

# WEST YORKSHIRE AGS GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER NO. 69 AUGUST 2019

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*Physoplexis comosa*

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### ***The Chairman's Ramblings.***

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What a difference a year makes. My lawn mower has been working overtime this year with the warm and sometimes very wet weather. No sooner had the lawns been cut than within a few days the grass had grown and needed cutting again.

My own alpine collection is mainly of the bulbous type, but this summer two alpine plants were outstanding. *Lewisia columbiana alba* and *Saxifraga pentadactyla* grown from seed collected in Sierra Cantabrica, Spain at 1900m. I started to harvest my bulb collection in early July, counting and cleaning the bulbs, with just a couple of pots of Crocuses lost. I Then started to repot towards the end of the month. First came the autumn flowering Crocuses: 48 pots. Next were spring flowering Crocuses: 62 pots. Next were Colchicums: 11 pots. Then were Galanthus: 49 pots. Still to do from my collection are Fritillaria, Cyclamen and Iris which will be repotted in September.

Over the last few years the membership of our group has slowly declined from its peak when the membership stood at nearly 200. We have gained a few new members through the AGS Autumn Show and a number of promotional exhibits at Harlow Carr gardens, and in an effort to attract new members I staged a promotional exhibit jointly with the Saxifraga Society on the 4/5 May at RHS Harlow Carr gardens.

I would like to thank Michael Wilson and Mathew Childs for their support in helping with this promotional weekend. The display was a joint venture with the Saxifraga Society and our local group. It was also held in conjunction with the spring garden weekend, and the Tulip, Daffodil and Rhododendron Societies' Spring flower shows.

The group has had a good year, with an excellent turnout of members for our local group show and AGM. It was followed in June by an organised visit to York Gate garden at Adel in Leeds. Many thanks to Ben Preston for his guided tour of the garden and his holiday photo presentation. A further organised event was a day of field trips to three nature reserves around the Kippax area - our thanks to Charlie Philpotts in co-ordinating the day.

### **Local Group Show Awards – Spring Show**

The Local Group Shield (most points), H.C. Crook Tankard. (best plant in show), Daphne Kent Trophy (best plant in 19cm pot) all went to Ian Instone. The Hemingway Trophy (best bulbous plant) to Fred Bundy. The Lovat Plaque (most points section 'B') to Charlie Philpotts.

September will soon be upon us and a new Group year will begin. I am really looking forward to another series of splendid talks with some of the country's best and most knowledgeable speakers, which will hopefully keep us going through the winter.

We have the AGS National Flower Show on the 12th October and our local group Autumn show the day after at Harlow Carr gardens. The following Saturday the 19th is the replacement date from the lost day due to the AGS show the speaker is Jo Walker on New Zealand flora.

Our first meeting is nearly upon us and hope you all have had a good summer. I look forward to seeing you all then.

Eric Rainford

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# AGS West Yorkshire group field trip June 2019

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Firstly the people who joined me on my field trip enjoyed it so I will do another next year. They will two sites a few miles away from Harrogate. They are Staveley and Burton Leonard lime works. The links are below to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust website pages. Staveley is a superb wetland site and is especially good for birdwatchers. Burton Leonard is a small but charming old lime quarry which has a number of orchids and other wildflowers.

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/nature-reserves/staveley-nature-reserve>

<https://www.ywt.org.uk/nature-reserves/burton-leonard-lime-quarries>

Hope to see you there!

Charlie Philpotts

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## What's in a name? - *Saruma henryi*

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*Saruma henryi* is a relatively uncommon, shade-loving, Chinese native that grows naturally in damp soil in dense woodland valleys and stream-side banks. It is an endangered species in its native areas in central and southern China (on the ICUN Red List) but is becoming more common in Western gardens.

It was first described in 1889 by Daniel Oliver from herbarium specimens at Kew which had been collected from the wild by Augustine Henry. Ernest 'Chinese' Wilson reported finding the species in a number of areas of Central China on his plant collecting expeditions in the early

years of the last century but it is not clear whether he brought specimens or seed back to the United Kingdom. Daniel Oliver acknowledged its discoverer by giving it the specific name *henryi*. The generic name is also noteworthy



*Saruma henryi*



Spring foliage

because it shows that taxonomic botanists do sometimes have a sense of humour. The closest relatives of *Saruma henryi* are the handsome, evergreen, hardy gingers, the Asarums. However, Asarums differ from *Saruma* in the fact that the former have petal-less flowers, often hidden beneath the leaves, whilst *Saruma* flowers do have petals and are held above the foliage. The generic name was ‘constructed’ by moving the first letter of *Asarum* to the end – thus creating the new genus *Saruma*, of which *S. henryi* is the only representative.

