part), a pigstye, a dunghill, two or more beehives. A fence or hedge with plum, pear, apple or cherry trees planted in or against it. Apples and plums were regarded as the most useful. A line of gooseberry and currant bushes with pears and a vine against the house if the climate and position are favourable. Honeysuckles and roses next to the porch and ivy over the water closet. Scented clematis by the pigstye. The border round the house should have such herbs as parsley, thyme, mint, chives and flowers and shrubs. Recommended vegetables are potatoes, peas, turnips, kidney beans etc.

Mrs Austen certainly **'dug her own potatoes, and I have no doubt she planted them ... When at work she wore a green round frock like a day labourer's'** (reminiscence of a grand daughter).

At the end of her life Jane Austen worked out how much her work had earned her in her lifetime. She had £600 invested in the Navy 5 percents, made up as follows:

First edition of 'Sense and Sensibility', £40

Copyright of 'Pride and Prejudice', £110

First edition of Mansfield Park and second edition of Sense and Sensibility', £350

When she switched to John Murray as publisher, Egertons sent her small residual amounts:

First edition 'Mansfield Park', £13,7s

Second edition 'Sense and sensibility', £12,15s and £19,13s

First earnings from 'Emma' less losses an 'Mansfield Park', £38,18s

Grand Total, £684,13s

Why does Jane Austen still make us smile?

"Nothing fatigues me but doing what I do not like". (Mansfield Park)

"For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbours;and laugh at them in our turn". (Pride and Prejudice)

"One half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other". (Emma)

"Surprises are foolish things. The pleasure is not enhanced and the inconvenience is often considerable". (Emma)

"Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions. A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world". (Persuasion)

"Human nature is so well disposed towards those who are in interesting situations, that a young person who either marries or dies is sure of being kindly spoken of". (Emma)

"She looks remarkably well. Legacies are a very wholesome diet". (Letter 1808)

"Composition seems to me impossible with a head full of joints of mutton and doses of rhubarb". (Letter)

"Husbands and wives generally understand when opposition will be in vain". (Persuasion)

"No man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves. It is the woman only who can make it a torment". (Northanger Abbey)

"Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor - which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony". (Letter to Fanny)

THE THREE STEMS COMPETITION

Thanks to Penelope Townsend for judging the Three Stems competition. Sarah Wilks brought in a very beautiful bunch of classic spring flowers capturing the scent, flavour and cool beauty of

the season. *Osmanthus delavayi* justifies a rather dull appearance through the year by sprinkling clusters of its scented white flowers along every twig in the first warmth of spring. *Helleborus argutifolius* crowns itself with large lime flowers, that look good even with if the snow falls. None of that nonsense this year, flowers have appeared like a burst of sunshine on the dark evergreen clothing of winter. The group was made up with the most floriferous sprig of rosemary I have seen. *Salvia officinalis* 'Tuscan Blue' looking spectacular even after its recent traumatic name change. A very well deserved first place.

Second went to Sue Lake with a vase of three *Fritillaria meleagris* which she says is spreading well in her garden. I was very envious. It likes a moist garden, I have a moist garden but I can't keep them. To be fair, I think the rabbits eat them. Suddenly I can think of another very good use for that Rosemary! Finally, Dave Mayhew brought in a trio of Camellias like a classic Cornish garden in miniature. The deep red flowers of *C.* 'Bob Hope' are amongst the darkest I know. Beside it the large pink flowers of *C.* 'Tiffany' looked like a delicious dab of ice cream in a dish of mulberries. *C.* 'Margaret Davies' made up the trio, the double white flowers have the finest red picotee margin. The ensemble was put together nicely, came third and wins my special award for the best coordination with the new red curtains!



1st. Sarah Wilks.
Osmanthus delavayi
Helleborus argutifolius
and *Salvia officinalis* 'Tuscan
Blue' .

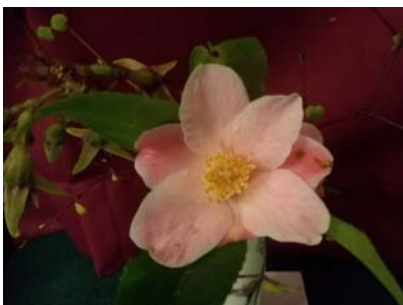


2nd. Sue Lake.
Fritillaria meleagris.



