

Santa and his little helpers have been around already, checking out who has been naughty or nice. Naturally I have been both so there is a problem for the fat jolly one to sort out. It was either Santa's reindeer who left the holes in the grass or the badgers have been busy again. At this time of year they start turning over the turf to find the grubs below. I don't really mind the damage - I am quite honoured that they come to visit at night - and there isn't anything I can do about it anyway. I have stopped filling the holes in, they only turn them out again the next night. By January they will have eaten everything there is to find and they will move on. Plenty of time to fix the damage then.

Dark evenings keep catching me out. I arrive home thinking I will get something done and it all looks possible as I walk up to the front door. It is strange how it all looks different once I am inside. I go to the door, look at the pool of light spilling out into the darkness and think - nah! Fortunately the garden has slowed down for the year, there's nothing to be done that won't wait until the weekend. I have some Hydrangeas to plant, but before they can go in I need to take some *Aucuba* out. For six months now I have been glaring at them every time I walk past, so I think they have got the idea by now. I have a felling axe that will make the point more clearly if needed.

This is a strange season in the garden. I still have a few dahlia flowers and the fuchsia are behaving as though summer will never end. At the same time the earliest snowdrops have already faded and I have the first daffodils in the meadow.



Saxifraga stolonifera 'Kinki Purple'.



Saxifraga stolonifera.



Saxifraga cortusifolia 'Silver Velvet'.

The autumn saxifrages are also making a spectacular show. The genus *Saxifraga* is mostly known for spring flowering alpines and they don't grow very well in Cornwall. The more compact and silvery the rosette the less they like moisture in the soil. They can be grown in a dry open place, but they aren't seen at their best. Mossy Saxifrages are more tolerant of moisture and grow well in borders but they must be propagated regularly or the cushions become ragged.

Less well known are the larger, autumn flowering herbaceous saxifrages from the section *Irregulares* which come from China and Japan. They are becoming more popular and there are plenty of new introductions. Following a wet summer they have performed very well in the garden.

They are easy to grow in light shade and prefer a light, humus rich soil. Unfortunately these are also perfect conditions for vine weevil. The distinctive fat white grubs with chestnut heads eat

away the roots and underground stems. Often the first sign of damage is the plant wilting. Further investigation will usually reveal that all underground parts have been eaten away and the remaining rosette is simply sitting on the soil surface. The neonicotinoid insecticides were very good at controlling vine weevil but they have now been withdrawn from sale and the replacements are ineffective. Fortunately there is a very good biological control available in the form of *Nemasys*. It is available by mail order and it can often be obtained through garden centres in the summer. The control agent is a nematode that parasitises vine weevil grubs. They will be posted to you, and although they will last for about a fortnight if you keep the package in the fridge it is better to use them immediately. Mix with water and sprinkle over the soil or pots with a watering can using a coarse rose. It must be applied in moderately warm weather to be effective, so it is probably better to wait until May if using it in the open garden.

Saxifraga stolonifera was a popular house plant from my childhood. It produces abundant plantlets on long stolons so it is easily passed along to friends. As with so many easy plants it has fallen out of favour, though the variegated form 'Tricolor' is still seen occasionally. New introductions from Japan with stronger purple leaf markings have found favour in gardens recently. *S. stolonifera* 'Kinki Purple' was introduced by Crug Farm Plants and found in the high mountains of the Kinki Peninsula, Honshu in 1997. It is reliably hardy and seems to have thicker leaves than older forms.

S. cortusifolia is a more compact species from Japan that prefers acidic soils. The leaves are clustered in dense rosettes and usually have deep cuts and incisions around the margin. A number of recent selections have been made, 'Silver Velvet' is my favourite. The purple-brown leaves have strong silver lines radiating from the centre. The pale pink flowers are typical of the section, growing on tall scapes and with two elongated lower petals.



Saxifraga fortunei
'Rubrifolia' .



Saxifraga fortunei 'Bychan' .



Saxifraga fortunei 'Conwy
Snow' .

These plants make an interesting addition to shady corners of the garden, but the most significant member of the group is *Saxifraga fortunei*. In recent decades the range of available cultivars has increased enormously, mostly through imports from Japanese breeders but an increasing number of excellent plants have been bred in Europe and the USA.

In the light of their growing popularity, the RHS conducted a trial of *Saxifraga fortunei* cultivars at Wisley between 2012 and 2015. Older cultivars such as 'Rubrifolia' and 'Wada's Variety' were compared with the best of the modern introductions.