*Saruma henryi* is a hardy perennial whose thick, soft, crinkled, velvety leaves erupt from the soil in early spring. At first, the hairy leaves are varying shades of purple but the colour fades to mid-green and the leaves assume the mature heart-shaped form. When grown in a moist soil the leaves may reach six inches (150mm) in length but if the soil is drier, they grow to only half the size.

Within a week or two of emerging, the plant bears numerous, three-petaled, bright yellow flowers that continue to be produced from April to late autumn. It is never a showy plant but is certainly worth its keep in any shaded garden. My plants all grow in a heavily shaded, west-facing border that receives little direct sunshine. Plants grow to a height of a couple of feet (600mm) and after the first year become multi stemmed and produce impeccably behaved, tight clumps.

Seeds are produced freely in small groups and bear a remarkable resemblance to mouse droppings! They require a chilling period to germinate. Initially I



*S henryi* seeds



Germinating seeds

collected seed which I stratified and then germinated in a propagator in spring. I no longer do this because germination occurs freely under the parent plants and the seedlings are easily identified by their elongated cotyledons. Flowering plants are produced in the first year from a spring sowing. The plants are also easily propagated by division in autumn or spring and the only negative comments I have heard about the species is that it is sometimes devoured by slugs. On my sandy and highly acid soil (pH 4.5) slugs are rarely a problem so I have no first-hand experience of this.

Peter Williams

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## ***The Wonderful World of *Physoplexis comosa****

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I have been trying to work out which insects are responsible for pollinating this beautiful flower and how it is done. The internet has been very unhelpful and people who have commented on this subject have been too vague to be of much use. One said that they saw a butterfly on the plant pushing its tongue into the base of the flower. Another said it must be ants that go inside the gaps at the base of each flower and pollinate it from inside.

This year I decided to watch the flower develop using a hand lens and report my observations. The previous year I dissected an individual flower to see what was inside. I placed a sharp knife between the gaps in the bulbous part of the flower at the base and cut the flower open in an upwards motion towards the tip of the flower, opening up the tube.



*Physoplexis comosa*

From looking at the result of the opening up of the flower, it looked like there were 5 stamens hidden inside the tube but without any signs of pollen.

At the base of the tube was a yellow colouration which looked like nectar. The purple coloured pollen was on the outside of the purple tube and some had fallen down onto the base of the flower and stuck to it. The curly, split stigma was at the top of the tube above and out of the way of the pollen.

Loaded with this information and having tried to put pollen on the stigmas with no success of getting any seed, I watched the flowers develop this year.

The first stage was as in the picture below. It firstly produced the individual



flowers in a cluster with the bulbous base and the purple tube above. The second stage was that a spike appeared at the end of the tube producing a telescopic effect.



*Pollen on outside  
of tube*

As this spike pushed through further, elongating the flower tube, it pushed the pollen through from the anthers inside which left the pollen coating the outside of the extended tube. At this point the end of the extension spits open to form the stigma, making sure that the stigma was out of the way of its own pollen.

The next problem is to make sure that you have another plant in flower from a different clone in order to pollinate the plant. I had some young seedlings that I had grown from seed donated to the AGS which had a single flower on them, so I was able to jiggle them about a bit to cross pollinate them. I think some of them have actually produced seed this time. This, however doesn't explain which insect can pollinate them naturally. I observed bees taking the pollen from the tubes but none of them appeared to touch the stigmas on top of the tubes. They just appeared to spin around them.

I have just had a few more seedlings of this plant decide to flower very late in the season (beginning of August) and hoverflies were very interested in the flowers and landed on them in droves, but they still appeared to stay clear of the stigma. So it is still a mystery as to which insect would be able to pollinate this type of flower. At the moment it is the human bee-ing that has the best chance of success.

