Vireya Venture

January 2003 – Issue 50



Scarlet Butterfly

2003 has opened with drought here in the sub-tropics, beautiful summer days tempered with sea breezes but little or no rain, hopefully your part of the world is wetter. Each issue I have been including photos of some newer hybrids. These colour photos do add to the printing cost, a run of 60 copies uses most of a standard colour cartridge. ($84.00). I have not received many comments and was wondering, are the photos enjoyed or just expensive decoration? Should I continue ? It was interesting to read Lyn Craven's notes on the low altitude R Christi story so soon after reproducing Bob Wither's story on Lou Searles find from the March 1986 edition of 'The Rhododendron' . R wentianum certainly sounds impressive.

Editor

Rhododendron wentianum

... from low altitude to high flyer

Lyn Craven

One of the more enigmatic plants that the late Lou Searle discovered in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and introduced to horticulture is the so-called 'low altitude *Christi'*. From memory , my first plant of this came from Bob Withers. For many years my plant grew quite well but never showed the slightest sign of producing flowers. Bob flowered it and discussed it within an article on R *christi* (Withers 1986). In his article , Bob records the plant as having been found by Lou at an altitude of c.2150m " in a tribal area known as Sina Sina" and sent to Melbourne in 1974. The

flower and leaf form is quite well shown in the photograph on the front cover of The Rhododendron 25 (3) but the colour reproduction either was not good or the dyes have faded. (see Venture 49) Bob noted some of the differences between the low altitude plant and R. *Christi* and ended his article questioning as to whether the former was a variety of R. *Christi* , a natural hybrid of R. *Christi* or a new species.

Subsequently my own plant flowered and I wrote to Lou Searle to ask for additional information about it. In his reply in May 1992, Lou quoted from the notes under his collecting number 89 " found on native land, in forest litter on No. 2 Dom. Similar to *Christi* but lacks the red-flushed new growth". The plant was not in flower when Lou found it and to the best of my knowledge he never saw it flowering in cultivation.

Graham Snell grew some seedlings of the plant and gave me a few of them to grow onto flowering as I was interested in seeing if they came true from seed. If so , this would be an additional point in favour of the plant being a species and not a hybrid. The seedlings flowered some years ago and were sufficiently uniform vegetatively and florally to indicate that there was no segregation and therefore I concluded the plant was not a hybrid.

Clearly the plant has very little relationship with R. *Christi* , differing greatly , inter alia, in the corolla shape , lack of hairs on the corolla, corolla colour and stamen disposition. Using the keys in Sleumer (1996) I had not been able to identify the low altitude plant with a known species and I had put the matter aside until I had more time to dig deeper. Around two years ago, when curating some vireya specimens in the Australian National Herbarium, Canberra, I had occasion to look at specimens of R. *wentianum* and realised that I had found the identity of Lou's plant. We had specimens of R. *wentianum* from two localities: 1500m, Mt Antares, Star Mountains, Papua (formerly Irian Jaya), Indonesia, common small epiphytic shrub; and 1300m, Erave; Southern Highlands Province , Papua New Guinea, solitary terrestrial shrub on limestone ridge. It became apparent that the herbarium material I had collected from my glasshouse could not be identified using Sleumer's keys because it has broarder leaves than are recorded by Sleumer for R *wentianum.*

Rhododendron wentianum was described by the Dutch botanist S.H. Koorders in 1909 (Koorders 1909) based upon material collected in Papua (then called Dutch New Guinea) by a physician, G.M. Veersteeg , who participated as physician – botanist in the 1907 leg of the Dutch New Guinea Expedition led by H.A. Lorentz (Steenis-Kruseman 1950). Koorders named the new species for F.A.F.C. Went, who had spent several years working in Java (as director of a sugar cane experiment station) and later became Professor of Botany at Utrecht University (Steenis-Kruseman 1950) . Sleumer (1966) records the species as occurring in the Main Range of Papua from Mt Carstensz to the Star Mts , and in the upper Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea. The Southern Highlands Province record mentioned extends the range of the species in PNG further south than was previously known and Lou's collection extends its range further east. A more full locality for Lou's collection is: Eastern Highlands Province, Kundiawa subdistrict, No 2 Dom, Sina Sina .

The species is well worth growing. Not only does it have a very attractive foliage and a pleasing spreading habit but it has extremely beautiful flowers. In my view the species is one of the few to which the term 'exotic' can be applied; many other species are more showy but this does not equate to their being exotic per se. The orange-red to coral corollas, aptly described by one collector as 'tangerine', with the bright yellow patch basally on each of the lobes are eye catching. The flower form also contributes to the appeal as the corolla is short-tubed and relatively broad across

the limb, presenting quite a strong affect. The foliage is a good foil for the flowers as well, being smooth and glossy. The spreading habit is pleasing too. Definitely, this is a high flyer among the vireya species.