In Japan plants compact selections have been developed as companions for bonsai, displayed in ornamental pots to emphasise the season and the woodland environment. 'Bychan' is a small selection of *S. fortunei* var *obtusocuneata* with deep green compact foliage that forms a neat cushion. The small flowers grow on short stems. It is a good plant for a pot or a well maintained corner of the garden. It is so small that it needs protection from aggressive weeds. Even quite friendly weeds can cause problems.

In the UK, Keith Lever at Aberconwy Nursery has raised a number of small cultivars probably best suited to the growers of Alpine Plants. 'Conwy Snow' was one of his first introductions with small darkish foliage to offset the abundant white flowers.



Saxifraga fortunei 'Pink Haze' .



Saxifraga fortunei 'Black Ruby' .



Saxifraga fortunei 'Hiogi' .

'Pink Haze' is another from Aberconwy Nursery with dark foliage, slightly taller than 'Conwy Snow', it was also awarded an AGM. It is an early example of forms with pink flowers. The breeding of new colours started in Japan but has spread worldwide and recent cultivars are startlingly bright. 'Black Ruby' combines deep purple foliage with deep pink flowers to give an effect that can rival the best of the modern *Heuchera* cultivars. It can be slow growing and tends to lose its leaves in winter so it takes a little care in the open garden. The brightest colour in my garden comes from 'Hiogi' with abundant cherry red flowers through October and November contrasting with the rich green foliage.

In Japan the flowers have been developed to a remarkable degree. The darkest come from 'Kokuryu Nishiki'. Deep red-maroon flowers with narrow petals are delightful when displayed well. They suit the Japanese style of growing plants in decorative pots but are too dark to make an impact in the garden. The foliage is mottled with a creamy variegation that adds interest out of the flowering season.

'Ogon No Mai' is a very late flowering form well suited to the climate of Cornwall where the November flowers will escape damage by frost. The greenish flowers are supported on short cushions of apple-green foliage. When growing vigorously the flowers can produce extra petals, but double flowers are best seen on cultivars such as 'Shiranami'. The bright stems of flowers form a compact dome above the crisp green leaves and it can remain in flower until Christmas, perhaps with some slight protection from extreme cold and wet. They are all completely hardy but the flower stems can be damaged if the weather gets stormy.

The most extreme of the group is probably 'Gelbes Monster', raised in Germany. The large flowers are lime green with an assortment of extra petals in unexpected shapes and sizes. It did well in the trial but it wasn't awarded an AGM.

More information on the trial is available in the October 2015 copy of 'The Garden' and also in the December 2015 edition of 'The Plantsman'. Plants are available by mail order from Edrom Nursery in Scotland. Aberconwy Nursery (no mail order) often exhibit at the AGS shows and may well be at Rosemoor next year (check with the AGS online for details). Cotswold Garden Flowers stock a range of Japanese cultivars and plants may also be available from local nurseries in the flowering season.



Saxifraga fortunei 'Kokuryu Nishiki'.



Saxifraga fortunei 'Ogon No Mai'.



Saxifraga fortunei 'Shiranami'.

LAST MEETING

Wild Flowers and Ferns of Cornwall. by Ian Bennallick.

A great pleasure to welcome Ian Bennallick to the meeting. Ian is the East Cornwall and Devon recorder for the Botanical Society of the British Isles and part of the Botanical Cornwall Group which organises visits to sites of botanical interest in Cornwall. They welcome non-members to join them. Details at botanicalcornwall.co.uk.



Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*).



Town Clock (*Adoxa moschatellina*).



Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*).

Ian has helped in the production of several books including the new "Flora of the Isles of Scilly" and "Ferns, Clubmosses, Quillworts and Horsetails of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly" (details available on the Botanical Cornwall website).

Cornwall is divided into 1km squares and records of plants that occur in them are collated into distribution maps that build a good picture of climate, geology and plant needs in the county.

Filago minima, the Small Cudweed is rare in the UK and found in open areas. In Cornwall it occurs on china clay waste around St Austell and by the side of tracks. Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) has been the subject of a lot of eradication effort. Detailed mapping of its distribution in the county has shown that it is frequent in mining areas, river banks and disturbed areas but far less common in other places.

