

# The Review



The Group for  
Beardless Irises

Issue No 8 Autumn 2011



'Red Tessa' bred by Terry Aitken and available for sale this year.



The Siberian Field at Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden

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## Editor's Notes

### Brita Carson

It seems unbelievable that the south of England is suffering from drought in February. Husband muttered, that night after the item on the TV 'News', that it has rained here every day since August. That is a slight exaggeration coming from an everyday-if-he-could-get-away-with-it golfer but we really have not seen much of the sun in the last 6 months. Records at the end of December, from nearby Eskdalemuir, often the coldest place in Scotland, show we had over 7 feet of rain last year. April was the only sunshine month and the warmest.

One highlight of last year was the GBI day at Aulden Farm in Leominster, Herefordshire. It had all the elements to make a thoroughly enjoyable day. First there was a talk by Sidney Linnegar on one of his pet subjects, the Reticulata irises and there is no-one who knows these little spring beauties better than he does. If you can outfox the mice they come up whatever the weather. Then there was a magical trip by Brian Mathew transporting us between countries and over the mountains of the world to find beardless iris species. The variety of today's hybrids, often not at all similar to their ancestors, makes it easy to forget they had their beginnings in species which came from these far away places.

In the afternoon we had two garden visits, the first was to Ivy Croft which had wonderful plants for Alpine garden enthusiasts and unusual shrubs and trees bordering herbaceous beds full of interesting plants.

We finished the day at Aulden Farm to see a National Collection of Siberians but the unusually early season meant bloom was almost over. However there was a large selection of colourful *Hemerocallis*, the perfect plant to follow the Siberians before the ensatas flower along the dry river bed. A vast garden like theirs has many other exciting plants, shrubs and trees planted to make individual enclosures or themed gardens each with its own atmosphere.

One highlight of this coming year is the 90th Birthday Celebration at Wisley. It is promising to be a whirlwind of iris excitement from historic and modern displays; from short talks to longer lectures, and iris plants to purchase as lasting mementoes of a wonderful weekend. Why not look for something interesting to use in future hybridising. And have all those questions ready to ask the experts.

There is an unusual, but fascinating, mix of articles in the *Review* this time. Two authors have gone back to species, one from Arizona with Louisianas and one from Kirkcaldy, Fife with Pacific Coast Natives or PCIs. We hit the high notes with a beardless win of the *Dykes Medal* and then tell you how to hybridise your own. We go a little historical on bulbs and then to the future of wide interspecies crosses. Then, after *News* from other publications and *News* from the Southeast a couple of bugs and beasties to finish. A special "Thank you" to all those members who have given their time to write for this *Review* and to those writers from abroad who have kindly allowed me to reprint their material.

It is sad to have to report that we have lost Philip Allery and tributes to him start on page 10. He was the backbone of the Group for many years and he worked tirelessly for the good of the Group, promoting it at every opportunity. He could inspire anyone to grow and hybridise beardless irises and hopefully I can carry on his good work convincing you to grow irises.

## **Chairman's Report Anne Blanco White**

### **Carry on gardening – Autumn 2011**

This year's performance was pretty poor, but some irises tried to encourage me. Dr George Rodionenko's spuria 'Frygia' flowered well. Maybe the winter reminded it of home; it even tried to set seed, but they failed to ripen. Some seedlings of collected forms of *I. lactea* have done quite nicely though the sole representative of one batch has been malevolently chewed - probably by a snail. In spite of that it has done its best to grow and offset a little. My foetidissimas on the other hand have pretty well died out except for the one nearly hidden under the winter honeysuckle. They really do not like this garden and it is very disheartening as I was fond of them. Some interesting species which survived the winter have failed to survive the summer, or rather the later spring droughts, but on the other hand some South Africans which I thought gone forever are leafing up again. Cleaning up the *I. japonica* 'Variegata' in the pots at the front of the building I was surprised to find that *I. tuberosa* already has fine, long leaves and there is a very odd volunteer in one pot - probably a *pseudacorus* - which will have to be seriously fed and watered next spring in the hope that it will flower.

The long overdue repotting has been seriously hampered by the recent high temperatures in my garden; it was much too hot to deal with them in comfort. And what was done was not improved by the appearance of inexplicably deep holes of quite narrow diameter in many pots. The neglected pots with their surfaces of liverworts, grasses and poppies were not affected. At first I thought of birds, then I thought squirrels, but finally the villain was revealed in the form of a very dead, very pregnant mouse. I think she was caught out by an unexpectedly heavy shower and had a heart attack. I cannot really regret her passing as several plants have failed to survive her depredations.

Now it will be a case of evicting several unfavoured plants when the rain starts again to make room for the new seedlings crowding their pots. And that means clearing away more of the builders' rubble which clutters my beds. The worms are indefatigable in shifting up to the surface.

Some of you may remember that I was amused by the appearance of the very small green nightshade, *Solanum sarrachoides*, and that I thought I had lost it a year ago. Several of it turned up again this year and they can stay if their seeds germinate. Actually they were bigger this year: all of six inches instead of four. What was fairly promptly evicted was their commoner cousin *Solanum nigrum*. Much too tall and bushy and the tiny flowers had no garden value at all.

And after the Indian Summer and a nasty attack of cold, strong winds there is 'Walter Butt' in flower to show that the runner beans can't have it all their own way.

### **The Ensatas of Wisley.**

Wisley, of course, has been affected by the financial troubles of the last few years and late this spring there was a request to the Iris Sub-Committee (syn. Joint Iris Committee) to ask if we could check the identities of the ensata irises at the foot of the rock garden. Some of us went to look and it was a sad sight. The beds were infested with *I. pseudacorus*. A nice enough plant in its way, but not left to rampage in a garden setting. Interestingly, since it had clearly seeded with its usual abandon,

there were all shades of yellow down to primrose, but no true creams or whites. The first thing was to make sure that none of the flowering spikes were allowed to seed this year though there will be volunteers for years to come.

In the end the investigators were reduced to Sidney Linnegar and myself. Starting from the end of May there were two or three *laevigatas* in flower of which one was Perry's 'Mottled Beauty'.

We dealt ruthlessly with some misnamed *sibiricas* in passing. Then the *ensatas* started flowering and the real fun began. The original idea was to try and identify plants from a collection which had been sent by a Korean ex-student and the only guide was some slides of mine dating from the early 1990s and of very poor quality. Better than nothing, though, they did help at least to say that something was quite wrong or, alternatively, might be right. Gradually it became clear that there were interlopers as, in the course of replantings, specimens from the Trials had been added which were slightly easier to identify. But at the same time there were labels which could have been relevant to something especially in cases where several identical plants carried totally different labels. This can't be entirely attributed to careless gardeners as bored children will pick up labels and distribute them elsewhere.

Then I had a bit more fun. I was working on the slide library which involves looking at the alleged name of the plant photographed, checking its raiser and date of registration and whether the picture and the Check List description coincide at all. Now it is all too easy to write a label in a hurry and to get the name wrong. Similarly it is disconcerting to be looking for one particular name in the Check List and to suddenly realise that one close to it is needed for another purpose. Having had this happen twice it became clear that more of the *ensatas* had been registered than we expected: in fact it became clear that a number of old American raised *ensatas* had been exported to the far east and solemnly returned to Britain. This raised the possibility that some of the *ensatas* date back to the very early days of the Garden because some of the early raisers such as Perry and probably members of Council would give a piece of their latest pride and joy for the benefit of members. I was able to take some pictures to Norman Payne of Merton Park and he ruled several identifications out as they were plants he had known well which was a help.

So we now have some idea of what most of the *ensatas* actually are, but if any of you are down at Wisley at the right time you might have a look around and see what we have missed for there were several that remain unrecognised. And, by the way, if like me you have trouble walking long distances, do book your little electric buggy well in advance of your visit. It stands to reason that the RHS can't afford a large number of them and they are popular much of the time. You may have to take a very short driving test for they do want to be sure that you won't plunge down the banks into the water features.

### **Report from the chair**

As a group we have had a satisfactory year and now that the harvest is in we need to make sure that our nice new Seeds Officer, Janet Miller, has all that we can send her. It is possibly not the best year as the spring frosts, and probably the winter snows, meant that the bug life which should have been around to do the pollinating was rather thin on the ground. Do any of you go round your plants with

a soft-bristled paint brush to try and improve on nature's efforts ? It's surprising how little we know about just when to try and make sure a plant has been pollinated. Any member who feels inclined to experiment with paintbrushes and weather conditions and keep proper records should do so and please send the records to our Editor.

This has been just the sort of summer that we might have expected after the last winter: alternating droughts and downpours which were oddly restricted in their geographic effects too.

It emphasises the need to protect our plants both against snow and hard frost and against blazing sun and lack of rain. At least part of the answer is mulching. A layer of friable material on the soil surface really does give considerable protection both against cold and heat. It's just a pity that any right minded blackbird thinks the proper thing to do is to rake that mulch all over your nice tidy lawns and paths. Rake it right back again. It's important.

Next year, the BIS is celebrating its 90th Anniversary and we need to produce the best possible displays in local shows. Think of it as a trial run for the Centenary in 10 years' time. What you learn this coming year needs to be expanded and applied for the future to make irises fashionable again.

### *Iris foetidissima*

You will remember that there was an article from Robert Pries of the AIS in the last Newsletter telling us that he was setting up a very comprehensive database on the web.

