

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

No. 5

June 1979

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
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EDITORIAL

In June it is difficult to remember the dreadful Winter and cold Spring that we have had this year, but the gaps where the Hebes have been struck down are sad reminders. In contrast the Iris seem determined to defy the ice and snow, in particular the Iris Sibirica, What a hardy group these Iris are.

Just before the bad weather came, I had planted some out. I expected to find disaster when the snow went. Not a bit, there they were sprouting away merrily, and if I am lucky, one or two could be flowering this year.

Most of them were grown from seed, some had been given to me by members, and one or two I had bought. Now to give you some names :-

'Caesar's Brother', 'Blue Moon', 'Strand Perle', 'Dark Desire' x 'Orville Fay', 'Violet Repeat x Eric the Red (John Baxendale), 'White Swirl', 'Wisley White', 'Perry's Blue', 'Grey Mist', 'Blue Mere', 'Purple Mere', 'Polly Dodge' and one very old, No Name which I am told has 28 chromosomes.

Of the Chrysographes 'Berlin Riesen' looks well, as also do a group of 'Dark Hybrids' which were set last year. I look forward to seeing them bloom. The Iris Kaempferi and Laevigata have both survived in the pond, despite thick ice.

Our congratulations to Mr. Cassidy and his cheerful and willing band of helpers, whose stand at Chelsea won a 'Flora' Medal. 'Well done'. The conditions could not have been easy, because it was such a very big Show.

Max Davis, our Chairman, has resigned, due to pressure of work. Thank you Max for your assistance in the past. We welcome our new Chairman, Hilda Goodwin, who has kindly agreed to take over.

Hilda wrote about her garden and the Iris she grows in the last Newsletter. A member of the B.I.S. for 20 years, Hilda and her husband (who is the Hon. Treasurer of the B.I.S.) have long been stalwarts of the Society. We have promised not to make her task onerous, but we are very glad to have her expertise in the group.

Members of the Kent Group have kindly sent us their January Newsletter with a summary of a talk given by Ray Jeffs. I noticed the first paragraph gives an excellent description of Iris Sibirica, which I hope they will not mind me re-printing for the benefit of our members further afield.

It reads thus:-

Iris Sibirica. This species has a wide natural range covering parts of Europe, South Russia and North Turkey. Flower stems grow up to 3ft. in height with two branches and up to nine buds: spathe valves are scarious. The colour of the flowers is generally mid blue-violet although white or near white forms are known. A pattern of blue and gold veins at the haft is always present.

I am writing to the Kent Group to ask if we can print the whole talk in the next Newsletter, because it is so interesting. I am sure that you will all agree when you read it,

I think the message for the remainder of the year must be, 'grow a new Siberica' because at long last there are more plants becoming available. Happy Gardening.

Joan Trevithick.

My Irises (1) Adrian Whittaker

A relative newcomer, I joined the British Iris Society in 1974, having grown Tall Bearded's since the mid-sixties. Though I still grow a few of the older T.B's such as 'Black Swan' and 'Olympic Torch', some years ago my attention began to focus on Spurias and Sibiricas after realising that an ancient clump of Siberians and two clones of 'Orientalis' were consistently outperforming my T.B.'s, by being more resilient to weather variations, not requiring frequent splitting and producing graceful flowers reliably.

With hybridisation as the main interest and being very space limited I decided to concentrate on Spurias and Sibiricas. At the present I am trying to build up healthy stock, grown from B.I.S. and Group seed sown in the open.

Open sowing was decided upon, in the hope that some natural selection will take place i.e. 'Survival of the Fittest'.

My main aim is to try and select Spurias which flower well and reliably and also those which appear to be 'chalk tolerant'. Being on very alkaline soil, I put as much humus into the ground as possible. The PH of the soil and ants are the major problems. Some 'Louisianas' are also being 'raised from seed', but as expected it is a struggle with unsuitable soil, weather and 'cats' which have all taken their toll.

I do feel that Spurias and Sibiricas have a great future and would hope that as time passes, more people will discover their merits.

(Thanks Adrian, you certainly have problems, but it's good to know you are prepared to keep them. A thought I had 'why not train the cats to catch the ants'. Best of Luck anyway, let us know how it works out. Ed.)

My Irises (2) Phyl Olver

Phyl tells me she does not claim to be a specialist (cannot believe this is true) unfortunately a number of Species which were come along nicely, died in the drought of 1976. However, the Sibirica survived, as also did the 'Ochroleuca' (now Orientalis) these liked the hot conditions.

