

WEST YORKSHIRE AGS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NO. 70 FEBRUARY 2020



Linnaea borealis with *Cornus canadensis*

The Chairman's Ramblings.

It seems that the major topics of the moment, at least on television, are global warming and climate change, and when I look at my garden and alpine house, seeing the plant growth and the flowering of many so called alpine plants, one wonders whether there is some truth in all of this. Will such species be able to adapt in order to survive, or are we and our plants going to get a nasty shock? Will February and March prove to be cold and terminally arrest the growth of plants that have been conned into thinking that spring has sprung?

Here in my home in North Yorkshire, crocuses and snowdrops in the alpine house and garden are beginning to open with the rays of sunshine finding their way around the bungalow. I have two crocuses in flower, as yet



Mystery Crocus!

unnamed, waiting for Janis Ruksans' supplement to his Crocus book to be released with all the names of the recent finds.

Nominations for Committee.

I am sorry to raise this subject so early in the year but time waits for no man and May will soon be here. This is an old chestnut and perennially causes problems. Our committee meetings take place on a Saturday after the monthly talk. They last no longer than an hour, often less and at most five per year. You do not need any expert knowledge of alpine plants as in fact plants are very rarely discussed and you need not have previous experience of being on a committee. The duties are basic to keep the group alive and well. Be under no misapprehension, the Committee is not a self-perpetuating oligarchy, indeed this could not be further from the truth. Had these good people not been prepared to have their names put forward, the Group would undoubtedly have ceased to exist.

So for those of you who tire of seeing the same old faces on Committee, new faces are required. I have no wish to harangue you, I simply want you all to enjoy the meetings. The same old stalwarts cannot go on forever, so make my New Year and let's have some new faces.

A very happy and peaceful New Year to you all.

Eric Rainford.

Success with Seed (At Last)

I have over the years tried unsuccessfully to succeed with sowing Saxifrage seed. The main problem I have comes after the seed has germinated. The potting on process is where the losses are the greatest.

The main source for seed has been the Alpine Garden Society and Scottish Rock Garden seed

exchange. Germination from both societies is somewhat spasmodic. Whether the lateness of sowing has anything to do with it, I do not know.

In 2014 I obtained seed from Euroseeds collected in the wild of *Saxifraga pentadactyla* col 1900m Sierra Cantabrica Spain. In the wild it forms low cushions of smooth, slightly sticky and aromatic leaves with three to five blunt lobes and moderately lengthy petioles. Flowering stems are 8-15 cms tall, branched and bearing panicles of five to thirty small, starry flowers which are white verging upon cream, the petals 3.5 to 4 mm long. It is native to the Eastern Pyrenees and the mountains of central and northern central Spain on non-calcareous rocks and screes above 1800 m. *Saxifraga pentadactyla* succeeds better with alpine house treatment.

Obtaining fresh seed and sowing as quickly as possible may be the reason for my success on this occasion, with good germination and root growth prior to onset of the cold winter months, or is it I am just a bit lucky this time?

Eric Rainford.



Saxifraga pentadactyla

Attack of the Narcissus Fly

Last summer I re-potted my narcissus bulbs. They had been a bit neglected; it was one of the jobs I had not managed to do because of my knee replacement. I was steadily working through different jobs I needed to do in the garden. The snowdrops, crocus and other early bulbs had already been re-potted, so now it was on to the narcissus.



It was quite a hot sunny day in August, I set up everything which I might need. Potting tray, compost, pots, grit and gloves. I made a start, checked the bulbs were sound and cleaned off the old compost. That's when I found odd bulbs had slime around the base of them. I looked closer, cleaned

off the slime and saw a hole. Then I noticed the hole had an occupant. It didn't want to leave the hole with gentle persuasion, it just went deeper. I went to find my garden tweezers, the ones I keep in the greenhouse not my handbag. I managed to get hold of the occupant of the hole in the bulb with the tweezers. It had quite



a strong suction for such a small thing, about ½

centimetre in length, but eventually I managed to pull it out and discovered that it was a Narcissus Fly grub.



It was pale fawn in colour, much the same as the bulb itself. I took photographs with my mobile phone as a record of the event before dispatching the grubs. They must have been laid by the adult flies a few weeks earlier and had already done some damage to my bulbs. I replanted the sound, cleaned bulbs in the pot

and carried on with the rest of my collection.

I carefully checked every bulb for holes and grubs before re-potting them in fresh compost and eventually I had managed to complete the task.

Ian wrote an article for this Newsletter a while ago with a picture of the adult which is usually flying around in June on hot sunny days. We will be checking for them again next summer just in case there are some we have missed as grubs. We can now recognise the fly and differentiate it from a bee. We catch them with children's pond dipping nets which are just the right size for the job.

Georgina Instone

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

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 JULY 2020** (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!

Strawberry Cottage, 5th Helping

Summer of 2019 was not a good one for us. Bob was unwell from late spring, spent time in hospital in late June and half of July, then was kept on increasing amounts of antibiotics until September, also monthly vitamin B12 injections which he is still having. This meant he felt too exhausted to do anything physical for weeks and was very frustrated. Even watering the alpine house he had to have a break. He was diagnosed as having had an infection in a rib bone.

