

THE RHODOTELLER



www.nirsrhodos.ca

PO Box 3183, Courtenay BC V9N 5N4

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MARCH 2020

Coming Events

March 3 – Executive Meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of Antje Guertler, 2261 Tamarack Drive, Courtenay. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m.

March 10 - General Meeting

GARDENS OF BREMEN, GERMANY

Judi Murakami, a past NIRS President will be sharing with us her experience attending the ARS Convention in April 2018 and touring some of the beautiful gardens around Bremen, Germany.



Doors open at 7:00 pm.

Presentation begins at 7:30pm

MARCH PRESENTATION

GARDENS OF BREMEN, GERMANY



Join Judi Murakami, past president of North Island Rhododendron Society, as she shares her trip to Bremen, Germany and the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) Conference in slides and stories. As this was only the second time in ARS history that the convention was held in Europe, she knew it would be excellent (and it didn't disappoint)!

125 participants from 13 countries gathered in the beautiful city-state. Not only does Bremen have the only European town hall built in 1410 which has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site, but it is home to the Bremen Rhododendron Gardens, the Botanika Gardens with over 45 themed gardens, and is near major nurseries in the Ammarland district, rich in peaty soil.

The horticultural industry in Germany includes 450 nurseries, on 9,900 acres, employing 3,000 people, worth 250 M Euros. Tours to the nurseries were impressive, not just in the size and scope, but knowing that a family had been farming this area for 15 generations (since 1547) and founded the nursery in 1932.

Not only does this presentation look back at the conference, but will be a teaser for next month's meeting, to be held upstairs at the Florence Filberg Centre on April 14th. Judi has invited Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury Garden to speak in Courtenay, and we will be the first to hear his talk, as he will be a keynote speaker on May 1st at the 75th ARS conference in Portland.



PRESIDENT'S NOTES, *Maureen Denny*

Almost March. This is the time of year that always seems to drag on forever. I keep thinking spring is here or almost here but really, apart from some early rhodos, snowdrops, hellebores and crocus blooming it still seems too cold and damp on many days to be out in the yard for very long. Instead I think and dream about warmer days to come and laugh at myself because inevitably when it does warm up, I will complain about it being too warm and dry. This is a common syndrome that affects gardeners. If it is a little early to get out there and garden like mad it is **THE TIME TO PLAN**.

Our club is now planning and gearing up for the busiest time of the year. The April Plant Sale and Show, The Mother's Day Garden Tour, The AGM and The June Picnic. These events are the lifeblood of the NIRS. They bring all of us together to make these events as successful as possible while having fun. They raise the bulk of the funds needed for our club for the following year and the AGM sets up the foundational team to plan and execute it all.

Another event on the horizon is the semi-annual District One Meeting. Our club will be hosting this meeting on March 24. This session gets representatives of each chapter, (7 chapters in District One) together to share their news and ideas and hear the latest from the ARS.

In my own garden I am also planning. I will be removing two big spireas to make way for more rhododendrons. Out with these and in with more rhodos! Having a small garden, I try to have plants that really earn their keep. One rhodo I cherish is a yellow species, *Lutescens*. Garth gave me this rhodo a few years ago and it has now grown nicely in a pot to about 2.5 ft. It will be going on the ground where a spirea is coming out. I remember reading one of Norman Todd's essays and he mentioned putting purple hellebores in front of *Lutescens* so I will try that combination. I also have a very nice Party Orange and a Goldflimmer to put in the ground. These were grown from cuttings taken and grown at the Propagation Group.

It is also the time to peruse seed and plant catalogues, sort through seeds from last year, clean garden tools, prune fruit trees, start Begonia Tubers. and wander through Art Knapps to see what is coming in.

So much to do! No time to feel down about the weather!

See you at the next meeting Tuesday March 10th.

Maureen

Ways and Means: Raffle and Door Prizes March Meeting



Canadian Sunset

Flower is a vivid red to deep pink, fading in center to pale yellowish-pink with yellow cast. Blooms in midseason. Grows to 3 feet in height in 10 years and is cold hardy to -21C.

(More information available on page 106 and 210 of Greer's Guidebook, which is on sale at the ways and means table).



