



RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

Spring 2008 NEWSLETTER

Volume 33 Issue 2

SPECIES PROFILE

Rhododendron cyanocarpum Wallich ex G. Don 1834
Steve Hootman

There is tremendous variation in the natural ranges of the hundreds of species within the genus *Rhododendron*. Some species are quite widespread and vary greatly throughout their range. *R. arboreum* is an excellent example of this, ranging from the island of Sri Lanka and the southern portion of the Indian subcontinent to the Himalaya Mountains, China and even Thailand. A typical example of the other extreme would be *R. kawakamii*, an epiphytic species endemic to the island of Taiwan and, relatively speaking, showing little variation. The term endemic refers to being peculiar or restricted to a particular area or region. The Siskiyou Mountains of southwestern Oregon are famous for the number of endemic plants occurring on their ancient peaks. *Kalmiopsis leachiana*, a dwarf relative of rhododendrons, is probably the most famous example from this region. Likewise, many of the plants found in the Siskiyou are restricted to the serpentine soils which are so prevalent in that region and thus, endemic to a soil type.

There are numerous instances of endemism in the genus *Rhododendron*. A well-known example being *R. cyanocarpum* which is endemic to the Cang Shan, a well-explored and botanically rich chain of mountains in northwest central Yunnan Province, China. This species was first brought to the attention of western botanists by Peré Jean Delavay, a remarkable French missionary who spent approximately ten years collecting herbarium specimens in the Cang Shan and adjacent regions. Unfortunately, the first specimen of this species collected by Delavay and sent back to Paris consisted of only fruit and foliage. From this material, the French botanist Franchet described this new taxon in 1895 as a "blue-fruited" variety of *R. thomsonii* (cyan = blue, carpum = fruit) due to the superficial morphological similarities of the two species. It was not collected in flower until 1906,

when George Forrest was exploring the Cang Shan, collecting specimens and seed. From Forrest's collections, W.W. Smith was able to determine that this plant deserved specific status and made the necessary change in 1914.

Rhododendron cyanocarpum was first introduced into cultivation from seed collected by Forrest in 1910 (F#6775 & 6779). It has been reintroduced on many occasions since that time but remains relatively rare and unknown in cultivation. This species is found in a wide variety of habitats from 10,000 to 13,000 feet in elevation. It is quite common where it occurs and is often the dominant species in a given area, forming thickets and sometimes creating a wash of blue across the mountainside due to the glaucous blue-green coloring of the foliage. In the wild, I have noted this species as an impressive, large and upright-growing shrub or small tree. Often, in sites less hospitable to plant survival, I have seen massive and probably ancient specimens 20 feet or more in height with just a few tufts of foliage at the very tops of their twisted and leaning trunks. This small amount of living tissue was sustained by a thin strip of cambium somehow still functioning amidst the wind-scoured bark and wood - reminding me of the famous bristlecone pines of the American southwest.

This species is a member of Subsection Thomsonia and, as mentioned earlier, fairly closely related to *R. thomsonii*, differing from that species in its widely disjunct range and lighter-colored flowers. In cultivation, *R. cyanocarpum* also blooms much earlier than its Himalayan relative, often in full bloom at the RSBG in early March and eagerly anticipated as one of the first species to blossom each season. The flowers occur in a rather loose inflorescence of six to a dozen and range in color from pure white to pink or pale rose, with darker nectar pouches and often with a brightly colored calyx. They range in shape from widely funnel-campanulate to more fully campanulate (bell-shaped) as seen in the flowers of *R. thomsonii*. The distinctive foliage is orbicular to broadly elliptic in shape, three to four inches in length. One of the outstanding ornamental features of this species is the bright blue-green color of the leaves, due to a glaucous coating on the upper sur-

continued on page 2

In This Issue:

- Species Profile
- News & Notes
- Contributions
- 2008 Calendar

continued from page 1

face. The smooth lower surface is more or less glaucous to minutely hairy. The bark is pale cinnamon-brown and flaking.