3rd. Dave Mayhew.
Camellia 'Bob Hope',
Camellia 'Tiffany' and
Camellia 'Margaret Davies'.

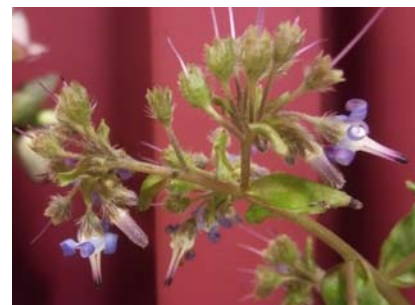
Still with *Camellia*, Jim Stephens brought in a single pale pink bloom as part of a delightful group, beautifully staged. Janice Greening produced three sprigs of *Ribes sanguineum* 'White Icicle', the best of the white flowered cultivars in my opinion. I didn't get a note of who brought the blue flowers of *Trachystemon orientale* but the pale flowers are always a joy to see and the lush leaves later in the season will easily trounce all competition (that's to say, it can be a bit vigorous). Thank you, it was lovely. At this time of year all of our hearts go out to *Helleborus*, special thanks to Trisha Wilson for making that plain. Jean Gadd had also fallen for their charms as had Pam Dormand. Apparently they did not suit the taste of Jane Austen on the night!



**Single pink *Camellia* from
Jim Stephens .**



**Janice Greening's *Ribes*
sanguineum 'White Icicle'.**



***Trachystemon orientale*
looking fragile (it isn't) and
lovely.**



Jean Gadd .

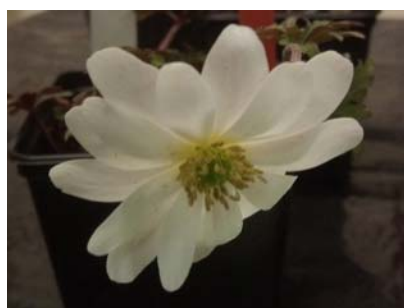


Trisha Wilson's Hellebore heart.



Pam Dormand.

Some very lovely things on the display table. Tricia Howard's spring arrangement brought a taste of the fresh excitement of the season to the hall and a lovely plant of *Tropaeolum tricolor* had delightful orange flowers hanging from the delicate stems. *Narcissus* 'Jumblie' is a lovely miniature cultivar raised by Alec Gray in Camborne. A pretty little thing but completely eclipsed by the success of its sister, 'Tete a Tete'. Plenty of flowers on the sales table this month. *Narcissus* 'Toto' had cool white tepals and a long creamy corona that fades to white. *Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour' has large white flower and is always an optimistic sight in the garden, waiting for the first sunny days to open its flowers wide.

*Narcissus* 'Jumblie' .*Tropaeolum tricolor* .*Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour'.

Scadoxus in Zimbabwe. by Jonathan Hutchinson.

Members will no doubt remember that in February Jonathan Hutchinson spoke to us about his time in the Falkland Islands. People may not be aware that Jonathan is also the National Collection holder for *Scadoxus* and that he has recently come back from a trip to Zimbabwe to study them in habitat. This article was first published in the Devon Plant Heritage newsletter but Jonathan thought we might like to see it.

A Twelve day Trip to Study *Scadoxus* in Zimbabwe in Conjunction with Oslo and Harare Botanic Gardens.

In June of 2019 I was invited to give a talk to staff members at the Botanic Garden in Oslo. This came about from an initial contact with some professors and students who are undertaking work on specific genera of African petaloid monocotyledons including *Scadoxus*.

In the previous summer it was suggested that I contact Prof. Charlotte Sletten BJORÅ, who was undertaking DNA research on *Scadoxus* but was limited by the amount of material that was available for the studies. In October of 2018 I was delighted that Charlotte and Prof Inger Nordal were able to visit the National Collection of *Scadoxus*, where we spent much of a sunny weekend taking leaf samples for rapid drying in Silica gel. This preserved the quality of DNA needed for their research. In the 1970's Inger had done much of the research and taxonomic

work on *Scadoxus*, which until that time was still part of *Haemanthus*, making it a particularly easy genus to become familiar with. She was now very keen to see this work progress and to test a number of hypothesis that had formed, though at the time of the initial research there was not enough material available to enable any conclusions.

