

NEWSLETTER

Volume 17, Number 1

January 2006

Xmas Party "Best Ever"


By Ingeborg Woodsworth

Greetings to you all—those of you who enjoyed our Christmas party at Pine Lodge Farm's Toad Hall and you, dear friends, who for illness or other commitments, missed out on one of the best Christmas parties we have ever held. The food was great, thanks to Joan Clarke's diligent phone calls and all you wonderful cooks.

Special thanks go to Shirley and Ian Efford who not only cooked a great ham, but also carved the 19-pound turkey. And thank you Sharon Tillie for dropping off your culinary treat and gift even though you were unable to stay owing to your bad cold. For the excellent wine selection, thanks to Siggi Kemmler, our stalwart treasurer. Our genial master of ceremonies, Wilson Grahame and Daphne Jackson, led everyone through the games, the gift raffle, and the brain-joggers. And what an outstanding holiday atmosphere our Mistress of Decorating, Janet Gardner, with husband David's assistance, brought to Toad Hall. Thanks go also to our host, Clifford Clarke, and his assistants Maritess and Fe, for making our club members feel at home. I especially enjoyed seeing Ann Springford and Peter Kearns, over those great appetizers, visiting with Stan and Nyra Groves, Allan and Liz Murray, Morgan and Yvonne York, Mary Gale, Marjorie Gunnlaugson and Bill Plasman, Fred Collins and friend, Pat and Sheila Cooney, the Dumonts, and the Morgans.

Surely I have forgotten someone. Our president Alan Campbell and wife Sandy, our program chair, missed a memorable evening. The azalea prints they brought back from the ARS regional conference in Oregon were the prized objects of a silent auction, and went to Wilson and Jane Grahame. (For more on the artist see story page 4.) We all wish that Dave and Lurana Dougan and Etta and Ruth Cook could have been with us.

I look forward to being of service to you all in the year ahead. I hope to connect with other chapters and our local Garden Club in bringing rhododendron-related projects

to the forefront, such as scholarships and propagation workshops with public involvement. Your hard-working directors will attend to most of the club's business to give more time at the regular meetings, not only for the main speakers, but also for five- or ten-minute presentations and hands-on workshops, and the opportunity for more interchange among members over refreshments. See you on January 4! 

What's Coming Up

January Meeting: January 4 at St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan (**note new location**), 7:30 PM

Speaker: Glen Jamieson of Qualicum Beach, a research scientist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans at Nanaimo and a member of the Mount Arrowsmith chapter, gives the second and concluding illustrated talk on his journey last spring to China's Yunnan province as a member of a botany expedition led by Steve Hootman of the Rhododendron Species Foundation at Federal Way, Washington.

How do we know what's what in rhodos? To bring everyone up to snuff in identification, there will be a mini-show at every meeting. Please bring a flower or spray of any rhododendron flowering in the garden.

Tea and Goodies: Ruth Cook* (748-8293), Dawn Fedorchuk (715-1233), Sandy and Alan Campbell (743-3597).

Because of Glen Jamieson's much-anticipated talk there won't be a showing of members' slides as is customary at January meetings. Keep an eye on the weather . . . if snow and ice cometh we'll have to cancel. Members will be informed by phone or email.

Directors' Meeting: January 18 at Leslie Drew's home, 4491 Creighton Road, 7:30 PM. Phone 748-6152.

Spring Show and Sale: May 6 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall.

ARS Western Regional Conference: Harrison Hot Springs, September 22–24, 2006.

*Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month
in St. John's Anglican Church Hall,
486 Jubilee Street, Duncan.
Set-up at 7:00 PM, start at 7:30 PM*

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society
PO Box 904, Duncan, BC V9L 3Y2 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>



Ben Hall's DNA

by Norman Todd

I recently received a copy of Dr. Ben Hall's [University of Washington] latest paper on his findings on the inner secrets of rhododendron DNA. It is the formal statement of what he told us at last spring's convention. I must give you the title but don't let it stop you reading what follows. The paper is called "The Molecular Systematics of Rhododendron (Ericaceae): A Phylogeny Based Upon RPB2 Gene Sequences." Loretta Goetsch, Andrew J. Eckert, and Benjamin D. Hall are the authors and the paper was published in the journal of *Systematic Biology*.

Many of you will remember Ben Hall's talk at our convention. It dealt with the taxonomy—the classification of the genus *Rhododendron*. Fundamentalists believers in Intelligent Design may experience some difficulty with fitting this kind of evolutionary evidence into their theory. It is hard to logically deny the existence of the evolutionary process. Ted Irving and Richard Hebda, at the same conference, gave us some insight into the geophysical and climatic conditions giving rise to the creation of new species of rhododendron and magnolia. This was a follow-up to the paper they gave at our 1989 conference on the origin and distribution of rhododendrons.