Scintillation

Scintillation is an open multi-stemmed evergreen shrub with a more or less rounded form. Flowers are beautiful pastel pink and have flared marking in its throat. The relatively coarse texture leaves can be used to stand it apart from other landscape plants with finer foliage. This is an extra hardy relatively low maintenance shrub. (pages 85,193 and 212 in "Greers")



Willbrit

This variety belongs to the group of Large-Flowered Evergreen Hybrid Rhododendrons. These are the drama queens of spring and early summer, producing stunning displays of deep pink showy flowers in big trusses against a backdrop of bold evergreen foliage. (Greer's page 213).

Goodies

Antje Guertler

We look forward to the goodies that Janet Campbell, Harriet Nowicki, Theresa Hartwig, Kathy Haigh, Helen Stefiuk have volunteered to bring to the March meeting. Thank you!

Plant Sale April 26 2020

by Event Team Leader Pauline Thompson

Plans are well underway for our annual Rhododendron Sale and Show. We still have nearly two months to go but with the April meeting held in conjunction with the Horticultural Society I am making my appeal for volunteers now and I shall follow up with you at the Tuesday March 10 meeting.

I am seeking volunteers to help with the room setup - vendor tables, truss tables, cashier area and the NIRS Table. We ask that all volunteers come as early as possible, hopefully around 8:30 am. The doors open to the public at 10:00 and there is lots of work to be done beforehand.

The NIRS Table will be organized by Judy Walker. Please contact her directly if you would like to work in this popular area. I have a couple of volunteers already but I'm sure there is always room for more. As you do your early spring clean-up and perennial split —don't forget to pot up a few extras for our NIRS companion plant table! This table is always a customer favourite and brings in a lot of revenue for the club. Please label the plants with names, common names are fine. This helps the sales team set up go a lot smoother and gives the customers names to look up if they wish!

Also as per usual, we ask that our members bring some goodies (cakes, cookies, sandwiches etc) for the workers to snack on while preparations are underway. Our social committee will be providing coffee and tea for refreshments.

Please refrain from 'shopping' until 9:30 to give everyone a chance to get organized. We will make an announcement when the shopping can commence. Volunteers may use the chair/table room for a holding area to keep their plants until they can go through the checkouts. NO storing of plants in the kitchen.

Lynn Wurz will be heading up the truss display so get your trusses to her as early as possible in the morning! I also ask that you send a list of the names of any trusses you wish to bring for the display to Noni Godfrey by e-mail (nonigod@shaw.ca) no later than say Saturday morning April 25 as she must print up tags. You should know by then what Rhodos are in bloom! Don't worry if you don't bring all you list, better to have too many tags than not have one for your favourite rhodo.

Carolyn Chester will be selling tickets for our Annual Mother's Day Garden tour at the Ways and Means table, along with the team promoting our booklets and pamphlets.

The event will be held, as usual, in the K'ómoks First Nation Hall at 3320 Comox Road (Dyke Road for you old timers). Please park on the grassy area next to the hall, not in the parking lot or the neighbouring properties!

Noni will be providing a copy of the poster for publication with this month's newsletter. Please print out some copies and post in your neighbourhood. We must get the word out!

Any questions regarding the sale don't hesitate to call or e-mail me. 250-339-3423 pauline.r.thompson@gmail.com



FRAGRANT RHODODENDRONS

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITES: Part 2

By Paul Wurz

I hope that you have not had your fill of looking at fragrant/scented rhododendrons! We have a lucky thirteen pictures in part two and should have more, but I think I spent too much time smelling the trusses than taking pictures. The pictures in part two includes hybrids, some species, and one Seymour Narrows which I grew from seed. I did have a picture of Hidden Acres in part one which I also grew from seed. I previously did not include any pictures of the Maddenia series as most of the varieties are quite tender and probably need some protection in our climate. I currently have a half dozen "cultivars" that I grow in pots and provide them with protection in the winter. Most of the Maddenias have a scent that is far more exotic than the other rhododendrons. The picture that I included in part two is Mi Amor, a spectacular rhododendron that is very sensitive to the cold.

I'll include a list of fragrant rhododendrons that I couldn't find pictures of in our image collection, some that are still in pots, and some that haven't yet blossomed. The list includes hybrids: Perfume, Ilam Cream, Heavenly Scent, Polar Bear, Alena, Mario Pagliotti, and Cotton Candy. The list of species includes: *R. auriculatum*, *R. decorum*, *R. diaprepes*, *R. discolor*, *R. fortunei*, *R. faitheii*, and *R. serotinum*.



