

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

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No. 2

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THE OBJECTS OF THE GROUP

1. Communication between members in Great Britain and overseas.
2. A means of exchanging ideas, plants, seeds etc.
3. To assist beginners in growing iris and to offer help with problems.
4. To report on hybridisation.

EDITORIAL

To follow in the footsteps of the late Alex Back as Editor of the Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris Group presents a rather daunting task, but I am prepared to attempt it, in memory of this most dedicated man, whose work proclaimed his enthusiasm and generosity.

In his first Newsletter, Alex stressed the need for communication between members, not only in Great Britain but throughout the world. Judging by the letters and literature received since June 1976 his dream is fast becoming a reality, and the Committee are deeply grateful to everyone who has written or spoken to them giving support to the Group.

I myself have been growing Species Irises for some time now, with the emphasis on "Sibiricas" and "Water Iris" and I really welcome the chance to study these lovely members of the Iris family in depth. Also to hear news from other members concerning "old faithfuls" and new and exciting "finds" which we hope will come to light.

The greatest reward that we who are striving to follow in Alex' fine record can hope for is that you will regard this as your own Newsletter. Let us know if you have grown Sibiricas, Spurias or Japanese Irises; your successes, your failures and anything you think will be of interest to other members. Meanwhile, happy and successful gardening to you all.

Joan Trevithick

LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear enthusiasts,

I am not a specialist in Siberians, spurias, or Japanese irises, rather I try to grow representatives of all those types of irises which I can grow

in the open garden.. Siberians I have grown for some years and Spurias for the last three but .Japanese irises have yet to find their way into my garden although some seedlings should get planted this year. Although I hybridise in all sections of pogon irises apart from arils I have yet to start in apogons but I like to think this is only a matter of time and space as it is hybridising which gives me most enjoyment in growing irises.

My appointment as Chairman of the Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Group arose by default really through the very small attendance at the annual general meeting and as far as I am concerned is of a temporary nature to keep the Group alive and to set it on its way toward becoming a thriving group. As we are a small and far-flung group the Newsletter will be the prime method of communication within the group and we are indebted to Joan Trevithick for undertaking to be our Editor. Please support her with copy of your experiences in growing and hybridising siberians, spurias and Japanese irises; the Newsletter can be only as good as your contributions.

Finally, I would like members to consider whether or not they would like to alter the aims of the group to include all other apogon irises and rename the group to "Apogon Iris Group" or some such name. This would open the Group to the growing number who are growing and using Pacific Coast irises. I do not know of anyone working with Louisiana irises but widening the scope of the group may encourage someone to try them. If I get sufficient favourable response to this suggestion a proposal could be put before the A.G.M.

Max Davis

### SPURIA IRIS

About ten years ago my son and I thought we would try out a few spuria iris. We sent off for about a dozen, and added a few each year, now having about thirty varieties.

They all flowered the first year from planting, flowering about the second week in June to about the third week in July. This extends the iris season a good month.

Those iris are quite tall, some touched six foot this year. Plant at the back of the border, well drained and facing south or west, and feed with old cow manure. The increase is quite good with strong rhizomes and can be split up in September-October, in about three years.

For flower arrangers this iris makes a good show. We cut all the leaves off about the middle of August, leaving about three or four inches from ground level. Plant in full sun. Ours are planted on a hill and get everything the weather offers.

V.H. Humphrey

### EVOLUTION - OR REVOLUTION?

This may seem an odd title to give an account of my interest in Siberian and other beardless irises, but my iris-growing career has changed markedly since its early days 13

years ago. To begin with, I didn't realise that there were lots of different kinds of irises - our first garden had a bed of *Iris germanica*. Luckily we lived not far from Mr. and Mrs. Brummitt who were raising money for charity by selling spare rhizomes and so we also got some TBs which, though older varieties, were of much better quality than are seen in most gardens. Despite poor treatment these impressed me so that when, after having two daughters who took all my time and energy for a while, my interest in the garden really got going, I found myself really hooked on irises and wanting to get more. I got some catalogues, drooled over them, joined the B.I.S. and began to find there were many irises I'd never heard of or seen. Along with an increasing number of TBs I got some *sibiricas* and species and enjoyed them. We moved house three times in two years and the irises came too, but when we came to our present home 1,000 feet above sea level in South Shropshire, facing north-east, cold and on a heavy clay with lots of rain, the TBs didn't like it and it was a struggle to keep them alive. Meanwhile the *sibiricas* which had (I'm ashamed to say) been left largely to their own devices grew and flowered cheerfully, as did the species which were mainly those of the *chrysographes* section. I had become interested in remountant irises and had a few remountant TBs which did better, owing to their stronger constitution, but I had also been told of remountant *sibiricas* and the possibility of remountant *spurias*. Clearly the most sensible thing to do was to try to garden with, instead of against, the climate and soil but by that time the decision was not just painless, the charms of smaller-flowered irises had captured me. I do still have a dozen or so TBs which will grow here, but my pleasure and interest is centred on the Siberians. I am building up a collection of these which includes some recent and older English, American and German varieties - the last two due largely to the kindness of friends in these countries. (I can heartily recommend iris-growing as encouraging international friendship.) As the remountants get established they are producing two seasons of bloom a year so I have an exciting time in September as well as June, and there are rows of seedlings derived from my own crosses and seed supplied by friends which give me even more to look forward to. The collection of 40-chromosome species of the *chrysographes* section is growing too, and I have had some interesting forms of *I. chrysographes* itself grown from B.I.S. seed.