I will always remember how Inger marvelled at the thickness of the flower bract of *Scadoxus membranaceus*. Asking if she had not seen the plant before she said that she had only known many of the plants previously from Herbarium specimens. Whilst I knew this was the case for much taxonomic study, it hadn't really occurred to me what an onerous task botanists and taxonomists have in providing a description from a plant that was possibly dried years before. So much of the plant is lost due to pressing, particularly all the colour pigments but especially the feel of the plant. We take so much for granted with the plants that we grow!

Another major topic of the weekend, and a particularly exciting one, was that I had been asked by Charlotte if I would be interested in joining a botanical trip to Zimbabwe! She was arranging this twelve day study trip along with Prof. Clemence Zimudzi of the University in Harare and would include other professors, MSc and PhD students from both countries. The trip was based on a number of petaloid monocotyledon genera of particular interest to the participants, of which *Scadoxus* was one. Zimbabwe had been a country I had wanted to visit for many years primarily because one of the *Scadoxus* species, *Scadoxus pole-evansii* is endemic to the Nyanga Mountains that borders Zimbabwe and Mozambique. This was such a fantastic opportunity knowing that one of the key aims was to find this beautiful species and travelling with such a knowledgeable group I was bound to get a great deal from the experience.

Another aspect which was particularly important to Charlotte was that the distribution of *Scadoxus puniuceus* which runs down the eastern side of the continent, is disjunct with distinct isolated pockets between Ethiopia and South Africa. One of these areas is in the south of Zimbabwe, limited to areas in and around Matobo National Park. This had been the basis of one of the hypothesis raised by Inger, as to whether these isolated pockets come from a common ancestor or if they have evolved separately but, morphologically look so similar that they have been classified as the same species. Hopefully some of the material received from the National Collection and subsequently from the Zimbabwe trip will answer this question.

I had also been asked if I would like to collect material, this was something that I definitely wanted to undertake but knew it would require a good deal of paperwork. This would ensure that it complied with the Nagoya Protocols to allow for documented material to be a valuable part of the National Collection.

Thankfully due to the Support of Lucy Pitman, Plant Heritage Plant Conservation Officer and Dr John David, Head of Horticultural Taxonomy for the RHS, the various problems that arose with my seed collection requests were ironed out and eventually my request to collect was granted. Sadly, on the eve of our return from Zimbabwe the protests that affected the whole country, due largely to massively inflated fuel prices, came almost to a point of melt down. This brought the capital to a standstill with all the businesses and offices closing down, and of course included the offices of the Zimbabwean Research Council where I was due to get my paper work signed off! Hopefully these will still come through to support the material that I was able to collect.



***Crinum macowanii* growing by the roadside.**



All of the participants of the trip.



***Gloriosa superba*, the National Flower of Zimbabwe.**

The trip was made up of two excursions;

From Harare drive South to Matobo National Park - *Scadoxus puniceus* .Return to Harare Drive east to Nyanga Mountains National Park - *Scadoxus pole-evansii*. It was hoped that the widely distributed *Scadoxus multiflorus* would be found as we travelled through the other areas.

Matobo National Park.

Travelling down to Matobo on good tarmac roads gave us plenty of opportunities to stop and look at areas of roadside vegetation. Bulbous plants were the focus for the whole trip and we saw a number of genera to appeal to the whole party. *Ledebouria* with their very variable and marked foliage was an area of speciality for one professor and her PhD student, with a number of collections made along the journey and throughout the trip *Chlorophytum* and *Hypoxis* were also for being sought out, both genera being difficult on occasion to determine from other species.

Christopher Chapano, Head of the Botanic Garden in Harare was delighted to find specimens of *Dipcadi*, a diminutive member of the Hyacinthaceae. He said it was very poorly represented in the Botanic Garden Herbarium and so was keen to rectify that. On the showier side we saw many *Gloriosa superba* in a wide range of colour forms, both bicoloured and of red or yellow. *Crinum macowanii* was also a common sight growing in damp seeps in depressions along the road side. By the time we reached our destination the light was fading quickly, but a bulging herbarium press showed the successful start to our trip.

