

THE NEWSLETTER of  
THE SIBERIAN, SPURIA, and JAPANESE IRIS GROUP  
of the British Iris Society.

This Includes other Apogon Irises.

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No. 1

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SOME TIME AGO I promised that the first NEWSLETTER of this new group would coincide with the first meeting, at which the group should be launched in June 1976. Since then, I have received many good suggestions concerning a NEWSLETTER, which will be considered and acted upon if possible, but my promise shall not fail, which is the reason for this little effort, which is a beginning, and will improve with the passing of time.

Whatever the future holds for us and the Beardless Irises, we are part of our great B.I. S. and Iris Societies throughout the world, and the hope is that the Newsletter shall be our communication medium between members throughout the world. It is hoped that members will write of their successes, their failures, their experiments and the results, tell their wants and their needs, for publication. It is hoped that it may also be a means of exchange of plants and seeds, and a means of helping the beginner to become the expert, and to solve many of our problems.

The Beardless Irises are coming to the fore, and are being grown in greater numbers than ever before. They are playing a greater part than ever in Iris shows and Iris Gardens, and thus are reinforcing the grand display of the Bearded Iris.

We owe a great deal to the enthusiasm and generosity of overseas people who have become members and sent donations to help start the Group, and have given me much encouragement. It is most necessary that we should endeavour to enlist new members who are non-Iris growers, as members, give them a few plants, and introduce them also to the B.I.S. and their National Iris Society.

In Great Britain, we need many more people and young people to grow Irises, in the North, South, East and West. Irises can be grown all over the United Kingdom, especially the Beardless Irises or Apogons, Russia is very proud of her Iris population, so I am sure that Irises which grow in that country will grow all over the British Isles. I can just imagine the Siberians and the Laevigatas flourishing in Ireland. We have a member in Durham, where the air is keen and bracing and siberians flourish. I am sure he will soon get others to join in his Iris adventures.

We are greatly indebted to Mr. Ernest Naylor, Editor of the B.I.S. Newsletter, for the publicity so kindly given us with the inclusion of Siberian and Spuria Notes and News. I have received much help and advice and many suggestions, one being that instead of publishing a separate Newsletter, it be included in the British Iris Society Newsletter, of which we might

contribute to the cost; this might be a good idea, and a help to parent Society and Group or Section. What do you think? We shall have to decide these things at the meeting. I have lots of vary valuable M/S of interest to growers and hybridisers, contributed mainly by experts outside of the United Kingdom. Now we need the pens and brains of our British experts, to get busy, we do not yet know who is going to volunteer to be Editor, but we need a multitude of .good articles which will make light work for an Editor. A Newsletter needs to contain Your experiences, Your experiments, Your news and views and ideas, so please send me yours as soon as possible.

Nearly all the Tall Bearded and Median experts grow a few Apogons, especially Siberians, I believe that you could help with your experiences, what sort of Siberians do you .like best? the small fairy-like flowers, or the big shapely ones with wide parts? Both have their uses. We remember that Tall Bearded Irises are the main source of Spectacular value at the Show, but the Beardless Irises make for artistic and aesthetic value, and botanical interest in the Show,

It seems to me that the aims of the Group should be:

- 1, To interest B.I.S.. members and others in growing, hybridising and enjoying the Beardless Irises. Thus to get new members for the B.I.S. and the whole Iris world.
- 2.. To help and encourage all who are interested in these Irises, by seed and plant exchanges, and sales. . . . .
3. To issue two Newsletters a year, with help and advice on hybridising and growing, being a means of communication throughout the Iris world.

Alex Baok

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A meeting will be held in a Committee Room during the first day of the Iris Show, probably at 3 p.m. I have asked for this time. The President of the British Iris Society, Mr. F.I.L. Knowles, has kindly consented to attend this meeting, which will mark the official launching of the Group. Please make an effort to attend, those who have shown their interest, and we should be pleased to have the support of others. Even if you don't grow Beardless Irises at all, we should be delighted to have your help and support.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. P. Hewitt, without whose kindness and toil this Newsletter would never have been printed and circulated in time. My grateful thanks to them.

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I have many more splendid articles for the Newsletter, written by noted authorities on Siberian and Spuria Iris, and hope that the one included, by Dr. Currier McEwen of U.S.A. may be of help to many.

## Notes Regarding Some Hybridising Goals in Siberian Irises – Currier McEwen

Let me first congratulate all members of the Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris Group and say how pleased I am to be invited to write for your first Newsletter. I have recently been working on a rather long article on hybridising goals in Siberians which will be published later, I trust, in the Bulletin of the American Iris Society. Hence I will not try to cover the subject comprehensively but will pick out a few areas of hybridizing effort which I tend to think of as “English territory”, namely, improvement in the 40-chromosome group of clones and hybrids and the development of rebloomers.

