

WEST YORKSHIRE AGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 68 FEBRUARY 2019



Cyclamen coum

The Chairman's Ramblings.

I hope you all had a good and happy Christmas and now is the time to look forward to seeing your plants, be it alpines or your garden plants, coming into life.

In the last newsletter I commented on the changeable weather, with the beast from the east followed by a very warm spell and to follow a very hot summer. My bulb collection enjoyed the heat judging by the size of the bulbs. The one genus that suffered most of all and this applies to all collections up and down the country was Saxifraga. The national collection at Waterperry in Oxfordshire was seriously damaged, whilst the plants were shaded and watered, the air temperature was so high they could not withstand the heat. This also applied to my own collection.

The first bulbs to flower in late August, some three weeks earlier than previous years were *Colchicum (Merendera) montana* 'Norman Barrett'. We had the

weirdest face of all on one of our pear trees, then this was followed a few weeks later by *Colchicum kotschyi* and *Crocus mathewii* 'Pink Princess'. It is generally reported that *Crocus banaticus* needs summer moisture but here in my front garden facing south and growing under an Acer tree was flowering freely in a very dry soil. The next few weeks is the lead up to the National Alpine Flower Show, Saturday 13 October at the RHS Harlow Carr Gardens Harrogate, with Ian & Georgina Instone, the new Show Secretaries, organising the event. An excellent show



Colchicum kotschyi

despite poor weather and our local group show taking place on the Sunday.



Crocus mathewii
'Pink Princess'

This year is the centenary for the end of the First World War. (The War to end all Wars) My local town Selby and Selby Abbey have been decked out with some 50,000 hand made knitted poppies, all from the local village residents. WW1 has been an interest of mine since researching my family history, I have visited most of the battlefields and cemeteries in Belgium and France from the 1914/18

war, and those family members who lost their lives.

Our local group meetings continue to bring in revenue from plant sales and the raffle, I thank those members for their efforts for this valuable revenue stream.

This brings us into the Christmas period and our December meeting with local group members photos and presentations. Di Dark with photos from our local group show, Anne Wright photos from her garden, Eric Rainford photos from AGS exhibit at the Harrogate Spring Flower



Crocus banaticus

Show and his garden, Charlie Phillpot on his interest in Orchids and Trevor Wright photos of his year round garden and Ian Instone on the AGS National Alpine Flower Show.

Your committee has listened to members comments regarding the loss of a meeting in October due to the National Alpine Show. We have therefore arranged to have a meeting on the third Saturday, the 19th October, in 2019. Speaker to be arranged.



A right pear!

As I finalise my notes, and looking around the garden, the alpine house, snowdrops are bursting through which bodes well for a great display.

Finally, I wish you all a Very Happy New Year.

Eric Rainford

AGS West Yorkshire group field trip Saturday June 15th 2019

10.00am. Meet at Enterprise Park at Ledston Luck. Café and toilets available on site. Reserve is a short walk away from here. This is a former mining site and has many types of wildflowers and birds. There is a lagoon and small ponds which attract a range of dragon flies, chasers etc.

12.30. Drive on to Kippax sports centre car park. We can eat our packed lunches at the picnic before walking up the hill to look around Townclose hills. Toilets are available in sports centre. This reserve is a natural limestone outcrop being home to a wide range of wildflowers.

15.00. Go to The Chequers Inn for a quick drink before visiting Ledsham Bank reserve which is a few hundred yards away. Ledsham bank is a small but charming meadow with a good range of flowers which are not normally found locally.

Links to nature reserves.

Ledston Luck - <http://www.ywt.org.uk/reserves/ledston-luck>

Townclose Hills - <http://www.ywt.org.uk/reserves/townclose-hills>

Ledsham Bank - <http://www.ywt.org.uk/reserves/ledsham-bank-nature-reserve>

Addresses for meeting places.

Enterprise Park, Leeds, LS25 7BF

Kippax sports centre – Kippax, Station Road, LS25 7LQ

Chequers Inn, Claypit Lane, Ledsham, Leeds LS25 5LP

Other information.

