

# NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Ian E. Efford and Siggie O. Kemmler

January 2011

## SPECIAL EDITION ON THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION



### **International Collaboration: Creating The Rhododendron Species Foundation.**

**Joe Ronsley**

‘The Rhododendron Species Foundation is a non-profit organization founded and incorporated in 1964 by members of the American Rhododendron Society in order to secure the finest authentic forms of *Rhododendron* species, and to develop a comprehensive collection of this plant genus. Conservation has become of primary importance in recent years due to the destruction of *Rhododendron* habitat in many areas of the world.’ Such is the

opening paragraph on the history of the RSF as outlined on its website—[www.rhodygarden.org](http://www.rhodygarden.org).

The Rhododendron Species Foundation was founded in 1964 on the collaboration of dedicated plantsmen and women, in three different countries—the United States, Britain, and Canada. A small group of gardeners in Oregon, led by Dr Milton Walker,

### **The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society**

**A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society**

PO Box 904, Duncan, British Columbia V9L 3Y3 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>

were unsatisfied with the usual rhododendron hybrids to be found in local nurseries and garden centres, and, consequently, in gardens. Perhaps they were purists who simply wanted to get back to the original productions of nature. Or they were concerned with conservation of species endangered by habitat destruction. Or perhaps they had the refined sensibilities that lent themselves to the more subtle beauties of the natural originals rather than the ‘in your face’ showiness of most of the available hybrids. Clearly, upon investigation, the line between subtle beauty and showiness is not so clearly drawn, however, at least not always. But whatever the original motivation, there was a desire to introduce into North American horticulture, to accompany the man-made hybrids, the natural species of *Rhododendron* for the discriminating enthusiast and connoisseur. The original idea for the implementation of the idea was to take cuttings from the best species *Rhododendron* clones in the great British gardens, plants which themselves were propagated from among those introduced directly into Britain by the renowned British plant explorers in Asia, and bring them into cultivation as a collection of *Rhododendron* species in the United States. The intent, by the way, lest there be eyebrows raised among the cynical, was not to take the cuttings surreptitiously, but rather to take them with the full and generous collaboration of the proprietors of the British gardens! Eventually the plants would then be further propagated, and be disseminated among private interested parties.

### Coming Events

**Steve Hootman**, Executive Director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation will be speaking on Vancouver Island in January.

Jan. 11th Tuesday – “Rhododendrons in their natural habitat”  
North Island Rhododendron Society, Comox

Jan 12th Wednesday – “ Plant Exploration in China and Vietnam”  
Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society, Qualicum Beach

Jan 13th Thursday “Exciting changes and new introductions at the RSBG”  
Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, 7:30 at Beban Park Social Centre

Note: CVRS next meeting is in February

This was the idea of a small group of men with big imaginations, living in two states, Washington and Oregon. But, unfortunately, the people directing American customs regulations had smaller imaginations, and required that all plant material imported from outside North America be fumigated when



coming into the United States. In other words, the plants could be legally imported into the US, the only requirement being that they be dead. Fortunately, however, the plants could be brought, legally and live, from Britain into Canada, and the resulting propagated plants could then, after a period of time, say two years, be imported from Canada into the United States. So, on the recommendation of Milton Walker's friend Mary Greig, owner of Royston Nurseries on Vancouver Island, the plants were sent from Britain to Canada, rooted at the University of British Columbia, and when established sent to the fledgling RSF, at the time located in Oregon—in Dr Walker's own garden near Eugene, actually. One plant of each taxa was retained for the UBC Botanic Garden collection.

This last detail, the compensation, as it were, to UBC for taking the trouble, suggests to me a possible spin-off from this arrangement, which may be of special interest to Canadians. At this time there was no actual garden at UBC designated as a botanical garden, though some members of staff had titles such as Director and Curator of the Botanical Garden. Instead, special plants, many coming from Ted and Mary Greig's Royston Nursery, were planted throughout the campus, and the entire campus was considered to embody a botanical garden. But in 1963 the Botanical Garden designation itself, along with its previously titled Director and other personnel, was abandoned, and the relevant people transferred to the Department of Physical Plant, or Buildings and Grounds as it was then called. Evelyn Jack, now Evelyn Weesjes, working at the time in this Department, propagated all the cuttings

coming from Britain, beginning in 1964

In an article by **Roy Taylor** to be published in the upcoming RSF Yearbook for 2011 entitled "**UBC Botanical Garden: Early Years**", he states that

“The Botanical Garden was resurrected in 1966 as a non-academic service department reporting to the Presidents' Office. It consisted of 24 hectares (60 acres) set aside for a new Garden and include other campus garden elements, e.g., Nitobe Garden, the Rose Garden. With appointment of Dr Roy L Taylor as Director of the "New" Garden, the Rhododendron Species Collections 'left' Physical Plant. Miss Jack joined the Garden staff in charge of the seed collection and propagator. In 1971 she was transferred to a full-time position in Physical Plant.