He is anxious to have photographs of colour forms of flowers and "berries" of this species. So if any of you have pictures he could use, do email them to him [robertpries@embarqmail.com](mailto:robertpries@embarqmail.com). Any pictures that are used will be properly attributed to the photographer.

And it's no use relying on me because most of mine are so old that the film stock is deteriorating badly. This is a pity as there are many variations on flower colours and several seed coats too.

*Iris* 'Norton Sunlight' R Coe 1969. Spuria. Standards mid-blue, gold base, glowing gold centre. Falls gold merging into brown, dark blue edging. 36in.

Does anyone have material of this iris ? It sounds rather spectacular which is more than can said for the plain darkish yellow masquerading under its name. The true one did well in the trials at Wisley.

## **Treasurer's Report**

### **Alun Whitehead**

Due to the timing of this Review, I have been able to combine the 2010 and 2011 figures in one report. Before I detail them, I would like to thank Brian Mathew and Sidney Linnegar and all those who attended the Beardless Iris Day and made it so successful. Thanks go to Brita Carson who arranged the supper for those who lingered at Aulden in the evening.

Overall the Group is accumulating funds due to our tight budget, the success of the seed sales and the income from the Beardless Iris Day. The figure for seeds in 2011 is reduced due to the separate mailing of the seedlist (see below). I must apologise for the Beardless Day figure which looks like rampant profiteering. My only defence was that we budgeted the event to break even with approximately 30 attendees which would be usual for a BIS AGM and Lectures day. We ended up with over 70 and this fed straight through to the bottom line. The achievement was even more remarkable as the event was in the rural backwater of sleepy Herefordshire. It was very pleasing to see Sue Pierce, a former GBI Editor, and two founder members. If the Beardless Day surplus is ignored, the Group broke even in 2011.

As you will be aware, Janet Miller has now taken over the Seed Sales from Madeleine Bullock, to whom we send our thanks for looking after members so well and for putting the Seed Sales on a better footing. Thanks go to Janet for volunteering and taking over the job so competently.

### **2012 SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW DUE (for Hard Copies)**

Please send cheque, **£4.50 for U.K. & Europe; £5.00, elsewhere** payable to: ***The Group for Beardless Irises*** in respect of your subscription 2012 to: **The Membership Secretary, GBI, Aulden Farm, Aulden, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0JT.**

You can still pay for 2 or 3 years in advance at the following rates

	2 Years	3 Years
UK	£8.50	£13.00
Europe (low rate)	£9.50	£15.00
Europe (high rate)	£12.50	£21.00
Non-Europe (low rate)	£10.00	£15.50
Non-Europe (high rate)	£13.00	£21.50

**Please include your name, address, telephone number and email address. We will publish a list of members periodically. Please indicate if you would prefer that your details are not included. You can also pay using the PayPal button on the website.**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>
Subscriptions	282.03	260.00
Donations	5.50	7.50
Seed Sales	252.44	65.11
Plant Sales	0	0
<i>Newsletter Cost</i>	-125.39	-68.40
<i>Review Cost</i>	-191.60	-186.93
Interest received	0.60	0.60
PayPal charges	-7.81	-11.86
Website	-6.99	-77.77
Postage		-9.98
Beardless Day - Net Income		529.05
<b>Total: Net Increase at Bank &amp; PayPal</b>	<b>208.78</b>	<b>507.32</b>
Opening Total Bank Balance	2599.54	2808.32
Plus Net Increase in Funds	208.78	507.32
	<b>2808.32</b>	<b>3315.64</b>
Represented by:		
Closing Treasury AC Balance	1043.34	1043.94
Closing Current AC Balance less uncleared cheques:	1738.97	2175.55
Closing PayPal Balance	26.01	96.15
	2808.32	3315.64
Subs paid in advance	438.50	393.50

## Treasurer's Report Continued

Under the constitution, subscription rates must cover the cost of sending out the Review & Newsletter. Typical postal costs for each mailing are:

UK	Europe (excluding UK)	Non-Europe
£0.51	£1.49	£2.07

As you can see, to send the Review and Newsletter to non-European members eats up their subscriptions without adding the costs of printing. Also, there is due to be a large rise in postage this April. It looks as if overseas members are getting poor value for money by having the Seed List and Newsletter by post but if sent by email, a large part of the cost is saved and they will arrive sooner. We would also like to pay extra to have colour throughout the Review in future. With this in mind, the subscription rates per annum for 2013 onwards will be:

UK	£5	
Non-UK	£6	(Newsletter and Seedlist by email)
Non-UK	£9	(All sent by airmail)

These rates will apply to all renewals, but a £0.50 p.a. discount will still apply when paying for 2 or 3 years in advance.

**All members: Even if you do not need to renew this year, please let us have your email address if you are happy to receive the Seed List and Newsletter by email. Let's save the money and put it to a better use!**

## Seed Officer's Report Janet Miller

As a girl there was nothing I liked better than watching my Grandad in the garden. Most of his time was devoted to growing vegetables and any surplus would be sold at the gate along with any spare eggs. There were no garden centres then and money was tight. People used to save their own seed rather than buy from seed merchants and I soon learnt that flowers could be grown in the same way. It always amazed me to see beautiful plants emerge from small dried seeds and, over the years, I have experimented with countless sorts of plants from all around the world. I am now hooked on the many varieties of iris. I'm sure, reading this, you will know much more than I do about irises but have you all tried growing them from seed? If you look at the seed catalogues, you will not find such a good selection as we have and you will certainly not see them at this price! Our donors send in seed from America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many of the European countries. They have been growing these plants for many years and most of them are enthusiastic hybridisers who have been very kind to send us some of their precious seeds. I want to thank them for collecting, cleaning, packing and sending them to us. Although I have sent out lots of orders this year, I hope that I can tempt all the members to start growing these fascinating plants from seed. Whatever your fancy, please consider having a try this year. Can I take this opportunity to remind the people who already grow them to save and send in their seed later in the year ready for the next seed exchange. Very many thanks to donors and customers for all their help in this my first year.

## **The British Iris Society 1922 - 2012**

### **90th Birthday Celebration**

June 2-3, 2012, RHS Wisley Garden, Surrey GU23 6QB

This will be your chance to celebrate the history of the BIS and to look to the future, so come and join us for a fantastic weekend. Meet old friends and make new ones and share your passion with other enthusiasts.

- \* Display on the history of the Society and famous Irisarians
- \* Historic Iris display by Sarah Cook and Anne Milner, NCCPG Collection Holders
- \* A Celebration of British bred Irises by Barry Emmerson and Simon Dodsworth
- \* Exhibition of Iris prints from the Lindley Library in the Glasshouse Gallery
- \* Displays, plants and photographs by the Groups of the Society  
and of course lots of irises for sale.

#### **Saturday June 2**

BIS Summer Show - All BIS members are eligible to exhibit at this Show, so even if you don't normally exhibit why not bring an item of Iris memorabilia along for the non-competitive display.

A series of short talks to include

Sarah Cook on "**Historic Irises**"

Denis Lobidel on "**The History of the Kent Group**"

Sidney Linnegar on "**Some of my early Iris Memories**"

Jim Gardiner RHS Head of Horticulture

#### **Sunday June 3**

Plant sales from nurseries and lectures.

Claire Austin on "**Irises Past and Present**"

Claire is the NCCPG National Collection holder of Bearded Irises, author of several iris books including *The Encyclopaedia of Irises*, a Chelsea Gold Medal Winner and she also finds time to run a Nursery specialising in irises, peonies and herbaceous plants. She has been growing irises for over 25 years and has a wealth of experience and knowledge to share with us.

Tony Hall on "**Rare and Unusual Iris Species from Kew**"

Tony was Manager of the Alpine & Bulb Unit at Kew Gardens for nearly 30 years and is now an Honorary Research Associate. He is renowned for his knowledge of iris species, particularly the Junos, and has lectured throughout the world. The talk will cover some of the more unusual irises that have been grown at Kew but will also focus on some of the areas of the gardens where these irises are grown or exhibited, as well as their cultivation requirements.

Terry Aitken on "**Adventures in Hybridising**"

Terry is from Washington State USA and is Past President of the AIS as well as a Past Editor of their *Bulletin*. He has been hybridising irises for over 35 years and has won American Iris Society medals in seven different classifications of irises. He is the recipient of the AIS Hybridisers Medal, AIS Gold Medal as well as the Foster Memorial plaque. This is Barbara and Terry's first visit to England, so we are very fortunate that he has agreed to share his extensive knowledge and enthusiasm with us.

Further details will be in the Spring Newsletter and on our Website.

## **In Memoriam**

### **Philip Allery**

Somehow, Philip always seems to have featured in the Group activities so it comes as a slight shock to find that he didn't actually figure in the membership lists until 1984. His detailed description of his garden in '86 made it clear that Japanese irises weren't his only interest. Indeed at that time his speciality was how best to grow some types of irises. And from this time for many years his regional reports for the West-Midlands area would contain helpful comments on the subject as well as detailed descriptions of shows and exhibitions. He had connections, too, with Japan and had accumulated a lot of interesting material particularly in connection with irises.

Then, too, he was always interested in raising plants from seed and investigated composts and manures to ensure that the seedlings had the best start in life. If a plant wasn't doing well then he would recommend that the grower should consider if it should be moved to somewhere that might give it a better chance. Always happy to share his knowledge and expertise; this was a field in which he really excelled.