In cultivation, this species can be thought of as basically an early-season, lighter-flowered version of *R. thomsonii* with more intensely glaucous-blue foliage. *R. cyanocarpum* is relatively hardy in the maritime Pacific Northwest (to 0°F.?) although the flowers may be damaged by early season frosts. There was some damage to the foliage of this species when the temperature reached 4°F. in December of 1990. It will thrive if given a sheltered and well-drained position where the beautiful early season flowers can easily be admired. High overhead shade, a fast-draining organic soil, and good air movement will provide the ideal conditions to keep this plant healthy and less susceptible to powdery mildew. Although this disease can disfigure or even partially defoliate an unhealthy plant in a bad year, the glowing early season flowers and attractive foliage make every effort to cultivate this species worthwhile.

A clone of this species exhibited by Lady Loder of Leonardslee in 1933 received the Award of Merit. I am unaware of any hybrids having this species as a parent.

Accessions in the RSF Collection:

1965/274 Leonardslee

1975/007 Hilliers

1975/102 Windsor – Flowers white flushed pink in bud, opening white.

1977/731 F#15570:Windsor

1995/063 SBEC#0971:Glendoick – Pink-flowered selection.

1995/066 SBEC#0361:Glendoick – White flowers.

1995/081 EN#2458:Glendoick

1996/003 Dawyck – Pure white flowers.

CCHH#8245 – Five accessions in 2000.

CCHH#8230 – Five accessions in 2001

References Consulted:

Chamberlain, D.F. 1982. "A Revision of *Rhododendron*. II. Subgenus *Hymenanthes*." *Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh*. Vol. 39(2):

Cox, P.A. & Cox, K.N.E. 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species*. Glendoick Publishing. Scotland.

Davidian, H.H. 1989. *The Rhododendron Species*. Vol. II. Timber Press. Portland, Or.

Hootman, S.E. 1995-2006. Unpublished Field Notes.

Rhododendron Species Foundation: Records - 1964 to Present.



The image above, of an ancient *Rhododendron cyanocarpum*, was taken by Steve Hootman in the Cang Shan mountain range, Yunnan Province, China at about 3400m during his 1997 expedition.

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

RSBG NEWS & NOTES

Rick Peterson

Great News! After many years of planning, the **Tropical Conservatory** will become a reality in 2008. This new structure, close to the entrance of the Garden, will be a year-round public display for the Vireya collection (for those of you who are new to species rhododendrons, Vireyas are rhododendrons that grow mostly at higher elevations in the tropical regions of southeast Asia). We sincerely appreciate the contributions to this project from many donors, but special thanks goes to long-time member **Fran Rutherford** of Port Orchard, Washington who has been the major contributor. Clearing for the area began in April, with excavation of the site in May, and construction to follow soon thereafter. The structure should be completed by the end of June. Co-Executive Director/Curator **Steve Hootman** and Nursery Manager **Denis Bottemiller** will then begin the next and most exciting phase: designing and planting the interior!

Spring Board / Annual Members Meeting

The Rhododendron Species Foundation board of directors met on Saturday, April 26th for the spring meeting in conjunction with the Annual Member's Meeting. Members voted on a slate of Executive Committee members (non-officers) as well as board directors, many returning for another term. New to the board this year are **Wilbur Bluhm**, **Deena Henkins**, and **Prudence Holliger**

Wilbur Bluhm of Salem, Oregon is a professional horticulturist, a retired Oregon State University extension agent, and a consultant to growers and planners. He is a member of many plant societies and founder of the Willamette Chapter of the Native Plant Society. Wilbur is a long-time member of the Willamette Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, giving many programs over the years as well as contributing to the Journal of the ARS.

Deena Henkins of Seattle, Washington retired from the State of Alaska Department of Health and Welfare, Environmental Health Division after 29 years and moved to Seattle in 2001. She had an interest in species rhododendrons even while living in Alaska but the ability to grow a wider range of varieties expanded after moving to Washington where she has been nurturing dwarf species in pots and larger plants on the grounds of her condominium. Deena joined the Seattle Rhododendron Society in 2001, becoming a board member in 2006 and treasurer since last June. She became a member of the RSF in 2004 and began volunteering in 2007.