By July 1970, the UBC Board of Governors had formally approved plans for development of the Botanical Garden Research Administrative Center and associated gardens. The garden areas of special interest for the Rhododendron collections were the Main Gardens and connecting Marine Drive Garden, and the Nursery (adjacent to the Physical Plant Nursery containing the foundation Rhododendrons).”

and continuing over several years. Then, between 1963 and 1966, Dr. T M C Taylor, Head of the Botany Department, and Dr. J W Neill, Professor of Plant Sciences, somehow persuaded the university administration to create an actual botanical garden. A specific parcel of land was set aside for the purpose, and the current UBC Botanical Garden was officially approved in 1966 and opened in 1968. [see box]. My friends who were present at the time say that the arrangement between UBC and the RSF could have

had no impact whatsoever on the discussion with university administrators, who, they say, were relatively insensitive on the subject. But the timing of these events suggests to me that it is inconceivable that the RSF connection, and the opportunity it provided for UBC, did not come up in the conversation. The records provide no proof either way, unfortunately, since there are no detailed records of the discussions. But the administrators must have been convinced by *something* in order to have made their decision to establish a real botanical garden, especially after having decided so recently to eliminate all reference to it at the university. And while the administrators may have had no appreciation for plants and gardens, as my friends say, they could certainly understand and appreciate the value of a collection of, say, rare books and manuscripts that might just be an important asset to the university, and worth being provided a suitable housing, or even the setting up of a new academic programme. The collection of plants coming from Britain, with their history in regard to botany and horticulture, could easily be seen as an equivalent, even by university administrators. It is intriguing to contemplate the possibility,



*Mecanopsis* at RSF

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then, that not only did UBC contribute to the establishment of the RSF, but conversely, the RSF contributed to the establishment of the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden as well. I don't suggest that the RSF connection was the sole convincing argument, but it could very well have played an important part, though, of course, I can't prove it.



Whatever the case in regard to the establishment of the two collections, since the time of this inspired initial collaboration, close relations and joint efforts among people in these three countries have continued, with the exchange of plant material, joint plant expeditions, duplicate collections as insurance against losses, and, important as anything, the sharing and exchange of experiences, ideas and knowledge.

Moreover, plantsmen and gardeners from other countries have over the years joined with those in the original three in this mutually beneficial relationship. And they have done so not only in the occasional coming together for a single project, but in a closer, more lasting and comprehensive fashion by actually becoming a part of the now mature Rhododendron Species Foundation.



This 'now mature Rhododendron Species Foundation' now has its own, 'now mature', botanical garden with a distinct focus on species rhododendrons, and comprising arguably the most comprehensive collection of *Rhododendron* species in the world. In 1973 when the idea was broached to George Weyerhaeuser, CEO of Weyerhaeuser Corporation, and evidently a keen gardener himself, he was immediately and enthusiastically receptive to providing space on the new Weyerhaeuser corporate campus, and in 1974 the Weyerhaeuser Company generously leased at no cost a permanent site of 24 acres for the collection at its corporate headquarters in Federal Way, Washington, a suburb just south of Seattle. The collection was moved there in 1975, and the resulting botanical garden has been developing ever since, with new acquisitions constantly being added from, among other sources, newly collected propagating material from the wild. Executive Director Steve Hootman has been responsible for most of the more recent acquisitions, but his colleagues from around the world have contributed as well.

A membership program was started in

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1976, and plant distribution to members was also begun about this time, with the profits helping to support the garden. In this last respect the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden is unique among horticultural organizations and botanical gardens. Visiting most famous botanical gardens, and the sales areas afterwards, one is almost inevitably disappointed not to be able to purchase the special plant he has just seen. Only the common commercial varieties are usually for sale. At the RSF the dissemination of special plants as well as their display is important, and the very best and rarest of species in the collection are distributed to its members in a twice-a-year sales offering. Of particular interest to RSF members in British Columbia is the scheme, initiated a few years ago, whereby plants ordered by BC members are brought en masse to the UBC Botanical Garden, where they can be picked up by the members who ordered them.

