

## THE RHODODENDRON NEWSLETTER

October 2014

Published by the  
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### **2014 PROGRAMME**

#### **OCTOBER**

#### **NATIONAL CONVENTION AND NATIONAL COUNCIL AGM**

**Speakers include: Dr. George Argent, from the Royal Botanical Gardens Edinburgh, who is considered the world's leading authority on Vireya Rhododendrons and Monsieur Frederic Danet from the Jardin Botanique de la Ville de Lyon in France.**

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6.30pm:** Public talk at Mueller Hall, National Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, Birdwood Ave., South Yarra.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> at 9.00am:** National Convention at the National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> at 2.00pm:** Official Opening of the Vireya House at NRG followed by a visit to the Ferny Creek Horticultural Society Spring Show.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm:** Convention Dinner at Eastwood Golf Club, Liverpool Rd., South Kilsyth.

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup>:** Self drive garden visits at Mt Macedon.

#### **NOVEMBER**

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> at 2.00pm:** ARSV AGM at the National Rhododendron Gardens. Come and join us for afternoon tea and a garden walk.

## **PRESIDENTS REPORT SEPTEMBER 2014**

As I write this spring presidents report it is becoming evident that that season is in full swing. The narcissus are in flower, the magnolias are showing off and the smell of freesias and native pittosporum (both invasive weeds) fills the air. Those heady scents are evocative. They remind me of spring at my parent's house or running around the tan in warming weather, when I was a lot younger, thinner and had legs that worked properly. In the Gardens at Olinda the large leaved Rhodos have been flowering very well this year. The early Rhodos are already producing an excellent display. The giant Sir Robert Peels are noticeable above the roof tops both in the Dandenongs and in Melbourne. Spring may make you think of spring shows at Olinda, but again we will not be having a Spring Show, instead we are encouraging members to provide entries of Rhodos for the Ferny Creek Show.

Prue Crome, Andrew Rouse and Michael Hare have done a fantastic job of organising the 2014 National Convention for the last weekend of October. There are a great range of activities for you to attend. You can go to the public talk given by George Argent and Frederic Danet at the Mueller Hall on the 23rd, the conference on Saturday with a very interesting range of speakers and the opening of the Vireya House, the conference dinner at the Eastern Golf Club and on the Sunday a tour of three excellent Mt Macedon gardens. You can choose which of these events most interests you or you can, of course, come to the whole lot.

The free public talk on the 23rd of October, mentioned above, is part of our aim to expose any plant experts that visit us, who can give informative and entertaining talks, to as wide an audience as possible. It worked well with Steve Hootman last year. The interest registered already for the October talk is very encouraging. We also have visiting in November an expert on plant conservation in China, Bob Moseley, who has retraced some of Joseph Rock's explorations. He has agreed to present the results of his studies in China which include comparisons of photos Rock took in his time to the photos taken recently from the same position. We will sponsor this talk again as a free public presentation, probably at Domain House (near the Herbarium) in late November. We'll email with more details later.

In the Gardens at Olinda the labelling crew of Tuesday volunteers has been working through areas of large leaved Rhodos and keeping John Curtis very busy engraving labels. They are also working hard at catching plants as they flower so we can put names on unknowns. Alex Pottage is also working as usual at improving the nursery. It is becoming increasingly obvious from the number of inquiries that our supplying of Rhodos will become more important as other sources of supply dries up. The potting shed and Rouse House are progressing slowly, I will write more about these when they are finished, next newsletter (hopefully).

As you will have noticed other than the upcoming talks and convention the committee have not organised any activities. In part this is as a consequence of most of the committee also being Tuesday volunteers. We see and work a lot with Rhodos. We would be very happy to

organise things members want we are just not sure what that might be. So contact a committee member and give us some guidance.

Finally the ARS lost two significant members this quarter. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find tributes to Lyn Craven and Murray McAlister. The contributions these members made to the Society will be sorely missed.

**John O'Hara**

## **THE SPECIES COLUMN.**

*williamsianum* -Subsection Williamsiana. [photo page 11]

Rhododendron *williamsianum* is a first-class species in both foliage and flower, and forms a compact rounded bush. Unfortunately it invariably fails in Melbourne gardens but thrives at Olinda. Even in a shady position this species cannot withstand high soil temperatures and seems to die from the roots upwards.

*williamsianum* was originally placed in the Thompsonia Subsection but has now been moved to its own Subsection. Superficially it seems similar to *orbiculare* in the Fortunea subsection, but they are botanically distinct.

### **Name:**

Named after J.C.Williams of Cornwall.

### **Distribution:**

From central Sichuan at 2400 to 3000 metres, growing on cliffs.

### **Characteristics:**

This species forms a rounded shrub up to 1.5 metres high. The leaves are almost round (orbicular) and bronzy when young. The flowers are freely produced in groups of 1 to 3, with 5 to 6 lobes and are a delicate shade of pink. Although not botanically related, there are a few species with similar rounded leaves:

*orbiculare* has 7 lobed flowers.

*callimorphum* has larger leaves and pink flowers with a deeper blotch.

*campylocarpum* ssp. *caloxanthum* has small round leaves and yellow flowers. We have a number of these in the rockery but they are extremely slow-growing and show no sign of flowers.

### **Hybrids:**

A large number of hybrids have been raised overseas but most are not available here. The following list includes all of these hybrids which have been planted in the Rhododendron Garden:

Arthur J. Ivens A.M. (*williamsianum x houlstonii*) Rose Pink.  
Bow Bells A.M. (Corona *x williamsianum*) Pale Pink.  
Cowslip A.M. (*williamsianum x wardii*) Pale Yellow.  
Humming Bird (*haematodes x williamsianum*) Deep Pink.  
Moonstone (*campylocarpum x williamsianum*) Creamy Yellow.  
Temple Belle (*orbiculare x williamsianum*) Soft Pink.  
Thomwilliams A.M. (*thomsonii x williamsianum*) Deep Rose.  
Treasure (*forrestii v. repens x williamsianum*) Deep Rose.

### **Where to See *williamsianum* Plants.**

The oldest plants are growing in the pond area, below the kurume bowl, and would be around 50 years old. They would be around 2 metres across and put on a magnificent show in early October. There are also 5 plants in the Main Rockery and several old plants in the Moorland area..

**Alan Kepert.**

## **VIREYA SPECIES COLUMN OCTOBER 2014**

*R dissilistellatum* Craven *sp.nov.* See “Three new species of, and realignments in *rhododendron* sect. *schistanthe* (Ericaceae), *Journal of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens* 27 (2014) 25 at 32-33” [Photo page 11]

### **Classification**

**Section *Schistanthe* subsection *Solenovireya*.** This accords with the classification proposed by Craven *et al* **Vireya Rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification (Ericaceae, *Rhododendron* section *Schistanthe*)** Blumea 56, 2011: 153. The classification proposed by Argent *Rhododendrons in subgenus Vireya* RHS 2006 had *Vireya* as a subgenus and this species in section VII *Euvireya* Subsection iii *Solenovireya*. It is in good company as Argent’s Subsection has 35 members.

