



## RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

Summer 2008 NEWSLETTER

Volume 33 Issue 3

### SPECIES PROFILE

*Rhododendron dalhousiae* Hook.f. 1849

Steve Hootman

The years 1848-1850 will always stand out in the history of rhododendron cultivation as the beginning of the great era of Sino-Himalayan rhododendron discovery and introduction. Over that short period of time, Joseph D. Hooker, in his thorough exploration of Sikkim and the immediate surrounding areas, managed to introduce into cultivation nearly every rhododendron native to that region of the Himalaya. One of the most spectacular of his many outstanding introductions was *Rhododendron dalhousiae* Hook.f. (1849) which was proclaimed by Hooker to be "the noblest species of the whole race." Its amazing four and a half inch long creamy white to pale yellow flowers created quite a stir when it flowered for the first time in cultivation a mere three years after seed was introduced by Hooker in 1850.

Since Hooker's original introduction, *R. dalhousiae* (dalhouse-e-e) has been collected many times throughout its extensive geographical range including the extreme southern border of Tibet, Bhutan, northeastern India (Sikkim & West Bengal) and Nepal. This species is native to the broad-leaved forest zone on the lower slopes of the eastern Himalaya from 5,000 to 9,000 feet in elevation. It typically grows epiphytically in large trees but is also found on cliffs, large boulders and occasionally terrestrially on steep slopes. In Sikkim, I found it to be most common on steep cliffs and as an epiphyte in large trees of the oak and magnolia families (Fagaceae and Magnoliaceae respectively). I will never forget the magnificent floral display and sheer abundance of this species in a

small area of southern Sikkim. The trees seemed to be literally dripping with blooming *R. dalhousiae*! The large clusters of pale creamy yellow trumpets were vividly highlighted against the dark green foliage of the trees in which they grew. At the time, our rhododendron tour group was traveling through a

large tea estate on our way back to Gangtok, the capital city. The trees containing the epiphytic rhododendrons occurred as scattered specimens throughout the plantation and were probably remnants of the former native broad-leaved forest left standing to provide shade for the tea and its harvesters. Many of these large evergreen trees had three or four massive specimens of *R. dalhousiae* growing within their lofty boughs, providing one of the greatest spectacles in nature that I have ever witnessed.

A very closely related taxon, *R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum*, was formerly considered to be a distinct species (*R. rhabdotum*), but was only distinguished from *R. dalhousiae* by the presence of red stripes on the corolla lobes. This former species was reduced to varietal status under *R. dalhousiae* by Dr. James Cullen in his 1978 revision of subgenus *Rhododendron*. It occurs in habitats and elevations similar to those of *R. dalhousiae* but is found only at the eastern end of the range of that species (northeastern India (Arunachal Pradesh), Bhutan & southern Tibet). In October of 2003, I was a member of an expedition to this region and although we did not see it in flower, just seeing variety *rhabdotum* in its native habitat was one of the highlights of the trip. We always found this variety at around 8,600 feet where it grew with *R. grande*, *R. griffithianum* and *R. maddenii* ssp. *maddenii*. The *rhabdotum* plants were growing in thickets on steep rocky slopes along the road where they could reach out to the sunlight. The large golden capsules were most impressive against the dark leaves and smooth cinnamon bark. Plants grown from seed collected in this region have since flowered and I have been most impressed with the overall size and quality of the blossoms – much finer than any that I have previously seen in cultivation. Note: In the remaining text, my references to "this species," "*R. dalhousiae*," etc. should be interpreted as pertaining to both *R. dalhousiae* and its variety *rhabdotum*.

*R. dalhousiae* is a member of the Dalhousiae Alliance within subsection Maddenia. Other members of this Alliance include *RR. excellens*, *nuttallii*, *lindleyi*, *taggianum*, *liliiflorum*,

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*kiangsiense*, *levinei* & *chunienii*(?). It is closely related to *R. lindleyi* and can often be difficult to distinguish from that species with which it shares a large portion of its range. However, *R. lindleyi* may be distinguished from *R. dalhousiae* by its highly fragrant, generally somewhat smaller white flowers and smaller, narrower leaves. Also, the calyx of *R. lindleyi* is distinctly fringed with long white hairs while that of *R. dalhousiae* is typically glabrous. In the wild, *R. lindleyi* generally occurs at slightly higher elevations where the ranges of the two species overlap.