1980 marked the limited opening of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden to the public, the formal establishment of a coordinated volunteer program, and the completion of a garden master plan that proposed replanting the collection in the Garden to reflect taxonomic groups (those species that are most closely related are planted near one another). This replanting was completed in 1984.

In recent years the emphasis in plant acquisitions, and distribution, has moved from cuttings of superior cultivated clones to an emphasis on plants propagated from seed collected in the wild. Cuttings from superior clones



The propagation greenhouse

continue to be taken, and offered for sale to members, but these are considerably augmented by plants from wild collected seed. Our brilliant Curator and Executive Director Steve Hootman is one of the world's foremost contemporary plant explorers, with a reputation among his adventurous international colleagues for intrepidity, and knowledge. Collection of wild seed began in the 1980s, but was advanced seriously in the '90s when Steve began to engage in frequent expeditions to Asia in search of new and special plants. He continues to do this, this article actually being written for the most part while he has been struggling with the wet, the cold, and the leeches in China. His collections of known species increases the gene pool of plants already in cultivation, often with new variants, and, what to me involves a certain horticultural glamour and romance, he and his colleagues are still discovering entirely new species not known previously in the west.

The first issue of an RSF yearbook, with the catchy title *Rhododendron Species*, appeared in 2006. For the 2007 issue RSF volunteer Prudence Holliger, a professional editor, began to assist with the publication's editing, and beginning with the 2008 issue she took over as

Editor, with Steve Hootman and Rick Peterson as Associate Editors. Then for the 2009 issue, Rick having left the organization, it was published with Prudence as Editor, and Steve Hootman and myself as Associate Editors. In 2009, too, publication time was getting closer to the goal—of November/December—with publication taking place in January—a big improvement from April the first year. There was considerable tweaking of details in these first issues, improving the publication from one issue to the next. The yearbook, comprised of articles on diverse subjects, written by *Rhododendron* enthusiasts, professional and amateur, around the world. The yearbook is comprised of articles on



The Rutherford Conservatory

diverse subjects, written by *Rhododendron* enthusiasts, professional and amateur, around the world, along with the plant catalogue for the spring distribution. It provides an incentive for membership in the RSF, even after members possess all the plants they want or can accommodate (though I know such a statement as this last is nonsense), since it comes complementarity with membership. The publication also gives

the organization an increased international stature and authority.

The first Membership Directory, listing RSF members in eighteen countries, was



*Agapetes serpens*, another ericaceous plant that would do well in our gardens.

issued for 2009, and accompanied the yearbook in the mailing to members. The intention is to publish it every second year in the future. The Directory is a means for RSF members to know of the existence of other people with similar interests in rhododendrons, who may live in close proximity to themselves, and also to provide the means of communication among members wherever they may live.

A tropical conservatory for the RSF had begun to be contemplated in 1998. Several people contributed to finance the construction project over the succeeding years, some of them substantially, but the prime mover and contributor was long-time Board member Francis Rutherford. Finally, in 2008, with various delays having taken place over ten years, and with Fran Rutherford in his mid-80s, there was felt to be a sense of urgency to get started. The building fund was

substantial enough for planning to begin in earnest, and would be topped up by Fran in order actually to begin construction. Construction began in early 2009. A bequest from Rutherford's sister was placed in the RSF endowment fund to support the ongoing cost of operating the newly named Rutherford Conservatory. Unfortunately, while Francis Rutherford was on hand for the ground-breaking ceremony, he died before completion of the conservatory. He left his entire estate, totaling over \$1,000,000 including his home, to the RSF in the form of an endowment for operation and maintenance of the conservatory and the cultivation of Vireyas and other tender rhododendrons. The Rutherford Conservatory is now in full operation and open to the public. A visit to it is very impressive indeed, though it will be a couple of years before the plants have the effectiveness that comes with maturity.



New plantings in the greenhouse

Fran Rutherford's contribution to the RSF, very considerable as it was, was only part of recent augmentation of RSF finances. At the 2008 April Annual Meeting President Joe Ronsley announced that *Fondation Franklinia*, a charitable foundation based in



Switzerland and devoted to botanical and horticultural causes, and belonging to Belgian RSF Board member Philippe de Spoelberch and his family, had pledged \$1,000,000 to the RSF endowment fund, to be paid over five years. Philippe de Spoelberch has also personally contributed an additional \$50,000 over five years for renovation of the azalea sections in the RSBG. He and his daughter Caroline de Spoelberch (Vice President of the Foundation) were in attendance at the meeting when the announcement was made, and, not surprisingly, received a standing ovation.

