

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P. O. Box 3283 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4

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Dec. 2

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Ernie Exner, 2160 Stadacona Dr., Comox.

Dec. 9

The annual Christmas party will be held. Please bring one wrapped gift, per person, value around \$10, and suitable for a gardener. There will not be a speaker, but you will need sharp wits for the Rhodo Game. Refreshments will be provided by the executive.

Nov. 11

Glen Jamieson brought slides of a multitude of shrubs that bloom in the winter, interesting trees whose beautiful bark glows in the winter sun, and almost no snow and ice. In fact we soon realized that our winter gardens are full of colour - the brilliant yellows and bronzes of Hamamelis, shiny red bark of Prunus serrula and Arbutus menziesii, and the bright faces of species Crocus and Eranthus. Everyone really enjoyed the discussion, and no doubt made plans for "just one more" winter-flowering plant.

President Robin Harrison	339 4754
Vice-pre Guy Courchesne	336 8642
Secretary Marleen Crucq	339 7845
Treasurer Ernie Exner	339 6845
Ways&Means Linda Easton	923 4166
Librarian Linda Deneer	337 8287
Social Marion Lofthouse	334 4609
Membership Pauline & Richard Bonney	3397594
Editor Mary Palmer	923 6629

## MEMBER NOTES

As I write this, a Postal Strike has just started, and we are considering ways of getting this newsletter to every member.

## CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

*Solly and stockings,  
Wise men and brandy,  
Chocolates and puddings,  
Poinsettias and candy,  
Joseph and Mary,  
Children and sleighbells,  
Presents and sherry,  
Chimneys and candles.*

## MERRY CHRISTMAS



This is the time of year to pick gardening books from the shelf or the library, and have a good browse, while your brain is busy with plans for next year's display. One of my

favorite authors is Beverly Nichols and I recently came across a copy of his "The Gift of a Garden", published in 1972 by Dodd Mead & Co. This book is a condensed version of 3 of Mr. Nichols' very popular books, and his gardening advice is timeless. I plan to quote from this book, picking bits from various paragraphs that should be interesting to all of us.

"Begin with the soil". . . if a young man is starting a business within sight of the white cliffs of Dover, he must realize his horticultural limitations, then he can begin to make a garden. What sort of soil person are you? An acid person is somebody who lives heathers and azaleas, whose heart beats more swiftly when he comes into country thick with bracken, shining with silver birches and alight with wild rhododendrons. "(That sounds like us. Ed).

"My next vital instruction concerns Time... Plan for the Future. Planting for the future means realizing, at the age of 25, that shrubs and trees have a habit of growing, sometimes quite fast. The dainty little conifer you place under a window in 1971 will develop, sooner than you think, into a dark, encroaching monster .." (Have you noticed that new growth on some rhodos this year is 8-12 inches on each small branch? Ed.)

This is just a small sample of the lively discussions in this book, many of them wildly humorous. In fact a sub - title could easily be "The Mistakes I made in Gardening and How Not to Repeat Them" This book is a "Good Read". Ask for it at the local library.

## WHAT'S MY NAME?

I have a pretty little rhodo whose tag said R. Coral Velvet, and on reading about it I came across these descriptions:

Greer's Guide (3d Ed) 1996.  
yakushmanum hybrid.

This yakushmanum hybrid was received from Japan as the species yakushmanum, but several years of growth observation indicated the influence of cross-pollination. Small leaves and stems are thick with velvety indumentum. The 2" wide flowers open as lovely coral pink and fade to light salmon. Its blooming extends through the spring because just a few trusses open at a time, and because the flowers often last longer than 3 weeks. Often it will flower in the fall. It can have brittle stems. This is the same plant that was registered as "Grand Teton" by Mrs. George Clark in 1991. (Greer 1970).

Encyclopedia of Rhodo Hybrids.  
Cox & Cox 1988.

Coral Velvet. yakushmanum x  
unknown.

A seedling from Japan originally considered to be a form of yakushmanum. Long lasting flowers opening at first coral pink, then fading to light salmon, about 5 per open truss. Shiny, rather small, narrow, slightly twisted leaves with silvery tomentum above and thick velvety indumentum below, on a fairly dense plant of symmetrical habit, with stiff, rather easily broken stems also with indumentum. Inclined to bloom in the autumn and be wobbly on its roots... Another hybrid, "Grand Teton" is very similar, and the two have been confused.

Rhododendron Hybrids (2nd Ed).  
Salley & Greer 1992  
Coral Velvet. yakushmanum 1/2,  
unknown 1/2

Once considered a selected form of yakushmanum. Small leaves and thick velvety indumentum. Long-lasting flowers open coral pink, fade to light salmon. 2" across. Swanson & Greer, reg. 1979.

The only reference I can find to Grand Teton is in Salley & Greer. Grand Teton. yakushmanum 1/2, elliottee?(1/2)  
Parentage uncertain. Much like Coral Velvet, but taller.

I am not clear on how a rhodo can be registered by one name in 1979 and by another in 1991. Are they the same cross, and are they the same plant or not? We really need to know whether or not Mrs. Clark started from seeds or a cutting. Mr. Greer started from a seedling obtained from Japan. The more we learn about rhodos the more fascinating they become. All I know is that Coral Velvet is a beautiful little plant, but I will leave it staked for this winter anyway, just in case it has a brittle or wobbly stem.

## RHODODENDRON CLASSIFICATION

I have been reviewing "Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh" Vol 39 No. 1, 1980. A revision of Rhododendrons.

17 years after these revisions were printed, most people are still confused regarding classification of rhodo species. I don't suppose I can explain all the whys and wherefors, but in quoting from these "Notes" I might be able to clarify some points.

"It is sufficient to note that there is a taxonomic history of tension

between horticulturally-based and herbarium-based classifications.

The horticulturally-based classification, which was devised almost exclusively for those species hardy in the British Isles, began with the introductions of large numbers of species from western China in the early part of this century. The main collector of these was George Forrest, who had been an employee of the Edinburgh herbarium, and many of the living plants that he sent back from China were found to grow well in the Edinburgh garden. Under the influence of Forrest and his mentor, the then Regius Keeper, Professor Bayley Balfour, Edinburgh rapidly became the main centre of taxonomic work on the genus, and large and unrivalled collections of herbarium and living specimens were accumulated.

In order to cope with the flood of new material sent back by Forrest and other collectors, Bayley Balfour devised a classification based on SERIES- groups of related (or supposedly related) species, named after their best known representatives, and given equal status within the genus. This system was an ad hoc one, devised to cope with the special situation created by the vast quantities of new material. Bayley Balfour himself knew that it was only a temporary expedient, and he intended to revise it thoroughly when time became available. Unfortunately, he died before this could be accomplished. His successors did not take up the challenge, and the system, given its definitive form in "The Species Rhododendron" ed. Stevenson, 1930, ossified thereafter.

Being more or less horticulturally based, this system included many species of doubtful origin; plants known only from garden material.

often appearing as 'rogues' in seed pans of other species, were described as distinct species. The characters used in the recognition of the species were often extremely tenuous, and, in spite of the great general interest in exploration for new rhodos, geographical distribution seems to have played little part in the classificatory process. The supraspecific groups, the series themselves, were often nomenclaturally invalid or of dubious validity, and no attempt was made to group them into clusters of related series.

The Balfourian system has been very influential, at least in the English-speaking world. It forms the basis of the categories used in rhodo shows in Britain, USA, Canada and elsewhere, and most popular books on rhodos (of which there are many) are based on it. Its inadequacies may be summed up as follows:

- a. it is based largely on cultivated, rather than wild material;
- b. the species concept used is extremely narrow;
- c. classification above the species level is non-hierarchical. Also, it does not include a large part of the genus - the non-hardy species were more or less ignored by Bayley Balfour, and only a few of them are listed, without descriptions, in "The Species of Rhododendron".