With strong views on the judging standards both for plants and by humans, he was active in instituting assessment guides when *Ensata* irises were introduced into the Wisley Trials. This was partly because of Currier McEwen's enthusiasm for persuading us to take up growing them again on a serious scale in Britain. Philip was a most enthusiastic supporter and grew those plants on a surprising scale. Indeed, it was in the '80s that he started his own breeding programmes which resulted in his first registrations in '99. Entries in the trials were successful and he collected several AGMs.

In 1995 he stood down from the regional work to become Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the Group at a difficult time and was a very useful recruiter and publicity operator in any shows that could be reached. Sadly, he had to stand down in 2001 when his sight deteriorated so that he could no longer read efficiently nor drive around on visits.

Philip and Ruby were a magnificent combination: generous and enthusiastic hosts always ready for a party. Even after Ruby's death he did his best to keep an open house for friends. We have missed him greatly for a long time now. It was very sad that he had slowly to give up so many of the things that he enjoyed doing and finally to leave his beloved garden with all the memories it encapsulated.

*Anne Blanco White*

Philip died on January 18, 2012 in his 91st year. We first met Philip at the West & Midlands Iris Group's Silver Anniversary dinner and he was introduced to us as the "beardless man"! Obviously, this was not a reference to being clean shaven, but to his interest in irises which we, of course, shared. There were numerous visits to Aldridge where we were always made very welcome and given every encouragement to grow both *ensatas* and Siberians. I will never forget his "study"; it was just overflowing with papers, books in piles around the floor and endless box files, all containing something pertinent to iris. How he managed to find what he

needed always astonished me, but he did!

He had joined the GBI in 1984 when, in those days, it was the SS&J (Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris Group) and soon became immersed in the group. Firstly he took on the role of area co-ordinator for the West and Midlands Region. Then in 1994 he became Treasurer and Membership Secretary; for a while he was also Librarian, and, I think, even Seed Officer for a short time. It seemed that he would turn his hand to any position just to keep the group active and it was his sheer enthusiasm and determination that kept the group going through what were difficult times. Despite failing eyesight he edited the *Newsletter*, a task which he thoroughly enjoyed but could never decide when to stop. There was always another little snippet that he had to include and the Newsletters became rather erratic in their appearance. Philip thoroughly enjoyed the friendships that he made, both home and abroad, and he was an excellent ambassador for the group.

Philip lived in Walsall in the West Midlands and had a long suburban garden which was always full of something of interest as he was an avid seed sower. He had a particular interest in hybrids of *Iris ensata* and raised 'Aldridge Prelude', 'Aldridge Snow Maiden' and 'Aldridge Ruby', which he named after his late wife. Eventually maintaining the house and garden just became too much for him and he moved to Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire to be nearer his son, Martin and family. But this did not stop his interest, as only last autumn we had a phone call asking for irises, because he wanted to plant some in the communal gardens where he was living. His phone calls were always a cause of apprehension to me as he had the habit of ringing in very late in the evening. He was not an early riser and tended to work late into the night, but whenever I heard a phone late at night, when I'm inclined to think the worst has happened, I would rush to the phone only to hear a voice saying "Hello, it's your friend Philip here". I will miss those words and thank him for all he did for the group.

*Jill Whitehead*

When I took on the job of BIS Seed Distribution Officer, over 20 years ago, it was Philip who came to my rescue and gave me all the help I needed to get started. No-one else was available to explain what I should do or how to go about it but Philip very kindly came to see me. He talked over what I needed to do and how important it was to keep detailed records of orders and money received. He also gave me all the help I needed to request seed from donors, how to store seed and then package it ready for sending out. He has given me endless support over the years, and helped me to build up a large Seed Bank receiving and supplying seed all over the world.

He and Raymond Bomford used to enjoy a visit to see my garden and they would both bring me plants to grow. He had an immense amount of knowledge, which he had gained over his lifetime, and I found him extremely generous with this and his advice.

Philip was a very kind person, already missed by a lot of people, and the Group for Beardless Iris owe a great deal to his hard work and continual perseverance to keep it going when volunteers weren't coming forward to do the different jobs. I will always remember him for his help and kindness to me.

*Margaret Criddle*

## **Philip - The Tireless Worker for the Promotion of the GBI**

When my husband read Philip's plea for a new editor to save the demise of the *Newsletter* of the *Siberian, Spuria and Japanese Iris Group* he suggested that I should offer to help. Philip hated to have to give up being editor but his eyesight was failing quickly. He was one of the "Old School", the original perfect gentleman who didn't really approve of my more modern way of writing and probably thought it was filled with slang or even slovenly. And he was probably quite right.

Kindness was his middle name and he insisted we stay with him when we visited. I was concerned he would talk about nothing but the *Newsletter* and irises all evening and poor husband would be very bored. Nothing of the kind. He and husband got stuck into the *Old Pulteney* (whisky) we had taken him. They spent all evening agreeing and disagreeing about every football match and cricket match in the previous six months. Who was bored with that?

A trip round his garden in the morning and a good blether about irises, lilies and all the other treasures he grew had me listening intently to learn more. Philip's own hybridising programme was short lived because his failing sight was affecting the ability to pollinate successfully and he produced only a few hybrids.

Every new member got quite a surprise when they first joined as Philip expected them to write about themselves which he then printed in the newsletter, a sort of retrospective CV. But he could never do enough for you with gifts of seeds and plants. He worked tirelessly in promoting the Group for Beardless Irises and anyone who knew him, would agree, he had ways of making you grow irises.

*Brita Carson*

## **The Dykes Medal - Siberian Iris 'Stephen Wilcox' Jill Whitehead**

In July each year the British Iris Society's Trials Committee meet to decide on the Awards for the year. The Executive Committee then have a meeting to ratify these Awards. As secretary of the BIS, I attend only the second meeting, so when Sidney Linnegar, the Chairman of the Trials Committee, announced that the *Dykes Medal* would go to 'Stephen Wilcox', (named for Jennifer Hewitt's son-in-law), I was delighted for her. As GBI members will know this is Jennifer's second *Dykes Medal* for a Siberian, the first being for 'Peter Hewitt' in 2008. It is no easy feat to produce an iris to the high standard required to gain a *Dykes Medal*. The medal is named after a founder member of the BIS, William Rickatson Dykes, and is the highest BIS garden award. Any iris has to undergo at least six years of trials in a number of gardens. First, it must gain either an RHS Award of Garden Merit in a 3-year trial at Wisley, or a BIS Award of Garden Commendation which involves being grown for 3 years in at least 3 different gardens. Success in one or both of these trials qualifies the iris for a further 3 years in up to 7 gardens, by this stage the iris will have a proven track record as a good garden plant. Then, this prestigious award is only given if the iris is considered worthy of it, in fact it has not been awarded since it went to Jennifer in 2008. 'Stephen Wilcox' was registered in 2003 with a height of 68cm and is described as having rich lavender pink standards with a violet veined centre, style arms of lavender pink, falls are deep wine-red with a bright violet halo around a gold signal with dark veins. Lightly ruffled appearance with a slight sweet fragrance. Its parentage is ('Reddy Maid' x 'Harpwell Happiness') x 'Shall We Dance'. So congratulations Jennifer, and here's to the next one.

## **Why? What? How? Hybridising Beardless Irises. Jennifer Hewitt**

### ***Why be a hybridiser?***

It isn't something that appeals to everyone, and those who do hybridise have different reasons for doing it. But all of us grow plants, and arrange them in our gardens, to create something that pleases us, and hybridising takes the creative process a step further. Most of us grow at least some plants from seed and if that seed comes from the BIS or a similar society, there can be surprises amongst the seedlings. The person who wants exactly what it says on the packet is not going to fancy this but the more adventurous gardener will be pleased that the results of open pollination are assorted plants, and perhaps something really special will turn up. Then it is only a small step to making deliberate pollinations and creating something of one's own planning, perhaps something unique.

### ***What to hybridise?***

It can be almost anything in the plant world but of course we shall think in terms of irises. Reading through the BIS *Year Books*, AIS *Bulletins* and so on can be daunting, as it seems everything is being done already, but this is not the case, particularly among beardless irises. And because they originate from many different habitats and climates, there will surely be some you can grow in your garden, greenhouse or house. The majority are easy, or reasonably easy, to grow, and not only look good in themselves but combine well with other plants. They come in just about all possible colours, forms, and sizes of plant, and though some sections have had quite a lot of attention from hybridisers, there are still areas to be explored, developments to be made, while other groups have had little or no attention.

Space does not allow me to go into many possible paths that could be pursued - most groups need an article to themselves. But here are some suggestions just to start you thinking.

1. Developing *Iris ensata* (Japanese iris) or Pacific Coast iris cultivars which will grow on alkaline soils.
2. There are remontant or repeat-flowering cultivars in some sections but more of them, perhaps from more species, would be welcome.
3. Little has been done with the Evansias; what might result if *I. milesii* and *I. tectorum* were brought together? Or either of these with stored pollen from *I. japonica*? Hardy plants in a wider range of flower colour and size? Some sections of the genus have closely related members which produce fertile hybrid offspring from interspecies crosses, but does this apply to pairings among Evansias? If not, and the offspring are sterile and can progress no further can progress be made by converting diploids to tetraploids by using colchicine or other methods? Tomas Tamberg's success in producing fertile interspecies tetraploid hybrids shows that it is possible, though not always easy.
4. Tetraploid *I. laevigata*?
5. What potential may there be in *I. foetidissima*?