### **Name**

The specific epithet is derived from the Latin *dissilio*, fly apart, burst and *stalla*, star. A plant in full flower reminded Lyn Craven of a bursting modern firework.

### **Origin**

Indonesia, Sulawesi Tengah, the western lower-mid slopes of the Gunung Sojol complex, Balukang, on Tinombo-Siboang path (between camp 3 and camp 10 Lat 00 28 19, Long. 120 08 27 alt. 1153-1344m, lower montane rainforest. It is known only from one natural location. However Craven notes that it is possible the species is widely distributed around the lower-mid slopes of the Gunung Sojol complex.

### **Conservation Status**

Craven says the species is best given the conservation status Data Deficient according to the criteria of the IUCN Red List (IUCN 2012). Although known from only one location it is unlikely to be disturbed in the foreseeable future.

## Description

Craven distinguishes *R radians* in that its leaf lamina is narrowly elliptic to narrowly obovate with the base cuneate to obtuse whereas in *R radians* the leaf lamina is ovate to ovate-oblong. *R radians* leaves are fatter. The two species can be compared in the NRG Vireya House.

Craven describes a lax shrub to c. 60-70cm. To even the casual observer the relationship to *R jasminiflorum* is evident. Same shaped shrub. Same colour of new growth. Similar leaves though narrower.

But the inflorescence is striking. 7-15 florets in ‘a more or less spreading hand’ the corolla white, salver form, straight tube 59-79mm including corolla.

## Cultivation

The species flowered for the first time in cultivation for Lyn Craven. The rooted cuttings that Lyn supplied to Society members have been a great success. They grow well, flower profusely, and often. Better still they are not prone to rust and, in cultivation they grow to Lyn’s description of wild plants. There is one, in ground, at Beechmont about 1m. I have several in ground and others in pots at Montrose. The examples in the Vireya House are growing well.

## Verdict

A species well worth growing in the garden or in pots

**Simon Begg**

## **VALE LYN CRAVEN 11 JULY 2014**

A full tribute to Lyn by Andrew Rouse will appear in *The Rhododendron* to be published shortly. Lyn was a young man when the Australian Rhododendron Society was formed in 1960. Lyn moved to Canberra with the CSIRO in 1964 and became Australia’s only Rhododendron taxonomist though his principal interests were *Syzygium* and *Melaleuca*.

When I joined the Society, late in life in the mid 1990s, Lyn was a legendary figure like Dr John Rouse and Dr Bob Withers.

I remember first meeting Lyn when he drove to Melbourne with his microscope and slides to demonstrate scales and hairs on *Vireya* leaves and flowers. Lyn was reputed to have one of Australia’s finest *Vireya* collections in a glass house in Canberra. I got to see that collection in 2006 just after visiting the world’s best collection in the *Vireya* Research Glass houses at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

Lyn and Kirsty made Marcia and me very welcome.

I think shortly before this, in 2005, out of the blue, Lyn sent rooted cuttings of a number of *Vireya* species to ARSV members who, like me, put up their hands. *robinsonii*, *goodenoughii*, *aequabile*, and *loranthiflorum*, were among them, along with an unnamed species #114. Later Lyn said this was *radians*.

Not long after my visit to Canberra Lyn was taken ill with Multiple Myeloma. He battled that bravely until his death.

Lyn retired from CSIRO in 2009 but remained a Research Fellow. Lyn and Kirsty visited Olinda on a number of occasions visiting family but also ensuring the preservation of his collection. I well remember the happy suggestion I made to him that he should entrust Andrew Rouse with his most precious items. Andrew now has, from his father’s, his own and Lyn’s

efforts, Australia's finest Vireya collection. Lyn gave me many other Vireyas which I was able to grow in the open at 'Beechmont', *bryophyllum*, the genuine forms of *dielsianum* and *stevensianum* among them.

Lyn kept working until a very few weeks before he died. He wrote or co-authored major papers on Vireya including, in 2011, being the lead author in a paper with Danet, Veldkamp, Goetsch and Hall entitled "Vireya rhododendrons: their monophyly and classification".

On 2 June this year Lyn sent to fellow Canberra residents Ben Wallace and Robin Hide and others, including me and Andrew, an email

*Dear All*

*Attached are some images of a plant that flowered for me recently.*

*Firstly, Ben and Robin, I suggest you cut and paste the detailed file name into one of your images of the plant. That way you have the flower dimensions.*

*OK, the image is of the F1 cross made by John Rouse between *R. leucogigas* 'Hunstein's Secret' and *R. konori* 'White Giant'. The plants are 19 years old. It seems that the ones I have were the only ones in Australia (earlier this year I gave three pots to Andrew Rouse). John was, from memory, starting to become ill and had closed down his propagating facilities and was no longer growing any of the seed from his current crosses. Seed was sent to at least Hawaii and California. One of the Hawaiian plants of the cross apparently has been named 'Sweet Marnie' -- but as you know with F1s of this type (where the parents are genetically homogeneous) the seedlings are pretty much like peas in a pod. My plants were very neglected and did not get past the stage of having been pricked out into a flat for growing on to the point they were big enough for potting up into 50 mm tubes, until a couple of years back. [All my vireyas were neglected, not just this batch of seedlings.] By then, the surviving plants were such that I had to pot up to three plants together in the one tub to avoid totally destroying their root systems!!*

*It is a pretty neat hybrid, but not a garden or shadehouse plant as it is too straggly. What is needed now is to cross it with something like *rhodopus* or *williamsii/kochii*, which has overlapping corolla lobes and a domed inflorescence (as opposed to the flat inflorescence of the *konori* group of species). This might make the inflorescence more attractive, and give a more bushy plant.*

*Enjoy, Lyn*

Lyn's photos appear at page 12

Lyn's final paper was sent to the publisher just three weeks before he died. He proposed "Three new species of, and realignments in, *Rhododendron* sect. *Schistanthe* (Ericaceae)". The Paper is published in *Journal of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens* 27 (2014) on 21 August 2014.

One of the new species Lyn proposes is *R. dissilistellatum*. This is #114 a struck cutting of which I received from Lyn in 2005 and which he then described as *R. radians*. I have a number of plants of this species in Marcia's and my garden at Montrose. We left behind a number of plants at "Beechmont". It is fitting that I include Lyn's description in this issue's Vireya column.