A really good clump of I.Sibirica 'Cambridge Blue' likes the rather acid soil, which brings out the full beauty of its colour. Phyl grows a few Tall Bearded and one or two Intermediates.

An oddity - new to her, appeared in 1977, this was a pale yellow form of Iris Foetidissima, sown by the birds all over the garden. Two plants have quite good flowers, the 'falls' being heavily veined in clear blue, the possibility being that a cross pollination having taken place with a blue Iris (sounds interesting). Pacific Coast Hybrids de quite well, having beautiful colours and unusual markings.

I understand that you have a Display Bed in the Park near to you at Tunbridge Wells, with a collection of Siberian Irises, I wonder how they are, and if the Park is troubled by 'Vandals' in the same way as the 'Friary Gardens' at Newark.

SIBIRICAS FOR THE GARDEN

REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF MRS. MAHJORIE BRUMMITT

IRIS YEAR BOOK 1970

There should be a place in every garden suitable for the members of Sibirica subsection. Graceful blooms of purple, white, yellow, rosy hues and every shade of blue on tall slender stems carried above grass-like foliage and forming dense clumps. These irises are delightful growing around the edge of pools, where their reflections can be seen in the water. They can also be grown with great effect in large groups of different colours, when it is a wonderful sight to see a mass of various hues waving in a gentle breeze.

For the smaller gardens they grow quite happily in mixed herbaceous borders, where their pointed leaves are decorative all summer, and are a pleasing contrast to the other foliage, The blooms are so prolific that some can be gathered for use in the home, and the seed pods in the autumn are much sought after by flower arrangers.

The stems being slender and wiry seldom blow down, so except in an extremely wind-swept garden they do not need staking - a distinct advantage to the gardener during the busy season.

The cultivation of Sibiricas is quite easy, most of them like a cool soil, rich in humus, with plenty of water in their growing season. A light dressing of garden compound manure, or farmyard manure can be given in the spring, but if the soil is rich in humus this is not absolutely necessary. Many of these irises do well in semi-shade, but not under trees, where the soil would be too dry. The best time to divide and move a clump is in mid or late September, when they have made good growth after flowering, and then as they are deciduous they will soon lose their leaves. Sometimes those who have not grown them before think that they have lost them, but there is no need to worry, they like and indeed need their winter rest, and they 'pop up' in the spring renewed in strength for the flowering season.

Over the years a great amount of hybridizing has been done with Sibiricas, both in America and England, and they have come a long way from the early hybrids derived from 'Orientalis', which had small rather flimsy flowers with narrow segments.

There are many named cultivars of reasonable price and good garden value to be found in the specialist nurseries' catalogues, a few of which are 'Wisley White', 'Cool Springs', light blue, 'Mountain Lake', bright blue, 'Placid Waters', medium blue falls, standards and style arms light blue, 'Blue Cape', royal blue with a network of white lines, 'Helen Astor', red and 'Ottawa' royal blue with a white flush on the falls.

A great stride has been made, both in substance and form when Mr. P. Casabeer, U.S.A., produced his famous 'White Swirl'. This cultivar has proved a first class parent, passing on its good qualities to its progeny. It is interesting to note that 'White Swirl' is the parent of many of the Sibiricas receiving awards from the R.H.S. 'White Swirl' x 'Gatineau' produced the good seedling named 'Cambridge'. 'White Swirl' x 'Tycoon' gave 'Dreaming Spires' and 'Sea Shadows'. The best of 'White Swirl' x 'Wisley White' produced 'Anniversary' and 'Limeheart'. 'Eric the Bed' is rather a temperamental Iris, it grows fairly well in some gardens, in others not at all. Where it does grow it has a tendency to rebloom. Crossed with 'White Swirl' it has produced the reblooming 'Violet Repeat'.

These Sibiricas all belong to the 28 chromosome group, and there is another group having 40 chromosomes. These have a different colour range and the hybrids are derived from 'Forrestii', 'Wilsonii' and 'Bulleyana'. Fine examples are Maurice Kitton's 'Yellow Court' and Doris Hansford's (now Hansford-Morris) 'Charmer' and 'Blue Signal'. Unlike the 28 chromosome group, they need drier conditions, but water in the growing season.