Science always tries to sort what is found in nature into an orderly arrangement. Living things are notoriously difficult to fit into neat and tidy slots. Neat and tidy slots imply that matters are static. Living things are not static; they are changing and evolving. Consequently, the "system" that the classifying scientists come up with is not perfect and can almost always be improved. The analysis of DNA is a new and powerful tool for describing how one organism differs from another and by how much. It helps to fine-tune earlier classifications.

About 25 years ago I attended an international conference on the classification of rhododendrons in Kent, Washington. It was attended by about 300 people, most of whom were professionally involved in trying to put rhododendrons into some logical order of kinship. DNA analysis was unknown at the time of this conference. Most systematizers were using the classical technique of minutely examining a plant's morphology—the number and shapes of the flowers, leaves, seed, etc. (i.e., the physically visible characteristics). The cutting-edge scientists at that time were using analyses of the chemistry of the plants.

I was told that this was the first international conference on rhododendrons that the Chinese had attended.

Inasmuch as a large percentage of the genus *Rhododendron* is native to China, what they had to say was of very real consequence if there was to be international agreement on a classification. The Chinese had carried out meticulous measurements on the spacing, shape, and size of scales on the leaves, flowers, and twigs among other things. The results of the more esoteric analyses did not always quite agree with the more classically derived results. The Orientals and the Occidentals got onto a fairly steamy argument. I recall the chairman calling for order and saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, please remember that this is a serious subject but not important." Things quieted down.

It is perhaps worth observing that the Irving/Hebda approach involves processes on the macroscale—ice ages, mountain building, and continental collisions—while that of Hall works in the microsphere looking at the molecular variations within a small part of the DNA strand. The first explains the causal forces for the evolution of new species; the second records the microchemistry of the mutations that have taken place over long periods of time.

The most important of Hall's recent findings upsets the basic division that we gardeners have been using to divide the genus. We have recognized four main types. We first of all divide those with scales from those without (i.e., lepidotes from elepidotes). We can easily distinguish an *augustinii* from a *fortunei* and we know that these two types have evolved so differently that they will not mate with each other. The non-scaly (i.e., elepidote) rhododendrons we have split into three groups—the larger-leaved ones, the deciduous azaleas, and the evergreen azaleas. This is the grouping that Chamberlain, Cullen, *et al.* follow. Many of us use the *Encyclopedia of Rhododendrons* by father and son, Peter and Kenneth Cox, as our basic reference. It divides the genus *Rhododendron* into these four main subgenera—the lepidotes are called subgenus *Rhododendron*, the larger-leaved ones are called subgenus *Hymenanthes*, the deciduous azaleas are subgenus *Pentanthera*, and the evergreen azaleas, *Tsutsutsi*. There are five other subgenera, but most of us can forget about them as they each contain only one or a few species, the botanical curiosities, and are seldom seen in gardens.

One of the most important empirical factors supporting this subdivision is that members in each subgenus, while sexually profligate amongst themselves, almost never produce offspring with members of the other subgenera. However, the DNA results obtained by

... continued on Page 3




CVRS Silver Bowl Awarded

Alan Campbell is the winner of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society's perpetual silver bowl for 2005.

The award is given each year, on the recommendation of recent previous recipients, to a member who has given outstanding service to the chapter. The award is usually presented at the Christmas party, but Alan could not attend this time owing to his work. The bowl will be presented at the first meeting of the New Year on January 4, 2006

President for the last three years, Alan has been a tireless worker on the club's behalf. A capable propagator, he has been a generous donor of rhododendrons to club meetings and special events. Although the move was controversial at the time, he returned the group to its roots in the American Rhododendron Society with the elimination of a local membership category. The measure recognized that only through full ARS membership come the benefits of circuit speakers, ARS foundations, the Journal and other educational features.

The silver bowl, large enough to accommodate the biggest single rhododendron truss, has been presented annually since 1990. Names of recipients are engraved on silver plaques attached to the applewood base. The bowl is also a memorial to members who have contributed much to the advancement of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Cowichan Valley; their names are engraved on the bowl itself. 

BEN HALL'S DNA . . . continued from Page 2

Ben Hall do not support *Pentanthera* being a subgenus. He proposes that it now become part of *Hymenanthes*. The genetic differences are not significant enough to warrant subgeneric rank. The ranking below "Subgenus" is "Section." Hall proposes that *Pentanthera* be given a Section ranking. He proposes other changes in the other smaller subgenera, but as most of us are not familiar with the species involved these will not be detailed here. I can provide a photocopy to those who would like to have one.