After Lyn's funeral I received an email from Ben Wallace with a photo of *R viriosum* worn by Xiaomei at the funeral. Needless to say Lyn provided Ben with the cutting which provided the timely flower. Again a photo appears at page 12ia

Lyn we will miss you even though, on occasion, we failed to live up to your exacting standards  
**Simon Begg**

### **VALE MURRAY HUGH MCALISTER**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2014 the Victorian branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society lost one of its recent driving forces in Murray McAlister. Murray became active in the ARS as part of his retirement from the Education department. He brought with him a wealth of organisational skills, energy and an active intellect. Attributes that were used to greatly benefit the ARS and the Rhododendron Garden at Olinda.

I had known Murray as the right hand man to Bill Taylor for a number of years and then as the Victorian branch President in 2006. I had the pleasure of seeing him drive the *Vireya* study group for many years but it was not until 2009 and 2010 that I got to know Murray much better. It started as a walk around the rather run down section of the Garden at Olinda that was the Moorland at a point where Bill Taylor's *Vireyas* were planted. The problem was that Bill's newly planted plants were on a steep slope and the ones nearest the road were falling over and losing their mulch down the slope. So we decided a drystone retaining wall was needed. So we set about building one, gathering rocks from near and far, big ones, small ones, whatever we could manage. We didn't ask whether anyone else thought this was a good idea, we just did it, Murray's view was it was better to apologize than ask permission.

Each Tuesday morning we'd start about 9 o'clock, work until morning tea and do a few more hours after the break. Murray didn't say much about his health but as time went on he was more frequently at doctors appointments. We continued to work on the wall, with Murray doing less of the digging and shifting smaller rocks each week. As we worked Murray would talk about his work as Principal at Upway High School and his battles with bureaucrats. He frequently mentioned his year teaching in Montana, USA, deriving it would seem his greatest ironic pleasure from teaching American history to the American students and heatedly discussing American politics with republicans and democrats alike.

His work within the ARS is best illustrated by the difference we can see in the healthy state of our *Vireya* collection now as opposed to when Murray first became interested in the sub-genus. In 2004 Murray wrote an article in *The Rhododendron* bemoaning the fact that despite Bob Whithers having stated in 1991 that there were 120 *Vireya* species in cultivation in Australia by 2004 there were only about half that number growing at Olinda. Murray knew this was not acceptable. Murray, with Bill Taylor's help, worked out that the best way to improve this situation was to import plant material from New Zealand. Murray had such good contacts and persuasive power that he and Bill returned from a trip across the ditch with free cuttings for over 80 different species. We can only imagine how much poorer the *Vireya* House at Olinda would look without this inspired decision by Murray and Bill to go and collect all that they

could. Their timing was impeccable because shortly after returning with their plant spoils the import window closed for living Rhododendron material from NZ.

Andrew Raper recently told me of another Rhododendron legacy of Murray's. A very large trussed white flowered Asiatic hybrid that Murray had grown from seed and already chosen the name Kosciuszko. We hope to propagate this and make it widely available.

**John O'Hara**

## **VIREYA UPDATE**

On the vireya front, it has been a busy couple of months up at the National Rhododendron Gardens Olinda.

### **Vireya Species bed**

Earlier in the year, the volunteers completed the inventory of the vireya species bed and all the plants that could be identified are on the database and have been re-labeled. There's some fine specimens in the bed, including very fine forms of *R. blackii*, *R. buxifolium*, a big-leaf form of *R. konori*, *R. superbum* and *R. rhodoleucum*. The inventory also revealed the sole surviving *R. abietifolium* in the gardens – we've propagated from this plant and recently planted rooted cuttings in the glasshouse.

What we'd like to now do with the vireya species bed is to turn it into a better landscaped display of vireya species. Whilst we have many fine plants we could improve the aesthetics whilst retaining its collection value. What we plan to do is to increase mass plantings and particularly of some of the smaller species, which currently are somewhat lost in the bed. To that end, the volunteers are propagating those species we'd like to bulk up and hopefully we can plant these out over the next few years. We've also planted out some small-medium size tree species, to provide some additional structure and provide some filtered shade for those sections of the bed where we've seen high levels of sun-scorch in summer. A special thanks to James Pethybridge, Blackwood Ridge Nursery, who kindly donated the trees for the bed.

Now that we have the bulk of the vireya species in cultivation in the glasshouse, we no longer need to persist with those species that have repeatedly proven to be difficult to grow in the vireya species bed. As part of the ongoing bed maintenance, we propose to progressively remove those species that are not performing well.

### **Vireya hybrids in the NRG Olinda**

More recently, the volunteers completed an inventory of one of the vireya hybrid beds known as Bill Taylor's bed (the vireya bed next to the moorland). The plant search, databasing and labeling of this bed is largely completed, and it's pleasing to see that some hybrids worthy of retention in the gardens have been located in this bed. Now that they are databased and labeled we'll be able to readily use these plants as stock material for propagating.



Within the gardens, there are extensive areas of vireya landscape planting – along the former golf course boundary, and in beds close to both of the rockeries. These are nearly all hybrids, almost none of these plants are labeled and with the passage of time it is no longer possible to reliably identify them, so they'll remain as general landscape planting. In discussions with Parks Victoria, we've made the case for transitioning one of these beds from general landscape hybrid planting, to a vireya hybrid bed where we can display labeled examples of worthy hybrids. We've found a suitable bed – on the east side of the main path just passed the point rockery – and have cleared out the unwanted unlabelled plants in the bed (seemingly a myriad of different *R. macgregoriae* crosses!). We're in the process of putting aside labeled hybrids for planting out as well as sourcing and propagating other hybrids for later planting. In time, we hope to develop up a bed that displays the wide range of vireya hybrids that are in cultivation and suitable for Victoria's climate.

### Potted vireya collection

With the glasshouse up and running we no longer have a need to maintain the potted vireya species held in the 'cage'. Over the last 12 months many of these specimens have been planted out in the vireya species bed or the glasshouse. The 'cage' has not proven to provide the conditions conducive for the easy maintenance of vireyas, with regular and debilitating outbreak of fungal diseases. As experienced at the Tesselars plant sale, specimens that would otherwise been attractive to collectors were difficult to sell due to their poor condition. Consequently, we plan to dramatically scale back on the range and quantity of potted vireya species, and when we do propagate it will be for a specific purpose (for sale, specific order, planting-out etc) with the plants cared for accordingly.

Likewise, the collection of potted vireya hybrids is not in good condition. At this stage I'm not sure what to do with them - better specimens have been put aside for planting out in the vireya hybrid bed – however much of the rest of them are unsaleable and should probably be discarded. Suggestions welcome!

### Vireya Glasshouse

The most recent round of planting out was undertaken in August, with additional species planted into the treefern towers in the centre of the glasshouse. We're attempting to establish multiple specimens of some of the smaller species that might enjoy epiphytic conditions, and to that end have planted out *R. rubineiflorum*, *R. gracilentum*, *R. lamrialianum* ssp. *lamrialianum* and *R. bryophilum*. I hope in time that these towers will be festooned with vireyas!