Neither of us can tolerate hot weather and the plants didn't like it either! Despite watering, some just could not tolerate the heat and we lost quite a few, mainly cushion Saxifrages.

Starting in April 2019, here are some pictures:



Part of front garden, rockery between drive and pond.

The hedge on the left is masking our Calor gas tank. Note path edges. The next picture is the front garden taken from by the gate in the previous picture but a week earlier. The weeping willow was here already and we have had it



pruned once but had it done again in November (pictured later).

In a previous article, our dog Motto's digging habits were mentioned. Here is an example, hidden under a bush, this was about a metre square! The soil heaped against our neighbour's fence.



Below is a picture of the back garden taken from between the far and mid back, still in April:



Along the wall of the workshop on the right are my snowdrop pots. I also have some planted in various parts of the front & back garden.

Below, the same area from the landing window, taken in June.



Mini woodland in foreground. Gazebo in far back garden.

I used the bricks we made in 2018 to edge the front path in August making it easier when mowing the grass. In September we bought a scarifier and some edging bricks. The scarifier worked really well, removing six large bags of moss from the lawn in the picture below: Also showing the ‘home-made’ bricks edging the path and how much the weeping willow comes out not only over our garden, but also our neighbours’. Some shade is welcome but this was increasing each year.



The bricks bought at auction were just enough to edge the whole of our trough and scree area to the left of the drive way in the front garden, also making it easier when mowing the grass around it.



Above is a picture taken in November of edging around scree and trough area.



Left is the 'after' picture of the willow taken in November. I call it the 'wonky totem pole'! Hopefully it will look better when the new branches and leaves appear next year!

And the pixie door with new toadstool!



Field trip to Staveley and Burton Leonard nature reserves.

Saturday 4th July or Sunday 5th July.

The trip to the two sites can be run on either day to suit our members. It would be good to car share if possible and pick up others who could not make it by public transport. Staveley is around 7 miles from Harrogate and Burton Leonard is a short distance away. Both sites offer easy access but good walking footwear is recommended, note there are no toilets on either site but we could visit the pub in Burton Leonard for a quick drink and use theirs.

Staveley



Staveley is part of a larger area known as Staveley Carr and has been renowned for rare plants for centuries. Today, this large, accessible site has been sculpted through quarrying activities followed by decades of work by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and dedicated volunteers. The site is in two parts: the East Lagoon edged with vegetation that was allowed to develop naturally post quarrying, comprising fen, reed swamp, scrub and flower-rich grassland; and the West Lagoon, which was landscaped and returned to agricultural usage after quarrying, with arable and intensively grazed areas. This part of the site has seen much activity to create more interesting wildlife habitats, since the Trust's purchase of the land in 2010.

An 11 hectare hay meadow has been created on a former arable field, islands,
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nesting platforms and a sand martin wall have been built around the lake, and ponds and scrapes put in to increase the area of wetland habitat.

There are two small bird hides and one large one overlooking a lagoon which was built for large school trips. This site has marsh helleborine, dune helleborine, common spotted, twayblades and bee orchids amongst a wealth of other wildflowers. Otters live on this reserve and are seen regularly.

Burton Leonard

Once a limestone quarry, this nature reserve is now an oasis for scrub, woodland and grassland plant species. Butterflies bask in the sun and other insects may be found seeking shelter in this quiet spot. The site's industrial past is still evident, with a number of lime kilns found throughout the nature reserve. Orchids include twayblades, common spotted, pyramidal and bee orchids. This is a small charming site and is worth spending an hour or so walking around.

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

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

Charlie Philpotts

Linnaeus's favourite flower



Linnaeus knew this plant from his travels to Lapland in northern Sweden and is reported to have found great quantities near Gävle on his first expedition there in 1732. It was to become his favourite plant and was incorporated into his coat of arms when honoured in 1757 for his work in devising the binomial system of plant and animal nomenclature.

A young Linnaeus dressed in the national costume of Lapland can be seen holding 'his flower' in the copied portrait overleaf by Hendrick Hollanders, painted years after

Linnaeus's death. The specimen of *L. borealis* in the portrait looks like a very robust form, certainly much larger than the ones I have seen flowering. It might,



of course, simply be ‘artistic licence’ on the part of the portrait painter.

When Linnaeus found the plant in Lapland it was known as *Campanula serpyllifolia* but later it was renamed in his honour by his friend and fellow botanist Jan Frederik Gronovius. Naming genera after famous botanists was common at this time but there was often no correlation between the features of the botanists and the plant genera that took their names.

This is certainly the case for Twinflower because quite unlike Linnaeus who was, and still is, of very great importance, the plant has been described as lowly, insignificant, disregarded, and flowering

but for a brief period. The specific name *borealis*, added by Linnaeus himself, refers to its widespread occurrence in boreal, i.e. northern, regions where it can be found in open woodlands and sub-arctic scrub and has a circumpolar distribution. It does, however, occur further south at high altitude in mountainous regions in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Japan. There are thought to be three geographically distinct sub- species in Europe, North America and Asia.