Petasites fragrans, the Winter Heliotrope has strongly scented flowers in January. It spreads very vigorously but maps of its distribution show it to be most frequent in West Cornwall and along the roads, declining as you move further east. The Danish Scurvygrass, *Cochlearia danica* shows a clear link to the coast but its distribution also shows a strong line along the route of the A30, perhaps a consequence of the application of road salt in the winter.

Many of the rarer plants in Cornwall are those that need open areas and perhaps trees should be planted carefully to maintain suitable habitat. *Adoxa moschatellina* on the other hand is a plant of ancient woodlands and only occurs along the river systems of East Cornwall. *Viburnum opulus* is found naturally in East Cornwall along the Camel and Fowey valleys. The natural distribution is complicated by the fact that it is commonly planted in the mix of trees used on road verges. The Spring Squill, *Scilla verna*, is limited to the north coastal strip round as far as the Lizard. It has good and bad years but it can be spectacular. There are one or two records on inland heaths. The common Cow Parsley, *Anthriscus sylvestris* is an indicator species for soils with high levels of nitrogen. Distribution maps show that it is absent from Bodmin Moor and around St Austell where there are low nutrient levels. It is also sensitive to exposure and so less common on the coast.

Ian guided us on a fascinating tour through the wild plants of Cornwall, highlighting the things to be learned from the distribution of many species and the ways in which the flora of Cornwall is changing.

There is a new "Flora of Cornwall" being planned which is clearly going to be very interesting.



Winter Heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*).



Spring Squill (*Scilla verna*) at Godrevey.



Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*).

THE THREE STEMS COMPETITION

Thanks to Ian Bennallick for judging the three stems competition.



1st. Charlie Pridham.
Lapageria rosea
 'Ongol' (white),
Lapageria rosea 'Beatrix
 Anderson' (red),
Lapageria rosea 'Hugletts
 Blush' (pink).



2nd. John Mann.
Saxifraga fortunei (left),
Saxifraga fortunei
 'Rokujo' (centre),
Saxifraga fortunei 'Conwy
 Star' (right) .



3rd. John Sirkett.
Nerine undulata .

Lovely to see a collection of *Lapageria rosea* forms from Charlie's National Collection and John Mann's selection of *Saxifraga fortunei* forms was beautifully timed. They are looking at their best at the start of November. They are good small perennials for the garden if the vine weevil can be fought off - nematodes are a very effective biological control but need to be applied in reasonably warm weather. I brought in *Nerine undulata* in case anybody had failed to notice that it is *Nerine* season!



Camellia sasanqua 'Crimson King' (red), *Camellia sasanqua* 'Gay Sue' (double white) and *Camellia sasanqua* 'Rainbow' (single white).



Fuchsia .



Canna 'Wyoming', *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Cabaret' and *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight'.

Pam Dormand brought in a selection from her *Camellia sasanqua* cultivars to show that the season has already started. They have an interesting scent in the garden, some people love it, but not all. Sue Lake brought in a selection of *Fuchsia* that showed what a good addition they make to the garden at the end of the year.

Peter Howard brought in an interesting selection of late perennials. *Miscanthus* 'Cabaret' is a bright variegated grass through most of the summer, but in autumn it erupts into a magnificent volcano of creamy flowers that stand up well to the wind and rain we occasionally see at this season. There are a large number of variegated *Miscanthus* cultivars, but this one seems to make the best display. *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight' produces large trusses of flower very freely. They are most magnificent if the plant is stooled regularly once it is established. They are pale green for a week or two after opening but become white in the later stages and develop pinkish tinges as they die off. A wonderful plant, lovely to see a cut stem in the competition.



Rhododendron 'Yellowhammer' .



Autumn foliage.



Astrantia .

Sarah Wilks brought in a stem of *Rhododendron* 'Yellowhammer', a very strange companion for Peter Howards *Canna* 'Wyoming'. There is usually a sprinkling of spring flowers to be found at the end of autumn but this year seems to be especially mixed. *Rosa* GERTRUDE JEKYLL was a delightful evocation of summer. I would have said 'reminder' but as I recall it started raining in June and didn't stop (sorry, I didn't record who brought it in, but thank you, it was lovely). The display table also held some delights. *Senna corymbosa*, *Calceolaria pavonii* and *Delairea odorata* supplied as much in the way of yellow flowers as anybody could want (the *Delairea* used to be *Senecio mikanioides*, but it was a rare thing even under that name). The blue and the white forms of *Plumbago auriculata* appeared with them to soften the blow. A vase of autumn foliage reminded us all of the season - a courageous thing to stage, one puff of wind too many in the car park and it would have been a handful of sticks. Beside them, a vase of *Astrantia* flowers looked like an early summer posy.

