

THE NEWSLETTER

What's The News?

Editor's Notes - Brita Carson

Presidential Comments - Anne Blanco White

Seed Exchange Officer - Seeds Needed - Janet Miller

News from Kent - Olga Wells

Farewell Iris sibirica 'Emperor' - Alun Whitehead

Irises and AGMs - Anne Blanco White

Attractive to Bees - Alun Whitehead

This Hybridising Lark - Brita Carson

Officers of the Group

The Group for Beardless Irises

Issue No.9

Summer 2013

Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

What an unusually hot and very dry spell we've had here in Scotland from the second half of June until almost the end of July. It gives us an insight into what many other countries take for a 'normal' summer. But my energy levels plunged, my concentration practically gave up on me and every muscle and joint complained every time I tried to anything very energetic. Sun and hot weather are wonderful when you are on holiday and in full relaxation mode.

We have a friend who recently returned from a trip to India, with members of the Scottish Rock Garden Club, where she went to find the *Meconopsis* and various primulas in flower. She was there for a month and it rained every day. Her camera got water in it so she only had the use of an inexpensive one that she had as a back-up. She found the trekking more tiring than she expected probably due to wearing waterproofs every day. It made her realise what these early plant hunters suffered, and much more without the use of modern-day equipment, in search of plants. How easy it is to forget where so many species came from and what dreadful conditions these early hunters must have experienced.

Towards the end of the Newsletter are lists of species and cultivars that have recently gained AGMs from the RHS; the modern results of the hybridisers' (and bees) work on the plants that the plant hunters originally brought back on their trips. Everyone has a part to play in the production of modern flowers. Anne explains the criteria for the awards.

Farewell *Iris sibirica* 'Emperor' - is explained by Alun. Take note of this new naming, members and nurserymen alike. At last the editors have taken it onboard and included Siberians correctly in the *Plant Finder*.

Janet would be delighted to receive any quantities of seed. Please collect and send off to her any you can spare. Not all the country has had the same good weather and Anne doesn't think she will have many. Olga has some good results from Kent and what the weather has had to offer her irises there, both for shows and for seeds, and there may be some seeds from her.

Please send Margaret the seed from the bearded irises. They would both appreciate a note or email listing what you hope you will have at harvest time. This also means they can start to make up their seed lists. I won't have as many as I had hoped, as you will see, if you are still reading to the end of this newsletter.

Presidential Comments

Anne Blanco White

Another weird year has passed. Dark and cold in the first few months so that the plants brought to shows tended to be slightly unseasonal. Flowering has been poor in the main and I think the seed harvest will be miserable though there have been a few bees and other pollinators around. We do need to take the pollen and nectar bearing plants seriously around our irises since so many rely on them for seed setting if you aren't prepared to go out with your paint brushes or cotton wool. Though again we can't always get results if the weather is unkind. It's really thwarting when a capsule seems to be fattening up nicely and then collapses.

So we thank Brita for her editorial encouragements to help us do better, Janet for trying to spread the seeds further around and Alun for managing the finances.

Carry on Gardening

Last year was not good for ripening rhizomes – some of my spurias flowered; some of the Evansias flowered with a miserable seed set in both cases. The lacteas are still with me though one clump needs a nasty shock. The junos only half recovered from some creature which dug them up immediately after replanting and threw them every which way. One or two have bloomed true to name, but the rest need further attention. The reticulatas were simply on strike. And my versicolor from Sable Island flowered with a nice aubergine coloured stem. But what did do well were the PCIs I collected as their garden was going to be wrecked by a developer. I was told to try and lift them with plenty of soil. Mmmmh – in a dry spell from Bagshot sand? Anyway, I did my best. They were rushed home and dumped in buckets with about an inch of water. There they sat as I worked my way through and parked them in pots. Those that weren't sold at shows flowered well and by sheer chance they have set seed quite well. As did a shy little spike of *fulva*.