When Alex Back suggested forming a Siberian and Spuria Group I wrote to say I was interested and from then on he gave me a lot of encouragement and help, and persuaded me to try *spurias*; he gave me *Ellison* and *Ticehurst*, and seed from other plants. Tentatively I bought some species and this collection, too, is now growing. So far I am encouraged by the way these *spurias* grow here and in time I may risk: some of the modern American cultivars. It seems to me that here is a great opening for English breeders to produce comparable plants which will be suited to life in this country, Alex had a good deal of success with American varieties but in conditions very different from mine. So far I have only seen *Ellison* in bloom here though some seedlings should reach flowering size this year. I do find

the plants take a long while to settle down after moving.

Japanese irises I regard, I'm afraid, as an acquired taste which I haven't yet acquired, especially *I. kaempferi*. I would like to try *I. laevigata* and its variegated form which I think is one of the most striking combinations of leaf and flower that I have seen. I do have *I. pseudacorus* and several forms of it. Finally there are a number of Pacific Coast hybrids raised from seed, also some of the species and their colour forms. Perhaps by now the title of this piece is explained - a revolution in my garden and thinking, but the evolution of interests and aims which hold some hope of realisation. For the Siberians I would like to see varieties with more buds and branches but would not like to see any larger flowers than are at present appearing in the tetraploid varieties. These are big enough to make a good garden spectacle without losing the airiness which is an inherent part of the charm of the Siberians, in my opinion. There is a growing number of varieties which rebloom and this, I feel, is an advantage which may make them of greater interest to all gardeners. Spurias too have a great future, I feel, with the new colours and patterns which are evolving; once we have good garden plants their appeal to the flower arrangers which is evident at the Iris Show should result in a growing popularity. To sum up, I feel that the interests which this Group was formed to encourage all have a real future not only for specialists but for gardeners in general.

Jennifer Hewitt.

#### SIBERIANS and SPURIAS SEEN AT THE B.I.S. LATE SHOW and WISLEY, JUNE 1977

Because of the late season there were not many of these irises to be seen on June 14th and 15th. The only entry in the class for 3 vases of 6 spikes each of 3 varieties of Siberians was that of Ray Jeffs who got a second prize for Sea Shadows, Cambridge and an unnamed variety which looked similar to Cool Springs. However there were four entries for the class needing only 3 spikes which was won by Mrs. Goodwin with White Swirl, Cambridge and Limeheart, all looking very good. Mr. Worth had less familiar irises, Sparkling Rose (red), Dewful and a large-flowered very dark purple, Showdown. 3 spikes of Wisley White were third and an unplaced entry from Mrs. Butcher contained three seedlings, all very tall with smallish flowers.

There were no entries in the class for spuria hybrids but a number of the species appeared in classes in Division VII, and a lovely spike of *I. cartholiniae* won the Angela Marchant Trophy, awarded to the best or most interesting species iris in both Early and Late Shows combined. This had three flowers open, perfectly spaced and of a rich blue. Other spuria species appearing in classes and on the display of the Species Group included *I. halophila* and *I. cartholiniae* both in several colour forms. *I. graminea* and *I. g. var. pseudocyperus*, *I. notha* and *I. Sintenisii*. The only *I. laevigata* to be seen was *I. laevigata alba*, and *I. pseudacorus* and *I. p. alba* also of the *Laevigatae*, but many species of the *sibirica* and *chrysographea* series were well in evidence.