OTHER EVENTS LAST MONTH

Christmas is coming and for the most part gardens have been left to reindeer and fairy lights, certainly that is all I have found (unless you count badgers and an occasional Peacock)!



Trees at the entrance.



Lights in the formal garden.



Miscanthus.

Rosemoor, November 18th 2017.

'See How Our Garden Glows' at Rosemoor. The light show at Rosemoor is targeted at the under 10's and if you have young children or grandchildren they will love it. The show has been extended this year through the formal garden, last year it was restricted to the Winter Garden and there wasn't really enough to warrant a special visit.

More fairy lights this year to line the paths, the trees are illuminated in startling colour and there is plenty to see. I marvelled at the eyesight of small children who could run about in the garden while I could barely see the path in front of me. Another great innovation was the easy availability of hot drinks which helped the evening along rather nicely.

A selection of garden sculptures have been illuminated and add to the effect. I liked a large Peacock that showed well in the light but an eclectic selection of birds, bats and dinosaurs will appeal to all tastes.

Open Thursday to Saturday until 6th December.



Peacock sculpture.



Illuminated planting.



Tree sculpture.

Waterperry Gardens by John Mann.

For hundreds of years travellers have been bringing seeds and plant material from all over the world to this country. Most of these plants are unsuited to either our climate or our soil, and therein lies the challenge to us gardeners. The pinnacle of such a challenge to our horticultural endeavour must be attempting to grow plants from high mountains at ground level. These tiny miracles of nature grow in cracks in rock with no soil, surviving in endless cloud and frequent snow. They hold a special fascination for us and this fan club is large.

During a garden tour I took last September I called at Waterperry Gardens near Oxford. Home to

the School of Economic Science, it was once famously a school for lady gardeners run by the redoubtable Miss Havergal. It remains a place of horticultural excellence and the garden has one of the finest herbaceous borders in this country. The landscaped gardens were full of colour and interest and provide many ideas and inspirations for gardeners. A museum and things for sale were added attractions.



Rock Garden at Waterperry.



Waterperry Gardens.



Herbaceous border at Waterperry.

Hidden away in a separate enclosure I discovered the National Collection of Saxifrages, those tiny gems which make tight cushions in the most inhospitable places in the highest mountain ranges - a challenge indeed in our climate. They were arranged in a number of only moderately raised beds made of rubble and planted into and over boulders of tufa. This is a form of porous limestone laid down following evaporation of a chalky spring - rather like the formation of stalagmites in limestone caves. These are quite soft and crumbly at first when quarried but harden with exposure to the air.

These saxifrages are strictly spring flowering in pinks and reds, whites and yellows and include a great number of species, varieties and hybrids, which have been made whilst in cultivation. In September they were barely distinguishable from one another yet gave a remarkable insight into their method of cultivation. During the height of summer the 5 foot wide beds were covered by a screen of laths 7 foot wide providing 50% shade set at 7 foot high. These were being removed and replaced by 7 foot wide corrugated plastic at the same height. Watering was done by a fine mist spray when judged necessary and no nourishment was given.

Thinking of all those that I have killed over the years in our wet climate I asked the Curator, Adrian Young, about losses. He looked at me pityingly and replied "Some of these plants are 30 years old."



Shelter for the Saxifrage collection.



Saxifraga 'Joy Bishop'.



Shelter for the Saxifrage collection.

Menorca, October 2017 by Tricia Howard.

Menorca is the second largest of the Balearic Islands. We stayed on the south coast in Cala Galdana with a white sandy bay and turquoise water, lovely to swim in, and many other sandy coves to walk to through the woods. The trees were mainly Aleppo pines, holm oaks and wild olives with tree heathers in bloom and delightful small patches of pink *Colchicum* growing in the pathways. On the Island there is a wide diversity of habitats, the calcareous soil is shallow

with many rocky outcrops and honey coloured stone walls around the small fields. Adorning these dry stone walls were lots of *Clematis cirrhosa* with small creamy flowers. In some spots streams have created ravines and gullies, with ideal places for ferns in shady moist spots. One that particularly caught my eye was an *Asplenium sagittata* sometimes called *Phyllitis sagittata*, a hart's tongue fern with arrow shaped fronds. On the sand dunes the Sea daffodil, *Pancratium maritimum*, were shedding their large black seeds from fat pods, and prostrate Rosemary was thriving on sunny rocky outcrops.