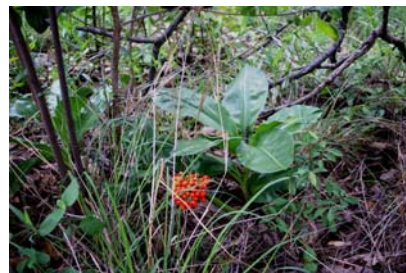
Matobo National Park is famed for its landscape of huge boulders and bizarre standing stones. We spent two days here, enabling us visit much of the park. We continued to see a wealth of plant material that appealed to the interests of the team. Of particular importance to me was the chance to gather twenty separate collections of *Scadoxus puniceus* seed. This wonderful bounty then continued to keep me busy for the rest of my trip evenings as not all of the seeds were ripe at the time of collection. I needed to ensure that as it did ripen the red pulp that surrounded the seed did not turn to a soggy mass. Some of the seed then wasted no time in starting to germinate so the prior purchase of small plastic containers proved very useful for protecting the seeds and their delicate radicles.

One particularly special part of the trip for the whole team was meeting a couple of game wardens and being asked if we would like to see some White Rhinoceros? With strict instructions from them on what we should and should not do, we were led to an open expanse and were able to watch from a remarkably close distance as a small family came closer towards us. On talking to the guards about the *Scadoxus* seed they said that the baboons did occasionally eat them, which had a narcotic effect!

After this very positive start to the trip we returned to Harare to change flower presses and prepare for travelling to Nyanga in the East.



Maleme Camp, Matopo National Park.



***Scadoxus puniceus* in fruit.**



***Scadoxus* leaf samples cut up for drying.**

Nyanga Mountains National Park.

Having the chalets as accommodation at Punch Rock, set amongst a beautiful stand of mature flat topped *Acacia abyssinica*, was a wonderful starting point for our ventures around Nyanga National Park. For the first day after getting our permits for access and allowing us to collect we started to drive the loop of road called the Scenic View. This soon turned out to be an area of considerable disappointment as the whole area had been taken over by *Acacia mearnsii*, one of

the Australian black wattles. Some areas of this had been burnt through to leave the charred skeletons of the trees. On inspection of the blackened ground we saw thousands of emerging seedlings that would prove to be the next generation. This tree had been eradicated from large tracts of ground outside the park so hopefully this area would also be cleared at some time. Unperturbed by this minor setback, the following day we set off to Mtarazi Falls which is one of the given locations for *Scadoxus pole-evansii*. After viewing the beautiful falls themselves we followed directions that took us to an area where the *Scadoxus* had been seen growing on a previous occasion. On eventually finding a couple of seedlings our anticipation of seeing further plants certainly grew but Prof. Clemence Zimudzi's call 'we've found it and its in flower!' was more than any of us had expected. To see this beautiful plant in flower and in habitat was a real treat. It was something that I had wanted to see for years, it was well worth the wait! The second recorded locality for this species is a few miles away at Pungwe Falls so we decided to visit this location. Sadly we were soon prevented as the roads were very badly pitted and flooded and there was a risk of the vehicles getting stuck. Still we returned home triumphant from what was the highlight of the whole trip.

On our return journey to Harare we continued to look for *Scadoxus multiflorus* which had been harder to find than anticipated. Clemence said this was due to the lack of rain. We stopped in areas where it had been seen previously and was known still to grow, but there were absolutely no signs of growth. Eventually, we did find a couple of specimens at an undocumented site and they were in seed so this was another success. Everybody on the trip was very pleased with what had been achieved and was deemed a huge success on a number of counts, from the number of collections made, to an increased distribution for a species of *Chlorophytum*, which had previously been thought to only occupy a much smaller area.



**Mtarazi Falls,
Nyanga Mountains
National Park.
Location for *Scadoxus
pole-evansii*.**



**Prof. Inger Nordal
and
Prof. Charlotte
Sletten Bjora.**



**The Professors
visiting the National
Collection of
Scadoxus.**



It was great to meet up again in Oslo a few months later and talk about the Zimbabwe experiences. I felt very privileged to be asked to give two talks, about the RHS and Plant Heritage, to a small audience of University and Botanic Garden staff. Charlotte also spoke about synergies between Botanic Garden and University staff while Ida and Kine, the two MSc. students, gave presentations on *Scadoxus* phylogeny and the *Scadoxus puniceus* complex. I am particularly grateful to Charlotte for enabling me to be involved in the work that they continue to undertake and to Plant Heritage Devon Group for providing me with funds to assist my travel to Zimbabwe and to be part of a truly memorable and worthwhile experience.