### ***How to Hybridise?***

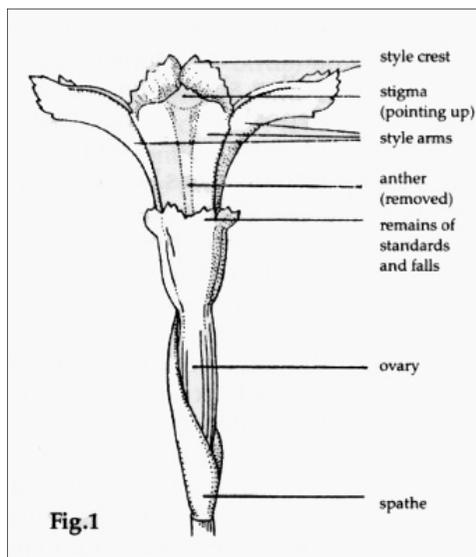
Faced with, say, a lily or daffodil, and an iris, and having a little knowledge of flower parts, anyone could be forgiven for finding the first two simpler to understand than

the iris, when looking for the reproductive parts. Iris anthers are in fact reasonably easy to identify but there's nothing that looks like a stigma so where do you put the pollen?

An iris flower has, as you know, three standards and three falls, and with beardless irises it is easy to see three more parts springing from the centre of the flower. These are the 'petaloid' styles, so called because they have become more elaborate than a simple pistil with stigmas at the top (as in a lily) and they do contribute greatly to the beauty of the flower, but you have to search for the stigma and it looks unlike any other. Fig 1 shows it, on the underside of the style just beneath the crest; usually in beardless irises it is a little triangular flap and may be a slightly different colour from the rest of the style. You put the pollen on its upper side, the one which is pressed up against the style when the flower is fresh. But that is not the first thing to be done.

You have probably noticed that your beardless irises readily set pods of seed without you doing anything, but bees have been busily collecting nectar from them so obviously they are doing the pollinating. Low fertility is rarely a problem among the beardless, either as pod or pollen parents, except in some man-made hybrids. Even then, it may be a physical problem in that, for example, the shape of the flowers has been developed to a point where the space between the styles and the hafts of the falls is too wide to be bridged by even a large bumblebee so pollen may be collected but it is not deposited. And seed is not set. But you cannot depend on this happening with any flower and it is essential that you get to your projected pod parent first and ensure that it only gets the pollen you want to use on it.

Fig. 1 shows a beardless iris flower (a Siberian, but others will look much the same) with the standards and falls removed and only the styles left attached. The anthers, which were under the styles have also been removed so that no accidental contamination by the flower's own pollen can take place. This will be a pod parent which, after being pollinated by the chosen male (pollen) parent, will develop seeds in the ovary if all goes well. I prefer this method of preparing the female parent as I am too clumsy to manage other methods without irreparably damaging the flower, but the doyen of Siberian and Japanese iris hybridising, Currier McEwen, opened the buds and removed the anthers, then tied the falls up in their original position so that bees cannot enter, and re-opened them to apply pollen



Line illustration by the late Pauline Dean.

then tied them up again. Another leading hybridiser, Marty Schafer, opens the bud and applies pollen to the unripe stigma and then ties the flower up again. For those who, unlike me, do not find their fingers turning into ten outsize thumbs, either method is satisfactory.

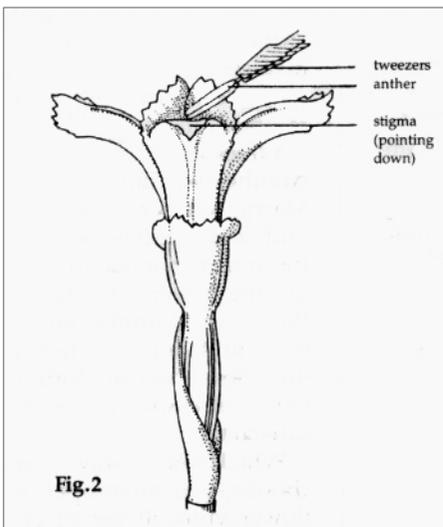
Whichever way you choose, you must open the flower yourself before bees can get in, which means when the bud is at the 'bulgy' stage. You can soon tell the right time by observing a few flowers. They are well up out of the spathe but not still so tightly furled that they are hard to open.

It is also advisable to collect the anthers you want to use from flowers which you open yourself, so that they will not have been contaminated by another pollen. When you take them off, they will be tightly closed, but a few hours in a shallow dish in a warm dry room will see them opening and the pollen grains become visible. Very occasionally the anthers will refuse to open, which means they have no, or very little pollen, in most cases. Gentle use of a pin's point may enable you to open the sacs. Do not put the dish on a sunny windowsill - it will be too hot and the pollen will dry out. Too much moisture, though, bursts the grains, which is why making crosses on a wet day is a waste of time. You may be able to devise some way of keeping wet off the flower without enclosing it in an airtight bag, but damp air will probably spoil the pollen. Very hot dry weather can also cause failure.

Pollen should stay viable for several days or more. Meanwhile, the stigma will become receptive a few hours after the flower would have opened naturally, and will remain so for 24-48 hours. When it bends downwards you may be able to see its upper surface, which was pressed to the underside of the style, glistening, and the pollen will adhere to the stickiness. But as Marty Schafer's experience shows, pollen can be put on the stigma before it is ripe and will 'take' in due course.

Fig. 2 shows the act of pollination; the anther is held in a pair of tweezers (I follow Cy Bartlett in finding philatelic tweezers much the best. If you have to use another kind, flatten the ends so that they grip gently and do not cut the anther). Apply it tenderly to the upper surface of the stigma and the pollen should be seen to be deposited. It may not be essential to pollinate all three stigmas but unless you have only a tiny amount of pollen, it is better to do so.

For safety's sake, stake the stem, and tie a label beneath the flower, having recorded the pod parent's name followed by x and the name of the pollen parent, which is the conventional way to do it. You may use the card labels with threads which shops used to use. I find that 4 inch (10cm) white plastic labels are



Line illustration by the late Pauline Dean

very suitable and not too heavy, and they can later be used in the seed pots. Writing on them in pencil lasts as well as, sometimes better than, any 'permanent' marker. Also, record the cross in your stud book.

It is not necessary to protect the flower against insect pollination; I have watched bees collecting nectar, hanging on to the remnant of the falls and going nowhere near the stigma. But you can enclose it in a paper or fabric bag (not polythene) if you wish. The other thing to remember is that if there is another flower in the same spathe and you are not pollinating it, it must be removed by snapping the stem below the ovary as soon as it fades.

The ovary should begin to swell in about 10-14 days and if it continues to swell evenly all should be well. Unfertilised ovaries usually wither after the flower drops but there can be "phantom pregnancies" which look promising for a while. In about three months, maybe less, the pod will begin to split at the top and you can see whitish or green seeds inside. It needs a little longer, until they are brown, for the seeds to ripen, but it seems that for some irises, e.g. spurias, seed germinates best if sown green.

Do not let the pods open so far that seed is spilt, but collect them together with their labels into an open cup or jar where they can dry off. You can remove the seeds from the pod then or later, as you wish. Sow in a separate pot for each cross and label the pot, though you may decide to sow direct into the garden but this has its risks. There are ways of treating the seed before sowing which may encourage germination and these are described in BIS Guide no. 2 *Raising Irises From Seed*, which has much helpful information on all kinds of iris seed.

If germination is poor in the first spring after sowing, you can extract the seedlings and keep the pot in hopes of more appearing later, though in my experience this is more trouble than it's worth. Line the seedlings out in the garden, label the rows and keep a map or note of which is which in case labels are moved by birds, animals, children, wind ...whatever. A few may flower in their second year but three years from the date of the cross is more likely and it can take longer than that. Then all you have to do is decide which ones to keep. Beardless irises usually produce few really poor flowers, but it is for the special ones you will be looking. These are the real reward for your care and patience, and make hybridising so enthralling.

*This article has been reprinted by kind permission of Jennifer and Berney Baughen who was editor of the 1986 Year Book where it was first printed.*

## **A Total Surprise**

### **Jill Whitehead**

Whist walking along a Cornish lane in February, we were stopped in our tracks and stared open mouthed at a little clump of *Iris tuberosa* flowering on top of a hedge. It was a total surprise to see such an iris in flower and where it was growing. This might seem strange to those who are not familiar with Cornish hedges, but they are a very distinctive feature of the South West.

Cornish hedges are stone-clad earth banks often topped with turf and sometimes trees are planted on top to increase the wind protection. They are never referred to as hedgerows or walls but always hedges. The type of stone used is obviously dependent on locality. Many of these hedges are very ancient and all show a great diversity of plants and plant-life. They are a unique man-made wildlife refuge. So if you think about it, the iris was really growing in a raised bed with a rich diversity of both wild and cultivated plants to keep it company. To me these hedges help to make Cornwall special and are an absolute joy to walk along. There is always something to admire when walking through the fields and along the narrow winding lanes. Traditionally the hedges were planted with wild flowers but, over time, cultivated flowers have colonised the routes too. The shrubs and trees have become wind-sculptured adding their own magic. One of the footpaths we followed was on top of a hedge, which was great, no mud and no cattle, they were all safely contained in the field below us.