It's been pleasing to see the bulk of the species take well to the conditions in the glasshouse, and over the last few months we've flowered *R. citrinum*, *R. dissilistellatum*, *R. konori*, *R. inundatum*, *R. orbiculatum*, *R. perakense*, *R. jasminiflorum* and *R. himantodes*, to name a few.

The glasshouse has gone through its first winter. The temperature never dropped below 0 Deg C and there doesn't seem to be signs of cold stress, so would appear that supplementary winter heating is not required. We've noticed that with the high humidity we are getting some late

petal blight, that if left unattended has on some plants, spread to the surrounding growth. We'll probably need to tinker with the glasshouse humidity such that the humidity is adjusted seasonally so that during the cooler months the GH runs at a lower humidity – or possibly increase air flow. Thankfully there's been no sign of root-based fungal disease.

There's been considerable growth since planting out in September 2013 and the garden beds within the glasshouse have rapidly filled out! Short term we don't have many more plants earmarked for the beds, with the next round of additions to go into hanging baskets.

We now have 360 specimens representing about 180 species, sub-species and forms on display in the glasshouse.

A reminder that the official opening of the vireya house will be during the ARS Conference, Saturday 25 October at the conclusion of the presentations. I very much hope that you will be able to attend.

**Andrew Rouse**

### **NURSERY REPORT**

During the winter months stock has been reorganised and the shade houses tidied up.

Andrew has a list of both Vireya species and hybrids to be propagated. Species are needed to meet member requests, to build numbers to ensure none are lost and to meet the need for plants in the Vireya house or outside species gardens. A few, such as *tuba*, *laetum*, *rarilepidotum*, *phaeochitum*, *loranthiflorum* and *konori* are needed for sale to the public, especially Hills residents. Hybrids were chosen for shape, flowers and disease resistance. They, too, are needed for multiple purposes; building named hybrid beds at NRG, supplying member needs and, increasingly, for sale of good plants to the public at NRG and plant sales at Tesselaars.

The process has begun both from plants that have languished in the Tunnel or the Shade House for some time and can be rescued and from cuttings from the Propagating House that have rooted.

Laurie and Alan have been undertaking a similar process for Asiatic and Azalea species and hybrids. In the case of species they have identified species in the NRG garden that need extra numbers and that will be needed for the new Species Beds planned for the Golf Course. In the case of hybrids ARSV is, increasingly becoming a principal, indeed only, source of supply as the long standing commercial growers progressively cease business

We have had a request from the shop to provide a list of rhododendrons available for selling to the public. Mike and I have organised a short list of plants we think will be suitable for suburban gardens.

Our next focus is to do more propagating of red, pink and purple rhododendrons with a view to selling at future plant sales like Tesselaars. The public seem to want these colours and will buy accordingly rather than named hybrids.

All these plants need to be kept labelled, weeded and shaped. The old days of "lottery" where a plant might be there, or not, and might be labelled, or not and a label might be right, or not are past.

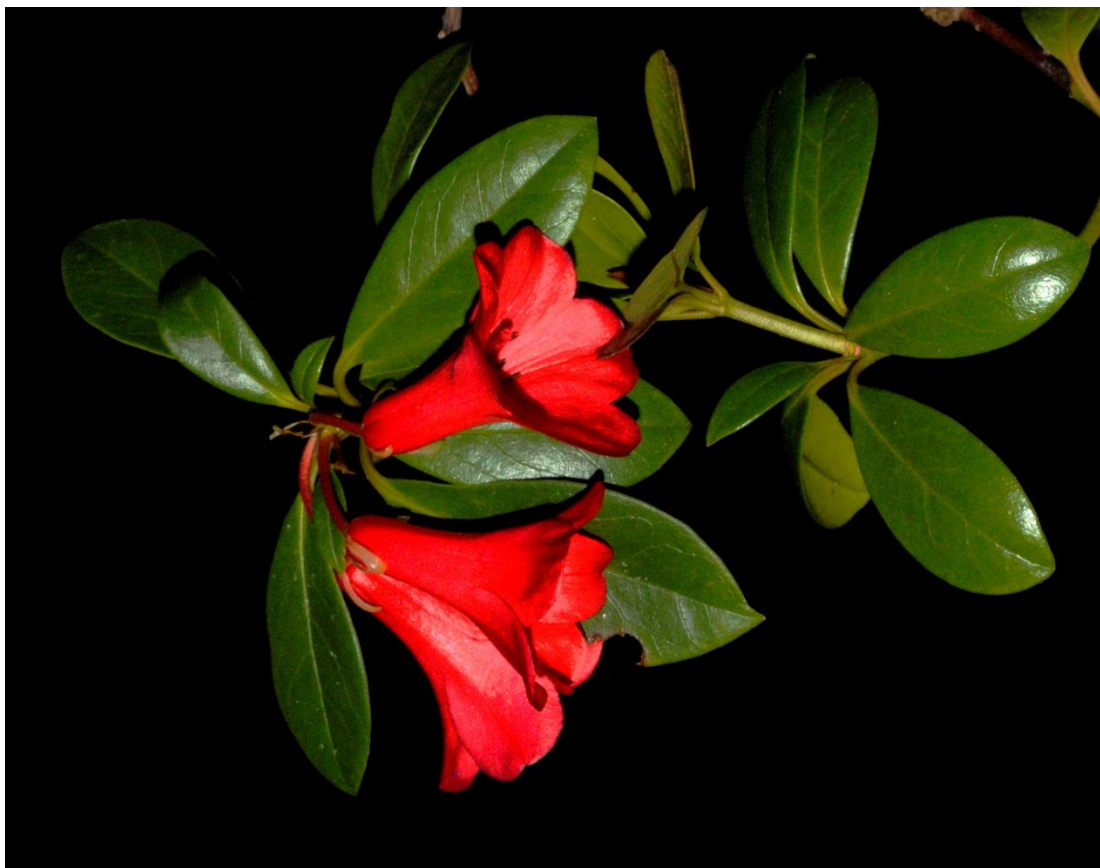
**Alex Pottage**



*R dissilistellatum*  
Photo Simon Begg, "Beechmont", 2007



*R williamsianum*  
Photo Alan Kepert, NRG, 2013



*R viriosum*

Worn by Xiaomei Wallace at Lyn Craven's funeral



*R leucogigas* "Hunstein's Secret" x *R konori* "White Giant"  
Photo Lyn Craven sent June 2014

## Thanksgiving for the life of Lyn Craven

Opening Song: "Where are You, my Brothers?"  
Dmitri Hvorostovsky

Welcome

Prayer

Hymn: Morning has Broken

Reflection

Readings – Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Eulogies:      Family: Ross and Kirsty and Tim  
                    Botanical: Brendan Lepschi  
                    Friends: Roger Kilham