FRAGRANT RHODODENDRONS CON'T

If you have the opportunity to visit the gardens of: Art and Susan Lightburn (Northwest Bay), Dick & Ann Beamish (Nanaimo), Al & Liz Murray (Cobble Hill), or Ken & Madeline Webb (Saanich) make sure that you take it as they all have extensive collections of fragrant rhododendrons.



Although it is a rainy cool day it is time to go out and get wet!



SNAPWEED – ONE ANNOYING WEED!

By Diana Scott

Cardamine hirsuta, also known as hairy bittercress, springcress, lambscress, popweed, shotweed, pepperweed, flickweed, snapweed and many other names that are best left unsaid, is one challenging weed. A member of the mustard family (Brassicaceae) it is considered a winter annual/biennial native to Eurasia and was likely brought to North America as an edible bitter herb. If you've seen one in your garden – you'll likely see a million!



Snapweed, as it is commonly called in BC, is typically a brilliant green but looks almost purple in some places in my yard – particularly in the gravel. Described as having a rosette of pinnately compound leaves, it sends up a tiny stalk of tiny white flowers, then quickly goes to seed, often while producing more flowers. The seedheads are thin stalks which like many Brassica species, will burst explosively when touched – sending seeds flying far from the parent plant. Trust me – this is true.

Sadly for those of us in the Pacific Northwest, it is not only one of the earliest flowering weeds, it will produce several generations in a season. It is frost hardy, can survive winter, and will flower as temperatures rise in early spring. The seeds remain viable in the soil for a long time, and any disturbance will bring more to the surface to germinate. On the plus side, *Cardamine hirsute* has a short life cycle. That's it for the plus side unless you think the itty-bitty white flower is attractive. On the minus side, if you find one in your garden and don't remove it, you are in for a battle!

How did you get it? Hard to say – but many sites indicate that it is very common to find them on the surface of container plants in nurseries and garden centres and that it can be introduced unwittingly via container grown plants. It is so common here, however, that it will be rare for a garden NOT to have it.

SNAPWEED CON'T

So, how does one control it? As with all annual weeds it is critical to get rid of it before seed can be produced. Although typically larger, I have snapweed that flowers and goes to seed on plants smaller than a pencil eraser. I am open to any brilliant suggestions, but after trying all the typical methods, the only thing that I have found to be even marginally effective is to pull every one out when I see it. It is my priority in the early spring, and I have spent days on hands and knees with a garbage bag pulling the little guys out. I can't walk by one without thinking that if I don't pull it out now I will have hundreds more to deal with. Makes for a busy day in the garden...

Classic controls are hand weeding, mulching to prevent germination, torching, and applying weedkillers. One site suggests applying a mulch of organic matter 15 cm deep to help suppress the weed by preventing germination. Works well, although snapweed seeds are quite happy to germinate in the mulch if seeds from a plant nearby 'pops'. I have also tried a propane weed torch on my gravel paths, however it is typically raining or quite wet when the first round of snapweed is flowering and going to seed so it takes a lot more propane than one might think. This technique has not been very effective for me. Since I have quite a number of gravel paths, I did try a contact-action weedkiller (Roundup), however that didn't work well for me either. By the time it started 'killing' the plant, the snapweed had flowered and gone to seed. They are pretty fast once they get going! My main strategy is labor intensive - picking and bagging as many as I can before they've gone to seed. In my experience, pulling and just leaving them on the soil results in wonky-looking but rerooted, flowering and seeding specimens. Bag them.

Snapweed seems to love our climate. I have been trying to love it back, but to no avail. Once established, particularly in lawn areas, it is really difficult to eradicate. It's in my lawn. I believe that snapweed and I will continue to see a lot of each other.

My advice: see it, pull it, bag it. Good luck!