Prudence Holliger of Issaquah, Washington has worked as a technical writer and publisher since the early eighties. For the last nine years, she has been editing and publishing *Magnolia*, the Journal of the Magnolia Society Interna-

tional. In 2007 she generously volunteered to be the editor and typographer of *Rhododendron Species*, the yearbook of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and has produced two volumes to date. Prudence serves on the board of the Magnolia Society International and Seattle Rhododendron Society. She joined the RSBG in 1992 and met long-time board member **Don King** on a RSBG staff/volunteer hike in the Cascade Mountains. They were married in the RSBG gazebo in July 1996! Prudence is also a long-time member of the Photo Committee at the RSBG.

Treasurer **Robert Gust** resigned in January due to work commitments. Bob joined the RSF board in 2006 and took over from former treasurer **Bill Lindeman**. On behalf of the board and staff I extend a special thank you to Bob for his



Artist Susan Heston's conception of the new RSBG Tropical Conservatory

time and efforts with much being accomplished over the past two years. Executive Committee member-at-large **Bill Brackman** was asked to fill the position and he graciously accepted.

Volunteer of the Year 2007

I am very pleased to announce **Deena Henkins** as volunteer of the year for 2007. Deena became a member in March 2004 and began donating her time – twice a week for at least eight hours per day at the RSBG – in January 2007. She works primarily in the nursery transplanting seedlings and rooted cuttings, checking and updating the nursery plant inventory, culling dead plants, cleaning hoop houses, pulling plants for distribution, helping pack and ship mail order plants, and a myriad of other nursery jobs.

Thank you so much, Deena, for your support and dedication. You are a pleasure to work with and the staff is definitely grateful for the 580 hours you donated last year to keep the nursery progressing forward!

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

Spring Plant Sale Fundraiser

Twenty-two years ago the first RSBG spring plant sale was held near the east entrance of the Weyerhaeuser corporate building where a cold wind howled through the breezeway. Nevertheless, it was a great success and a few years later the site was moved to Weyerhaeuser's west parking lot where there was more space. The sale originally developed out of an annual volunteer plant sale where members donated plants to sell and raise funds for volunteer projects. Now the spring sale, along with the one in the fall, is a significant source of operating funds for the RSBG.

Being the first major plant sale in the Puget Sound region – typically the first weekend in April – it is subjected to the vagaries of early spring weather and this year was no exception with chilly temperatures and a few rain showers (although, there were a couple of minutes of sunshine!). Gross sales this year were \$52,412, just shy by a thousand dollars or so compared with last year. Most of our participating nursery vendors did well and I extend a sincere thank you to **Blue Frog Garden Nursery, Bubbling Springs Nursery, Chimaicum Woods: A Rhododendron Nursery, deGro Flower & Garden Co., Fairmeadow Nursery, Foliage Gardens, The Greenery, Hardy Fern Foundation, Keeping It Green Nursery, Lee Farm & Nursery, Madrona Nursery, Mount Forest Farm, Overland Enterprises, Robinwood Nursery, Species Unlimited, and Steamboat Island Nursery**. These vendors contribute 40% of their sales to the RSBG and the staff and volunteers are most grateful for their support.

I am also very grateful to our spring sale sponsors: **Columbia Bank** for donating the use of four credit card machines, **Trader Joe's** for lending shopping carts for our customers use, and **Weyerhaeuser Company** for loaning the use of their employee parking lot. Without their support the overhead costs of the sale would be substantially higher. I would also like to give special recognition to **Carolyn, Cindy, and crew** of Trader Joe's for their participation and cheerful enthusiasm as they handed out free treats and samples to customers – thank you so much!