Sites are suitable for people who are reasonably fit although good walking footwear is essential, there are no stiles or similar to walk over. If people have concerns over mobility or fitness we can drop them off at easier points of access. Packed lunches and drinks to be brought with you. We normally have a collection tin for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust who manage these reserves on these walks and suggest a donation of £3.

Hope to see you there!

Charlie Philpotts

Ichthyoselmis macrantha and a few of its relatives

My first encounter with dicentras was the popular and showy spring-flowering *Dicentra spectabilis* (now known as *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*). This was followed by other varieties including an attractive white clone *Lamprocapnos spectabilis* 'Alba' and a dark red cultivar 'Valentine'.

Over time, I became less interested in brightly coloured plant hybrids and increasingly attracted towards plant species, especially those that thrived in shade. The first woodland dicentra species that I grew were the delightfully ephemeral North American *Dicentra cucullaria*



Dicentra cucullaria

and the more persistent woodlander, *Dicentra formosa*.

Dicentra cucullaria appears as if from nowhere in early spring and begins displaying its shining white flowers almost at once. The plants are only 20-25 cm tall but look lovely against bare soil or a carpet of leaf litter. They are true ephemerals and are gone by late May.



Dicentra formosa

I first saw *Dicentra formosa* growing in a large stand in Ray Wood at Castle Howard in North Yorkshire. The plants were almost certainly introduced by Jim Russel who planted many very choice shrubs and trees into the wood. The *D. formosa* plants in Ray Wood appear to be very close to the native American species and have spread to form colonies many metres across that thrive in the woodland environment despite competing with bracken.

My only regular failure has been with the Asiatic species, *Dicentra peregrina*. This has finely divided leaves and is the only dicentra species to occur outside North America. I have still not managed to keep it for more than a season in the garden and think perhaps it might do better as an alpine house plant.

My most recent shade-loving dicentra introduction is *Ichthyoselmis macrocapnos*. This species naturally occurs in Myanmar and western China where it grows as a woodland plant.

The generic name *Ichthyoselmis* comes from the Greek *ichthyo*, relating to fish and *selmis*, meaning gallows, referring to the fact that the flowers hang in small bunches that look like dead fish hanging from a fishmongers hook. In native areas the plant



Ichthyoselmis macrocapnos

has the common name of goldfish plant reflecting the flower colour.

It was discovered by Ernest Wilson in 1904 on Mount Emei, and entered cultivation when Veitch and Sons grew plants from seed collected by Wilson.



I. macrocapnos emerging

This species demands deep shade and shelter from winds. In April, a large 'blister' appears at the soil surface and in a day or so strong 'coils' appear and start to expand rapidly. After a few more days the coils have straightened and developed into flowering stems each supporting a few pale-yellow flowers up to seven centimetres in length. These are the largest of all 'dicentra' flowers (hence the species name, *macrantha*, meaning large flower) and explain why the species is sometimes known in cultivation as the large-flowered dicentra.

The leaves and flowering stems of *I. macrocapnos* reach about 60-75 cm and persist to the first hard frost. The flowers stand out well in the shade and always attract the attention of observant visitors.

My colony of *I. macrocapnos* lives under the branches of a *Magnolia* 'Elizabeth' and is surrounded by dwarf rhododendrons and thrives with no direct sunshine at all. This year I was concerned that the plant would not survive the very hot and dry summer because numerous authorities have reported that the species requires permanently damp soil conditions. The plant was not watered and did not show signs of water stress whilst the drought tolerant *Omphalodes cappadoica* that was growing in a nearby location where it received two hours sunshine a day, was totally wilted for days on end.

When the plant is well suited to its environment it spreads freely by underground rhizomes and can be propagated easily by lifting and potting the new plants that appear around the parent. This can be done in early autumn or spring but possibly also at other times of year if the young offshoots are carefully handled and not allowed to dry out. This year I decided that I would like to try to grow a large number of plants from seed so that I could have specimens

for friends, and plants to sell for charity when we open out garden.

I watched the flowers fade and was quite disappointed to see that they just became papery with no apparent seed formation. This was not a surprise because I thought that my colony which was derived from just a single plant might not be self-fertile. In June I removed the dead flower heads and peeled apart the brittle flower parts and was delighted to find that



I. macrocapnos seedpod

there were numerous shiny black seeds with very obvious clear elaiosomes to attract ants and aid dispersal.

I thought that it would be interesting to see if British ants would be attracted to the elaiosomes of this alien species that they would never have previously encountered. I had recently bought a new camera with time lapse facilities and decided that the ant / *I. macrantha* interaction would be my first attempt at time-lapse photography.

I gently squashed a seed pod and put it on the floor of my polytunnel that was covered by a woven polypropylene ground sheet. There were numerous ant colonies living in the floor of the tunnel and I positioned the seed pod near an entrance and set my camera to take a photograph every 15 seconds. The results showed that the ants almost immediately started to remove seeds and transport them to their nest. The 15 second interval was however too long, and in the short video clip, it appeared as if the seeds were simply disappearing without ant intervention! In other words, the ants moved too quickly.

The next morning, I was about to repeat the exercise when I noticed much larger seeds with very apparent elaiosomes deposited around the entrance to the ant nest. I did not recognise the seeds at first but a short investigation revealed that they were from a group of *Jeffersonia diphylla* a few metres away. The seed pods of the *Jeffersonia* had opened and the seeds were just beginning to fall out of the architectural structures. The ants were very active but could not get the large seeds through the small entrance hole despite great efforts to do so.



Ants with J.diphylla seeds

After a few hours the ants had increased the size of the nest entrance and taken in the seeds.

I sowed batches of seed in different conditions in June. Some were sown in standard seed compost (80% fine peat:20% coarse sand and 1g per litre of slow release fertiliser) and kept in a cold glasshouse. Other were sown similarly but placed outside. I have

also used a technique that I frequently

use with trilliums where I cut a 70 mm length of 110mm diameter plastic pipe (standard plastic sewer pipe) and knock into the soil where the plant is growing. I gently stir the seeds into the surface and cover with 5mm mesh to prevent small mammals digging. This allows the seeds to experience natural conditions whilst still being easy to find and to avoid accidentally removing during weeding. Obvious weed species that germinate in the tube are carefully removed as they develop.

Seedlings began to appear in the standard compost in pots placed outside in late October and I am hopeful that I might obtain a good crop of seedlings by next spring.

Peter Williams

Our New Fern Bed

The back of our house faces north and the garden slopes down to this point. It is shady for most of the day with only a little sun at times. For years we have had a very wet, soggy, mossy lawn here, with very little grass and huge cracks in the clay soil in summer. We have also been growing ferns in a shady part of the garden which was not easily accessible so the plants were a little neglected.

After some thinking and gentle persuasion, Ian measured out an area of the lawn which could house the ferns. The turf was removed and stacked at the top of the garden by the compost heap where it could be left to rot down for later use.

Then the hard work started. Narrow paving flags were inserted on their edges around the edge of the bed to match the rest of the lawn. This is to help stop



the lawn growing into the borders because it is full of wick grass. More 3 x 1 paving flags were laid horizontally around the bed so it could be accessed from all sides without having to walk on the garden or soggy grass. The heavy clay had to be dug out before a good mix of ericaceous compost could be added to the bed, suitable for the ferns. The top few inches of the clay soil was scattered around the garden to help fill the other beds and the more solid clay soil from lower down was barrowed to the top of the garden to increase the height of the banks of the ditch which often overflows into the garden. The new compost was firmed in and brought level with the paving.

The next task was to sort out the fern plants. As I said before they had been somewhat neglected and the top surface of the pots were covered in moss which had to be removed. Then the dead foliage was taken off leaving the healthy fronds on the plants. As each one was cleaned it was taken to its new home ready for planting. We then arranged the pots in the bed to see how they would look their best and when we were happy, planting began.