*Iris tuberosa* must suffer a personality complex as over the years it has been in and out of the Iris family although it has always stayed as a close relation. It is now firmly included in the family but is still often referred to *Hermodactylus tuberosus*, which may be the name you are most familiar with. This name refers to the finger-like tuberous roots and of course to Hermes, messenger of the Gods. It is also known as Widow iris, I suppose because of its rather sombre colouring and as Snake's Head iris, a reference to the colour and the flowers, almost funnel shaped, which are supposed to resemble a reptile's mouth. Native to the Mediterranean region it seems to have a wide geographical spread, which suggests that it is a fairly ancient iris.

*Iris tuberosa* was introduced into gardens in the 1750s, and references can be found in older books on cottage gardens, although I wouldn't immediately think of it as a cottage garden plant. It is a close cousin of the *reticulata* group with a very similar leaf, square in cross section and rather long and narrow. Flowering height is usually about 30cm, the stems bearing a single solitary flower of an olive-green colouring with black, velvety purple falls. Occasionally there is also a mix of yellow or bright green streaks. To my eyes it is a very subtle combination, graceful and elegant. Gerard, the herbalist called the flowers "goose-turd" green, he certainly had an original way of expressing colours. I think it is the distinctive colouring that appeals and because it flowers early in the year, lifts the gloom of the dreary, nondescript days before spring arrives. Perhaps if it flowered later it would not have the same appeal. It has a delicate fragrance which intensifies in warmth, so good for flower arranging. Margery Fish notes "that arrangements in which they are used always get good marks". She also mentions that it grows well in thin grassy places, even with a little shade, so perhaps this implies that it is poor soil and dryness in summer which is important. Although checking other bulb books, sun seems to be the important factor with a hot dry dormant period.

It dies down after flowering and as it is a winter growing iris, plant in autumn. The leaves are up before Christmas and don't seem to be damaged by cold, but the flowers would benefit from some shelter from harsh spring winds.

There is another reason for my admiration and that is because I cannot grow it successfully, well not yet anyway. You know what gardeners are like, always wanting to grow what they cannot and I am no exception. It certainly does not like our heavy clay, but having seen it growing in Cornwall, I have the incentive to try again. Especially after reading Sir Michael Foster who writes, "in my garden it multiplies rapidly, and, indeed, I find difficulty in getting rid of it from any place to which it has been planted", if only that was true for me.

## **Interspecies and Interseries Crosses of Beardless Irises** **Brita Carson**

Lech Komarnicki has written an extensive publication on growing irises in Poland for members of the Middle European Iris Society, countries with a colder climate. Lech was persuaded to translate it into English and Anne has enjoyed editing it with him. Alun has put it on the website of the BIS. It is very comprehensive and would be too long to include in the *Review* but is easily found online and makes very interesting reading. Lech pays tribute to Tomas Tamberg for inspiring him to start making these way-out crosses and then encouraging him to continue. Some of you may have been fortunate to hear the talk Tomas gave at the AGM but if not, his talk can be read in the 2011 *Year Book*, titled "New Hybrids Forever". Lech has made many interspecies and interseries crosses and even species crossed with series. He records his results in an honest manner, admitting any failures alongside the successes. He hasn't recorded results of crosses of species from the same series that he thinks are too obvious, e.g. two different species of Californicae or two different Sino-Siberians.

Lech calls some of them "wide" crosses, nearer impossible I would have thought, but the results he has got will confront the critics with plants that show they have blood from both parents. This is important to prove that the cross actually happened. Hybridising a plant from a series with a species just doesn't sound as if it will work and Lech admits that although there are all sorts of reports of wide crosses there are few of these recorded in the Check Lists, few plants in existence and even fewer photographs.

The translation needs to be read a few times to get to know the names that he has worked out for these crosses. In fact he reckons the breeder is allowed to make up the combination-adjective to describe the finished plant. These names become confusing and I hope if plants become readily available then they will be simplified e.g. *Verbitosa* is (*I. versicolor* x tetra *Sibtosa* (**Sibiricae** x *I. setosa*)). At least it is possible to tell which is the mother or pod parent because it is at the beginning e.g. *Sibtosa* - (**Sibiricae** x *I setosa*) with the exception of *Calsib* or *Calsibe* which was the first crossed and named species and it is the Siberian that is the mother plant with pollen from the Californian.

It makes fascinating reading and you can feel the enthusiasm that Lech has for the challenges of hybridising interspecies and interseries. It is early days yet but soon, I'm sure, the flowers will have the wow factor. Everyone could have a try at doing something similar and in Tomas's words make "New Hybrids Forever".

## **Losing My Heart to Species**

**Tom Dillard, Arizona**

I have always had an appreciation for species - not only Louisianas iris species, but the species forms of many plants. There is something magical about the way plants evolved on their own. I first noticed this phenomenon with daylilies, but over time I have come to appreciate many other garden plants because of their simplicity.

With Louisiana irises, I am especially taken with the species. I like the sparseness found in the species. The flowers of the species, unlike the modern cultivars, evolved to attract pollinators. Humans tend to choose flowers that are large and showy to the eye; insects choose the flowers that get their attention - and provide a reward of nectar.

Like a beautiful but understated woman, species Louisiana irises are beautiful without having to be tarted up with ruffles, flashy colours, and substance so great that the flower would be at home in a wax museum. Sure, I like flowers that have substance, but I also like the ones that flutter in the wind; I sometimes like the falls to actually hang down enough that the flower can be seen from some vantage point other than looking down on it.

For some years now, I have been seeking out Louisiana species. Once, years ago, I came across a large stand of *Iris fulva* growing in a wooded area near Little Rock. These plants were blooming, throwing up stalks in defiance of the gloomy shade. That was the first large wild stand of Louisiana irises I had ever seen, and I was fascinated by the variety of colours, heights, flower forms, and foliage characteristics.

Right now, my favourite species - based on flowering last spring - is a clump of *I. nelsonii*. I believe I purchased this several years ago from Iris City Gardens near Nashville, Tennessee. It is a tall robust clump. I can't locate any pictures of the clump in flower - but I am including a recent image of it in December. It seems to make a tight clump, without the nomadic tendencies of many Louisiana irises.

I am also keen on *I. brevicaulis*. I like the blue flowers, though they do tend to bloom on short stalks. *I. brevicaulis* blooms about two weeks later than the other species in my garden, which makes for a nice continuation of the season. This species does have a tendency to grow outward from the centre of the clump, forming a circle over time.

Over the past few years, I have tried to acquire the various *I. fulva* variants. Ken Durio's 'Total's Swamp Red' (2004) was collected from a swamp near Abbeville, La. because of its intense red colouring. The flower does have a good red colour, but the plant has not been robust in my garden.

Bois d'Arc Iris Garden offers a variety of species, including a couple of *I. fulva* which look so good in the on-line catalogue. My specimens should bloom for the first time this spring.

This past summer I was able to add two species from the garden of Jeff Weeks in Denham Springs, La. Gary Babin of Baton Rouge generously sent me several rhizomes of an *I. brevicaulis* from his garden. I am anxious for May to get here so I can see these gift plants bloom for the first time.

*Editor - This is reprinted by kind permission of the editor and author, Tom Dillard. It was first printed in the Fleur de Lis, Winter 2011.*

## PCIs – 2011. Waiting for the Penny to Drop Philip Jones

In the past few months I have changed my way of thinking about how I grow PCIs. For years I have tended to grow them among other plants with grass-like tendencies. Varieties of *Deschampsia*, *Miscanthus*, *Molinia* and *Panicum* and also daylilies and *Dierama* have been tried and tested. It seemed obvious that grass-like plants would look well together and that after they had finished flowering some of the rather unkempt examples of the PCIs would blend in with these other plants and not draw too much attention to themselves.

The penny has dropped and I realise now this is not the right approach. An untidy ruffian of a grass-like plant stands out in the midst of an assembly of grassy smoothies. It does not blend into the background but looks an eyesore - the unwanted guest. Its only chance of passing unnoticed would be in the company of a crowd of other horticultural ruffians. But there is another way - the way of supporting contrast. Here the grass-like PCI has been given a positive part to play. It is not trying to hide or pass unnoticed but rather has found itself a supporting role. Its untidy grass-like features point towards other plants that are different in size and shape. These would be taller than the irises and - unlike the irises - would not spread themselves about. I think these taller plants also need to have "see through" foliage.

If there were evergreen plants or shrubs forming a dense background the untidiness of the irises, playing centre stage, would hold our attention. And if the irises were to be grown among other evergreens of similar size our irises would no longer be playing a supporting role - there would simply be two kinds of evergreen plants. During the winter months this could be pleasing if there was a big contrast between the darkness and lightness and also neatness and untidiness of the different foliage of the respective plants. But I am looking for something more obvious and easier to achieve.

The perennial plants are deciduous and they die back in the winter. From spring into summer they grow taller than the irises and some of them will flower in autumn.

This idea fell into my lap in September when I was attending an extraordinary lecture on every iris on earth presented by Lady Christine Skelmersdale at the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. In the interval I was attracted to a particularly delightful form of autumn anemone - it was called *Anemone x hybrida* 'Robustissima' - courtesy of Beryl MacNaughton's *MacPlants*. Having bought it I wondered where to put it - I am running out of space. It suddenly dawned on me that it would look good with the PCIs after they had flowered. The idea fell into my lap - the penny had dropped.