*This snapweed flowering in the gravel,
February 15th*

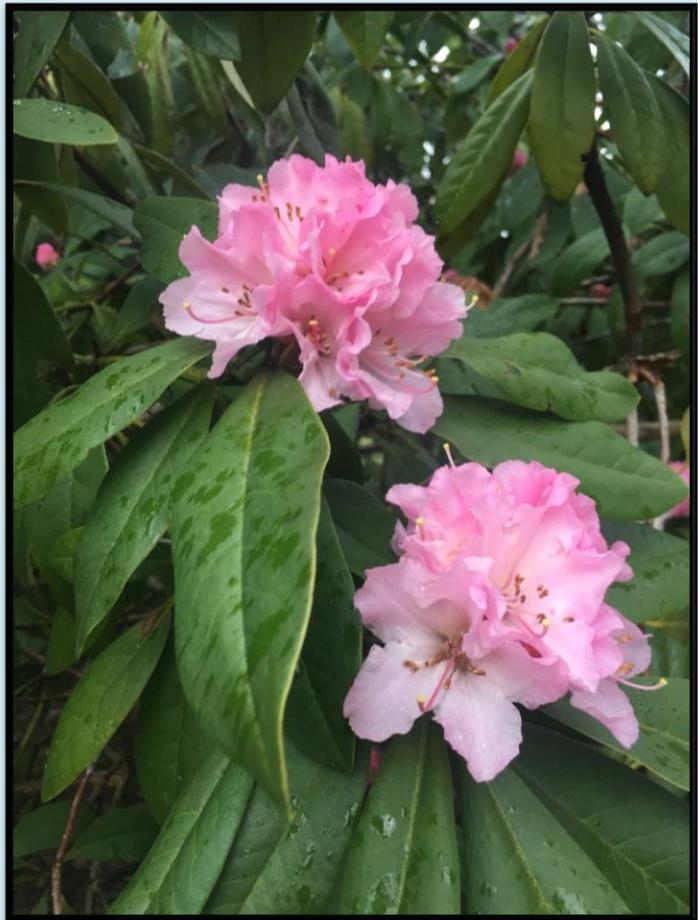


THE COMOX VALLEY RHODODENDRON GARDEN

The weather was in our favour for the first work party of the year held on February 13. We (about ten members) accomplished a good general clean up of the gardens, mostly raking up branches and leaves fallen after the winter winds. This Saturday a small CVRG Committee will be meeting to go over plans to implement a regular and long term maintenance plan for the gardens. I will report next month on what is going on. The next work party will be March 12th, weather permitting.

Bring your tools and goodies to share.

Maureen



Signs of spring in the CVRG. While walking the airpark on February 25, a dreary rainy day, it was uplifting to see this Rhododendron blooming when walking through the garden, I wasn't able to confirm the variety, so in Dick Bonney style, 'it's a nice pink one', Nadine

PROPAGATION GROUP

Reported by Diana Scott

The first meeting of the new season was graciously hosted by Maureen Denny on February 29th, and we had a great member turnout. This will be a significant year for the group as we are winding down our activities and focusing on maintaining and selling our remaining stock.



These past few years have been a wonderful learning opportunity for us. We started with exploring different types of propagation with some field trips and a number of excellent demonstrations and mini workshops. Early on we were very fortunate to have been offered the use of the Smith greenhouses and propagation tables. Due to the knowledge and expertise of a number of our members, most notably Wolfgang Hoefgen and Garth Wedemire, we found ourselves moving from doing a few cuttings for our personal use, to going into 'production' for the club. Several years of doing cuttings, repotting, and nursing along a wide variety of rhodos and azaleas resulted in a fine stock of plants for our Rhodo Sales and club activities.

It has been a great 'run'. Last year we decided to wind down production and did not pot up any new cuttings. We will care for the remaining plants, growing on our most recent plants for this and next year's sale. Since our stock is limited, we will not be having a Member's Only Sale, but we will continue to have a few rhodos available each month at the Ways and Means Table as well as for door prizes and the Raffle.

Our Propagation Group members will continue to have fun together, attending work parties and tending to these remaining plants. There is still lots to learn and review, so from time to time we may take part in propagation-related demonstrations and mini workshops which will be open to all interested members of the club.

Our thanks, once again, goes to Adela Smith for her continued support of our endeavour and the use of her property!