Study of the Check List of Siberian Irises(1) shows that of the 435 registrations up to 1970, only 20% were of the 40-chromosome group. Dykes named two in 1914 and Perry 20 from 1922-29 but after that there were very few until those of Maurice Kitton and Doris Hansford in the 1961-70 decade. In recent years in the U.S. Jean Witt and Leona Mahood on the West Coast and McGarvey and I in the East have introduced a few. Thus it can be seen that the lion’s share of the work has been done in England. This area of hybridizing has had a sad loss in the death of Mr. Kitton. I hope that others in your new Group will pick up his torch.

As to specific goals for the 40-chromosome Siberians there are, of course, all the usual ones such as developing new colors and improved forms. A special need, I think, is to work for better branching and bud count. Unfortunately most of the 40-chromosome species have no branch and only two buds at the terminal. I. clarkei branches, however, and can be used as a parent. I imagine that some of Doris Hansford's introductions must have branching also, because my Blue Forty, which came from one of her mauve seedlings which she gave me years ago, has a branch and its sister, Mauve Mood, sometimes does. Puget Polka of Leona Mahood also branches as does my Purple Princess which has I. clarkei as one parent. Hence there is a pool of parents to work with.

Another, and I suspect more difficult, task will be to improve the ability of group to survive under adverse conditions. It is generally believed that they have rather rigid requirements as to soil pH, humus content and moisture. Certainly I have lost many more of the 40-chromosome ones which I have shipped than of the easier ones with 28 chromosomes. This subject needs:

- a) better observation and testing and b) hybridising effort.

Turning to the subject of reblooming Siberians, this has only recently received much attention. Most growers of Siberians see an occasional rebloom stalk appear in such cultivars as White Magnificence, Eric the Red and others but those which bloom consistently and abundantly are few. In my garden My Love has been the most reliable and, of course, all know

Mrs. Brummitt's Violet Repeat. In the past few years a new group of hybridizers has become interested in rebloom. Those I know of are Jennifer Hewitt, Alex Back and John Baxendale in England, Marlene Ahlburg in Germany and Currier McEwen the United States. So again this is a predominantly English field. I believe it is now clear that rebloom is primarily a matter of genetics and, therefore, improved rebloomers should be certain to come from crossing the most consistent reblooming parents, plus some outcrossing to bring in improvement in form. The latter probably will come through tetraploidy also; the four or five reblooming tetraploids which I now have have rounder, more pleasing form (to my eye) than their diploid relatives.

Leaving the subject of Siberians, let me add a word about the other irises in which your group is interested. I regret that I have had little experience with Spurias. I tried some with seeds sent to me years ago by Bill Gunther and Walter Ferguson to see if I could convert them to the tetraploid state. They grew reasonably well in Maine but would not bloom, perhaps because of our very cold winters, and I reluctantly gave up these efforts. I believe tetraploidy would do much for spurias because, to my mind, many of the modern ones have flowers too small to balance the tall stalks; and tetraploids could be expected to have larger flowers and, probably, shorter stalks. I hope some of you will take this on.

I have the impression that Japanese irises are rather neglected in England as they are in the U.S. This surprises me because they certainly are spectacular and they make a great impression on visitors to our garden. Nevertheless the number of people hybridizing them in the U.S. is very small. I hope most earnestly that your Group will stimulate interest in these lovely irises, too, and encourage more of your members to develop new ones.

#### Reference

1. Edwards, Siberian Iris Check List, The Siberian Iris Vol.3, numbers 1,2,3, and 5, Spring Issue 1970 to Spring Issue 1972.

#### NOW WHAT ARE YOU GETTING UP TO? - Alex Back

Most of us experiment in our hybridizing and often get exciting results. I have been growing the 40-chromosome Siberians, and selfing Maurice Kitten's 40's hybrids, and crossing them back to the species. Some will flower soon and I shall be eager to see what they produce.

Marlene Ahlburg is anxious for suggestions and help with breeding Pink Siberians, other than with Pink Ensign. Is anyone else interested, who could help? Many including myself are busy on a project for attaining rebloom in Spurias, Siberians and others. Could we share our successes and failures in contributions to this Newsletter? I can foresee the time when we have Beardless Irises which do not just bloom again, but bloom throughout the summer.

Spurias need no special treatment and suffer few ills and diseases. We need more

people to grow and hybridise these attractive plants. The way is wide open for good new varieties like Philip Hutchinson's Ellison and Ticehurst. And there are great possibilities for improvement in the 40-chromosome Siberians. Doris Hansford has some good ones from *I. bulleyana*; *I. clarkei* has been little used but Currier McEwen has had some success; *I. forrestii* and *wilsonii* have great possibilities crossed with 28-chromosome Siberians, and will cross with Pacific Coast hybrids; *I. setosa* x Siberian crosses are possible, Japanese Irises and the Louisianas grow well in the U.K. So, TELL US WHAT YOU ARE GETTING UP TO: