

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.28 JULY 1997

One of my more floriferous Vireyas,(R.konori x R.zoelleri) has been in full flower for some weeks; it is a good pink with yellow tubes. But two of the trusses came out simultaneously with no pink at all, just a uniform light yellow, lobes and tubes. These did not change as they aged and fell while the next truss to open had the normal colouring. As Vireyas have not been prone to the 'sporting' so common to azaleas and camellias why would this happen? Maybe it was the weather?
Since our last issue we have a lot of damp, cloudy and cold days but rainfall was still very low - 2mm only in April, 80.5mm in May (one good fall of 25mm) and 114mm in June with a magnificent 79mm on the 29th, making a grand total of 196.5mm spread over 22 days. At least we had a flower on R.zoelleri,a rare happening for us, and a very spectacular large flower.

The Proceedings of the 1994 Pacific Region International Rhododendron Conference in Tasmania were published in April and mailed to all Delegates. Further copies are available from Mr. Neil Jordan, P.O.Box 39, Burnie, Tasmania 7320. They make interesting reading with the majority of articles relating to Vireyas with references also to other rhododendrons from the Tropics.

And there is a new book out too - "Vireyas, a Practical Garden Guide' by John Kenyon and Jaqueline Walker of New Zealand. The book runs to 96 pages, semi-soft cover, well bound, and well illustrated with 80 colour photos. It is published in Australia by Florilegium. Mr.G.Teague has it for sale from Florilegium P.O.Box 644 Rozelle N.S.W. 2039 at $25.00.

Subscriptions for 1997/98 are now due and are unchanged at $10.00 Please send them to P.O.Box 8, Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500

J.Clyde Smith, Editor.

R.searleanum

From L.Searle, Mortons Creek, N.S.W.

When it became obvious that the fungus attacking Cocoa in New Britain was not going away, I was lucky enough to be offered another job in the P.N.G. Dept. of Agriculture. Better still, it was as Project Manager Pyrethum, and I was to be based at a place called Kundiawa, which was the Administration Centre of the newly created Chimbu District.

This put me right in the centre of the New Guinea Highlands, with the Eastern Highlands on one side, Western another and Southern Highlands stretching down to the Gulf of Papua. I was to find out, when I learned a bit about them, that I was in the centre of what was probably the most exciting Rhododendron area of P.N.G.

The late Don Stanton came and stayed with us in 1971 and he was able to name most of those that we saw on our trips. I took him to a place called Ekuam at near 8,000 feet on the slopes of Mt.Digine (13,000 ft.) which I visited regularly to buy pyrethum and he was staggered! There were lots of species in bloom, but predominant was R.christi. Amongst all these species were many seedlings which were different, I had been watching these for about four years, but had never found a mature plant.

Some time later my daughter, who was training at R.N.S.Hospital in Sydney, came home for holidays and brought three of her colleagues with her. We went for a drive out to Ekuam but about four miles before we got there we came upon two plants in full bloom. They appeared to be large plants of those seedlings, about twenty feet above the road and about fifty feet apart, in grassland with scattered Lithocarpus and Casuarina. One plant was much more deeply coloured in the throat than the other, almost crimson, both beautifully fragrant. The altitude was about 7,000 feet.

I sent specimens to the Forestry at Lae (by arrangement with the Airline pilots) and their Chief Botanist, John Womersley, came up with the determination of them as R.maius, but he was not very sure of that. Certainly they were not like the specimens of R maius that I had seen. This was my LS39, and so it was listed as R.maius.

Later, when Dr.H.Sleumer, who had been a very encouraging correspondent over the years, was up dating his "Rhododendrons in Malesia", he obtained herbarium specimens from , amongst other places, Lae. He then wrote to me, I still have his letter, and as read "where did you find this magnificent plant?" That was one year and a week after seeing the plants in bloom. Next weekend I found the same two plants again in bloom. I sent off a large box of material to Dr Sleumer, whose daughter, he had told me, was an avid stamp collector. Margaret, my wife was Postmaster of Kundiawa at the time, and the box was adorned with as many denominations of P.N.G. stamps as she could put on.

Next there arrived the Doctor's "New Species and Noteworthy Records of Rhododendrons in Malesia", and in it he had described Rh.searleanum !

Earlier on, Dr.Sleumer had sent me his "Account of Rhododendrons in Malesia" and over the years his letters were a great source of information and encouragement to me.

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Dr.Sleumer's description of Rh.searleanum was published in Blumea Vol 21 No.2 1973 but as this is in botanical latin and an English translation was not available I was fortunate to have the assistance of Mr Lyn Craven of Canberra, who has come to our aid with the following precised translation:-

'Rhododendron searleanum

Shrub 3-4m tall.Branchlets 6-8mm wide.Leaves broadly elliptic, at the apex broadly attenuate with the tip very shortly subacuminate or obtuse, 6-11cm long, 4-7.5cm wide, with 7-8 veins on each side of the midrib; the petiole (6-)10-22 mm long. Inflorescence (11-)14-16 flowered. Pedicels 8-10mm long. Calyx obliquely disc-like, c.4mm in diameter. Corolla tubular, slightly expanded at the lobes, pallid, flushed pink at the throat, in the dried state 9.5-10cm long, the tube 6.5-7cm long, the lobes (2.5-)3cm long, the limb 5-6cm in diameter. Stamens 10, slightly exceeding the corolla tube, the filaments hairy, the anthers 4.5mm long. Ovary lepidote and hairy, 15mm long, the style c.6cm long and lepidote and hairy for much of its length.'

Note that Sleumer referred this species to subsect.Solenovireya where it is close to R.maius nd R.pleianthum.

Editor.

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Rhododendron Registrations.

The many references to new hybrids in Rhododendron journals and newsletters are typified by the latest issue of the Am.Rhodo. Scty. Journal for Spring 1997, where nine pages detail the interest of some members of the Seattle Chapter Hybridizers Study Group. Such efforts are not peculiar to Rhododendron growers of course but it was interesting to count just how many rhdodendron registrations are being made. In round figures (I did not have the totals for'92) there were 2,000 made in the last eight years. These are summarised below:-

YEAR	Total Registrations		Vireyas from:			
	Rhodos & Azaleas	Vireyas	Aus.	N.Z.	U.S.A.	P.N.G.
1989	285	5	3	1		1
1990	144	7	6	1		
1991	241	55	46	8	1	
1992	n/a	45	41	3	1	
1993	436	20	15		5	
1994	302	19	4	9	6	
1995	161	7	4	1	2	
1996	268	10	3	6	1	
total	1837	168	122	29	16	1

THE NORTH COAST REGIONAL BOTANIC GARDEN

In our January issue this year Neil Puddey of Woolgoolga gave the names and details of the Vireyas that were planted in the above Botanic Garden at Coffs Harbour. My wife and I visited there in early May and it was most pleasing to see what a beautiful display they have made. They are situated fronting a path not far from the entrance, in a reasonably open area that shows them off to advantage. Of the 41 plants there' more than half were in flower and the others were all of flowering age and in very good condition.

We were given an escorted tour and many details of some of the rare plants they have - a large area of the garden has been kept as forest reserve and extensions are still being made in their glasshouses and non-Australian plantings. It is an amazing example of what a community group (the Ulitarra Society) can start. They submitted a plan to council in 1973 to make over an old Council night soil and rubbish dump and this took off in 1982 when it was decided that this was to be the centre piece of the Coffs Harbour 1988 Bicentenary celebrations.

The "Friends' of the Garden are still a very active groupand make a most important contribution in the maintenance, weeding pruning, planting, seed collection, plant sales and guided tours etc. They staff the information centre seven days a week and also sell drinks,ice creams and mementoes.

Coffs Harbour has many other attractions and it was a change to see some rain after our dry months. The gardens all looked happy, not the least of which was Mr.Puddeys - Jagera, in the Open Gardens Book. Here he has a Vireya wholesale nursey as a supplement to his normal occupation and as a consequence has many Vireyas growing around his house as stock plants, and looking very healthy in what, in retrospect, seemed almost rainforest conditions . They were planted on top of the ground in beds of fine pine bark, a practice to emulate.

One of his sale plants was a great surprise - 'Rosie Posie' is listed in catalogues as having 'Balsam like flowers', a term that goes back to days of the Veitch nursery men in the mid-18th Century. In fact the flower that we saw was a perfect double with an inner group of five full petals. this type of flower was described in detail by the Rev.Prof. Henslow in the Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society of August 1891 and is worth repeating viz:

THE BALSAMAEFLORUM SECTION OF RHODODENDRON CROSSES

The group of semi-double and double forms of Rhododendrons called 'Balsamaeflorum', from their resemblance to the double flowers of some Balsams is a curious result of self-fertilisation. Mr.Heal..... observed a single flower in a certain truss on a plant of the second generation to have one anther only,slightly petalloid. He impregnated the pistil of the flower with pollen from the other anthers of the same flower; this process being thus strict self fertilisation.

About twenty seedlings were raised, which now constitute the Balsamaeflorum section.

It would, I think, be incorrect to say that self fertilisation in this case was a cause of doubling, but that it enabled and encouraged the tendency to petalody to be intensied. For,on the contrary, whenever a member of this group has been crossed with a true species, or one of the crosses raised from the seven species, the results were always normal, thereby showing that this tendency to petalody was destroyed or overcome by the natural vigor of the true species or cross with which it was united.

With reference to petalody, differences range from a very slight condition in the filaments to a completely double state.. In one seedling raised the stem was forked, each branch terminating in a truss; and while the flowers in one truss had all their stamens more or less petaloid, those in the other had but some only.

(The name of the original plant is not known but from the Rev.Prof.Henslow's final detailed descriptions the variations in colour and in the form of the flowers indicated that its parents were R.javanicum, R.jasminiflorum, and R.brookeanum and their hybrids.)

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We called in on Lou Searle on our return from Coffs Harbour,and while Neil Puddey grows his Vireyas in pine bark, Lou uses sawdust, and they do well in that too.He has since written:-

"What did you think of my Vireya garden seedlings? I found another batch this morning. As you would have noticed they are all germinating on the rotting pine logs in the sawdust. I would have thought that end grain wood would have made a better seed bed for such minute seeds. But, no, they are all in the cracks in the logs that are lying down. One batch came up on a piece of Cypress pine but it did not have the moisture holding capacity of the Pinus patula. We shall pot them up in August - September, and see what has been sent us.

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Mr.R.A.Mitchell of P.O.Box 298, Volcano, Hawaii,96785, U.S.A. has sent me copies of the first four of the newsletters that are being sent to a number of people interested in Vireyas and in possibly forming a Branch of the American Rhododendron Society in Hawaii, and now meeting to consider this.

This was initiated after a meeting of fifty people in Volcano on January 31st - as listed in issue No.26, incorrectly, to be at Mr.Mitch Miller's garden - my apologies to Mr.Mitchell.

Should you have thought of joining the A.R.S. this could be a very informative Branch with which to place your membership, with their major interest being in Vireyas.

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