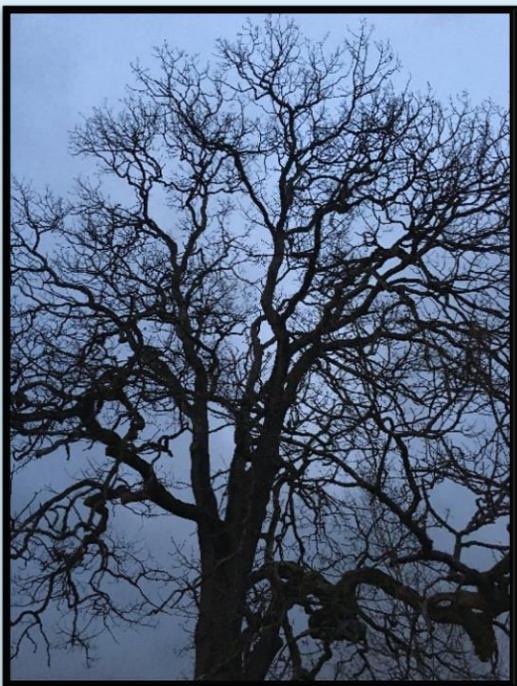
LOTS TO DO DURING WINTER MONTHS. *Nadine Boudreau*

There may not be lots to do in the garden, but it can still be all about the garden.

I do a lot of planning (dreaming) this time a year, there are so many wonderful websites to browse through. So many nurseries are going into mail order and pre order of choice plants. One nursery site that I find has a large selection of interesting plants is Phoenix Perennials, a lower mainland nursery. They have a nice selection of Rhododendrons, (they call it Rhododendron Rhumba), herbaceous perennials, succulents, clematis collections, rare bulbs, edibles and more. The website has outstanding pictures of the plants as well as descriptions. And if you were at Robert Argall's for the picnic last year, you too may have fallen in love with roses again. Well look at the selection of David Austin roses they have.

I have shopped at the nursery, but have yet to purchase through mail order, so I cannot comment on that. But have noticed many of the plants sell out quickly on the site. Check it out, it will perk up any dreary winter day. **phoenixperennials.com**

Look up at the beauty of deciduous trees around you.



With the contrast of dark grey skies, the framework of deciduous trees stands out. The natural shape of trees, all so different. Oval or round shaped, columnar or Pyramidal, some shape like a vase, some weeping. When planting it is good idea to think about the shape and size of a tree you need for your site. Don't be swayed by the nice little tree at the nursery, know what shape it is going to be. You don't want a spreading tree in a corner for example. When this does happen often pruning of the tree begins, fighting how it naturally wants to grow. When a tree can grow naturally with minimal pruning it tends to be a beautiful specimen.

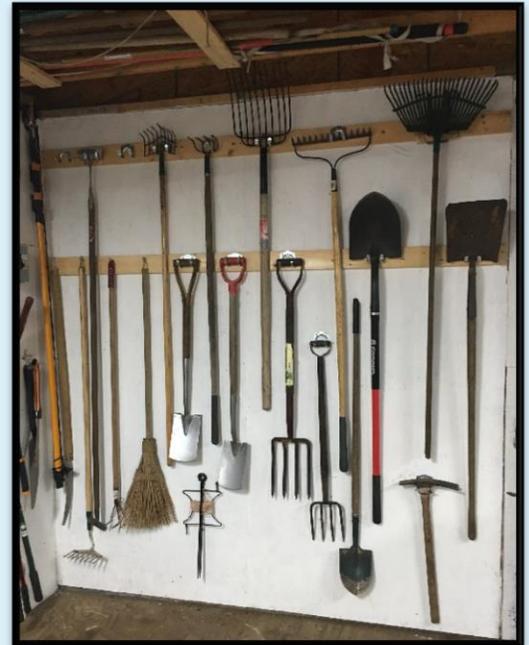
Above is an oak growing in the middle of a paved parking lot at the CV sports centre. To the right 'Oh My' a photo from the internet,



Sharpen/clean your tools, get them ready for action

I love good tools; they make whatever job they are made for easier. Over time we find what works best for us. Good tools aren't cheap, so a bit of maintenance can go a long way. Keeping the soil washed off, sharpening blades, grind edger and shovel tips, oiling handles, tightening any screws, etc.

I try and keep my tools organized so I can easily see if a tool is left in the garden somewhere or at a worksite.