Dr. Hall is clearly excited about these results. In a separate communication, he says, "Regarding Subsection *Pontica*^{*}, not all the dust has settled as yet but I see these getting scattered in three or four directions. First, eliminate *hyperythrum*; it never should have been separated from *pachysanthum* and *pseudochrysanthum*." He says the most derived and cohesive cluster in the *Pontica*


Rhododendrons in January

Snow and ice are of utmost concern at this time of year as we amble among our rhododendrons.

Question: Should we or should we not off-load snow from our beloved shrubs?

Personally, I head out as soon as snow begins to fall and unload, then try to follow up as necessary. Should you encounter ice crusts on these snowcaps, it's best not to disturb anything. The likelihood of damage such as buds breaking off—or entire branches—is too great.

Don't forget to use snow as insulation by pushing it under branches toward the shrubs' stems.


During severe freezing spells, particularly if sharp easterly winds sweep through the garden, you may use water to spray and encase those shrubs and trees susceptible to frost damage. 

by Ingeborg Woodsworth

Species Studies – 2006

Species Study Days will again be held at the Rhododendron Species Garden in Federal Way, Washington. The sessions will be held on four Saturdays—February 25, March 25, April 29, and May 13, from 10 AM to 4 PM. For more information, contact Mike Bale of Abbotsford at (604) 853-8839, or email lu_zhu@telus.net

Section is *macrophyllum*, *caucasicum*, *aureum*, and *catawbiense*. He also says that there appear to be several interesting [clusters] in the non-Section *Pontica* of the subgenus *Hymenanthes*. It is to these that his next efforts will be directed.

I recall a remark made by one of my mathematics professors at university. He had just explained some esoteric problem and he said, "If this does not give you a thrill, you are not a mathematician." My memory of his saying this is clear, but I have not the slightest idea of what the thrilling problem was. Remember, too, the words of Conan Doyle. "It has always been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important." 

* See *A Rhesplendence of Rhododendrons* for some information on its present members.



One Good Turn . . .

You never know what good fortune—and talent—can come with a convention.

Among those attending the American Rhododendron Society's convention in Victoria last spring was Donald Hyatt, president of the Potomac Valley chapter in Washington, D.C.

Alan Campbell of our Cowichan Valley chapter met Don at the Victoria convention, and saw him again in the autumn at the Western Regional conference in Newport, Oregon. "He had so thoroughly enjoyed his time on the Island," Alan said later, "that he offered me two prints to take back to our chapter for its benefit."

One print painted in 1977 depicts the patented azalea hybrid "Redwing," which has ruffled rose-red flowers; the other, dated 2001, shows the native azalea species *R. prunifolium* whose red flowers open in late summer. The prints were displayed at the Christmas party and raffled, with proceeds going to the club.

With the two watercolour originals, Don ventured for the first time into reproductions. A recently retired math and computer science teacher, he has been painting botanical illustrations since his high school days, orchids and wildflowers more than anything else because he had more spare time in the summers than in the spring, when the rhodos bloom.

He had painted probably fewer than 20 rhododendron portraits, and when he sold the originals he found "they just disappeared into humanity, never to be seen again." Rarely did he hear of anybody owning one. So he stopped selling originals at least 15 years ago. Some of his favourite paintings are posted on his personal Web site (www.donaldhyatt.com).

When he retired recently, he had all sorts of plans for painting, first and foremost all of the east coast native azalea species. Now, however, he is chair of the 2006 ARS convention in Washington, D.C. (May 12–16), a joint convention with the Azalea Society of America, and that is taking all his available time. "I have never been busier in my life and I haven't picked up a paint brush in over a year. I do have several paintings under way, but they are not finished yet." Meanwhile, he is building a Web site for the convention (www.arspvc.org/2006). Beyond his art, he maintains a 50-year-old private garden and a nursery, and is a frequent speaker on the need to preserve eastern North American native plant species.

What did he like best at the Victoria convention? "Clearly, the garden tours. I wished that I could have

gone to every single garden, but time was limited. I did extend my stay on both sides of the convention so I could go to Butchart Gardens on my own as well as a number of other places in Victoria and Vancouver. Superb weather, too! Where do we place our order so we can have similar weather for our convention next May?" ↪

New Members

Meet some of our new members. Among them is Sharon Pettersson, who with husband Roger moved this past year to Cowichan Bay. With their new house came several rhododendrons. She is an experienced gardener who looks forward to growing them—and more—under less difficult conditions than she experienced at their Calgary home.