It is important to grow a few similar plants together to give the desired effect. And I think that there should be some variations of shades of foliage in the plants themselves. This should not be too difficult with the autumn anemones. I also think I need smaller plants with anemone-type foliage; *Anemonopsis* springs to mind. It is important to try to establish connections between tall and small - the sort of things the artist would add to a painting in order to bring the different parts together. After consulting my horticultural bible - Graham Stuart Thomas's *Perennial Garden Plants* with the author's own remarkable illustrations - I am tempted to try *Aconitum*, *Polemonium* and *Cimicifuga*. I am on the look-out for

other candidates that are taller than the irises with a branch and foliage structure similar to the autumn anemones.

There are all sorts of other plants - like the American lilies which I try to grow with varying success - that can be added once the basic structure has been established. I have also replanted some of the "not so untidy" PCIs in the mixed beds to see how they contrast with other plants, particularly with the darker forms of *Cimicifuga* which I already have.

Early this year I bought hybrid PCI seed from as many different sources as I could find. I have now three hundred seedlings but they are all rather small and only a few are likely to flower next year. I also have fifty more mature plants from last year which will flower next May. This is all part of an investigation to find out what kind of PCIs are being used by horticultural organisations and seed suppliers. For example, I get the impression that the picture of PCIs in the seed catalogue of *Thompson and Morgan* is pretty much the same as it was in 1976. I am not complaining about this because these are the hybrids that appeal most to me. I like the gentle shades of the early hybrids, but I do not expect that many of my present seedlings will fall into this category. This is because of the great influence of the American hybridisers in the past twenty years who have gone in search of much stronger colours and colour combinations and formations.

I am also growing PCI species. Here the problem is getting the seed. Strange to say the most attractive form - *Iris innominata* - is difficult to get hold of, at least in its many variations. In Victor Cohen's *Guide to the Pacific Coast Irises* he writes:

"*Iris innominata* is probably the most attractive species in the *Californicae*, and it has achieved tremendous popularity in a comparatively short space of time. In its best known form from the Rogue River area of south-western Oregon, it produces brilliant, deep golden flowers but it has a much wider range of colour than was at first assumed; from pale cream and apricot, through beige, buff and various shades of yellow to a rich, deep orange, and from orchid pink to a deep blue purple. Many of these flowers are gorgeously veined and netted with burnt sienna, red, or purple lines."

Beth Chatto used to have plants of some of these variations but they are no longer available. I can't think of any reason why these plants or the seed from them should be impossible to find. You would think that there must be someone in North America who would have had the inclination to bring these various examples of the most beautiful of the *Californicae* together as a matter of national horticultural pride. Perhaps I am not looking in the right place.

It is not difficult to get hold of old seed of *Iris douglasiana* and *Iris tenax* gathered from different named sources from the Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises. Also *Iris bracteata* is not hard to find but there is not much of *Iris innominata*, particularly the variations mentioned above. I still have a couple of plants of *Iris purdyi* which I got from Brita a couple of years ago. They should flower this year.

If I had taken up this quest for the species two years ago I would possibly have discovered *Northwest Native Seed* which unfortunately has stopped trading. Until recently it listed *Iris hartwegii* ssp. *hartwegii*, *Iris hartwegii* ssp. *pinetorum*, *Iris macrosiphon*, *Iris purdyi*, *Iris tenuissima* ssp. *purdyformis* and *Iris tenuissima* ssp. *tenuissima*. It also gave the locations and habitat where the seed was gathered. If anyone knows of a source of seed for these or other PCI species I would be very happy to be pointed in the right direction in 2012.

## ***Sol Invictus* – the Unconquered Sun, Alun Whitehead**

Wasn't that a funny year? Our first charity opening in April and we sell out of ice cream as if it had been July. Jill was trying out another new recipe and it all vanished. Did this bode well for our Beardless Iris Day? We thought we had picked a safe date, but of course the Siberians were on their last legs by that stage, most were over. All the ingredients were there for disaster, but no, everyone enjoyed it, with some asking whether they could book for next year. I personally found it very relaxing. When things go wrong and are beyond recovery, you can only sit back and relax. Did I tell you about a speaker phoning up late the night before saying that the USB drive containing his talk was corrupted and impossible to replace before he began talking the next morning... those who weren't there will just have to wonder.

In that brief period between March and May that substituted for the normal season, my lasting impression was colour. I loved the ranks of *Crocus* planted *en masse* in grass at Wisley with their short verticals of purple and white, offset with the occasional deep yellow. I'm sure you will see have seen this type of planting in other gardens for spring effect, but they seemed more pristine this year. After the cold winter which killed so many of the Pacific hybrids in pots, it was good to see 'Wisley Sunrise', (awaiting registration), unscathed, growing in the Portsmouth Field. This milky yellow with a red thumbprint, raised by Jim Gardiner, catches the eye from a great distance and is certainly colourful. The flowers were attractive for several weeks promising a good future. There were others such as the Juno *Iris aucheri* in the Alpine House - always a delight in the spring. But was it just colour that made the memory?

Another thing that struck me during the season was the number of leading plantsmen saying that "we should only be growing the best plants". Initially this sounds like a self-evident truth, but I remember the late Christopher Lloyd on a TV programme once talking about an *Aquilegia* Trial and saying that one cultivar was awarded an AGM because its stems were upright and held its flowers well, but another one wasn't because the stems drooped. My immediate thought was that you could use them in different ways. The quirky softer effect of the reject could not be achieved by the more rigid and so, "best" begs the question; "best for what?"

Let's follow the logic to the iris Trials. Take colour for instance. There is a natural tendency for stronger colours predominate. Any group of seedlings is likely to produce a small number that stand out. Likewise, there will be a few in a Trial which draw the eye and form a pleasing picture in themselves and deserve the awards. Should we throw the rest away? Think of the artist; sometimes a limited palette can produce something special, but if you went to the Tate Gallery and only saw paintings produced from one limited palette, it would soon become tedious. Those less striking colours can be used to good effect, just as green is essential in the garden to form a backdrop to the flowers.

Another reason for marking down an iris in a Trial is poor substance. Have you noticed how the whites in the garden stand out? Several years ago, at an iris lecture, the comment was made that nurseries should not be selling irises whose flowers could not stand up to a bit of rain. The one that came to my mind at the time was *I. ensata* 'Eden's Charm', a seedling from a Dutch firm which I don't think was ever registered. The delicacy of the petals certainly caught the light, sparkling out from the rest, and argument about not being weather resistant fell on deaf ears to

the lady who fell in love with it. So a rain storm ruins one set of flowers, the weather is usually variable enough for a later set to bask in sunshine. If you think about the old psychological trio: expectation→ frustration→ happiness, this type of flower is likely to produce more joy than one of the dependable best.

During the year, a plantswoman visited us and liked the way the falls on one of the *Spurias* tucked under. This is another fault and in talks we usually criticise *I. orientalis* for this and suggest the better behaved 'Wealden Elegance'. However, for this lady the fault was a charming feature. Another visitor was drawn to the Siberian 'Primrose Cream' which I tend to associate with a scruffy habit, but despite it looking no better than usual, the visitor was enthralled.

Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water, but we need to keep Trials in perspective. We all want to know which plants grow well and can be relied upon. However, gardening is a celebration and delight in diversity and I hope it never changes.

It is only when writing this (January) that I became aware of what really made the year special. This duller mild winter was in stark contrast to the bitter days of last winter with its pristine white snow, clear blue skies and glorious sunshine. During the iris season, it was the play of light through the petals which amazed and fascinated and you have to admit the structure of the iris is perfect for this. The standards cast shadows, the petals allow light through in varying amounts and there is always the hollow in the centre, all giving different graduations of colour. If you look at the photos on the CD you might think they are of irises, but look at the sun's rays and the play of light and shadow. Siberian 'Osborne's Grey' flowered for us for the first time and look at how the thin petals glow. Look at how the reliable Dutch 'Apollo' is brought to life by the sun. The more subtle colouring of Bob Hollingworth's Siberian 'Graceful Ghost' was a photographer's dream and the longer flowering period meant there were plenty of opportunities, but how much less interesting it would be without that touch of sunshine.

Now perhaps you can understand the odd title of the article more clearly. Like our favourite irises, I seem to have become a devoted follower of *Sol Invictus*, the unconquered sun.

### **Long Toms or tall black plastic pots**

Often Supermarkets have multiples of tall black plastic pots for sale. They are usually in bundles of 5 or 10 and fairly cheap because they are still wet and have been used for displaying flowers in the shop. Use a standard hand held drill with a large bit of a kind that looks a little like a paddle with a longish point at the end. Tape the spot to give some grip for the drill and, on a slow setting, gently engage with the plastic and control the downward pressure without breaking the thin plastic.

They won't last for years but are very useful for those irises that have a deep root system, like some of the water irises.