Weeds of course have done well, particularly Enchanters Nightshade! At least my dwarf *Solanum* is still with me having failed to put in an appearance in the last two years, but the surprise was *Zaluzianskya capensis* which doesn't really live up to such a name. I hunted through the wild flower books, gave up in despair and emailed Wisley with several pictures and some measurements. They said it is a S. African and seeds can be had from Thompson and Morgan if any of you are interested. It likes a very well drained, sunny site and I suspect it may well turn up elsewhere. The really worrying bunch though are the Morning Glories. I had a fair number of what I thought were time expired seeds and shot them into the planters in front of this building after replanting *japonica variegata*. I seem to have had 110% germination and if the irises survive it will be a wonder. Some things are really sent to try us.

Seed Exchange Officer - Seeds Needed

Janet Miller

I am wondering how many members have lots of seed but don't think to send some to the seed exchange? Perhaps you don't know what the name of your plant is but if you can describe it and even better know which species it is we could make a section for descriptions only if you think it is attractive and others will enjoy having it their gardens. Due to various problems not least the weather the number of seeds that I'm receiving is going down, down, down. Please send many or any.

If I get enough unnamed seed then we can have a section which has descriptions only, time of year when it flowers and height, if you could go out and measure the length of the stem with the seed pod on top before removing the seed and stem. Add anything else which might help with its description. The fresher the seed the better and I would rather not have to offer year old seed.

News from Kent

Olga Wells

Since writing in late January this year things have looked up on the beardless iris scene. The unguics held on pretty much until the cold and snowy spells of winter passed and then burst forth with great explosions of bloom. *Iris missouriensis* was next to appear on the allotment and put up enough good stems to provide an entry for the Kent Group show in May plus some PCIs doing the same thing. The Siberians were poor in 2012 so they received some fertiliser. I thought the constant rain last year had probably leached out any goodness in the soil. Anyway it seemed to do the trick and the plants put on their normal generous display. Some seedlings had bulked up enough to be assessed and, encouragingly, I believe a couple might be good enough to name at some point. Once again the spurias did very well. They obviously enjoyed the extra moisture they had received previously. 'Missouri Rainbows' was particularly showy and 'Blue Lassie' which had been hiding for a few seasons suddenly showed itself again. Some seedlings which had been lurking for 3-4 years all finally bloomed. Disappointingly none of these were any better than their parents for colour (a bit muddy) but one was quite short so maybe I won't ditch that one yet.

I just wish the beardless irises increased as quickly as their bearded relatives. I find mature clumps difficult to deal with now that I, myself, am more mature. I suppose one is never quite satisfied with things the way they are.

Farewell *Iris sibirica* ‘Emperor’ Alun Whitehead

If you had looked in last year’s Plant Finder, you will have seen an entry for *Iris sibirica* ‘Emperor’ and you might not have thought any more of it. However, if you had looked up ‘Emperor’ in the checklist you will have seen that it arrived in a shipment of *I. kaempferi* (*ensata*) from Japan. More likely to have been *I. sanguinea* coming from Japan, rather than *I. sibirica* and you might start to suspect the name. You’d be right.

One of the differences between *sibirica* and *sanguinea* is that the spathes of the former are desiccated at flowering time, whilst those of the latter are still a healthy green, sometimes flushed red - hence giving *sanguinea* its name. ‘Emperor’ is in fact a selection of *sanguinea* with a mainly green spathe usually showing some red, but the exact colour can change with cultivation. How the confusion over the name arose is best left in the mists of time, but it is pleasing to be able to report that after a recent decision by ACONAT (the RHS Advisory Committee on Nomenclature & Taxonomy), Plant Finder now follows the US registrars in placing most of these cultivars under the heading Siberian.

In fact most modern garden Siberian hybrids will have *sibirica* and *sanguinea* in their blood and it is safer to class them as Siberians rather than attributing them to a species, unless you can show that they are directly related. To confuse matters, the more recently discovered *I. typhifolia* is now being used to augment the gene pool of these irises and so again it is easier and safer to refer to them as Siberians.