Janice Graham-Andrews moved to Chemainus three years ago from the Toronto area where, she says, rhodos would grow but not bloom. Arriving here in July of 2002, she still didn't know they were capable of blooming—until the spring of 2003 when her next door neighbour's rhodos put on a spectacular show. She now has 22 rhodos flourishing on half an acre. She credits our member Joyce Gammie, who has a fine rhodo garden, with helping her along the way.

Dawn Fedorchuk, who gardens on Rosevear, off Somenos Road, and has lived in Duncan all her life, wanted information on a particular purple rhodo, went to the CVRS Web site, and as a result met Alan Campbell who gave her information and encouraged her to join our group. She looks forward to learning more about rhodos in the new year. ↪

Quick Quiz: Name the Hybrid

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. He's feeling sad | 10. Repair our road |
| 2. Rhododendron sage | 11. He's an extinguiser |
| 3. She's coquettish | 12. She's gone but not forgotten |
| 4. The Sprinkler Man | 13. We're making cakes |
| 5. She digs | 14. A little fishy |
| 6. Toy with no clothes on | 15. Keep talking |
| 7. That awful weed | |
| 8. Gambler's delight | |
| 9. She's finished | (See page 6 for answers) |



A Question on Hybridizing

by Alan Campbell

What is the purpose of the rhododendron flower? Fundamentally, attraction is the basis of its design. The rhododendron flower is the allure that alters the path of a passing insect. Mother Nature's improbable flyer, the bumble bee, unwittingly becomes an instrument of conception for the perpetuation of species rhododendra.

Continuity of a rhododendron species is not always the outcome as this industrious bee bustles about, absorbed in its own self-interest. Impartial meanderings through forests of pollen-laden stamens, collecting and dispersing pollen onto waiting stigmas will undoubtedly produce seed from which a plant will develop, exhibiting characteristics that will not always key to type. These accidental hybrids are not always destined for greatness; most will fail to produce a viable addition to the rhododendron family. Only occasionally will a seedling speciate, over thousands of years, to fill a niche as nature sees fit.


Attempting to deduce when and where man first involved himself with the hybridizing of plant material would surely confound even the wits of 221 Baker Street. The "why" is elementary. The hybridization of food crops was goal-oriented and approached with focused deliberation. The purpose: to increase crop yield for the benefit of the community. I don't believe the same claim can be made for the more ornamental plant material.

Does the rhododendron hybridizer consider that the genus *Rhododendron* contains a void that needs filling, a lack of variation? *R. sinogrande* will grow to an 80-foot tree with leaves 24 inches long and a flower truss 10 inches across. The other end of the scale can be represented by *R. fastigiatum* having leaves and flowers measuring no more than half an inch. *R. edgeworthii* will give all the fragrance any grower could hope for, if that is his need. Nature's palette is fully utilized from the pure white of *R. hemsleyanum* to the deep black-crimson of *R. sanguinum* var. *haemaleum*. Can any other genus boast further colours? No, no, I know what you're thinking, but that story of the Black Dahlia was not about a flower. All right, I will have to concede that there is no deep "gentian" blue on the rhododendron canvas. Perhaps there is a very narrow niche to fill.

Mary Greig of Royston Nurseries is reported to have remarked about hybridizing, "Do we really need another pink rhododendron?" Princess Abkhazi showed thinly

veiled contempt toward hybrids with the description of "blousy barmaids" when compared with their species sisters. So what drives these upstart hybridizers into, perhaps, thinking their genetic engineering can in any way improve on what Mother Nature has perfected over millions of years?

It is quite possible that I am afflicted with a quixotic delusion, but it is my ardent belief that hybridizers are a very special group of individuals bearing an abiding interest and affection for the genus *Rhododendron* and seeking an appropriate outlet to express their passion. Consider the span of time taken to produce their progeny. Initially developing a focus and a desired outcome of their efforts, choosing seed and pollen parents that will hopefully form a sound base to their vision, working in minutia to guarantee precise fertilization, waiting with expectation for seed pods to swell, sowing the resulting seed, and waiting for germination. Waiting, always waiting. Judging, critiquing, appraising, and culling. Evaluating the growing plants for 10 years (the required time before registration), hoping to find that one out of hundreds which fulfills the vision. Ten years! Surely this display of gumption rivals even the work of Michelangelo at the Sistine Chapel. Hybridizers are without a doubt the artists of the plant world. The painter, the sculptor, the perfumer will all find their muse in the genus *Rhododendron*.