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Words of Encouragement

Lyn's Life: Theme song from "Blue Hills"

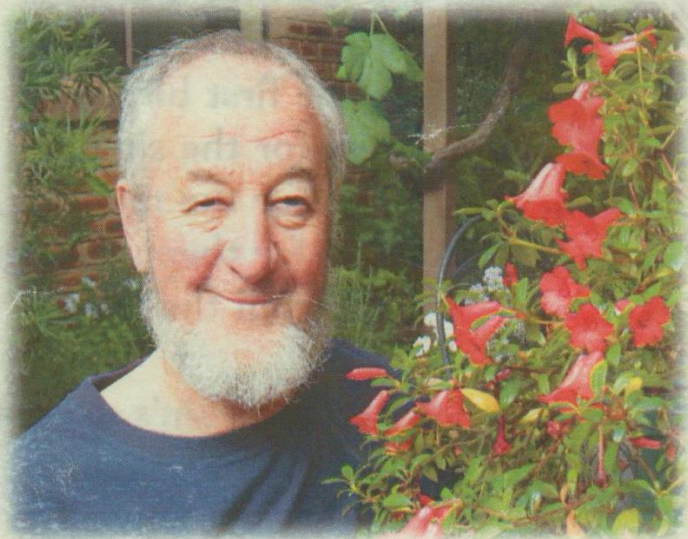
Announcements: Please join Lyn's family in the foyer  
for refreshments after the service.

Prayers for the Family

Committal

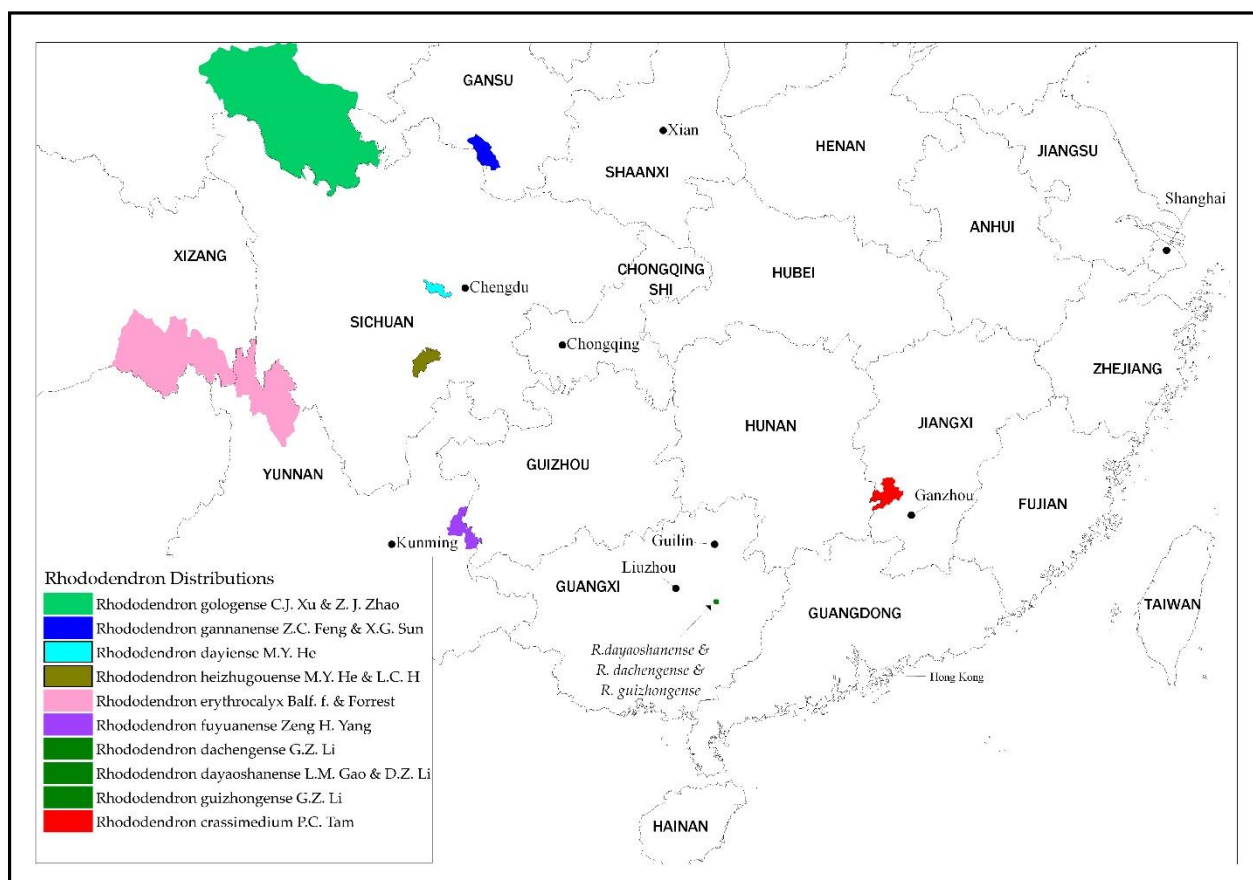
Blessing

Recessional Song: "Lady Eliza Lindsay Set" The Red House





**Figure 1 *Rhododendron columbianum*.** Photo copyright Tom Hilton (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/54259492@N00/3763539493> as *Ledum glandulosum*).



**Figure 2 Distribution of Chinese species** (from Fang et al. 2011). The distributions are mapped as counties within which the species occurs, the actual distribution is likely to be smaller, particularly in the west where counties are large.

## **RHODODENDRON UPDATE – 2 (OCTOBER 2014)**

*This is the second article by Francis Crome covering species not described in usual texts Ed.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This is the second part of our Rhododendron species update and contains 14 species. Our methods are described in the previous newsletter but basically we had a six-step process.

1. We extracted all “accepted” names of Rhododendron that were not synonyms from “The Plant List”, an online working list of all known plant species, produced by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Missouri Botanical Garden.<sup>1</sup>
2. We then removed species that were on the ICON<sup>2</sup> list of Rhododendrons whose seed can be legally imported into Australia.
3. We then removed species that Simon Begg had already determined were not on the ICON list and that await submissions to be prepared for their inclusion on the ICON list. These species are mostly from Argent (2006) and Cox and Cox (1997).
4. This left approximately 70 ‘missed’ Rhododendrons i.e. species not yet permitted for import and not on Simon’s list of species awaiting submissions to ICON, mostly species described since 1997.
5. These missed species were then cross-checked in two other on-line databases – The International Plant Names Index (IPNI)<sup>3</sup> and Tropicos<sup>4</sup>.
6. We then consulted The Red List of Rhododendrons (Gibbs *et al.* 2011) for their conservation status and checked other databases, Rhododendron society websites and primary scientific literature to discover more about each species.