A third group of Sibiricas for the garden are hybrids known as 'Chrysofors'. These are crosses between Chrysographes and Forrestii, and they produce small quaint speckled or dotted blooms in various colours on dainty plants with narrow leaves. It is quite possible

that the well-known 'Mirza Citronella' comes from this group- They are suitable for small gardens and when they are better known, they will be appreciated by flower arrangers.

(I would like to point out that we have seed of Chrysographos, Sibirica, and Mirza Citronella in the seed bank)

Trevor Nottle's Letter from Australia

I would say that our seedlings are thriving and now that the Autumn rains have begun the seed pans are beginning to look like 'pots of lawn', I am really pleased with a fine lot of I. Sibirica 'Grandis' seedlings. These seeds were sent to me by Jean Witt, accompanied by a glowing description of 5ft. stems topped with balanced blooms. Of all the Siberians I like 'Tycoon' best, its colours are 'jewel like' with tons of texture and a fine lustre.

Last week I managed to trim the foliage of the Algerians, without cutting off any emerging blooms. I am almost at the stage of praying daily over my plant of Stoker's (Starkers) Pink: This has grown well in a situation which is damper than I would usually use for an Algerian. The foliage is much thinner and shorter than others of the tribe and according to American reports it is altogether more delicate than its fellows. Already we have a few early blooms on a curious striped cultivar, the stripes are a very deep purple on the usual light blue ground. In bud the exterior is a lovely golden shade, I had it as I. xCretensis from Gordon Loveridge, but a recent visitor described it as 'a virused form' of I. Unguicularis. We have a very lovely white form which has good wide petals and a small gold flash. Although I have crawled around the plants on hands and knees, I have never managed to find any seeds. Does any one know whether or not they are self-fertile? It is quite possible that all the forms in Australia are propagations of one clone.

Right now another of my curiosities is nosing through the ground - Hermodactylus Tuberosa (known as Snake's Head, Widow or Mourning Iris), It is practically unknown here being offered by 3 specialists at prices ranging from 30c to 1 dollar 50c per bulb. Pasture grubs love them, boring holes in the dormant bulbs, leaving gaps when they start to grow.

Unfortunately the little bulbs do not grow fast enough to overcome the damage and die out after a year or two. Our new garden is free of these pests and I hope to again enjoy these green and black curios.

(Trevor is trying to found a Society devoted to "Old Fashioned" Roses in Australia and has sent a leaflet. Anyone interested, will you either write to him at the address in the Members' list or Hon/Soc,)

A Request

A colleague in another Group is interested in collecting the TRUE Species of Sibirica, Chamaeiris and Bulbous Iris. He would like to hear from anyone who has seed or plants. He

emphasises that they must be as grown in their natural habitat in the wild. The name and address to write to is :-

Mr. R. Cobb, 188 Bramcote Lane, Wollston, Nottingham. Thanks,

Shows

A note to remind you that the Late Show at the R.H.S. is on 26/27 June and the Norfolk and Norwich 150th Anniversary 27/28th June, 10th July - Annual General Meeting 20/21st November - Publicity Stand at R.H.S. Show.

Siberians in North Texas by Marie Caillet

(This article is reprinted from 'The Siberian Iris' by kind permission of the Editor)

I must be out of my mind writing an article on Siberians, when I know very little about them, growing only a few, and having grown them for only 5 years. When I moved my gardening to Denton County in 1972, few Iris people in the Dallas-Fort Worth area were growing Siberians - mostly because of 'no interest' and not because they cannot be grown. The local shows had a few entries, but nothing to promote their cause. I think I may be changing that 'no interest' attitude by entering good specimens in the Dallas Show and by passing along a few plants to my friends. I even included the Siberians in an article for the Texas Horticultural Society Magazine on what irises to grow in Texas. My interest came from the Philadelphia Convention in 1973 and from their similar growing conditions to those of the Louisianas. Someone, however, stressing their need for good drainage, almost put me out of the Siberian business that first year, for I didn't begin to give them enough water.

After some trial-and-error methods that first year, my Siberians are growing beautifully under the same conditions as the Louisianas i.e. in loose sandy soil full of compost and manure, soil sulphur added for an acid condition, two or three inches of mulch (ground oak leaves and pine straw) and all the water I can provide in this hot, dry climate. Those planted where there is more clay than sand have not grown nor bloomed as well. Those in partial shade have also done better than those in full sun. This too agrees with my culture of Louisianas. One must realize that this area of Texas often has months of 100 degrees or over during the summer, and had only 2 inches of rain from May to November this year. Growing in sand only multiplies the problem, for Louisianas can be planted in a plastic-lined bed to conserve moisture, but not the Siberians.