One of Philippe's motives in making his generous contribution to the endowment was to encourage others to do so as well. To what extent he actually generated such contributions or was only coincidental with them it is hard to tell, but his contribution was quickly followed by others, including the Rutherford bequest. There was also in 2008 a \$100,000 contribution to the endowment from the Benjamin and Margaret Hall Foundation, along with \$25,000 contributed to operating expenses for 2008. Shortly after, the Hall Foundation also established an ongoing trust fund to provide up to \$40,000 a year for 15 years,

primarily for the endowment, and contingent on the satisfaction of the trust manager, but with flexibility during the first five years allowing it to support operating costs, particularly the salaries of valued employees. Ben Hall was, and is, a member of the Executive Committee. Then, an unexpected \$235,000 was received in 2008 as a bequest upon the death of long-time RSF member Charles Larus, of Connecticut. Another \$100,000 followed, upon settlement of the estate. Other, substantial but slightly more modest, contributions, usually for specific projects, have also been increasingly made. When all these contributions are fully realized, the RSF endowment fund will be more than tripled in the last few years, reaching approximately \$3,000,000, and placing the organization on a newly solid financial footing.

In early 2009 the long-standing collaboration between the RSF and the Hardy Fern Society produced a new stumpery in the RSBG, an area of large stumps and logs to be planted mainly with epiphytic ferns and rhododendrons. This stumpery, evidently a Victorian invention—no, I didn't know the word either—is quite a sensation to see, but will be spectacular with the approach of its maturity in several years.

As in the history of all organizations, there have been both advances and setbacks. Over the years, there has been a mixed history of international outreach and inward looking provincialism. A Fortunately, however, in recent years the former of these attitudes has been in the ascendancy, and has essentially prevailed. There is considerably more work to do, but the international membership has increased significantly



and the benefits of this increase have, both tangibly and intangibly, accrued to the RSF.

Human relationships and friendships among people with common interests, though perhaps with different personal backgrounds, provide not only a benefit to a larger entity, but also enriched lives for the individuals themselves. Knowledge is the principal beneficiary of input from the widest possible sources of ideas and perspectives. It is important to the real meaning and purpose of the RSF that there be a wide range of members ready to contribute divergent accounts of their own botanical and horticultural experiences. As in any endeavor, out of the polemics of debate and disagreement, out of the exchange of differences in experience and perspectives, a greater wisdom evolves. It is in this spirit that the RSF was founded, and that it continues to seek as wide a participating membership as possible.



This spirit, too, enables the RSF best to realize its own 'Mission Statement': 'The *Rhododendron* Species Foundation is dedicated to the conservation, research, acquisition, evaluation, cultivation, public display, and distribution of *Rhododendron* species; provides education relating to the genus; and serves as a unique resource to

scientific, horticultural, and educational communities worldwide'. The means of achieving this mission are: 'To acquire and maintain a comprehensive collection of *Rhododendron* species; to conserve *Rhododendron* species through the cultivation and distribution of selected forms and documented wild collected material; to support the *Rhododendron* Species Botanical Garden, a living museum, for the display and cultivation of *Rhododendron* species; and to provide information and education, and to support research for persons interested in the genus *Rhododendron*'.

The larger and more internationally diverse the RSF membership, the greater are both its human and its financial resources. The gathering and exchange of plant material, crucial as it is, is only the beginning. Contributions to the RSF have come in the form of financial aid and in the correspondence and exchange of ideas, suggestions and advice, from places both near and far from the *Rhododendron*



### *R. erosum* new growth

Species Botanical Garden, a living museum, for the display and cultivation of *Rhododendron* species; and to provide information and education, and to support

research for persons interested in the genus *Rhododendron*'. Contributions to the RSF have come in the form of financial aid and in the correspondence and exchange of ideas, suggestions and advice, from places both near and far from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington. Currently, and more specifically, not only is extensive volunteer garden and nursery work done, necessarily, by members living in the immediate Seattle area, but major contributions are made from



*R. solitarium*

more distant places, through leadership of the Photography Committee by a member in Oregon, for instance; creating and managing the website, electronic expertise and assistance, and plant distribution by members in British Columbia; and participation in plant expeditions, sharing of perspectives among professionals, serving on the Board of Directors and on the Editorial Board, and writing articles for the yearbook, *Rhododendron Species*, by members in many American states and in

other countries. I have the honour of having been the first President of the RSF from outside the United States. The RSF today occupies more firmly than ever its rightful place among the premier botanical and The basic horticultural organizations in the world.