### **A NOTE ON PLANT NAMES**

Some of the following species accounts recount arguments amongst taxonomic botanists as to what names should apply to the plants. Although the reader can consult most modern garden books about plant nomenclature (naming) a few basic points are worth noting.

Taxonomy concerns itself with determining the *relationships* amongst plants and the **appropriate names** to apply to them. Determining relationship is perhaps the core of taxonomy and it addresses the following types of questions: is this plant a new species? or is it the same as some other species? or is it a subspecies? or a hybrid? or in the same family? Once a botanist makes these relationship decisions then a set of agreed rules of botanical

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theplantlist.org>. The List combines multiple checklist data sets held by these institutions and others and provides the accepted Latin name for most species, and synonyms by which that species has been known. "Around 20% of names are Unresolved indicating that the data sources included provided no evidence or view as to whether the name should be treated as accepted or not, or there were conflicting opinions that could not be readily resolved."

<sup>2</sup> ICON is the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture’s import conditions database

<sup>3</sup> IPNI is a database of the names and associated basic bibliographical details of plants developed by the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, the Harvard University Herbaria, and THE Australian National Herbarium.

<sup>4</sup> Tropicos® contains all the nomenclatural, bibliographic, and specimen data in the Missouri Botanic Garden’s databases - there are over 1.2 million scientific names and 4.0 million specimen records. It is a common source for other databases.

nomenclature (ICBN - “the code”)<sup>5</sup> are brought into play to correctly name the plant. This latter is a fairly mechanical process with hard and fast rules (e.g. if a name already exists for the plant then you must use it, no numerals can be used in names, etc.). The rules themselves do not assist in any way with the relationship questions. The rules will not decide whether or not plant A is a new species or the same as some other one, only what is the appropriate name to apply once the decision has been made by the botanist.

This does not mean that taxonomists do not argue about what name to apply once the decision about relationship has been made. There is plenty of scope to argue about names.

There is sometimes misunderstanding that “the code” stands in judgement on taxonomic decisions and /or maintains a definitive list of the names of all plants. This is not the case. The determination of plant relationships and names is an on-going process carried out in the scientific literature, books, journals, on line etc. When somebody publishes a new species or relegates a species to a subspecies of some other plant, they do so under their own aegis and it is their considered scientific opinion. They do not propose it to any external body for judgement. The acceptability or otherwise of the authors views is the subject of peer acceptance which is not always uniform.

The only time an external body is consulted is on naming issues and then only when there is severe disagreement or confusion on a complex naming issue, or when taxonomists want those parts of “the code” activated that will overrule the normal operation of “the code”. Cases can be referred to the relevant standing committees of the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) for a ruling. An example is *Acacia*. It has been shown that the 1000 or so Australian species are generically distinct from the other 120 or so species in Africa and South America. According to “the code” *Acacia* should be used for these 120 odd non-Australian species and a new genus name used for the Australian ones. A successful application was made to alter this so as to keep *Acacia* for the Australian ones and generate a new genus name for the others<sup>6</sup>.

There is no globally accepted list of plant names that everyone “must” use. There is no law of the land forcing you or me to use any particular plant name<sup>7</sup>. We use what is appropriate for the time. If you want to buy a plant and the trade name differs from the botanical name it would be sensible to hunt using the trade name. However, most of us try to follow the botanical lead and our society tries hard to be up to date with *Rhododendron* taxonomy.

In light of the above we decided to use The Plant List as our major source because it is the product of botanical institutions with stellar reputations whose core business is taxonomy.

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<sup>5</sup> *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants* produced by the International Association for Plant Taxonomy [http://www.iapt-taxon.org/index\\_layer.php](http://www.iapt-taxon.org/index_layer.php)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cpbr.gov.au/cpbr/taxonomy/acacia-conserved-2004.html>. Because the IAPT is a not a government organisation it has no legislative powers. Nobody can force African botanists to stop using the name *Acacia*, they do so only by professional agreement.

<sup>7</sup> An exception is where national or state legislation actually lists species names e.g. the Victorian Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act) has a threatened species list. Applications under the Act need to use those names. If you want a permit then best use the name on the list.



When The Plant List says a name is “accepted” we interpret this to mean that the name is one that most taxonomists would agree with. Note that even here, however, The Plant List provides a measure of its confidence in a name being “accepted” – disturbingly, it can vary from high to low.

## **SPECIES ACCOUNTS**

In the following accounts the species name and author is given followed by the journal reference for the original description. Then follows a small account of the species. More detailed descriptions can be found in the references with each account.

### ***Rhododendron columbianum* (Piper) Harmaja**

1990. Ann. Bot. Fenn. 27(2): 203.

Subgenus *Rhododendron*, Section *Rhododendron*, Subsection *Ledum*.

*Ledum* was a genus of about 8-10 species of *Rhododendron*-like plants from the temperate and subarctic regions of Eurasia and were lumped into *Rhododendron* Subsection *Ledum* in the early 1990s (Harmaja 1990, 1991). One, *R. columbianum*, was considered to be a hybrid between *R. neoglandulosum* and *R. groenlandicum* and is listed as such in Cox and Cox (1997).

This supposed hybrid has been shown, however, to be a distinct species based on chromosomal analysis<sup>8</sup>. Its common name in the USA is Western Labrador Tea.

Based on descriptions in the Flora of North America<sup>9</sup> it is a shrub or small tree up to 2 m high distributed from Western Canada to California. It is a lepidote species with persistent fragrant leaves, 2-8 × 1.5-3 cm in size and with entire margins. It bears small rotate symmetrical white flowers on long pedicels with stamens extending beyond the corolla (Figure 1 page 14). Its natural habitat is bogs and swamps but it also occurs on better drained sites. It has a broad altitudinal range of 3500 m.

This species is not listed in The Red List as it was considered a hybrid at the time of the list’s compilation.

### ***Rhododendron crassimum* P.C. Tam**

1982. Bull. Bot. Res. Harbin 2(1): 96-97.

Subgenus *Tsutsusi*, Section *Tsutsusi*.

Davidian (1995) describes this species but it is not included in either Cox and Cox (1997) or McQuire and Robinson (2009). Spady (1998) considered it a synonym of *R. polyraphidoideum* var. *polyraphidoideum* but The Plant List treats *R. crassimum* as accepted but, in turn, treats *R. polyraphidoideum* var. *polyraphidoideum* as a synonym of *R. polyraphidoideum*. Liu (2007), in his revision of subgenus *Tsutsusi*, lumps *R. crassimum* with *R. hypoblematosum*

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.rhodogarden.com/cross/ledum\\_taxonomy.html](http://www.rhodogarden.com/cross/ledum_taxonomy.html) and <http://rosebayblog.blogspot.com.au/2011/05/poster-of-rhododendron-ploidy-research.html>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.efloras.org/flora\\_page.aspx?flora\\_id=1](http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=1) and <http://floranorthamerica.org/>

Tam. The situation is somewhat confusing as the plant is little known, is not in cultivation and even the flower colour is not described.