Bayley Balfour's successors (Tagg, Hutchinson, Cowan and Davidian) accepted the system as it stood, making minor alterations but not attempting to provide the much-needed total revision, even though much new information became available after the publication of "The Species of Rhododendron".

This material will be continued in another newsletter.

## SOME SAGE ADVICE

Ken Gibson sent this article to the Cowichan Rhodo Society, by E-mail. .."I'll deal with what's necessary at this time of year ..

October - transplanting: Really, the energetic gardener will have already shifted the plants that are overpowering the others. Leaving it to next year only adds more work to the job. If it bothers you and you think it should be moved, then move it! I certainly wish I had taken this advice years ago.

I find this is the time of year to change your garden; pairing yellows with blues, pairing flowering dates, or removing that short plant from the centre. The most important task is keeping the best and casting the poor-doers to the outside - onto someone else's property, to a park or even a cemetery.

I just donated four large R. Elizabeth to my neighbour to the east. The reason is its susceptibility to powdery mildew. I feel this disease is spread from the southwest winds, and these plants are the first to be given the shelter of the hill and trees in an effort to prove this point.

Now we must deal with planting. NEVER PLANT A RHODO, PLACE IT. I usually spread compost on the site, a few inches thick. Old cow or horse manure mixed with cedar chips would work. I use ground-up cedar stumps mixed with shrimp offal. Now place choice compost around the perimeter where the protruding roots are. About this time I sprinkle Canola Meal or Bone Meal over the freshly buried roots. Add more compost to cover the meal. Step lightly on the circumference to compact the soil.

Add a layer of leaf mold and cover with coarse bark or chips. NEVER

bury the stem with compost - aerated chips are okay, but make sure stem and root ball are free of loamy substance.

This is perhaps a very good test for the rhodos you don't plan to move. We tend to build up the beds and plants appear to shrink. Lifting the plants is perhaps the greatest favour you can do them. I stake my plants by driving in a 1 1/2" cedar stick - usually vertically through a fork in the branches - then secure them with plastic-covered wire. The planted rhodo should now look as though it is growing on a miniature Mt. Fuji.

I realize that I shouldn't be telling someone from a different zone about watering, but I find that water kills more plants than any other cause. I never water rhodos now unless the plants indicate they need it (the leaves droop). Soaker hoses or ground watering are preferable to overhead sprinkling. Water late at night - never in the hot sun." Ken Gibson's E-mail address is rhodo@island.net



R. schlippenbachii

## TROUBLE DOWN BY THE POND

by Bill Rozel

Since 1992, we, Barbara and I, have lived just south of Brooklyn Creek on Pritchard Road in Comox. Among our delightful neighbours is a colony of Great Blue Herons living in the tall trees along the creek. Morning and night we see our feathered, long-necked neighbours flying back and forth, traversing between their home on the creek and the feeding grounds in the local salt marshes. Occasionally we have had a curious or confused bird drop down to have a look at our garden and occasionally even land momentarily, but, despite the presence of our two fish-occupied, micro (smaller than small) ponds they have, until now, always left promptly, without exploring the possibilities of a quick snack.

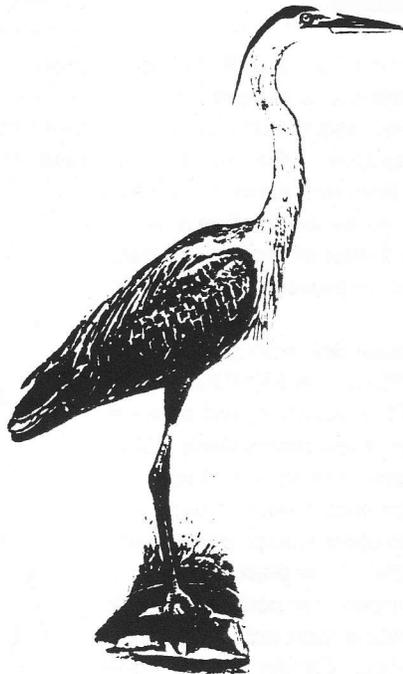
We always attributed this to the naturally shy nature of the Great Blue Heron and the presence of Harry. Harry is a concrete heron which stands guard by our front garden pond and, we always assumed, because of the naturally solitary nature of the local herons, had staked out our ponds as his territory. We were happy about this since we had become very attached to our goldfish - feeder fish purchased at Courtenay Nursery when very tiny and raised to magnificent (4-6") size in our pond. Some, we've even given names, and I religiously, twice a day ring a bell by each pond and distribute fish food. I am convinced that I am training the fish to come at the sound of the bell, although it is equally probable that the fish know a good thing when they see one, and humour my eccentricity. In any case the neighbours get a laugh from the procedure and consider me harmlessly barmy.