The common name comes from the fact that the flowers are borne in pairs, hence Twinflower, and are shown in the beautifully engraved Swedish stamp released in 2007 to commemorate 300 years since Linnaeus's birth. Both Linnaeus's name, and that of his favourite plant, are kept in the public mind in Scandinavian countries because they are commonly used for female children as

Linnea and Vanamo, the Finnish name for Twinflower.

L. borealis is a creeping, sweetly-scented, evergreen subshrub and is member of the honeysuckle family, the Caprifoliaceae. It is a rare British native species restricted to Scottish pine forests mainly in the Cairngorms. It has been recorded occasionally in northern counties of England but it is thought that these cases are either the result of deliberate planting or chance introductions via woodland products moved from Scotland. *Linnaea borealis* is a relict species that was almost certainly far more common throughout Britain during the last ice age and has retreated northwards as the climate warmed. British populations of Twinflower have declined over many years as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation. The wholesale clearance of native woodlands before 1930 was a major factor in endangering populations. Since then, uncontrolled grazing by deer and other herbivores, and changes in woodland management, have exacerbated the problem. The most significant of the management changes are the mechanical harvesting of timber that cause severe ground disruption, and the encouragement of dense tree regeneration that shade out light demanding species like Twinflower. In an ideal habitat, *L. borealis* grows in well illuminated areas of open woodlands in association with mosses, and flowers freely.



I first became enchanted by Twinflower when I saw it growing in the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh. I thought that my acid soil would suit it well and that it should get enough light when planted towards the front of the woodland beds. However, my efforts to get it established so far can only be described as lamentable. My first attempt involved just a single plant that grew away well after planting in early spring. In June, I observed that flower buds had developed and were just colouring before opening. A few days later when

I approached the plant, camera in hand, ready to record my first Twinflowers in the garden, I was astonished to find that the whole plant had disappeared. Undeterred, I obtained another specimen that I grew in my glasshouse for a year or so, during which time it developed into a large colony. I split this into five pieces and foolishly planted all out in just one location. To my dismay, exactly the same thing happened again! Excellent establishment and clonal growth were followed by good bud formation and then by an overnight disappearance. To misquote Oscar Wilde's *Lady Bracknell* – *to lose one planting may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose two looks like carelessness!*



Careful examination showed the plants had been cropped right to ground level and the poorly rooted stolons ripped out. What remained of the root system did not regenerate.

I believe the offenders in both cases were most probably pheasants or pigeons,

both of which are very common in my garden. Fortunately, *L. borealis* is very easy to propagate and I obtained more shoots from a friend who lives in an urban setting and whose unprotected plant flowers freely in his town garden.

I obtained the new propagating material in February this year when it looked rather dormant and unpromising. I simply buried the pre-rooted rhizomes shallowly in a pot, and in a period of a few weeks they began to grow actively.



This year I will again try to establish Twinflower in

the garden but the plants will have the benefit of mesh protection at least until they flower. I also intend to keep a reserve pan of *L. borealis* in my glasshouse because to lose a third planting would be horticultural homicide!

Peter Williams

Harlow Carr Show October 2019

Setting up the show on the Friday was a bit problematic as the tables had not been put in place but this was soon done by the able-bodied members of our volunteers. The material and plastic covers were soon put on the tables followed by the new wooden spacers, made and donated by Bob and Di, followed by the entry cards with class markers. We would appreciate any help setting up the show in future years so the job will be finished sooner.



Saturday went well, printed directions had been posted for the different classes, which helped exhibitors get to the right room with their plants. There were 46 exhibitors who brought 463 plants. Plant sales and refreshments did well thanks to our splendid volunteers as did the nurseries who brought many different plants for everyone to buy.

The Gardens had over 2000 visitors in addition to the exhibitors. The weather held out for us on the day after quite a wet week or so. Our volunteers were at work again clearing everything away after the show and again we were finished in good time. We would appreciate more help here too, so we can all go home early after

such a long day. We are very grateful to everyone who helped with putting on the show, we couldn't do it without you.

It would be really good if some more of you could enter your plants in the show if you are a member of the AGS. Michael Wilson did this and last year was awarded a Bronze Medal for 10 firsts in the Novice Section. He will now have to move into the Intermediate Section where he can try for a Silver Medal. You can ask Ian or Georgina for advice on entering plants as this is one of our jobs as Show Secretaries.

Ian and Georgina Instone

CALENDAR

15 FEB	South Wales Show
22 FEB	Pershore Early Show
29 FEB	Early Spring Show
7 MAR	Loughborough Show
14 MAR	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - Tommy Tonsberg – Growing Alpines and Woodland Plants in Norway
14 MAR	Kendal Show
21 MAR	South West Show
28 MAR	Hexham Show
4 APR	North Midland Show
18 APR NOTE DATE	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - Ben Preston - York Gate through the seasons
11 APR	Cleveland Show
18 APR	Midland Show
25 APR	East Lancs Show
2 MAY	East Anglia Show
9 MAY	Local Group Meeting, St Chad's - AGM and Local show and a short talk by a member.
16 MAY	Wimborne Show
30 MAY	East Cheshire Show

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.