The Flora of China<sup>10</sup> describes the species as a shrub, 0.5-1 m tall with different summer and winter leaves but in describing the leaf it does not say whether summer or winter leaves are being described, presumably summer. The leaves are small (1.3-1.5 × 0.7-0.8 cm) ovate with a cuneate base and acuminate apex. The undersides are densely tomentose, and the upper sides dark green, densely covered with fine warts. Flowers are funnelform, ca. 1.2 × 1.5 cm with a cylindrical tube ca. 7 × 3.5 mm born in 3-6 flowered inflorescences.

The species was originally found in open thickets at 1000-1600 m on Suichuan Xian, a mountain in Jiangxi province approximately 80 km NW of the city of Ganzhou, China (Figure 2 page 14).

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron dachengense* G.Z. Li**

2001. Acta Bot. Yunnan. 23(3): 287-288 f. 1 40359.

Subgenus Hymenanthes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Taliensia.

This species was not described until 2001 so does not appear in standard texts. It is a shrub 2-3 m tall with blackish gray branchlets and persistent bud scales. The leaf is leathery, elliptic-oblong to obovate, 3.5-7 × 1.5-2.5 cm in size with a cuneate to rounded base and an acute or mucronate apex. The lower surface has a thick felted indumentum and the upper surface is smooth. Flowers are campanulate, white to pink with the upper lobes sometimes having red spots, 2.5-3 cm in size. It occurs at lower elevations (800-1700 m) in east central Guangxi, China (Figure 2 page 14).

According to the Flora of China, the species may be more appropriately placed in subsection Neriiflora and appears allied to, and is possibly conspecific with, *R. roxieoides*.

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient and notes that “Two recent expeditions failed to find this species on the mountain where it is thought to exist. Needs further urgent research to establish the conservation status”. It is not in cultivation but Steve Hootman of the Rhododendron Species Foundation collected seed from the DayaoShan in his 2012 China expedition<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Rhododendron dayaoshanense* L.M. Gao & D.Z. Li**

2003 Novon 13(2): 189-192 f. 1.

Subgenus Azaleastrum, Section Choniastrum.

This species may be only known from the type collection which was 8 km east of Dayaoshan Mountain, Jinxiu county, Guangxi Province, about 78 km SSE of Liuzhou city (Figure 2). The habitat was the margin of mixed forest at ca. 1180 m altitude.

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<sup>10</sup> Flora of China [http://www.efloras.org/flora\\_page.aspx?flora\\_id=2](http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=2)

<sup>11</sup> <http://rhodygarden.org/cms/hootmanadendron-final-posting-for-2012-China-expedition/>  
[http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2012\\_10\\_15\\_October\\_Newsletter.pdf](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2012_10_15_October_Newsletter.pdf)

The original description classes it as a small tree, 3–4 m high with slender glandular and hairy, squarish young branches and smooth mature branches. The long (8-13 cm) narrowish (1.8-2.5 cm) leaves are clustered at the ends of branches, and are smooth above and with short hairs below. The pale rose, narrowly funnellform flowers have a yellow blotch inside and are largish (5–5.5 cm) and born laterally, not terminally, in 4- to 5-flowered umbels. The ovary is covered in a dense yellowish blanket of hairs.

The species may be a hybrid between *R. cavaleriei* and *R. championiae* according to the Flora of China.

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron dayiense* M.Y. He**

1997. Acta Phytotax. Sin. 35(1): 63-66 pl. 1.

Subgenus Hymenanthes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Taliensia.

This comes from the mountains of Sichuan just to the west of the city of Chengdu at an elevation of 2600 m (Figure 2), grows to a small tree (7 m) and bears red flowers with purple red spots inside in heads of 6 to 8.

Although described in 1997 the Flora of China does not include this as a species with its own heading. Instead it appears as a paragraph after the account of *R. wiltonii* as follows “*Rhododendron dayiense* ... needs to be considered. It is said to be closely allied to *R. wiltonii*, but differs in the longer pedicel, 2.8-3.2 cm, in the larger calyx, 4-5 mm, in the red corolla, and in the densely reddish brown hispid ovary, with red-brown hairs at the base of the style.”

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient and goes on to say that “Taxonomic debate exists around the status of this species”. It is intriguing to try to find out exactly what this debate is. The Red List gives five references (numbers refer to reference numbers in The Red List).

(6) Chamberlain D.F. (1982) *A Revision of Rhododendron II. Subgenus Hymenanthes. Notes from The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh* 39(2): 209–486. This was published before the species was described and it is hard to see how it is relevant other than as a description of *R. wiltonii*.

(50) Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (2008) *RBGE BGBASE Database. Unpublished. Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh*. THE RBGE herbarium and living collections are searchable on line and neither includes *R. dayiense* although there are two herbarium occurrences of *R. wiltonii*.

(57) IPNI and (58) The Plant List include both species as accepted names with no comments on synonymy.

Finally there is a personal communications (62) with Yuying Geng.

It is possible that this last communication and the cryptic reference to the species in the Flora of China may be the “debate” but it would appear to be a very private one.

### ***Rhododendron duclouxii* H. Lév.**

1903. Bull. Soc. Agric. Sarthe 39: 46.

Subgenus Rhododendron, Section Rhododendron, Subsection Scabrifolia.

Although listed in The Plant List, IPNI and TROPICOS as a species, the Flora of China and Cox and Cox (1997) regard this rather attractive shrub from Yunnan as a hybrid between *R. spiciferum* and *R. spinuliferum*. Recent molecular studies at the Kunming Institute of Botany have confirmed this (Yan et al. 2013).

It occurs as a shrub, 0.3-1 m tall with peach or rosy red flowers with white bases. It occurs in Yunnan in valley forests and coniferous forest margins at 2200 m.

### ***Rhododendron erythrocalyx* Balf. f. & Forrest**

1920. Notes Roy. Bot. Gard. Edinburgh 12(57-58): 110-112.

Subgenus Hymenanthes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Silensia.

This is regarded as a hybrid between *R. selense* and *R. wardii* but, unlike *R. duclouxii* or *R. columbianum*, this has not been confirmed or denied by molecular or genetic studies. The Plant List, IPNI and TROPICOS list it as a species.

It is a shrub to small tree with creamy flowers and is illustrated in Cox and Cox (1997). It naturally occurs in coniferous forests and thickets at 3000-3900 m. in E Xizang and NW Yunnan, China (Figure 2 page 14).

### ***Rhododendron fauriei* Franch.**

1886. Bull. Annuel Soc. Philom. Paris sér. 7, 10: 143. (as "Fauriae").

Subgenus Hymenanthes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Pontica.