At this time, I have 25 varieties in the yard, but some varieties are growing in three or four places for comparison of culture and location. The variety that has outgrown and outbloomed all others is VI LUIHN. I have not lost a plant of it, no matter where I put it nor

how little care it gets. Next to it would come 'Dreaming Spires', 'Lights of Paris', 'Limeheart', 'Starsteps' and 'White Swirl'. All have formed thick clumps and have been divided several times, 'Lights of Paris' had dozens of tall bloom stalks open at one time this past spring, after being moved (the whole clump) in February. Some more recently planted varieties appear to do equally well in this climate. 'Dark Desire', 'Letitia', 'Super Ego', 'Steve', 'Roanoke's Choice' and 'Marantha' are growing and increasing beautifully, 'Ego' for some reason, just survives. 'Anniversary' grows well one year and almost dies out the next. It is too pretty to lose so I just keep trying.

The foliage and bloom stalks are shorter here than I see further north, but the blooms are excellent. The only pests have been worms that eat the buds, grasshoppers that riddle the foliage, and moles that cause air pockets under roots. Siberians seldom win Shows here, but are sure to bring in the blue ribbons. It has been fun to enter them in the predominately Tall Bearded Shows in Dallas, but even more fun to look out in the back yard and see these bouquets of lovely little iris after most of the Tall Beardedes have bloomed out. I have worked for over 35 years to convert people to growing the Louisianas and now am adding the Siberians to my 'WHY DON'T YOU TRY' list.

(Mrs. Caillet writes "I am a charter member of the Society for Louisiana Irises, a Member of the Iris Society of Dallas, and an Hon. Judge of A.I.S. I belong to Region 10 (Louisiana) but now live most of the year at Route I, Frisco, Texas 75034)

The Group Library.

Copies of the following American Publications are obtainable from Mrs, J, Hewitt, Haygarth, Cleeton St. Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Kidderminster (Hon.Librarian)
Newsletters of the Spuria Iris Society.

Reviews of the Society for Japanese Irises.

Journals of The Siberian Iris,

The Genus Iris - subsection Sibiricae - B.I.S.

Alphabetical Table and Cultivation Guide to the Species – B.I.S.

Please include postage when requesting items.

The Seed Distribution

The following seeds are available :-

Section Spuriae

Spuria Orientalis (Ochroleuca)	5 pkts. at 5p.
do. Cream Yellow splodge on Falls	1 pkt. at 5p.
do. Pale Blue Yellow Signal	1 pkt. at 5p.

Section Laevigatae

I. Pseudacorus Bastardii (Pond Iris) 5 pkts. at 5p.

Series Sibirica

I. Sibirica (28 Chromosomes) Mid Blue 11 pkts. at 5p.

I. Sibirica (small) Dwarf form of Sanguinea 5 pkts. at 5p.

I. Sibirica (short) Purple/Blue Purple 3 pkts. at 5p.

Series Chrysographes

I. Chrysographes Hybrid (Purple and White) 10 pkts. at 5p.

I. Delavayi 3 pkts. at 5p.

I. Mirza Citronella 19 pkts. at 5p.

Series Tripetalae

I. Setosa (Blue Violet) col. Hokkaido Japan 11 pkts. at 10p

do. (Red Violet) very rare 10 pkts. at 10p

Will you please add postage when you send for seeds to Seed Dist, Officer:-

Mr. E. Elliott, 27 Nelson St, Cotmanhay, Ilkeston, Derbys, DE7 8PA.

The Group's Officers

Chairman..... Mrs. E.M. Goodwin, 42 Tycehurst Hill, LOUGHTON, Essex

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Hon. Librarian ,, Mrs. J. Hewitt, Haygarth, Cleeton St, May,
CLEOBURY MORTIMER, KIDDERMINSTER, WORCS.

Treasurer's Report

Subscriptions 50p are now due.

The money has been placed in a Deposit Account at the Bradford & Bingley Building Society, and the Cash in Hand at the moment £51.35p.

From this will be taken an amount in the region of £10 or more for Printing and postage, in the next week.