**Bulbous Irises - Sir Michael Foster  
Jill Whitehead**

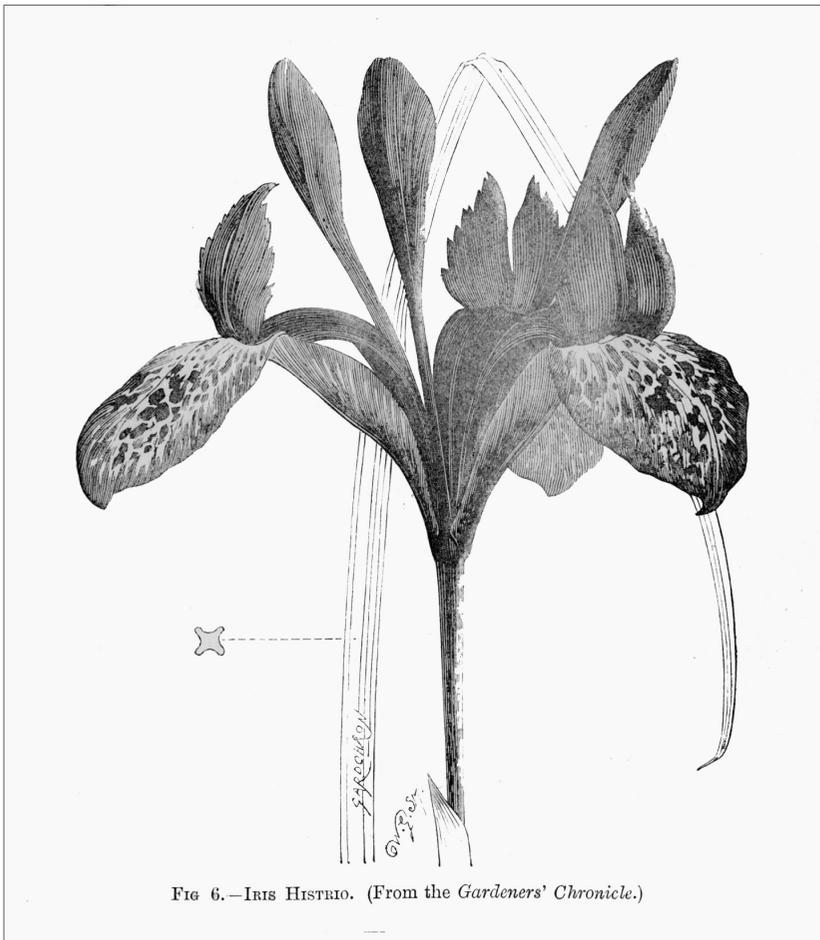


It was after Sidney Linnegar's informative talk at the GBI day that I started thinking more about bulbous irises and found the amazing publication by Sir Michael Foster. This was published in 1892 by the RHS and is based on a lecture that he gave to RHS Fellows in May that year. (At that time it would have cost you 2s. 6d if you were a Fellow and double that if not. It contains about 85 pages of detailed descriptions, illustrated by delightful woodcuts and drawings done by two of Foster's friends, Mr Caparne and a Mr Wilson.)

He starts by setting the ground rules, "I propose to treat the subject as much as possible from a gardener's point of view". He certainly uses the term "bulbous" quite loosely as a gardener might rather than a botanist but that is to our benefit. Obviously, the *reticulatas* are covered in some detail but also included are *Sisyrinchium*, English and Dutch Iris, and of course Junos. The first section gives the description and some anecdotal notes, hints and tips on growing conditions and raising

from seed where appropriate. The second part is a list of species, a more formal account with a key to identification. It also includes an outline drawing for each species, showing the shape of the fall, standard and style if they were spread out. The advertisements themselves are amusing, you could buy a "Portable Rustic Summerhouse" for £8, delivered free in London and the suburbs or carriage paid to purchaser's nearest railway station - how's that for a bargain!

Apart from the adverts, I was fascinated by the woodcuts. How different publishing would have been in those days, but more to the point that this lecture was given and then published. Perhaps I ought to suggest to the RHS that they reinstate that tradition, at least those of us who don't live in the South East or who are not in close proximity to a RHS garden, would benefit more from our membership. Equally so, the BIS and GBI have both had some excellent lectures recently and perhaps we should also do the same, it certainly would improve communication, and help to spread the word.



## News from other Publications

### Brita Carson

#### Siberians

This has been an excellent year for Siberian Irises. Jennifer has won a *Dykes Medal* for her striking 'Stephen Wilcox' (see page 12) and one of my favourite irises has won the *Morgan-Wood Medal*. 'Banish Misfortune' introduced by Marty Schafer and Jan Sacks has the colours that I find simply lovely. These colour combinations have always dominated my wardrobe and have even crept into various rooms in the house. I find here in Scotland, 'Banish Misfortune', is just as desirable as it fades and the colours soften. The plant is tall with a wonderful presence and stature but not at all stiff or solid. The delicate looking flowers sit high above the leaves and move with charming gracefulness. Its parentage is 'Snow Prince' (a white *I. sibirica*) and one of their yellow seedlings. The cross was made in 1992 and in 10 years it has gained the *Morgan-Wood Medal* which is the highest accolade to be given to an American Siberian.

Another introduction, using 'Banish Misfortune' as the pollen parent, is 'So Van Gogh' (Schafer/Sacks 2005), which has purple standards and yellow falls and now they have a line of new Siberians continuing in the yellow theme. Jan and Marty have won countless awards and medals over the years but two recent wins, for the *Franklin-Cook Cup*, came with 'Tree of Songs' in 2010 and last year, 'Ginger Twist'. This cup is chosen by those people attending the AIS National Convention to represent the best iris introduction by a guest hybridiser. This is usually won by a bearded iris so it means the Siberians were very special. I would put my money on both of these two for the next *Morgan-Wood Medals*.

#### Ensatas

*The Payne Medal* was won by Bob Bauer and John Coble with 'Lake Effect', a 6 - falls ensata in a beautiful shade of blue with a yellow signal and pretty light blue edging of the petals. This medal is awarded to the best Japanese Iris introduction and a photo of it can be found on the website of the Society for Japanese Irises. It is interesting to see that so many of the winning introductions these days, have six falls. Looking through the Ensata Gardens catalogue of Bob and John the majority are 6-falls with a few either 9 or 12-falls but hardly any 3 falls.

To see more spectacular ensatas, look at Terry Aitken's website. He is bound to show some of these in his talk at the 90th Birthday Celebration. Look up the website - Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden, taking care to include "Aitken". Terry has produced hybrids in almost every iris category, bearded as well as beardless. Inside on the front cover is 'Red Tessa', a beautiful ensata, in a delicious colour.

#### Spurias

On reading the most recent publication of the *Spuria News* from the American Spuria Iris Society I came across some information that might help other members to become really interested in spurias. First of all Brad Kasperek, from northern Utah, and then some more help from Dave Niswonger.

"Once again for at least the 1000th time I relearned the hard way that if I think I know what I'm doing—I probably don't. These delusions exist only because I wasn't smart enough to ask the right questions when I should have. After my experience with hybridising bearded irises I assumed hybridising

spurias would be similar - wrong! It seems that every technique or process I used with bearded irises was just far enough off the mark to impede my success with spurias in both producing seed and getting it to germinate.

Seed germination has been the bane of my spuria hybridising and I've tried everything I could think of to improve my results, but I've planted the seeds in POTS. Last year, *Iris*, the goddess of the rainbow must have smiled on my hybridising efforts because we harvested almost 21,000 spuria seeds which was a huge increase over all other years. So I quickly created a convoluted plan to test several new methods of improving germination and producing seedlings large enough to transplant by mid May. The crosses with the highest number of seeds were split into 3 groups: green seed to freeze, green seed to chill and dried seed to soak at the end of December. On January 2-3 we potted these seeds up in 77 x 2 gal pots and stored them in my bedroom to await their later transfer to the greenhouse."

*Brad will let us know what his results are but meantime it is still possible to order seed from Janet to sow this year.*

Brad then thought he would ask Dave Niswonger if he had any ideas on how he could improve his germination problems. If you are a BIS member you will have seen the wonderful hybrids in the *Year Book* that Dave has introduced recently. Dave passed on this advice.

"The most important factor affecting spuria seed germination is how many soil particles are in direct contact with the seed."

Brad continues,

"Thus he (Dave) plants his seed in a seed bed made of loamy soil without any added peat moss or other organic material and gets around 75% germination. Incorporating organic material would reduce germination by reducing the seed-to-soil contact. Additionally, he said to NEVER POT the seeds up because potting mixes have very poor soil-to-seed contact! Now why didn't I ask him for this advice six years ago. As "they" say—the only stupid question is the one not asked.

One thing I'm certain of is the geographical location, temperature zone, length of growing season and the amount, form and timing of precipitation makes an enormous difference in the culture of spurias whether gardening or hybridising. It's my impression that this sort of information isn't adequately documented or mentioned in articles or on our website. Do you believe this information would be valuable if someone would try to compile it?

Darol Jurn, the editor of the Newsletter also added his experience of planting 36 seeds in a custom planting mix of 50% soil and 50% composted material and got 100% germination.

*With the amount of seed that Brad has to sow I fear that any methods of ours will be small beer but I do get good germination using a soil based JI seed compost. I don't have many problems getting the seed to germinate but I do have endless problems transplanting and cultivating them successfully. Please email me with your experiences and I will pass them on to Brad.*

## **To Plant or Not to Plant**

### **Brian Wendel**

After careful planning for potential Siberian crosses, I had especially wanted to cross 'Esther C.D.M.' to 'Percheron'. However, the end of the crossing season found 'Mesa Pearl' and 'Seneca Cloudpuff' available. 'Mesa Pearl' carries the beautiful genes of 'Esther C.D.M.' for I wanted its beautiful tailored form. Of the 37 crosses made in 2000 and the resulting seedlings only two seedlings from the above cross remain. Three seedlings resulted from the cross and each developed into a nice clump and had maiden bloom in 2002.