This is normally relegated to a subspecies of *R. brachycarpum* and is illustrated as such in Cox and Cox (1997). Chamberlain (1982) elaborates on this arrangement but in The Plant List, IPNI and TROPICOS, *R. brachycarpum* itself is classed as a synonym of *R. faurei* and TROPICOS provides a Russian reference we have not been able to consult.

Either way, this is a one of the native rhododendrons of Japan and Korea occurring on rocky slopes above the tree line at 1670-2200 m. It is a shrub with pink to white flowers with greenish flecks. It is classed by The Red List as of least concern.

### ***Rhododendron fuyuanense* Zeng H. Yang**

1997. Acta Phytotax. Sin. 35(2): 189 pl. 2.

Subgenus Rhododendron, Section Rhododendron, Subsection Scabrifolia.

A shrub up to 2.5 m tall from east central Yunnan at 2000-2400 m (Figure 2), characterised by the young branches having scattered black glandular scales. The flowers are funnel form, purplish red in terminal or axillary inflorescences of 3-5 flowers. The flowers and ovary are scaly.

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient and indicates it is only known from the type. However the American Rhododendron Society listed seed from this species in their Seed Exchange Lots for 2013<sup>12</sup> but describes the flowers as white to pink/purple.

### ***Rhododendron gannanense* Z.C. Feng & X.G. Sun**

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.rhododendron.org/seed\\_exchange\\_list2013.htm](http://www.rhododendron.org/seed_exchange_list2013.htm).

1992. Bull. Bot. Res. Harbin 12(2): 145-146 f. 1-4.

Subgenus Hymenantes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Campanulatum.

The Flora of China describes this as a shrub or tree, 3-5 m tall growing in fir forests at 2800-3000 m. in mountains near Zhouqu Xian, southern Gansu, China, approximately 320 km north of the city of Chengdu (Figure 2). The flowers are broadly campanulate, pink, with purple flecks within, 2-3 cm long in a 6-10 flowered inflorescence.

It is not described in Cox and Cox (1997) and the Flora of China says it is close to *R. wallichii* but goes on to say “The present authors have seen no material and are therefore uncertain of its true affinities, although from the protologue (description) it appears perfectly distinct from *R. wallichii*.”

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron gologense* C.J. Xu & Z. J. Zhao**

1987. Fl. Lign. Qinghaica Add. 2.

Subgenus Rhododendron, Section Rhododendron, Subsection Lapponica.

According to the Flora of China this is a small, erect shrub to 1 m tall with the current year’s branches densely covered in brown scales. The leaf is small, 1.5-2 x 0.4-0.8 cm, elliptic or oblong, with rounded base and apex; both surfaces are scaly. The small (1-1.2 cm long) funnel-form, purple flowers are born singly or in pairs and have pubescent throats. It occurs in forests in SE Qinghai at ca. 3800 m (Figure 2 page 14). The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron guihainianum* G. Z. Li**

1995. Guihaia 15(4): 299-300 f. 3.

Subgenus Hymenantes, Section Ponticum, Subsection Fortunea.

This species is a medium sized tree to 8m tall, with leathery oblong-elliptic to oblanceolate-elliptic leaves 8-12 x 3-4.5 cm, with mucronate apices. Both leaf surfaces are smooth. The flowers, borne in inflorescences of 5 to 8, are broadly campanulate, white to rose, with purple flecks and a blotch at the base, 3-4.5 cm in size, the inner surface being downy towards the base. It is found in forests in Guangxi at 1100-1400 m. Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (2002) recorded it together with 16 other species of *Rhododendron*<sup>13</sup> in Dayaoshan National Nature Reserve.

The species has now been introduced into cultivation at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Seattle<sup>14</sup>.

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron guizhongense* G.Z. Li**

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<sup>13</sup> *R. cavaleriei*, *R. faithiae*, *R. farrerae*, *R. hainanense*, *R. kwangsiense*, *R. kwangtungense*, *R. latoucheae*, *R. levinei*, *R. liliiflorum*, *R. mariae* ssp.*kwangsiense*, *R. minutiflorum*, *R. mitriforme*, *R. moulmainense*, *R. orbiculare* ssp.*cardiobasis*, *R. rivulare* and *R. simiarum*.

<sup>14</sup> <http://rhodygarden.org/cms/hootmanadendron-final-posting-for-2012-China-expedition/>

1995. *Guihaia* 15(3): 198.

Subgenus *Tsutsui*, Section *Tsutsui*

The Flora of China describes this as a shrub 1-2 m tall with dark brown hairy young shoots and different summer and winter leaves. The leaf blade is papery, narrowly elliptic or elliptic-oblong, 2-3.5 x 1-1.4 cm with a cuneate base, a curled back slightly toothed margin, a pointed tip and prominent lateral veins. The flowers are funnelform, red or purple-red, ca. 1.2 x 1 cm; with a cylindrical tube ca. 6 x 4 mm in 3-5-flowered inflorescences. The outer surface is glandular-hairy and the inner pubescent. The style is 1.2-1.5 cm long, shorter than some of the stamens. It occurs in mountain forests at 1200-1700 m in eastern Guangxi (Figure 2).

Li (1995) originally applied the new name *R. guizhongense* to *R. glandulostylum*, which he considered distinct from *R. subnerve*, a species with which *R. glandulostylum* had been lumped. The Flora of China maintains that *R. guizhongense* may be synonymous with *R. subnerve* but The Plant List treats the latter as a synonym of *R. guizhongense*. Xiao-Feng *et al.* (2007) reduced *R. guizhongense*, along with six other species and subspecies to synonymy with *R. fuschifolium*. Their analysis was based on leaf measurements and non-quantitative comparison of other traits. Their table 1 lists characters for the various species but the entries for *R. guizhongense* differ somewhat from the description in Flora of China.

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

### ***Rhododendron heizhugouense* M.Y. He & L.C. Hu**

1996. *Acta Bot. Yunnan.* 18(3): 295-296 f. 1

Subgenus *Hymenanthes*, Section *Ponticum*, Subsection *Taliensia*

This species forms a shrub 3-5 m tall with smooth branchlets. The leaf has a densely woolly petiole and thick leathery, broadly elliptic to oblong-elliptic leaves 10.5-18 x 5.5-8 cm, with ear- or heart-shaped bases and sharply pointed tips. The underside is yellow-green to brownish with a thin indumentum; the upperside deep green and smooth. The campanulate flowers are pale yellow, purple-flecked on one lobe at the base, 4.4-5.2 x ca. 4 cm borne in 15-23 flowered inflorescences. There are 10 unequal stamens and a densely woolly white conical ovary. It occurs in mountain fir forests at ca. 3300 m in west Sichuan (Figure 2 page 14).

The Red List classifies it as Data Deficient.

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