Of course people can still argue over the name ‘Siberian’. With the name of this sub-section deriving from the misleading *I. sibirica* from Central Europe and even the appropriate spelling (some would prefer ‘Sibirian’), there is still some room for discussion if we get enough time to be bored. However, for the moment there is at least more sanity in the naming of these important garden plants.

Welcome, *Iris* ‘Emperor’ (Sib.)

Note: Members interested in taxonomy might like to look at www.hortax.org.uk, the website of The Horticultural Taxonomy Group. As well as giving information about how plants are named, the site gives the opportunity for raising concerns about cultivated plant names.

Irises and AGMs

Anne Blanco White

The Award of Garden Merit was re-instituted in 1992 which is really far enough back for any of us to be interested. The initial meetings to agree which irises should be included were fun as we all racked our memories for outstanding plants. Finally it fell out that there were two main categories: species irises and cultivars.

Many species, such as *foetidissima* (the type), *sanguinea*, *sibirica*, *ensata*, and *laevigata* (both forms) and so on, had been grown and recognised for centuries in this country without needing to be re-introduced. They qualified for the AGM because their cultivation requirements were understood and they could be safely recommended for garden use. Other species such as *reticulatas*, *junos*, *lophiris* and *unquicularis* have been grown for a lesser time, but again are established in gardens over Britain although there has never been an actual trial for them. *Junos* qualify as many grow well under suitable conditions and can always be found in plant catalogues as can *reticulatas*.

The second category again subdivides into two groups: those which gained the award after trial in the RHS grounds and those for which no trial could be arranged. Let us consider this second lot first: anyone who has grown Louisiana irises on any scale would blench at the thought of trying to control a trial. It is bad enough trying to keep tall bearded separated, but disentangling LAs was out of the question. There is the possibility of a trial of *unquicularis* and even *foetidissima* in the distant future under the new dispensation. These do qualify for an Award of Merit as exhibition plants but this does not cover their garden worth.

Now the cultivars generally: the earliest trials were for tall bearded followed by the smaller forms. The BIS got the bit between it's teeth and the RHS was persuaded to expand the trials to other popular irises starting with the *sibiricas*. These were our glory days of iris breeding: the PCIs followed, then the *spurias* (with a fine clump of *I. 'fulvala'* included once and it did rather well). Currier McEwen reinforced this with his *Ensata* introductions from America. These last were expanded by an outbreak of hybrids within the *Laevigatae* of which the most spectacular were the *Pseudatas*.

Trials for AGM were preceded by committee selection working from show judging standards which changed over the years as breeders changed flower sizes, numbers of buds and branching. The Award is intended to indicate that the plant should grow well in any well-tended garden with good soil conditions. Some characteristics could be put on one side: PCIs could not be recommended for chalk gardens for instance, but would do well elsewhere and so were included. The trials were staged on the Portsmouth

Field which faced south, suffered from frost, drought and gales and, in spite of changing the locations of the trials every three years or so, became steadily less satisfactory for irises.

Now change is underway again. We are back where we started with a solitary trial of tall bearded. This will be over in autumn of 1915. With luck another trial of a different group of irises will take over. Instead of the old JIC consisting of iris specialists, the plants will be judged by a committee of horticultural enthusiasts from various fields who may not entirely understand the general requirements of plants outside their particular specialism. It should be interesting for future iris breeders.

If you are buying plants from local sources, or indeed through websites such as the RHS Plant Finder, do look for the AGM logo to find the likeliest good doers.

The following beardless have all received an Award of Garden Merit. The first column is the year the award was made, the second gives the hardiness rating. All following Siberians have a hardiness rating of H7 - hardy to -20.