00-5 - a nice little clump with two bloom stalks with clear blue violet flowers with a clear red blush on the falls with a few little white dashes with the desired tailored form of 'Esther C.D.M.' I thought I really liked this one. Yet I wondered if it didn't look too much like its grandparent, 'Temper Tantrum'.

00-5A - a nice little clump with five bloom stalks and nice blue veined flowers with rounded form just like 'Seneca Blue Rose'. That was too bad.

00-5B - a nice clump with two bloom stalks of the ugliest white flowers, that you ever might see, was abruptly departed from the garden post haste.

00-5 and 00-5A were transplanted two years later and forgotten about for a few seasons.

Then at some point, I sent a start of each seedling to Jill Copeland for her evaluation. Jill must have liked them or was at least kind enough to send them on to some Michigan regional or Siberian event where they would grow and bloom. 00-5 did manage to grow on and catch the eye, and intrigue one of the premier Siberian Iris hybridisers namely Bob Hollingworth. You wouldn't believe how honoured and humbled I felt when he emailed to tell me how well he liked 00-5 and asked for my permission to use it for hybridising purposes. He also pointed out that 00-5 had just the opposite colour combination of 'Temper Tantrum'. He had also increased it enough that it could be distributed to the four display gardens for the 2012 Siberian/Species convention. In a previous letter, he had also encouraged the use of 'Mesa Pearl' in hybridising. He also encouraged me to register and name it.

Coming up with a proper name was not such an easy endeavour. I had been reading Paolini's series about Eragon and his lovely blue dragoness named Saphira. I thought that the lovely blue violet colour of the iris matched, and that when she breathed fire, her maw would probably have a nice red blush around it. Thus 'Blushing Saphira' seemed a most proper name for this beautifully tailored clear blue violet Siberian Iris with the red flushed falls. Many thanks to Jill and Bob for their encouragement with this iris for it might have been one that I would have just grown in my garden. I was really touched and honoured when Bob had included a picture of 'Blushing Saphira' in his Siberian Iris Training programme at the fall 2010 regional in Fort Wayne.

So when you have just three seedlings from a cross, plant them and you just might also have something worth sharing with the Iris world.

*This is reprinted by kind permission of the author, Brian Wendel and Brock Heilman, the editor of the AIS Region 6 Newsletter. It was first published in the Summer 2011 edition and covers Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.*

## **A new *Phytophthora* sp. causing basal rot on Japanese Iris**

More and more problems are arising throughout the world not only with the movement of people and plants but also perhaps with global warming. Lots of pathogens are finding their way into different countries. This isn't here yet but may well come in time. The following has been emailed to Anne:-

Japanese iris (*Iris ensata* var. *ensata*) is a popular flowering plant that is widely cultivated in Japan. Recently, a disease causing basal rot accompanying initial yellowing of a central leaf on the plants, has occurred in many iris gardens. These symptoms are visible from the early growing season until the flowering stage in wet cultivation conditions. Homothallic *Phytophthora* sp. was first isolated with high frequency from diseased plants collected at Suigō Sawara Aquatic Botanical Garden in Chiba prefecture, Japan. Typical symptoms developed on the plants when inoculated by root dipping in water containing cultured agar pieces of the fungus for 20–24 hr before transplantation to soil. The same fungus was recovered from the diseased tissues. The fungus formed oogonia with paragnous antheridia, oospores turning golden brown when aging, and non-papillate zoosporangia. Sequence analyses of rDNA-ITS region, beta-tubulin gene, and elongation factor 1 alpha gene revealed that the isolate showed similar homology with *Phytophthora europaea*. Its morphological and culturing characteristics (Jung et al., 2002) were almost coincident with those of the iris isolate. The isolate, however, was clearly distinct from *P. europaea* in phylogenetic trees. It was also found that the same disease caused by the clonal fungus was widely developed in Japan. We concluded that *Phytophthora* sp. isolated from Japanese iris differs from other known species in genetic characters and host plants.

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B Suigō Sawara Aquatic Botanical Garden, 1837-2 Ōgijima, Katori-shi, Chiba 287-0801, Japan  
C Chiba Pest Management Center, 804 Daizenno, Midori-ku, Ciba 266-0006, Japan

A look at *Phytophthora* on Wikipedia shows how we have already had plant pathogens causing total destruction of the host plant. They are mainly plant specific so only attack one species like *Phytophthora infestans* caused the devastation of the potatoes in Ireland.

One that is familiar to us today is the one that causes sudden oak death but many other ornamentals can suffer death by root rot.

## News from the Southeast Olga Wells

Another strange year weather-wise and not an entirely happy one for the beardless irises. While a lot of the country has had large amounts of rain the southeast has been pretty dry. The Siberians in particular have mostly, not all, grown badly, some of them to only in the region of half their normal height. In my garden the earlier flowering ones bloomed as they usually would but the later varieties had bloom that was sparse in some cases. The ones in the shadier areas on the whole did better. On the allotment where there is absolutely no shade they varied again and some of the tetraploids like 'Stephen Wilcox', 'My First Kiss' and 'Wealden Nocturne' were their usual rumbustious selves; most of the others were rather stunted. Another interesting phenomenon was that some that flowered well set their usual prolific amounts of seed while other whole clumps flowered well but produced absolutely no seed whatsoever. I put most of this down to lack of water rather than lack of bees. I could have let the hose soak the ground for hours. My preferred philosophy is not to water the ground like this. (Perhaps it is just being lazy.) I'm afraid the plants have to live with what they are sent from the sky and this, if these weather patterns continue, might mean growing more bearded iris and fewer Siberians. I hope that won't be the case.

The spurias varied in the same way as well, although they all grew to their normal height. Maybe some of them could just do with replanting in fresh soil. Many plants like their beds remade. One or two that have lurked about for years, 'Janice Chesnik' and 'Falcon's Crest' in particular, suddenly decided to put up some blooms. Again, not huge amounts of seed apart from 'Wealden Canary' which produced masses.

The Pacific Coast hybrids did surprisingly well. They get a lot of competition from other plants but they consistently threw up flowering spikes. Most of them grow in dappled shade in the garden. The few on the allotment were reasonable but the flowering period was quickly past; again virtually no seed. A replant of 'Tumbler's Hill' suddenly decided to grow away, which was a bonus. I had thought it was going to die out but, fortunately for this plant, it grows near the runner beans and had regular buckets of water thrown over it from the greenhouse tanks, which are alongside. All of which bears out, I think, what I said earlier. It would be good here in Kent if next year we could get regular amounts of rain, overnight if possible please.

I don't know if the dry weather has had anything to do with it but sometimes I get interesting caterpillars on the allotment; one was the elephant hawk moth. Another specimen was busy eating my bearded iris leaves and I am not really sure what it was although some of the Kent Group were put to the task of identifying it and came up with possible names. This year I found what I think is a strawberry spider up there. It followed me along the bed wherever I was weeding. Was this to do with the activity going on or was I stealing its possible home, which apparently are rolled up leaves? A few days later I found another one in the garden several miles away from the first. I think they would be better named "mini tomato" spiders as that was the colour, shape and size of it.

## Photo Credits

### Front Cover

Siberian 'Stephen Wilcox' (Jennifer Hewitt)  
Dykes Medal Winner 2011. Photo © Stephen Wilcox

### Inside Front Cover

*I. ensata* 'Red Tessa' one of the beautiful Japanese hybrids that Terry Aitken has produced. Photos © Terry Aitken

The Siberian Field at Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden, Photo © Terry Aitken

### Back Cover

One of the few ensatas that Phillip Allery was able to produce before his eyesight failed.

### Inside Back Cover

Siberian 'Blushing Saphira', seedling 00-5, which Brian Wendel decided to send for assessment. Photo © Brian Wendel

Unusual caterpillar and spider found by Olga. Email any name suggestions to Olga, address on page 32. Photos © Olga Wells

*Rhyssa persuasoria*, one of the giant Ichneumonidae the sabre wasps which uses its ovipositor to lay its eggs in wood. I found it climbing up the laundry window and its life was in the balance. It had to wait until Alun found out if he was a friend or foe. They are parasites that lay their eggs in or on the larvae of other insects or spiders. The hosts of giant ichneumonids are usually the larvae of horntails, or wood wasps (*Orocercus gigas*), and related species, as well as the larvae of longhorn beetles (*Monochamus sutor*). She was allowed to live. Photo © Brita Carson

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**Proof Reader** - Jennifer Hewitt. My very grateful thanks to Jennifer who is always so kind proof reading for me.



Sib. 'Blushing Saphira', Brian Wendel.  
*See page 28.*

Bugs and beasts see page 31





*I. ensata* 'Aldridge Snow Maiden' (Philip Allery Reg. 1999) WY1 37in 94cm ML 3 S. chalk white (RHS 155C); style arms white. Cream rib; F. chalk white, canary yellow (9A) signal; S. near vertical, F. flared and arched H6/83AY white, seed from Hirao x self.