As with most epiphytic rhododendrons, *R. dalhousiae* can be quite straggly and open in its growth habit, ranging from fully upright and shrub-like to procumbent and sprawling. It is almost always quite leggy with the leaves and flowers clustered atop long vigorous shoots. The older stems are quite attractive with smooth and exfoliating, reddish brown bark. The leaves are three to eight inches in length and up to three inches wide, narrowly elliptic to somewhat obovate in shape. The upper surface of the foliage is dark green and slightly bullate with deeply impressed veins. The lower surface has small, dark brown to reddish scales over a brownish to glaucous-green surface. The inflorescence consists of two to six flowers which are typically around four inches in length. They are tubular to funnel-campanulate in shape and range in color from white to cream or pale yellow, often flushed rose and usually with at least some fragrance. Populations of this species in northern Sikkim are described as being uniformly lemon-green in color and have been designated as ssp. *tashii* by Pradhan & Lachungpa in Sikkim-Himalayan Rhododendrons (1990). The flowers of var. *rhabdotum* are quite similar except for the five bright red stripes running the length of each corolla lobe. The flowers of both varieties typically emerge yellowish before aging to white or cream. In gardens, var. *rhabdotum* typically flowers later (mid- to late summer) than *R. dalhousiae* (late spring).

In cultivation, this free-flowering species is best grown in a cool greenhouse or comparably protected area in all but the mildest gardens. Most forms in cultivation are probably hardy to +10 or 15°F. with the flower buds probably a bit more tender than this. It does quite well planted out in very mild areas such as coastal California, parts of Australia & New Zealand, and along the western coast of Scotland. Cultivation in areas with harsher conditions is usually limited to container culture. Of course, this species does not make the ideal container plant owing to its vigorous and leggy habit. It is, however, quite amenable to life in a pot if provided with a free-draining soil-less mix and the appropriate amounts of water and fertilizer to compensate for the restricted root system. As with all epiphytic plants, the growing media (for container or in-ground culture) must be exceptionally well-drained for successful cultivation. A coarse, chunky mix composed of organic material such as bark, compost, and/or coarse peat moss with pumice, grit or lava rock added for stability and structure makes an ideal "soil." At the RSBG we grow our

entire collection of *R. dalhousiae* in containers. Many of our large stock plants have been grown under these conditions for ten or more years and are still quite healthy and free blooming. The various members of this Alliance, including *R. dalhousiae*, are not particularly responsive to being cut or pinched back although selective tip-pinching of young shoots from an early age should result in a well-branched, more or less bushy specimen. I grow several specimens of both var. *dalhousiae* and var. *rhabdotum* in my own garden in West Seattle and have found that judicious pinching back for the first two or three years results in a well-branched small tree. These plants, once they have become "pot-bound" are actually quite tough and easy to maintain. Like most plants that are epiphytic in the wild, they are adapted to periods of drought and grow well with a small, somewhat restricted root system. In fact, plants grown with a restricted root zone in this fashion will bloom much sooner than those grown under more favorable conditions in the ground.

Despite its lack of hardiness, this species has remained quite popular - a testimony to the beauty and splendor of its floral display. It has been used to a small degree in hybridizing, with 'Snow Mantle,' 'Alf Bramley' and 'Countess of Haddington' among its progeny. *R. dalhousiae* has received several awards including the Award of Merit (AM) in 1930 when shown by Clyne Castle, Swansea and again in 1974 for the clone 'Tom Spring-Smythe' shown by Sandling Park. This latter exhibitor also won the prestigious First Class Certificate (FCC) in that very same year with the clone 'Frank Ludlow' from Ludlow, Sherriff & Taylor #6694. The red-striped version of this species (*R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum*) is also the bearer of awards including the AM in 1931 to a clone shown by Bodnant and the FCC to clone shown by Exbury in 1934.

#### ACCESSIONS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE RSF:

##### ***R. dalhousiae* var. *dalhousiae***

1977/605 Tatum. Typical yellowish cream fading to cream.  
2000/025 Enjoy. I have not seen this clone in flower but it is labeled "best."

2001/243 Schick. "A very compact and bushy form."

Note: We also have over a dozen clones accessioned from seed collected in the wild from distinct or superior selected wild specimens under the numbers 130sd1995, SEH#502, SEH#521 & SEH#522. Although most of these have flowered over the past few years, they have not yet been fully evaluated.

##### ***R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum***

1977/703 Brodick. Flowers white with red stripes and a yel-

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The images on the cover are all *Rhododendron dalhousiae*. The one on the left was taken by Nirvan Hope and the other two are from the RSF image collection.



# SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT



At the Rhododendron Species Foundation Annual Meeting on April 26th, RSF President Joe Ronsley read the following letter from Board member Philippe de Spoelberch:

Dear Joe,

*I gladly confirm that the Board of Directors of the Franklinia Foundation approved on December 4th 2007, in principle, a contribution towards the RSF endowment fund of 1 million USD spread over 5 years, beginning with the \$200,000 already contributed for 2008. There is no reason to believe that the Foundation will not be able to make similar payments over the next 4 years.*

*There are no particular strings attached other than the question of continuity of present management and of the Board's intention as expressed in your memo, to establish the RSF as a world class institution devoted to the study and conservation of rhododendrons. Clearly the Foundation would be disappointed if no other donors were to follow its example.*

*With kind regards,*

*Philippe de Spoelberch,*

*Chairman of the Board,*

*Franklinia Foundation*

We are sure we speak for all RSF members and staff in expressing our deepest gratitude for this most significant gift. A larger endowment is the best way of providing long-term financial stability for the RSF, and of enabling it most effectively to fulfill its mandate. When complete, the Franklinia Foundation contribution will nearly double the current endowment fund. In our rejoicing, however, it is important to take note of Philippe's last sentence. While few RSF members are able to match the Franklinia Foundation's contribution, a clear intention of Franklinia's Board is to stimulate contributions by others in order to make the RSF endowment fund grow.

It was our pleasure to have Philippe and his daughter Caroline de Spoelberch, who is Vice President of the Franklinia Foundation, or more properly *Fondation Franklinia*, in attendance at the meeting. Philippe joined the RSF Board in 2005, and was awarded Life Membership in appreciation of his contributions, totaling \$30,000, for renovation of the Azalea Section of the RSBG. These contributions were made before, and in addition to, the grant to the endowment fund.

Philippe de Spoelberch is a prominent Belgian businessman who is keenly interested in horticulture. He created the 37 acre Arboretum Wespelaar in Haacht-Wespelaar, Belgium, some 10 miles north of Brussels, where *Magnolia*, *Ilex*, *Rhododendron*, *Acer*, *Viburnum*, *Fagus*, and *Quercus* are a few of the genera on which he has focused. Philippe is Vice Chairman of the International Dendrology Society.

The purpose of his charitable foundation, *Fondation Franklinia*, is to support the conservation and display of the world's flora. As a priority, the Foundation supports the objectives and the financing of activities of Arboretum Wespelaar, but it also supports financially any person, institution, botanical garden or private collection throughout the world, or any activity whatsoever of a botanical or horticultural nature, provided that it contributes to knowledge and conservation of plants worldwide.

The RSF is especially grateful to Philippe and the Board of Directors of *Fondation Franklinia* for this momentous contribution, and for the compliment implied in it. Through the financial stability that this grant, along with, it is hoped, others that it will stimulate, the RSF can make even greater strides towards establishing itself as the internationally recognized center of knowledge for the Genus Rhododendron.

continued from page 2

lowish flush at the base of the tube.

1983/077 Schick. Similar to 1977/703 but with a larger and more greenish-yellow flush, red stripes.

1994/003 Enjoy. Cream flowers with red stripes.

2006/046, 2006/081 & 2006/116 All from KCSH#0310 – grown from seed collected in the wild.

#### REFERENCES:

Cullen, J. 1980. "A Revision of *Rhododendron*. I. Subgenus *Rhododendron* sections *Rhododendron* & *Pogonanthum*." Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Vol. 39(1).

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Davidian, H.H. 1982. *The Rhododendron Species*. Vol. I. Timber Press. Portland, OR.

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Rhododendron Species Foundation: Records - 1964 to present.

## RSBG NEWS & NOTES

Rick Peterson

### Rutherford Conservatory

Now that the process of building the Tropical House for the public display of *Vireyas* has begun, members of the RSF Executive Committee have approved its name as the Rutherford Conservatory. This is in recognition of the major contribution toward the project made by longtime member Fran Rutherford, who has also been the primary driving force behind the project. While Fran has been the major contributor, the Benjamin and Margaret Hall Foundation gave a substantial gift to the project in 2002. Large contributions have also been made by the Hawaii Chapter of the ARS, David Burns, Roma Cockins, Mitch & Sandy Mitchell, Norman Archibald Foundation, Jack & Ann Root, E. White Smith & Lucie Sorenson-Smith, and H. Dean Stout, plus a long list of contributors donating under \$1,000. Currently, the project is at the permitting stage with the City of Federal Way.

### Member Bequest

A check for \$232,500 was received on July 18th from the estate of Charles T. Larus, a long-time member from Bloomfield, Connecticut. This major bequest was not anticipated by anyone on the board or staff but was, indeed, gratefully welcomed. There were no restrictions attached with the gift. The Executive Committee has decided to place \$200,000

in the Endowment Fund with the remainder to go towards operations.

Mr. Larus was very interested in species rhododendrons and he traveled with Warren Berg, Chip Muller, and others to China on botanical expeditions. June Sinclair, of Port Ludlow, Washington was on one of these trips and she fondly relates that, "Charlie was eager to identify the plants we would see and at night would bring material back to camp for us to figure out what we had seen. In those days there was a lot of new stuff out there, at least for us." The board and staff extend sincere condolences to Mr. Larus' family and friends.