96	'Annemarie Troeger'	95	'Berlin Ruffles'
02	'Bournemouth Beauty'	95	'Butter and Sugar'
93	'Cambridge'	96	'Harpwell Happiness'
05	'Hohe Warte'	96	'Perfect Vision'
05	'Peter Hewitt'	99	'Plissée'
99	'Prussian Blue'	96	'Regency Belle'
93	'Ruffled Velvet'	11	'Salamander Crossing'
05	'Shaker's Prayer'	99	'Shall We Dance'
95	'Shirley Pope'	95	'Silver Edge'
95	'Soft Blue'	08	'Strawberry Fair'
05	'Wealden Butterfly'	95	'Welfenprinz'

Sino-Siberians have 40 chromosomes and sometimes they are neither hardy or long lived although the four following are all hardy H7 (-20).

94	H7	<i>chrysographes</i>	94	H7	<i>delavayi</i>
94	H7	<i>forrestii</i>	94	H7	<i>wilsonii</i>

Spurias all have a hardiness of H7 too.

94	'Belise'	98	'Destination'
94	<i>crocea</i>	06	'Falcon's Crest'
98	'Ila Crawford'	06	'Lucky Devil'
06	'Philippa Baughen'	94	'Shelford Giant'
02	'Sunrise in Sonora'	02	'Sunset Colours'

Californian Hybrids or PCIs. Again the first column shows which year the irises gained their award. The second column shows the cold tolerance that

the irises can happily tolerate. In your garden they may be able to take lower temperatures.

93	H5	'Arnold Sunrise'	93	H4	'Banbury Beauty'
94	H4	'Big Money'	06	H4	'Blue Bossa'
94	H5	'Broadleigh Carolyn'	00	H5	'Floating World'

All the ensatas are hardy to H7.

99	<i>ensata</i>	'Aldridge Snow Maiden'	99	<i>ensata</i>	'Aldridge Visitor'
05	<i>ensata</i>	'Alpine Majesty'	99	<i>ensata</i>	'Barr Purple East'
99	<i>ensata</i>	'Caprician Butterfly'	11	<i>ensata</i>	'Chrystal Halo'
95	<i>ensata</i>	'Flying Tiger'	05	<i>ensata</i>	'Frisled Enchantment'
96	<i>ensata</i>	'Hue and Cry'	95	<i>ensata</i>	'Katy Mendez'
96	<i>ensata</i>	'Mancunian'	02	<i>ensata</i>	'Murasame'
96	<i>ensata</i>	'Returning Tide'	95	<i>ensata</i>	'Rose Queen'
95	<i>ensata</i>	'Southern Sun'	96	<i>ensata</i>	'Summer Storm'
96	<i>ensata</i>	'The Great Mogul'	95	<i>ensata</i>	'Variegata'

Species and Species hybrids.

94	H4	<i>aucheri</i>	94	H5	<i>bucharica</i> 'Foster'
94	H4	<i>confusa</i>	02	H7	'Berlin Tiger'
02	H7	'Chance Beauty'	94	H5	<i>foetidissima</i>
94	H5	<i>foetidissima</i> 'Variegata'	04	H5	<i>fulva</i>
94	H5	x <i>fulvala</i>	94	H7	<i>graminea</i>
93	H7	'Holden Clough'	94	H4	<i>hoogiana</i>
94	H4	<i>japonica</i>	94	H4	<i>japonica</i> 'Variegata'
94	H4	<i>kerneriana</i>	94	H7	<i>laevigata</i> 'Variegata'
94	H5	<i>lazica</i>	94	H7	<i>lutescens</i>
94	H5	<i>magnifica</i>	94	H3	<i>milesii</i>
94	H7	<i>orientalis</i> Mill.	02	<i>pseudacorus</i>	'Roy Davidson'
94	H7	<i>pseudacorus</i> 'Variegata'	05	H7	'Regal Surprise'
05	H7	x <i>robusta</i> 'Dark Aura'	94	H7	<i>sanguinea</i>
94	H7	<i>setosa</i>	94	H5	<i>sintenisii</i>
05	H7	'Tango Music'	94	H7	<i>variegata</i>
02	H5	<i>unguicularis</i> 'Mary Barnard'			