Ian Instone

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### \*\*\**Editor's Note*\*\*\*

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**Many thanks** to all the contributors to *this* newsletter. **PLEASE send me 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! Contributions to Anne at the meetings or post to Mrs A. Wright, 130, Prince Rupert Drive, Tockwith, York, YO26 7PU, **to arrive before end DECEMBER 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](mailto: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!

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## *Strawberry Cottage, Fourth Helping*

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Since I last wrote about our garden two years ago, as well as maturing, there have been some changes. Below are more recent pictures of various areas.



One of the first was selling the trailer which inhabited a corner of the front garden and was seldom used. I created the 'Corner Bed' (what else!) where it had stood and planted it with colourful plants hoping to attract more bees and butterflies to the garden, and also spring bulbs as I think you can never have too many of those! As I may have

mentioned previously, I have something out of the ordinary on each bed and this one has a snake.....I was born in the Chinese year of the snake. The picture above was taken in November 2018.

Also Bob cut down the hawthorn and blackthorn hedge (which is around the front garden to the left of the drive, facing the cottage) to a more manageable height and so dispense of a ladder.

However, most work has been done in the back garden. We gave the old greenhouse a good cleaning, removing all the glass in turn and replacing any cracked panes. There were already paving slabs down the centre so I laid others round the edges and we bought cement blocks to hold two raised sand beds made by Bob on the right hand side. The left hand side stayed as it was. Below is a picture taken on 31st October 2017, partly finished, which is now the bulb house although it contains *Lewisia*s too.

Also in the far back garden, Bob extended the triangular decking in the right

hand corner so that it could accommodate a gazebo. This came in very useful in the ensuing hot weather! It has been a little battered by wind and rain in the last couple of months but is still standing with the help of new guy ropes fitted by Bob. It has most of the garden furniture in it so I hope it survives the winter and more.



Motto, our lovely Border Collie, races around trying to reach the squirrels in the trees surrounding the far back garden. In doing so, he wore deep, muddy ruts in the grass paths and we thought the only way to remedy this was to pave them. Firstly, in the far back garden, I enlarged the round bed in the middle of the grass into a comma shaped bed and

outlined it with old bricks, unwanted by a villager. We kept the small lawn between this and the decking but around the left hand side it needed paving. However, slabs are expensive so we bought two paving slab moulds and made our own adding a little dye to the concrete mix and Bob also made up a mould for making five small bricks. (see below).



Below is this first stretch of path curving around the newly named Magnolia bed. Our small bricks will be used to line the front path.



Next I tackled the paths in the mid back garden which is the part to the right of the work-shop (double garage that was).

Above, workshop on left, rockery on right. On the other side of this garden I



made another path. The trellis to the left, below, at the back of the 'ruin' and the ladder on the right are to stop Motto digging holes. I've laid wire on the soil further down to prevent it there. I hope we can train Motto not to dig holes in

the future because I have a raised bed covered with canes for the same reason and it would look much better without them! (See bottom)



You may be able to make out this bed to the right of the archway through into the far back garden, picture taken last October, after Bob had cut down a *Staphylia colchica* which had taken over this area and shading it too much. It will come up again as it suckers. It has very attractive flowers so I won't mind.



Bob has also made a shaded 'cage' in the yard at the side of the cottage where we put newly potted plants as well as a shaded 'table' for pots of seed, but that does mean that the grandchildren have less space to ride bikes and scooters, etc.!

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# CALENDAR

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14 SEP	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Drs Ian & Carole Bainbridge – Modern Rock Gardening
28 SEP	Loughborough Autumn Show
5 OCT	Hexham Autumn Show
<b>12 OCT</b>	<b>Harlow Carr Show</b>
<b>13 OCT</b>	<b>Local Group Show, Harlow Carr</b>
<b>19 OCT</b>	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Jo Walker - New Zealand South Island Top to Bottom with the AGS
19 OCT	Kent Autumn Show
9 NOV	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Neil Huntley - Primulas
16 NOV	AGS AGM
14 DEC	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Mince pies and members' photographs
11 JAN	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Robert Rolfe -Some favourite genera – from Androsace to Viola
8 FEB	<b>Local Group Meeting, St Chad's</b> - Tony Willis - Macedonia

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## Website reminder

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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.

To find the website:

main AGS website > About us > Local groups > Filter by > Yorkshire and the Humber > West Yorkshire (click to get our full website area)

As this navigation is a bit long-winded, it could be useful to bookmark our website area.

Matthew Childs