### Garden Campaign

The board and staff are very grateful to the following members for their generous contributions to the spring garden campaign. Thank you so much!

Richard Aaring, Margaret Adams, Mr. & Mrs. Paul Anderson, Mr. & Mrs. Louis Appell, Jason F. Ashford, Mary Boatwright, Martha Box, Malcolm Boyd & Judy Allison, Mr. & Mrs. Werner Brack, Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Brackman, Dan Brady, Briggs Nursery & Dave Jarzynka, Joan Buhler, R. M. Campbell, Bonnie Campbell, Richard Cavender, Carol F. Chapen, Susan B. Clark, Mr. & Mrs. David Colby, Edward P. Cole, Mr. & Mrs. Douglas G. Crane, Mike Creighton, Mr. & Mrs. Patrick J. Cummins, Linda Dougherty, Sylvia Duryee, Mr. & Mrs. B. J. Falanga, Lucille Fleischmann, Robert Franz, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Fries, Mr. & Mrs. Herman C. Gehrich, Mr. & Mrs. J. W. Gerdemann, A. J. Giustina, Mr. & Mrs. William S. Greer, Kenneth W. Gross, Mr. & Mrs. Bjerne Hansen, Hans Hasche-Kluender, Deena J. Henkins, Valerie Hilt, Dr. & Mrs. Harry R. Houston, S. O. Kemmler, Jonathan Klay, Don LaFond, Kim Leeds, Anita R. Lockhart, John G. Marshall, Robert Mathey, William C. McCarthy, Patricia A. McGill, James McKechnie, William McMillan, Mr. & Mrs. Robert A. Mitchell, David R. Morel, Mr. & Mrs. William Morse, Dr. Charles H. Muller, Richard Murcott, Sonja Nelson, James K. Norquest, Dr. William T. Norris, Sue Olsen, Mr. & Mrs. John W. Parker, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Pember, Nayadean Pundsack, J. R. Read, Martha Robbins, Dr. Robert G. Shaver, David C. Short, June Sinclair, Helen Smelko, Mr. & Mrs. Rex R. Smith, Stan B. Sutherland, Ellen Stewart, Barbara R. Sullivan, Karen Swenson, Mr. & Mrs. Milton B. Tangard, Margaret B. Taylor, A. Jennifer Velinty, Jon Villaume, Donald H. Voss, Mr. & Mrs. Charles P. Vukovich, Carol Wall, Conrad A. Watne, Bob Whitman & Pam Perryman, Jonathan Wright

### Membership Directory – Please Read!

As mentioned in the spring newsletter the RSF will publish a membership directory this fall to be distributed to members only. It will not be sold or distributed otherwise. The directory will include all current member information including name, address, phone number, and email address unless notice is received from members who do not wish to have their information published. Please contact the RSF office if you would prefer not to be in the directory.

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 Chris Bonn  
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 Rita Carpenter  
 David & Wendy Close  
 Michael Dahlquist  
 Caroline de Spoelberch  
 Eric Dickerson & Christopher Becker  
 Sue Evanetz  
 Katsuhisa Fujiwara  
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 Robert & Josephine Wright

***Rhododendron Species  
 Botanical Garden***

The RSBG Newsletter is published quarterly in winter, spring, summer, and fall by the Rhododendron Species Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Submissions are due by the first of the month, 8 weeks before publication. Email rick@rhodygarden.org

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**Contributions (5/1/2008 - 7/31/2008) THANK YOU SO MUCH!**

**Life Member Gifts**

Jay & Pamela Green  
 Keith & Wendy White  
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**Member Gifts**

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**Endowment Fund**

B. J. and Natalie Falanga  
*Fondation Franklinia*  
 Charles Larus Estate  
 Ann Robbins

**In Memory (5/1/2008 - 7/31/2008)**

**In Memory of Marvel Laughlin**

Lucille Fleischmann

**In Memory of Dee Travis**

Bonnie Campbell



Keith White

***Rhododendron Species  
 Botanical Garden***

*We are very grateful to the above contributors for their thoughtfulness in choosing the RSBG for their gifts.*

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## 2008 Calendar

### March

15 – Spring Work Party & Potluck

### April

5/6 – **Spring Plant Sale**  
26 – Annual General Meeting

### May

31 – Volunteer Picnic & Work Party

### July

26 – Evening in the Garden

### September

20 – **Fall Plant Sale**

### December

12 – Volunteer Christmas Party

Rhododendron Species  
Botanical Garden

## FALL PLANT SALE

**Saturday, September 20, 2008**  
**9:00am - 2:00pm**

at **Weyerhaeuser Corporate**  
**Headquarters**  
west middle parking lot  
Federal Way, Washington

**Find great plants and**  
**support the Garden at the**  
**same time!**