Dutch	94	H5	'Professor Blaauw'		
Louisianas	05	H5	'Clyde Redmond'		
Junos	96	H7	'Sindpers'		
Reticulatas	94	H7	'George'		
96	H7	'Katharine Hodgkin'	05	H7	'Pixie'
94	H7	winogradowii			

Attractive to Bees

Alun Whitehead

To some, bees are scary things and to be avoided; larger and more imposing than the smaller cheekier wasps. However, I think that public perceptions have changed over the years and we now see them as Nature's benefactors bestowing the kiss of life on the waiting flower. It has always been a joy to hear the buzzing swarm on the ivy in March and April when there is little pollen to be had elsewhere. And for a nurseryman, if the epithet "attractive to bees" can be added to a label, it will certainly make the plant more saleable.

I am writing this with Siberians in mind. Most of the cultivars set seed without human interference and given the large opening between the style arm and the fall for some cultivars, a large insect must be present and so we can be grateful to the humble bee.

We had been collecting the Siberians from Lingen and they were massed on the drive by our potting barn. Each was being taken in turn to be split and potted, or in some cases clumps were placed in crates surrounded by compost for overwintering. Despite Lingen giving the appearance of being in an alluvial valley, the soil on the plants was heavy clay. The plants weighed a lot and it was with difficulty that they were being hoisted up onto the workbench. Accordingly, when it came to the turn of 'Kathleen Mary' she arrived on the bench with an unceremonious thud ready for dissection. But what was that? A faint humming was coming from her and then quiet. A careful touch and there it was again. If you felt the root ball you could even feel the gentle vibration.

Now from previous experience we knew what to expect. Sometimes when watering the greenhouse a pot would make a clear buzz – most disconcerting the first time it happened – but now we know to pull the plant out of the pot by its leaves and there in the neat spherical hole is the miner bee. At this stage, if the bee has read the script correctly, he says thank you and flies through the door – some are poor readers and need a helping hand.

The current clump was not making that cheerful happy buzz, rather a muted soggy dull one. By very gently and carefully tweaking the damp soil away with the dividing knife (in its former life when its handle was still intact it would have adorn the Sunday table along with the roast), gradually the little bundle of fury became exposed. Not that the bee was furious; probably more stunned or coming to. It was the sound of the wings beating fast that gave the angry impression. A couple of lumps of wet clay still stuck to his body and so the most delicate of touches with the knife tip were needed and we had our fresh unearthed bee. I remember noting the prominent yellow marks on the back of his head and then it was a swift journey riding on one of my leather gardening gloves to the *ceanothus* by

the barn door where the bee could recover. This procedure happened three times in all and the three bees disappeared quickly by themselves so I assume they were no worse for their experience.

Andrena, the genus of miner bees, is quite large with about 60 species in the British Isles. At the time of the bee rescuing, I was more concerned about the welfare of the bees but now in hindsight I wish we had a photograph to help identification. The miner bees are important because they emerge in early spring when there are few other pollinators about. Some species also have a second hatching about July which is when we were lifting the irises. From looking up details of the bee, I now know that they were unlikely to sting and that therefore the glove wasn't necessary. It came as a surprise to me that as well as some bees not being able to sting humans, apparently not all bees die after stinging. Clearly there is a lot of diversity and the generalisations used for bees are similar to those heard for irises - "Aren't they all blue?"

The three bees all came from the same clump of 'Kathleen Mary' and from none of the other Siberians, and so in conclusion, with pride and confidence, we can say that 'Kathleen Mary' is attractive to bees.

Alun wrote this article a few years ago, not long after he and Jill lifted the Siberian Collection of irises from Kim Davis at Lingen.