Some of the ferns have been left in their pots and sunk into the compost as these may be shown at some time at one of the national shows and this would make lifting them easier. There was also room for some dwarf rhododendrons to be arranged in their pots as they will also be shown and they might appreciate the shade.

We are pleased with our little project which has freed up another area of the garden for our other plants.

Ian and Georgina Instone

Autumn Show Harlow Carr 13th October 2018

We were able to have all three rooms to set up from Friday morning. James had put the tables in the rooms beforehand so all we had to do was arrange them in the right order and put on the cloths, dividers and cards. We did have a couple of issues which caused a few problems. James used the small tables



which were already in the teaching rooms instead of the larger tables that were used in previous years. This reduced the display area for each class. We managed to exchange one set for larger tables but James didn't think they had any more of the larger size. This caused issues with space allocated to classes of large pans on the Saturday morning but with the addition of more tables on the day of the event, we were just able to sort it

out. Something we need to remember for next time.

The weather for the weekend was not at all good and the footfall reflected this. On the Saturday the footfall was 1088 and on Sunday 611, far less than



in other years. Even so, we still had many members of the public looking around the show and buying plants and refreshments. Catering produced a very good taking of £201.44 and the Exhibitors appreciated tea cakes and hot cross buns for breakfast.

The members plant stall was also well supported and made a profit of £236.30.

Contributions from nurseries totalled £340. After all expenses were taken off (£52.80 Banner and £9.54 masking tape) we had £715.40 profit.

Any comments regarding the show will be welcome for discussion.

Many thanks to everyone who helped set up the show on the Friday and helped on the Saturday.

Ian and Georgina Instone

****Editor's Note****

Many thanks to all the contributors to *this* newsletter. **I am VERY keen to receive articles, news items, tips etc., for inclusion in future issues.**

All it takes is a paragraph, or a photograph, or both. This is not just the committee's newsletter! Have your say too! **PLEASE** give your contributions to Anne at the meetings or post to Mrs A. Wright, 130, Prince Rupert Drive, Tockwith, York, YO26 7PU, **to arrive before end JULY 2019** (e-mail attachments preferred but not essential - please send images separate to the text). Articles via E-mail to be sent to anneswright42@hotmail.co.uk (remove the 42 before emailing to this address)

Most formats accepted, e.g., Microsoft Word/Works and graphic formats like BMP, TIF, JPG. You can even hand write it, and I can manage!

Website reminder

The AGS West Yorkshire Group has its own mini website hosted on the main AGS website. Here you will find information such as our Programme, previous Newsletters etc. If you have any contributions that you think would be suitable for the website or any suggestions about it, please speak to Matthew Childs.

When locating our website area, you first see an introductory summary to our group. Clicking on 'West Yorkshire' (underlined) opens up the full West Yorkshire Group website area (perhaps useful to bookmark this). The quickest way to find our mini website is:

main AGS website > About us > Local Groups > Filter by > Yorkshire and the Humber > West Yorkshire

CALENDAR

9 FEB	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - Frank Hoyle – A talk on a visit to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado.
17 FEB	South Wales Show
23 FEB	Pershore Early Show
2 MAR	Harlow Show
9 MAR	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - Eric Rainford 'Buried treasures in Latvia'.
9 MAR	Loughborough Show
16 MAR	Kendal Show - with SRGC
23 MAR	South West Show Rosemoor
30 MAR	Hexham Show
6 APR	North Midland Show Chesterfield
13 APR	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - Derek Spicer - A talk on conifers with reference to alpine gardening
13 APR	Midland Show Solihull
20 APR	Cleveland Show
20 APR	Kent Show
27 APR	East Lancashire Show
4 MAY	East Anglia Show
11 MAY	Local Group AGM, Group Show & short member's talk.
18 MAY	Wimborne Show
1 JUN	East Cheshire Show Stockport
6 JUL	Pershore Show

Please support our local show at the AGM!