Leaflets are at this time being printed, on the decision of the committee, to be given out at the different shows and by individual members. You will find one enclosed in this Newsletter to pass on to an interested friend. Thanks. That we have not had to increase the yearly subscription, is due to the hard work put in by Jennifer Hewitt, who has produced the Newsletter for the last two years, at minimum cost and maximum effort. Thank you very

much Jennifer. Thanks also to Eric Elliott for running the Seed Bank so efficiently. Also to the members (many overseas) who send donations as well as subscriptions. Lastly thanks to the members who send plants to sell and bring in more revenue. There is a feeling that a donation, say of £5 should be sent to the Parent Society as a gesture, because quite a few members of the S.S. & J. Group are not members of the British Iris Society. If you have any objection, will you please let me know.

Finally, Mr. R. B. Carlin, Manager of the National Westminster Bank, Radcliffe-on-Trent has been asked to act as Auditor, a post which he has kindly accepted.

List of Stockists

Please forgive if this is a slightly out-of-date, as I have not had time to check by writing to each Nursery. If you find a new one, or that one listed is not now in business, please let me know. ED.

Aitken J.R. Orchardbank Nursery, Barnhill, Perth, Scotland,

Blom. Walter and Son Ltd. Coombelands Nurseries, Leavesden, Watford.

Bond. S.V. Thuya Cottage Alpine Nursery, Petersfield Road, Whitehill,
Bordon, Hants GU35 9AH

Bressingham Gardens, Diss, Norfolk.

Broadleigh Gardens, Barr House, Bishops Hull, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AE

Christian P.J. Pentre Cottages, Minera, Wrexham, CLWYD, N. Wales.

Drake Jack, Insh Riach Nurseries, Aviemore, Inverness-shire, Scotland.

Edrom Nurseries, Coldingham, Berwickshire, TD14 5TZ.

Elgwin Nurseries, Coldingham Eyemouth, Berwickshire.

Great Dixter Nurseries, Northiam, Sussex.

Hartside Nursery Garden, Low Gill House, Alston, Cumbria, CA9 3HL.

Holden Clough Nursery, Bolton-by-Bowland.

Hollet C.G. Greenbank Nursery, Sedbergh, Yorkshire.

Humphrey V.H. 8 Howbeck Road, Arnold, Nottingham NG5 8AD.

Jackman's Nurseries Ltd. Woking, Surrey.

Mars of Haslemere J.A. Haslemere, Surrey.

Orpington Nurseries Company Ltd. Rocky Lane, Gatton Park, Reigate,
Surrey, RH2 0TA.

Parker-Jervis J. & E. Marton's Hall Farm, Longworth, Abingdon, Oxon, OX13 5EF

Pennell & Sons Ltd. Brant Road, Lincoln, Lines.

Perry's Hardy Plant Farm, Enfield, Middlesex.

Ponton J.R. Kirknewton, Midlothian, Scotland.

Reginald Kaye Ltd. Wairhman Nurseries, Silverdale, Carnforth, Lanes.

Robinson's Hardy Plants, Greencourt Nurseries, Crockenhill, Swanley,
Kent, BR8 BHD.

Sunningdale Nurseries Ltd. Windlesham, Surrey.

Waterperry Horticultural Centre, Wheatley, Oxford OX9 1JZ.

Van Tubergen, Willowbank Wharf, Ranolagh Gdns, London SW6 3JI.

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From 'The Siberian Iris' Magazine of the American Siberian Iris Society,
Spring 1978.

Horticultural Terminology - The Inner Meanings continued:-

Normal Season: average; never experienced in living memory.

Overpriced: I can't afford it.

Perfect Form: I got a blue with it in the Show; antenum of ' Dog'.

Quite Nice: can't be rude after that good lunch; we must encourage
the beginning hybridizer.

Rarity: everyone else threw it out years ago.

Real gardener: Almost as good as I am.

Reverted: I forgot to cut off a seedpod and this came up in the middle

Slave: better gardener than I am,

Species: not quite as good as a 'dog'.

Specimen: I only have one of it.
Standard of Excellence: that big thing I saw last week; the one the judges liked; figment of the imagination.
Terrific: the originator is my best friend, even if his taste is all in his mouth.
True species: it doesn't look quite like the one in the book,
Unavailable: they didn't have it at the dime store
Valuable antique: someone took it west by covered wagon and it was the only plant that survived.

I am quite sure that we can produce some 'funnies' from this side of the Atlantic, but thanks for a good laugh to our 'friends across the sea'.

The January Issue

More from Currier McEwen of Tetraploid and Small Siberians, as well as your letters and comments. We are hoping to report on *Iris Laevigatae*, so, if you are growing these 'water loving' Iris we would like to hear from you please.