Reminder that there are some Siberian Irises originally donated by Dean Cole and Jeff Dunlop, two renowned hybridisers from America, that are available for sale. If you are interested please get in touch with Alun Whitehead. Any profit after postage and packing etc will go to the funds of the GBI. To find out more information about them this offer was printed in the last *Review*.

This Hybridising Lark

Brita Carson

Never did I imagine that I wouldn't be at least 50% successful at crossing a few irises. I was in for a shock. This hybridising lark isn't as easy as everyone makes out. I had no excuse with the weather, we didn't see rain for at least six weeks. Every day was hot and sunny but perhaps too hot and the wind was just a gentle breeze most of the time. As I turned brown so did the pods of the blooms that didn't fancy the mate I had chosen for them. Pollination hadn't taken place and I didn't know why.

When you start doing a serious programme of crossing you realise that the Siberians you expected to flower at the same time don't always oblige. And my first problem was not to check out all the diploids and the tetraploids, memorise or list them, and it's not always easy to find out which is which. They have been successfully pollinated by the experts but better not try it for beginners like me. That was the cause of the first few failures. OK there were still plenty left and new ones coming into flower all the time.

My first efforts were made using a cotton bud to do the daubing but these were too fluffy, too woolly and I couldn't tell if the pollen was sticking to it or not. I hadn't thought of getting enough small paint brushes to last a day so that I didn't have to spend time cleaning them. How long was the good weather going to last?

Now to try the anther into the stigmatic lip method which after the first couple of goes, dawned on me that I was putting them in back to front. Now had I at last got it? Had I found out what could be an easier way so that I didn't have to have the pollen ready and the stigma ready at the same time? However the anther hardens if not used immediately so my idea of keeping it to the next day was ok to produce plenty of good pollen but not so easy to gently insert into a delicate flower. How many did I kill by rough handling in the first stage so that there was no possibility of any pollination happening? Bees are a rough lot too so how can they produce big fat pods of seed effortlessly? I did have more winners with the diploids than the tets. so its back to the drawing board next year.

A whole year is a long, long time to wait to have another go. I now have a lot more respect for hybridisers, their sore backs, the cramp in their hands and painful thumbs grappling gently in the breeze with a flimsy filigree piece of a flower head.

There is no happy ending to this story yet. Please email me any practical advice which might help to change my failures into success and maybe this time next year I'll report I've crossed the first hurdle hopefully with some big fat seeds inside.

OFFICERS and REPRESENTATIVES

Chairman: Mrs Anne Blanco White
1 Portland Court, 38 Belsize Park, London NW3 4ED
Tel: 020 7435 2700. Email: anne@blanco-white.demon.co.uk

Seed Distribution Officer: Janet Miller
Westwind, Main Road, West Keal, Spilsby, Linc., PE23 4BE

Membership Secretary and Treasurer: Alun Whitehead
Aulden Farm, Aulden, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0JT
Tel: 01568 720129 Email: cat@auldenfarm.co.uk

Editor: Mrs Brita Carson
The Old Manse, Johnstonebridge, Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire DG11 1ES
Tel: 01576 470647 Email: britacarson@btinternet.com

Southeast Region Representative: Mrs Olga Wells
24 Westwood Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6BG
Email: olga.wells@talktalk.net

Specialists:

Siberians: Mrs Jennifer Hewitt
Haygarth, Cleeton St Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire DY14 0QU
Email jennifer.hewitt135@btinternet.com

PCIs: Fr Philip Jones,
Carmelite Monastery, Hot Pot Wynd, Dysart, Kirkcaldy KY1 2TS
Email: Philiperding@aol.com

Spurias: Alun Whitehead, address above

Japanese: Mrs Anne Blanco White, address above

Louisianas: Mark Haslett
12 Strangman Avenue, Thundersley, Essex SS7 1RB
Email: markecp@btinternet.com

Laevigatas Mrs Galen Carter
Rowden Gardens, Brentor, Nr Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0NG

Proof Reader

As always my sincere thanks to Jennifer Hewitt for proof reading the Newsletter.