I do not know if R. *wentianum* is available commercially in Australia but should any Australian reader like to add this species to their collection I will be pleased to send cuttings or propagate tubestock for them.

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CLYDE SMITH WRITES

This has been a phenomenal year in our garden. We had normal rainfall in the first three months totalling 661mm in our backyard , but after that only light misty rain which gave us 171mm in the following eight months. In the district the usual green pastures have changed to yellow weeds the first time we have seen them since coming here in 1938.

Yet until now growth was extreme and so was the flower show – not just in our garden but within the district, we did have some windy days and a little damage but the climax came on November 8th with very hot , very dry and very strong winds that left the garden with a disturbing display of burnt leaves – a novelty.

During the year I used almost no fertiliser and only sprayed a little weed killer – some mildew affected a few Vireyas but little other trouble required attention.

R konori * R zolleri was the outstanding performer with many trusses, on a compact bush about 1.5 m * 1m, of the typical brilliance and radiance of R. zolleri and the lobes of R. konori.

By contrast ' Littlest Angel' a very compact small bush about 1m * .7m * .7m high never stops flowering and is usually completely covered with small red flowers. It grows on a well-drained bed with a little shade in the early morning but full sun most of the day. This seems to be a major factor in its performance.

'Mini Mouse' flowered for a first time and now has about 70 trusses of small flowers on an open bush about 1.5m high.

The performance of R notiale is far better than any of the lochiaes, growth is twice as good and it flowers accordingly. Most of my R lochiae plants are not to be recommended, although the one from the Windsor Plateau is the best of them.

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"Vireya From Around The World"

Feb 14 & 15, 2003

Registration Form

Friday, Feb. 14, 2003
Seminar to be held at Cody's at the Waiakea Villas (located straight across the highway on the airport road). Speakers include George Argent of Scotland, Bill Moynier of California, Martin Monthofer of Germany, and E. White-Smith of Bovee's Nursery who will be presenting a slide and lecture prepared by Richard Currie of New Zealand. Lunch is included: **$50 per person**

Saturday, Feb. 15, 2003
Garden Tours. On the agenda is a visit to the Panaewa Rainforest Zoo to see the start of the public vireya garden the Hawaii Chapter is putting in. Next is a visit to a commercial vireya nursery, Pacific Island Nursery in Keaau followed by a visit to Mitch Mitchell's exciting vireya garden located in Volcano Village. Lunch and transportation is included: **$25 per person**

Name:_____

Address:_____

Phone:_____Email:_____

No. attending Friday _____ X $50 =_____
No. attending Saturday_____ X $25= _____

Total enclosed:_____

Please mail to:

Sherla D.M. Bertelmann
HCR – 1 Box 4641
Keaau, Hawaii
96749

Vireya Display & Seminar
sponsored by the Hawaii Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

We invite you to join us in a fellowship dinner hosted by our Hi. Chapter on Saturday evening, following the garden tours. Directions will be given at the seminar.

Hilo Hawaiian Hotel 71 Banyan Drive, Hilo, Hawaii 96720

HAWAII CHAPTER - A R S
(AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY)
February 13-16, 2003

Telephone Direct: (808) 935-9361 / Fax Direct: (808) 969-6472
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Name(s):_____

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City:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

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Arrival date:_____ Time:_____ Departure date:_____

Please indicate number of people in room:_____

STANDARD GARDEN VIEW: _____
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Maximum persons: 3 with existing bedding

DELUXE OCEAN VIEW: _____
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Regular Rate: $150.00 plus tax, per night
Bedding: 1 King or 2 Queens or 3 Twins
Maximum persons: 4 with existing bedding

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** All rooms include: Refrigerator & Coffee Maker.
** Rates are net, non-commissionable.
** Roll away: Please add $17.00 plus tax, per day. Roll-away(s) needed: _____
** All rates subject to 11.4166% GE and Transient tax. Taxes subject to change without notice.
** Cancellation Policy: 72 hours cancel notice is required for a refund or no charge to your credit card.

To confirm your reservation, please enclose a 1 nights' deposit. To guarantee with credit card, please complete below:

Type of credit card:_____ Number:_____

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Full name on credit card:_____ Exp. Date:_____

Signature on credit card:_____

**Requests for room must be received by January 14, 2003 or subject to rate and space availability.