OTHER EVENTS LAST MONTH

March has seen a lot of changes in our outlook and I am assuming that there will be very few events to report on for a couple of months at least. While we wait and see how the situation changes, here are the last few events that I managed to get to.

Wisley. 28th February 2020.

For several years the Royal Horticultural Society have run a special display in the glasshouse at Wisley to fill the awkward gap between the end of the Christmas festivities and the first signs of life in the garden. For several years the "Butterflies in the Glasshouse" display attracted large crowds and many of you will remember last years "Brick Safari" with its (more or less) life sized models of animals made from plastic construction bricks (Lego to you and me).

This year the title has been "The Great Houseplant Takeover" and the glasshouse has been filled with domestic tableaux showing a wide range of house plants slowly taking over a house. There were some interesting displays, a selection of brightly coloured *Guzmania* planted out in a four-poster bed attracted a lot of attention. House plants are very trendy at present, particularly among a young urban generation. I wondered if any of them would be inspired to try it.

Guzmania are like Boris Johnson in one respect, you wouldn't want to find either of them between your bedsheets. A child's high-chair with an *Opuntia* growing out of the seat gave pause for thought and the assorted climbers romping up a staircase suggested that the house had already been overwhelmed.

An interesting display, I'm not quite sure what I took away from it. I will certainly be careful in future that I don't sit on an *Opuntia* but I think that was already a principle I tried to adhere to. As with all themed flower arrangements it is the appreciation of the moment that matters and the Great Houseplant Takeover was great fun at the time. Gardening is mostly perspiration and I welcomed a moment of escapist fun in the depths of winter. The other visitors also seemed to be enjoying it though I am sure many of us checked between the sheets quite carefully before we leapt into bed that night.



Alpine Garden Society Show, Theydon Bois. 29th February 2020.

The following day was my first visit to an AGS show for the year. I couldn't have guessed at the time that it would also be my last, the AGS have cancelled the remaining spring shows. In previous years this early spring show has been held in school hall in Harlow with labyrinthine parking opportunities. The move to Theydon Bois gave the organisers a chance to stage the show in a bright new hall with plant sales in the hall next door. I always seem to remember the catering at this show and once again it was excellent. A cheese sandwich at mid-day filled me with delight, cheese and sandwich in almost equal proportions.

It is always good to start the spring at one of these shows with a bold display of colour. At home I had snowdrops and a few early *Camellia* to cheer the place up so the sight of tables overflowing with a rainbow of *Iris*, *Crocus* and *Primula* was a vernal delight. I have a weakness for *Anemone* so a seed tray of *A. caucasica* in full bloom left me wondering why I didn't grow it. The exhibitor sowed the seed in June 2017 so it is probably worth a try.

Among the unusual plants to turn up was *Hesperantha oligantha*, a smaller relative of the River Lily, *Hesperantha (Schizostylis) coccinea*. Note the admirable, politically correct new name. I have never seen it before and it might be an interesting addition to the spring flowers in Cornish gardens. The species has a narrow range in the western Karroo in South Africa where it grows in seasonal streams and shallow pools. If it is hardy enough it sounds perfect for a wet spring!



Anemone caucasica.



The vernal rainbow.



Hesperantha oligantha.

Chelsea Physic Garden. 1st March 2020.

Chelsea Physic Garden is the perfect location to end a weekend away. Travelling into and out of London is of course a perpetual delight - the glee in the faces of regular commuters is enough to lift the spirits in the greyest of weather. There was the feeling that spontaneous spring singing could break out at any moment to rival the early blackbirds.

The gardens were just shrugging off the last thoughts of winter, grass paths were still surprisingly wet but the mildness of central London meant that many plants that would be tender even in Cornwall were prospering outside. This was the first time I have seen *Justinia floribunda* growing in the open garden, and seemingly undamaged by the winter. It is certainly a thing to try outside in Cornwall. Usually seen as a greenhouse plant and distributed as *J. rizzinii*, it comes from eastern Brazil and is so easily propagated from cuttings that there is no reason not to give it a try.