At Wisley the next day there was a good show of bloom on the sibiricas but the storms on the night of the 13th-14th June had damaged a large number. The older English-bred ones were mostly doing well as were two selected in 1976 which were raised by Alex Back - W2, now named Valda, a deep royal blue with a prominent blaze, and VI, a flared light blue. Tomas Tamberg's SSTT59 was growing fairly well - this was described in his article in the April 1977 BIS Newsletter under the name Kobaltblau, which he hopes to register. The sandy soil at Wisley does not suit Doria Hansford's bullyana hybrids very well but Charm of Finches, Splash Down and Rob have made good clumps. There is a display bed of sibiricas raised by Dr. Currier McEwen, many of which have made large healthy clumps in two years and bloom well. Orville Fay (mid-blue, broad flaring shape) and Silver Edge (light blue with a thin white line edging the falls, a big flower) were the best but Fourfold White, Blue Burgee, Dear Delight, Ruffled Velvet, Sally Kerlin and Little White were all good clumps though the flowers had suffered badly from the rain. Blue Burgee is a very dark purple blue, widely flared; Dear Delight is a light very clear blue; Ruffled Velvet is a flared deep purple and Sally Kerlin a mid blue, broad flaring flower. Little White is a delightful miniature, only 15" high, with small white flowers of good substance and many of them. It is good news that most of these have been Selected to join the Trial; at present they are not available from any nursery in this country but it is to be hoped that one will start to stock them soon, now that they are proving themselves to be good growers and flowering well.

Jennifer Hewitt

SPECIES of the Series SIBIRICAE, SPURIAS, and LAEVIGATAE

The main species are listed, following the classification used in the B.I.S. Seed Distribution List 1978, with a very brief description based on those in the B.I.S. Alphabetical Table of Species and other publications.

<u>Sibiricae</u>	<u>Times of flowering/colour</u>		<u>Height</u>
Iris sanguines.	June	purple	36"-40"
var* violacea	June	dark purple	36"-40"
var. alba	June	white	36"-40"
Iris sibirica	May	blue-purple or white, and various	36"
<u>Chrysographes</u>			
Iris bulleyana	June	blue-purple	18"
Iris chrysographes	June	black-purple, gold marks	15"
rubella	June	dark red-purple	15"
Iris clarkei	May	blue-purple, solid stem	24"
Iris delavayi	June	purple	36"-48"

<i>Iris dykesii</i>	July	deep violet	30"
<i>Iris forrestii</i>	June	yellow	12"-18"
<i>Iris phragmitetorum</i>	April	dark blue	12"-18"
<i>Iris wilsonii</i>	June	yellow veined brown	24"
<u>Spuriae</u>			
<i>Iris brandzae</i>	May	blue-purple	8"-10"
<i>Iris carthaliniae</i>	June	sky blue, yellow line on fall	36"
<i>Iris crocea</i> (aurea)	June	golden yellow	36"-40"
<i>Iris demetrii</i>	May-June	dark violet-blue	28"-36"
<i>Iris graminea</i>	May	reddish-purple, sented	4" - 8"
Var. <i>pseudocyperus</i>	May	larger plant, no scent	12"-24"
<i>Iris halophila</i>	May	blue, cream or mauve	15"
<i>Iris kerneriana</i>	June	yellow	10"
<i>Iris klattii</i> (violacea)	June	dark blue-violet	12"-36"
<i>Iris ludwigii</i>	May	violet-blue, falls bearded	4"- 8"
<i>Iris monnieri</i>	June	daffodil yellow	30"
<i>Iris notha</i>	June	dark blue	18"
<i>Iris orientalis</i> (ochroleuca)	June	white, yellow blotch	36"-48"
<i>Iris pontica</i> . ( <i>marachelliana humulis</i> )	May	pale blue	4"- 8"
<i>Iris sintenisii</i>	June	deep purple or heavily veined on pale ground	8"-10"
<i>Iris sogdiana</i>	June	blue	up to 24"
<i>Iris spuria</i>	June	light violet blue, yellow	20"
			or
white			
<i>maritime</i>	June	purple	20"
<i>Iris spuria</i>			
<i>musulmanica</i>	June	pale yellow or pale blue	18"
var. <i>reichenbachiana</i>	May	yellow	12"
var. <i>subbarbata</i>		beard at base of falls	Tall
<i>Iris urumovii</i>	May	deep blue, purple or white	6"-10"
<u>Laevigatae</u>			
<i>Iris ensata</i> ( <i>kaempferi</i> )	July	purple, white and various	24"
<i>Iris laevigata</i>	June & Sept	purple	15"
var. <i>albopurpurea</i>	June & Sept	white mottled purple	15"
var. <i>monstrosa</i>	June & Sept	purple and white	15"
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	June	yellow, brown blotch	30"-40"

Var. <i>bastardii</i>	June	primrose yellow	30"-40"
<i>Iris shrevei</i>	June	purple to white	18"-24"
<i>Iris versicolor</i>	June	blue, purple veined	24"
var. <i>kermesina</i>	June	red purple	24"
<i>Iris virginica</i>	June	blue purple	24"-36"

### SPURIA SPECIES FOR THE GARDEN

(These notes were found among papers in a folder labelled "S S & J Newsletter" belonging to Alex Back, and seem to have been intended for an article in a later edition of the Newsletter; members are also referred to the article on "Spuria Iris for the Garden and Show" in the 1975 B.I.S. Year Book which deals with some of the same points and also recommends species and hybrids.)