We have all felt the allure of the rhodo flower. Returning home after a long day on the job, turn off the car engine and sit for a moment. There at the tree line Bob Rhodes's "Gabriola Blue" waves a greeting in the breeze, Frank Fujioka's "Starbright Champagne" glows in the evening light. Up the walkway Cox's little "Razorbill" with its pink tubular firecracker-shaped flowers shows more enthusiasm at your return than does the cat lying next to it. On the patio a potted "Fragrantissimum" administers aromatherapy. That furrow between the eyebrows disappears, the eyes soften, and the tension falls from the shoulders. We've returned to the embrace of Mother Nature. We feel the touch of the Divine. That, my friends, is the purpose of the rhododendron flower. 

On Display

Rhododendron "Crosswater Belle," a new *cinnabarinum* hybrid with peach-coloured bells raised by Ted Millais, was among new cultivars from United Kingdom nurseries displayed at the 2005 Chelsea Flower Show, the Royal Horticultural Society reports. Said to be resistant to powdery mildew, the plant grows to four feet and a spread of five feet.



Tea and Goodies Teams – 2006

- FEBRUARY:** Sharon Pettersson* (743-0787), Judy Gloster (746-5643), Mona Kaiser and Tom Rimmer (715-1814)
- MARCH:** Joan Clarke* (748-1272), Doris and Ian Anderson (746-8678), Mary Gale (743-9329)
- APRIL:** Janet and David Gardner* (748-1867), Judy Williams (748-3531), Cheryl and Michael Krieger (391-6225)
- MAY:** Peter Kearns* (746-5782), Daphne Jackson (748-9475), Jane and Wilson Grahame (715-1313)
- SEPTEMBER:** David Annis* (748-1338), Ann Springford (746-7303), Ruth and Michael Ker (748-7791)
- OCTOBER:** Cindy and James Little* (743-6777), Liz and Allan Murray (743-9190), Bev and Charlie Mountain (746-6339)
- NOVEMBER:** Anne and Roger Slaby* (748-4623), Maria and Siggie Kemmler (746-8751), Sharon Tillie (748-8254)

- * Indicates team leader
- Please let your team leader and Maria know if you can't come to a meeting.
- The team leader will select one team member to bring a half litre of milk.
- The team under each month's heading will supply goodies, set up and make tea and coffee, and be responsible for cleaning up after the meeting. The teams should be at the hall by 7:15 PM
- Maria will look after the kitchen supplies; if anything is needed or if there are questions or problems, please call her at 746-8751.

"Name-the-Hybrid" Quiz Answers

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Bob's Blue | 9. Margaret Dunn |
| 2. Percy Wiseman | 10. Taurus (tar us) |
| 3. Dora Amateis | 11. Fireman Jeff |
| 4. Gomer Waterer | 12. Mist Maiden |
| 5. Etta Burrows | 13. Patty Bee |
| 6. Teddy Bear | 14. Elsie Frye |
| 7. Doc | 15. Babylon |
| 8. Winsome | |

— 2006 Directors —

PRESIDENT	Ingeborg Woodsworth <i>mayocreekgardens@shaw.ca</i>	749-6291
VICE-PRESIDENT	Judy Gloster <i>kg10@telus.net</i>	746-5643
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TREASURER	Siggie Kemmler <i>siggie-k@shaw.ca</i>	746-8751
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Roger and Anne Slaby <i>rs0321@telus.net</i>	748-4623
	Ian Efford <i>efford@shaw.ca</i>	246-1453
	Jackie Walker <i>jacquelinewalker@shaw.ca</i>	743-3650
EX-OFFICIO	Alan Campbell <i>stonefold@shaw.ca</i>	743-3597

— 2006 Conveners —

BARGAIN TABLE/RAFFLE	Joyce Gammie Daphne Jackson	246-2484 748-9475
GARDEN CLUB LIAISON	Joyce Gammie	246-2484
GARDEN TOURS	Anne and Roger Slaby	748-4623
HISTORIAN	Bev Mountain	746-6339
INTER-CHAPTER RELATIONS	Ingeborg Woodsworth	749-6291
LIBRARIAN	Janet Gardner	748-1867
MEMBERSHIPS	Jackie Walker	743-3650
NEWSLETTER	Leslie Drew	748-6152
PICNIC/CHRISTMAS PARTY	Joan Clarke Mhairi Bruce	748-1272 743-8327
SPEAKERS (to mid-June)	Sandy Campbell	743-3597
SPRING SALE	Ian Efford Michael Krieger	246-1453 391-6215
SPRING SHOW	Sharon Tillie Janet Gardner	748-8254 748-1867
PROPAGATION	Alan Campbell	743-3597
REFRESHMENTS	Maria Kemmler Sheryl Krieger	746-8751 391-6215
SUNSHINE	Ann Springford	746-7303
WEB SITE	Alan Campbell	743-3597