It goes without saying, then (though I will say it anyway) that anyone with an interest in rhododendrons should be a member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. The basic dues are modest indeed, though it must also be said that *immodest* contributions and levels of membership are also welcome! The benefits include free admission to the RSBG—though admittedly this only benefits people living in the Pacific Northwest or travelers from further away—the yearbook *Rhododendron Species*, and the opportunity to purchase very special species rhododendrons not generally found in garden centres or even most nurseries, and with perhaps a better likelihood than just about anywhere else (no one is perfect) that they are authentic as labeled. (In my own garden I have changed from telling people what a plant is, to what I acquired it as!) And then, for those of you inclined to take the ‘high road’, you will be supporting a cause that involves conservation and the consequent protection of the environment, in the form of your interest in a plant genus that in beauty and diversity leads all others. Along with this is the advancement of education on the subject, and in its own way a real contribution toward a more civilized world.

For more details, including directions to the RSBG, pictures of species rhododendrons, history of the organization, general information, etc, you may call up the RSF website at

[www.rhodygarden.org](http://www.rhodygarden.org), or simply Google 'Rhododendron Species Foundation'. You

can also telephone at 253-838-4646 either to ask questions or to join the RSF.

Joe Ronsley was the past President, Rhododendron Species Foundation and past President of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Note: All photographs are from the RSF and were provided by Steve Hootman.

### From the Editor

In 2010, I began the idea of devoting the January issue to one important topic. For 2011, the issue is the Rhododendron Species Foundation, one of the most important sources for scientific information, rare plants and opportunities to enjoy seeing some of the rarer rhododendrons in the world. As it is so close, just a ferry ride away, it is a garden that should be know to all our members. Furthermore, because of the distribution of some of plants from the RSF through the Botanic Garden at UBC to our own members, we are finding the rarer plants turning up in our monthly raffles, etc.

It is easy to join the RSF and the application form can be found on the last page or at : <http://www.rsfcitymax.com/f/membershipformWEBSITE2010.pdf>.

Steve Hootman, The RSF Director, is speaking three times this month on the Island. If you are interested in car-pooling to the Nanaimo meeting, please let me know and I will try and connect you with others that might drive.

Ian E. Efford [efford@shaw.ca](mailto:efford@shaw.ca) 250-597-4470

### Reasons to Become a Member of RSF

Free year-round admission to the Garden (Enjoy every season from spring flowers to fall color!)

10% discount on Gift Shop and Plant Sales Pavilion purchases (Select from beautiful gifts items and great plants!)

Spring and Fall Plant catalogs (Members receive first choice of rare and unusual plants!)

Quarterly Newsletter (Packed with information about species rhododendrons and Garden activities!)

*Rhododendron Species* (This annual yearbook published by the RSF features articles ranging from plant exploration and taxonomy to individual species by authors around the world!)

## The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden MEMBERSHIP FORM

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Enroll me as an RSBG member!

Extend my RSBG membership another year!

My company matches contributions.

Gift Membership

*(I have enclosed the matching form)*

Mr.      Mrs.      Ms.      Dr.

Check here if *new* or *revised* address

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Prov./State \_\_\_\_\_ PC / Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive newsletters & other correspondence by e-mail!

PLEASE CHECK ONE:

Student \$15\*

Individual \$35\*

Family \$50\*

Supporting \$100

Sustaining \$250

Patron \$500

Benefactor \$1000

Life \$2000

PLEASE NOTE:

\* **Canadian** Student, Individual & Family members please add \$5.00 US for airmail service. All mail to Canada must go airmail in accordance with US and Canadian postal regulations. This covers the cost of shipping the Yearbook.

\* **International** Student, Individual & Family members please add \$10.00 US for airmail service. This covers the cost of shipping the Yearbook.

\* **Student** members please enclose photo-copy proof of student status.

Membership dues are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. **All funds must be in US Currency**

### Payment Information

Enclosed is a Check made payable to RSBG. (US funds only, drawn on a US bank.)

Charge to: \_\_\_\_\_ VISA \_\_\_\_\_ MASTERCARD Expires \_\_\_\_\_

V# \_\_\_\_\_

3 digit #, located above signature

Please mail or fax this form to the RSBG office:

**Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden**

PO Box 3798, Federal Way, WA 98063

**FAX: 253-838-4686    PHONE: Seattle—253-838-4646 Tacoma—253-927-6960**

**EMAIL: shara@rhodygarden.org**

For Office Use Only:

New Member number \_\_\_\_\_ New Member packet sent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Entered in computer \_\_\_\_\_ Membership card sent \_\_\_\_\_ Promo \_\_\_\_\_

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