Growing the Spuria species from seed is undoubtedly the most interesting way to get good garden plants, if one has the time and patience to sow a whole pod of seed, plant out the seedlings and save the best in form, colour, and shape of clump. It will surprise you what good and bad flowers and plants one will get. When I was in Cornwall the Cornish ochroleucas were much better forms, presenting more flower stems with 4-5 flowers on branches, and compact-growing plants. The flowers were large and a very pure white. Even so many houses had strangling clumps with only two or three flowers. But to get the best, and make it really work, it is necessary to open a few flowers by hand just before they are ready to open, pollinate with the plant's own pollen, and close up the petals again and tie up with a piece of soft wool so that the bees cannot interfere with your work. Sow the seed that same autumn and it generally germinates in the spring. Only save plants which are vigorous in growth and of which the flower form and colour are really outstanding. Another feature with the spuria species is to select a plant from the seedlings which carries plenty of flower stems and makes a compact, close-growing and tidy plant.

Spurias grow very well in this country and most of the species make good garden plants. They need a soil which is slightly acid to give of their best, but will still grow where there is lime or chalk in the soil. I have seen them fairly happy in the Banstead chalk and also on the Downs at Milton Regis, but nothing like as happy as on the acid soil of West Cornwall. Most of the species seem to be quite hardy, and being meadow plants do not thrive where the soil dries out. Water seems to be necessary in a dry spring, and a mulch of old manure or compost is appreciated rather than being dug into the bed. All resent disturbance and will give of their best in a place where they can stay for at least four years. The only one of the spuria species which will grow in partial shade is *I. graminea*.

All of the spuria species that I have grown are quite disease free, and will put up with quite a lot of neglect, but cannot compete with total neglect and such weeds as mare's tail and couch grass.

Most of these species have still much to add to the garden hybrids. Iris crocea will give browns if pollinated with blues. All the best blue hybrids have Monspur Cambridge Blue as an ancestor. Iris crocea also gives health and good branching and in many crosses the yellow is dominant. I. ochroleuca x I. crocea gives lemons, whites, creams and lots of yellows inferior to crocea. This could be the parentage of I. monnieri which I feel sure is a hybrid as it does not come true from aged.

Alex Back

#### THE SIBERIAN IRIS DISPLAY GARDEN

In 1974 Dr. Currier McEwen put forward the idea, at the Iris Symposium in Czechoslovakia, that Siberian Iris Display Gardens might be established in a number of countries in Europe, as well as in the U.S.A. and Canada. This idea was taken up by several people among whom was the late Alex Back and he was successful in establishing such a garden at Dunorlan Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. Dr. McEwen sent over 20 plants for inclusion in the garden which were varieties raised by himself, Professor McGarvey and Mrs. Warburton. Since Mr. Back's death contact has been made with the Amenities Officer for Tunbridge Wells and the Group's interest in the garden has been made clear to him. It is hoped that the garden will continue and that it can be further developed in the future.

Any members who live near Tunbridge Wells or who are paying a visit there and who could report on the state of the garden and plants, and if possible give descriptions of the individual varieties with comments, on their performance, would be doing the Group a service for which the Committee would be very grateful. It is perhaps unfortunate that none of the Officers at present lives near enough to visit the Garden frequently though efforts will be made to do so. In 1976 the garden will have been established for three years and should be well worth a visit. Few of the American varieties are to be seen anywhere else in the U.K. and it is thought that Mr. Back gave pieces of English-bred varieties. This is not known for certain and any information which can be passed to the Committee will be most helpful.

#### THE GROUP'S OFFICERS and SUBSCRIPTION

As was announced in the B.I.S. January Newsletter, a few members attended the meeting held on June 14th 1977 and a number of apologies for non-attendance and offers of support and help were received. Although it was a pity that more of the members could not be present it was very encouraging to hear from so many - thank you. Some decisions had to be taken and included finding a new Chairman and other Officers. The list is as follows:

Chairman ..... Mr. M.E. Davis,  
29 Fair-lawn Avenue, Meole Brace, Shrewsbury.



## THE NEWSLETTER

The plan is to have two issues of the Newsletter each year, in January and July. Our friends in .America are keen to help us and to hear our news. So come along you SSJ's, let's hear from you.

Joan Trevithick, Editor.