Erica multiflora.



Cala Galdana, Menorca.



Colchicum filifolium
(*Merendera filifolia*).

There were also lots of megalithic remains of the Talayotic period strewn all over the island to explore. I would definitely like to go back to Menorca, maybe in May to see more wild flowers in bloom.



Asplenium sagittata.



Sea Daffodil, *Panocratium maritimum.*



Clematis cirrhosa.

Cornwall Group HPS Renewal.

Renewal of membership to the Cornwall Group is due on January 1st, I have attached a renewal form with the details for your convenience.
John.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH.

The Christmas Lunch will be on Saturday 16th December, 12.00 for 12.30 at the Hawkins Arms in Zelah.
Please bring a good seasonal raffle prize. Organiser, Sue Lake (01872) 540395.

NEW YEAR WALK.

The New Year Walk will be at Luxulyan Valley on Saturday, 6th January 2018, starting at 10.30 am. Meet at Pontsmill car park (Satnav: PL24 2RR, OS map: SX073562). Take the A390 through St Blazey towards Lostwithiel, when you cross the level crossing onto the Tywardreath Highway the Pontsmill turning is 0.7 of a mile on the left with a low level signpost, Pontsmill ½ mile. Follow this lane to its end and the car park.

This is a moderate grade walk of about one and a half hours and good walking shoes or Hiking Boots are recommended.

The walk features Broadleaf Woodland, Par River and Victorian industrial heritage including the massive Treffry Viaduct. For more insight, go to www.luxulyanvalley.co.uk.

Lunch will be at the Britannia Inn (Tregrehan, Par, PL24 2SL) on the A390 at 12:30 - 12:45hrs. Well behaved dogs are welcome.

Any queries, contact Phil Gadd, Tel: 01726 817396

COMING EVENTS

With Christmas in sight there are very few garden events I can find. Please let me know of anything coming up in January or February - my diary is looking empty!

'See How Our Garden Glows', Rosemoor.

Thursday to Saturday, 4.00 - 8.30pm until 6th December.

The Winter Garden illuminated after dark, from 4.00pm to 8.30pm.

Cornwall Garden Society Lecture. Thomas Stone, "Winter Plants".

Tuesday 5th December, 7.30pm.

The Alverton, Tregolls Road, Truro TR1 1ZQ.

Cornwall Garden Society Lecture. Thomas Stone, "Hardy Geraniums".

Wednesday 6th December, 2.30pm.

Penventon Park Hotel, West End, Redruth TR15 1TE.

As an affiliated society we have a ticket to Cornwall Garden Society events. Please contact Tricia to see if it is available for these lectures.

Lectures are also open to non-members, a donation is appreciated.

Please would you let me know of any garden shows, open days or other events that may be of interest to our members so that I can include them in the next newsletter.

Please check the details for yourself. I try to verify them all, but I might make mistakes!

All other content gratefully received.

cornwallhps@gmail.com

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 6th December 2017. 7.00 for 7.30pm.

At Ladock village hall.

Shawn Poland will be talking about .

"Garden Butterflies".

Following this we will have our Christmas Social. Please bring some food, sweet or savory, suitable for a finger buffet. Nina will be there to serve both alcoholic and non-alcoholic mulled wine to accompany the food and we look forward to seeing as many members as possible. As the food tables will take up most of the room there will be no plant sales, however any plants for the display table will be welcome and the 3 flower competition will be as usual.

Cornwall HPS Poster.

Attached is a poster for our Christmas Social and Talk. It is a great opportunity to attract new members so please make a special effort this month to print the poster and display it in your area.
Many Thanks. Tricia Howard.

ADVANCE NOTICE

Saturday 6th January 2018. Starting at 10.30am.

New Year Walk, Luxulyan Valley.

See details above.

Please let me have any items that may be of interest to the members so that I can include them in the next newsletter. News items, visits, photographs and upcoming events especially welcome. Please let me know if I drop any clangers!

John Sirkett cornwallhps@gmail.com



Some early double primrose seedlings, just for Nina!

Don't forget the membership renewal form!