These secateurs are getting a make-over, new blades, springs, and a good buffing with a rust pad.

Don't forget to get yourself ready!

So many times, we get so enthused to get out in the garden, we start digging or something and we pull a muscle. Now is the time to do some type of exercise to get those muscles ready.

I just noticed a class 'Yoga for gardeners' in our local program guide, that sounds just right!



.....by Dave Godfrey,

Webmaster

Subtle changes will be occurring with our NIRS website. With Garth Wedemire's assistance, copies of the historical newsletters are being added to the "Newsletter" page. We have all but two issues (Vol. 1 Issues 2 & 4) in our archives. These paper copies are being scanned by Garth to 'PDF' files for adding to the Newsletter lists. There are some interesting readings of the events and activities of our club in its earlier days.

As we do each year, you will see new photo galleries added to the "Photographs - Yearly Gallery" page. Beginning this year, we will be changing the format of these galleries and utilizing a new program for displaying these photos. The new program is less time consuming to load the many photographs and provides a better display when viewing. Watch for these changes to occur throughout the year.

Finally, our 2020 Member's Yearbook has been published. For those members who missed our February meeting, your copy will be available for pick up at our March 10th meeting. The roster has been updated to include our many 2020 members, plus there are instructions on how to access the JARS magazine online. Enjoy!

THE VANCOUVER ISLAND
ROCK AND ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY
✻
ANNUAL SPRING FLOWER SHOW



Come to see rock and alpine, succulent, woodland and wetland plants. There will be plant and seed sales, door prizes, a silent auction, tea and more! *New in 2020: Plants grown by VIRAGS members for sale throughout the show, beginning Friday at 1:00pm.*

FRIDAY, APRIL 24 - 1 PM TO 8 PM
SATURDAY, APRIL 25 - 9 AM TO 3 PM

CADBORO BAY UNITED CHURCH
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ADMISSION BY DONATION

Visit our website at www.virags.com
Or find us on facebook at [vancouver island rock and alpine garden society](https://www.facebook.com/vancouverislandrockandalpinegardensociety)



Need a ride to a Meeting?

Call Sue at 250-331-1013 or
email grant.sk@gmail.com

**Actual ride car may not be the car pictured!*

NIRS Special Monthly Meeting – April 14, 2020 **“Exbury Gardens: The First Hundred Years”**



On Tuesday April 14, **Lionel de Rothschild**, grandson and namesake of the creator of Exbury Gardens, will give an illustrated talk about its creation and history in this, its 101st year.

Lionel has written and lectured internationally on Exbury and on rhododendrons. He lives at Exbury and takes an active interest in the gardens. He is currently chairman of *Exbury Gardens Trust*, a trustee of *The Rothschild Archive*, and is on the Garden Council of *Borde Hill Garden* in West Sussex.

Exbury Gardens are located in the Hampshire village of Exbury and belong to a branch of the Rothschild family. Now celebrating more than 100 years, Exbury Gardens is a 200 acre collection of woodland, herbaceous, contemporary, formal and wildflower gardens. Seasonal highlights include rhododendrons and azaleas in spring, herbaceous borders and hydrangeas in summer and acers (maples) and nyssa (tupelo) in autumn.

Lionel de Rothschild, Sr. who described himself as “*a banker by hobby, a gardener by profession*”, purchased the Exbury Estate in 1919 and began the task of creating the beautiful gardens. The war in 1939 brought the work to a standstill. Lionel died in 1942 and when his son **Edmund de Rothschild** returned from the war, the task of restoring the gardens to their former glory resumed. Today, Edmund’s sons, **Lionel** and **Nicholas** continue the family passion for gardening.

For this special meeting on Tuesday April 14, 2020, NIRS has changed the location of its meeting to the **Florence Filberg Centre**, 411 Anderton Ave., Courtenay, BC. Doors will open at 6:45 pm.



Come early and take part in pre-meeting activities:

- purchase tickets for our Mothers’ Day Garden Tour
- purchase some tickets for our many raffle prizes
- enjoy coffee, tea and goodies with fellow gardeners

Non-members of NIRS will be asked to pay an entry fee of \$5.00 to help with expenses. All attendees are eligible for our door prizes.

Lionel de Rothschild’s presentation will start at 7:30 pm.