Then - tragedy! As Barb was backing the car from the driveway one day recently, she noted an obviously addled young heron launch itself from a low branch near the creek and swoop directly at an oncoming motor home on the street. In a panic she (Barb, that is) waved frantically to alert the driver but to no avail and it looked like a tragedy was inevitable until, at the last possible moment, the bird veered hard right and staggered onto our front garden, landing next to the pond.

Normally he would have noted Harry

and beaten a hasty retreat but, due to my inexcusable carelessness, Harry had been allowed to become almost completely obscured by a pondside Kalmia. Our juvenile visitor obviously did not notice Harry, or else assumed that poor old Harry was in a coma or had departed this world.

Our visitor was enchanted with the pond, its waterfall, which he proceeded to explore, and finally the curious fish swimming about the main pond. He had time to do this because Barb and I were frantically attempting to take a picture of our visitor who, shy creature that he was, completely ignored our presence some ten feet away from him. We could hardly ignore him - he was at least 5' tall and a magnificent specimen, even without the full plumage of a mature adult. For some reason the implications of allowing this handsome beast to become aware of a larder full of tasty morsels never occurred to us. When it did, we attempted to shoo him away and he finally reluctantly left - but not for long.



The implications of the arrival of a heron to the fishy residents of our pond was somewhat analogous to the arrival of Godzilla to the residents of Tokyo, or perhaps that of Smaug the dragon to Tolkien's dwarfs in their Middle-Earth mountain. Disaster was about to happen! And it did! For the next couple of days

we were kept busy attempting to keep our newly acquired feathered teenaged mobster from gobbling up all our fishy friends, who took to cowering under the cover of plants and rocks in their pond. Every time we turned around he was back.

Finally, in desperation, I decided that only heavy artillery would solve our problem. No, I don't mean the old 16 guage, I turned it into the RCMP some time ago. Instead I settled on a scarecrow! A scarecrow with a difference. Our scarecrow, immediately christened "Scram" is a tall, almost avian figure, operated by a motion detector and attached to the garden hose. It lurks in the bushes near the pond and when anything approaches within its 35 foot range it immediately emits an oscillating stream of water in the direction of the intruder. We aren't certain whether old "Scram" actually wetted down our heron but in any case that was the last we saw of him around the front pond.

We were just congratulating ourselves on our success when Barb walked out on the back deck only to come face to face with the heron perched on the deck railing. He gave her a baleful glare before flapping away to land on our neighbours' deck. Shortly afterward, he was back, this time by the pond in the back garden. On being chased away he flew across the road and landed on the nearest lawn where he paced back and forth for about 15 minutes, occasionally glaring in our direction. Then, obviously coming to a decision, he calmly walked across the road, bringing traffic to a screeching halt in both directions. We were at first afraid he was about to ring the doorbell and launch a violent complaint, but instead he veered off and stalked majestically down the bank toward the creek.

I immediately moved "Scram" to a strategic location by the back pond. Since then, though we didn't witness an encounter we have seen no more of the heron. Unfortunately we've seen very little of our fish either. We're hopeful that this is the natural result of the cold weather which descended during our heron episode, but are afraid the population was pretty well decimated. O well - back to Courtenay Nursery!