A special thank you goes to each of the volunteer crew that helped make the sale a success: **Rollo Adams, Winnie Adams, Gary Becker, Bob Dunning, Bill Ehret, John Far-**

barik, Deena Henkins, Prudence Holliger, Don King, Pat McGill, Nancy Meyer, Bill O'Neill, John Parker, Garratt Richardson, Ann Robbins, Martha Robbins, Bettie Snoey, Ramona Soule, Richie Steffen, Carol Sterley, Rod Sterley, Diane Thompson, Paul Thompson, and Walt Thompson. These dedicated folks helped with a multitude of jobs that made the sale run seamlessly.

Membership Directory- PLEASE READ!

The RSF Board is planning on producing a Rhododendron Species Foundation Membership Directory for **RSF members only** (separate from the yearbook) and 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. An "opt-out" form is included below for your convenience which can be mailed to PO Box 3798, Federal Way, WA 98063. You may also call the RSF office at 253-838-4646 or email rick@rhodygarden.org to let us know if you prefer not to be listed.

Springtime

Most of the residents in the Pacific Northwest have been waiting – and waiting – and waiting for spring to begin this year. Now, it is true that, typically, the weather in springtime can be downright miserable in the Puget Sound and surrounding regions. Dark, cloudy days often with rain showers can be the norm, although there are usually some beautiful warm days intermixed with the ones that are less so. However, while this year the rainfall was a bit below normal, the temperatures were downright chilly, more so than usual, and continued to be so week after week from March through mid-May (okay, there were *two* nice days amidst those many weeks!). The thermometer never dropped too far below freezing and it rarely warmed up above 60°F with many days in the 50's. Of course, this had a huge influence on flowering time for the rhododendrons in the Garden. After observing 23 spring seasons at the RSBG, I was *amazed* to see *Rhododendron strigillosum* still in bloom at the end of March (typically, it is done by late February or early March at the latest) and *R. augustinii* at its peak on Mother's Day (late April for this one); visitors to the Garden on that weekend were treated to a spectacular display of species in bloom which they would not have seen otherwise at that time year.

Opt-Out Form for Membership Directory

Please note that the Membership Directory will only be sent to RSF members; however, if you do not wish to be included in the Directory, please return this form by September 1, 2008.

Do not print any of my contact information.

Print only my name, city, state, & country.

Name: _____

Please mail to RSF, PO Box 3798, Federal Way, WA 98063

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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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Co-Executive Director/Curator
 steve@rhodygarden.org

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Co-Executive Director
 Newsletter Editor
 rick@rhodygarden.org

Dennis Bottemiller

Nursery Manager/Propagator
 dennis@rhodygarden.org

Lisa Brittain

Nursery / Garden Assistant
 rsf@rhodygarden.org

Tammi Finnick

Gift Shop Attendant
 rsf@rhodygarden.org

Victoria Gunderson

Fiscal Specialist
 victoria@rhodygarden.org

Kurt Looser

Gardener
 rsf@rhodygarden.org

Deirdre Zema

Gift Shop Attendant
 rsf@rhodygarden.org

Contact Information

PO Box 3798
 Federal Way, WA 98063

Office: 253-838-4646
 Fax: 253-838-4686
 Gift Shop: 253-661-9377

rsf@rhodygarden.org
 www.rhodygarden.org

Contributions (1/1/2008 - 4/30/2008) THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Life Member Gifts

Honoré Hacanson
 Ben & Margaret Hall
 Bob & Janice Nelson
 Paul & Diane Thompson
 Keith & Wendy White
 Fred & Ann Whitney

Member Gifts

Joan Buhler
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In Memory (1/1/2008 - 4/30/2008)

In Memory of Dorothy Finch

Hazel Tarpley

In Memory of LaWanda Watters

ARS Shelton Chapter

In Memory of Britt Smith

Dorothy Dunstan
 Fran Rutherford
 Paul & Diane Thompson



RSF Image Collection

Spring Plant Sale Fund-Raiser

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

SAVE THE DATE!

Third Annual 'Evening in the Garden'

Saturday, July 26th, 2008
5:30pm - 8:30pm

All RSBG Members and their guests
are invited to attend!

Join staff and board members for
wine, beer, soft drinks and
hearty hors d'oeuvres

DOOR PRIZES & AUCTION!
\$15 singles, \$30 couples