This was also the first time that I have seen *Euphorbia atropurpurea* in flower, the dark red bracts looking particularly good on a sunny afternoon with a bright blue sky. Found growing at lower altitudes on Tenerife, it is probably not very hardy but it is known to hybridise with other species and the possibility of a red flowered herbaceous *Euphorbia* suitable for gardens cannot be ruled out.



Euphorbia atropurpurea .



The cactus and succulent greenhouse.



Justinia floribunda .

There are a number of Pomegranate trees in the garden and I was very pleased to see large yellow fruits ripening on one of them. I have seen a small fruited form ripening at Kew but these were the first ones I have seen that looked edible. The yellow skins were a bit insipid in the London light but I am sure they would have blushed a brighter colour in the Mediterranean sunshine. On the other side of the gardens a large Avocado tree was producing flower buds and seemed to be untouched by winter weather. I have a few seedlings growing in my greenhouse so perhaps they should also get a chance of being planted in the ground at home. The most colourful plant in the garden was undoubtedly the flower filled *Rosa x odorata* 'Bengal Crimson'. I have been told that it flowers in irregular waves throughout the year, paying little heed to the season. It is certainly something I should be trying.



Punica granatum
Pomegranates in fruit.



Chelsea Physic Garden.



Rosa x odorata 'Bengal
Crimson' .

Kew Gardens. 6th March 2020.

Kew hold a Festival of Orchids every spring in the Princess of Wales Conservatory. Admission was being controlled this year by means of timed admission slots booked online, and of course I hadn't got around to that. Fortunately by the end of the day the crowds were starting to thin out and the admissions staff had relaxed their approach (for which I thank them).

The display this year was themed around the orchids of Indonesia and particularly around *Dendrobium azureum*, the only pure blue orchid known. It is not thought to be in cultivation so it was represented in the display by a number of blue dyed *Phalaenopsis* hybrids. First discovered by Evelyn Cheeseman in 1938, *Dendrobium azureum* was only rediscovered in the wild in 2017. The *Phalaenopsis* were also used to good effect clothing arches and columns through the rest of the display accompanied by a range of flowering bromeliads. The Indonesian theme was reinforced by a group of Orangutans that seemed to be made from coconut fibre, and a rather handsome Indonesian Rhinoceros made of bark.



Blue orchids



and a bark Rhinoceros



celebrating the orchids of
Indonesia .

Valley Gardens, Windsor Great Park. 7th March 2020.

I went to the Valley Gardens in Windsor Great Park in order to see the large *Magnolia* in flower. Just down the road from my house a large *M. campbellii* in the village was in full flower. After a frost free week in Surrey I was hoping that the assortment of species and hybrids in the Valley Gardens would be at their best. On the day the timing was perfect. A blue sky would have helped but the cloudy grey background brought out the pink colours wonderfully. It was perhaps a little less kind to the white flowered trees but who cares, pink is good. The best individual tree in my opinion was this *M. campbellii* seedling with a tall, straight trunk supporting the stunning rosy-pink canopy of flowers. *M. dawsoniana*, *M. sprengeri* and an assortment of hybrids were also prospering, painting whole valley-sides pink and white.

However it turned out that the magnolias were not the only landscape spectacle in the gardens that week. The gardens have a very high water table so the lower sections are quite marshy through the winter. In one of the wet sections *Narcissus cyclamineus* had been established and was seeding itself over a very large area. I don't think that I have ever seen it looking so good. Among the plants were a number of self-sown hybrids with larger flowers and broader leaves. The other parent was something of a mystery until we crossed over a low ridge and saw the fields of our native *N. pseudonarcissus* growing beneath the trees. It looks just like a natural scene but the daffodils were planted originally and have spread themselves over the decades. An occasional hard margin to the groups still indicates their origin. And the woodland over the top - that is a forest of *Metasequoia* showing that the entire "natural" scene has been cleverly

contrived.

Not that anybody cared, it was magnificent.



Narcissus cyclamineus . *Magnolia campbellii* seedling . *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*
naturalised.

COMING EVENTS

I assume that all garden events this month will be cancelled.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting which would have been on Wednesday 1st April 2020 .
Has been cancelled as a Corona virus precaution.

ADVANCE NOTICE

It is difficult to know when it will be possible to resume meetings, I will include details here as soon as they are available.

Please let me have any items that may be of interest to the members so that I can include them in the next newsletter. Please let me know if I drop any clangers!

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