



# *The Fritillary*

Newsletter of the Oxford and District  
Group of the Alpine Garden Society

No. 28 December 2022

---



*Paeonia saueri* Mt. Pangeon, Greece.

Celia Sawyer





When chatting to Peter Sheasby at the September meeting he mentioned that he was growing *Lithops* and they were just at the beginning of their flowering season. Few people in our group, maybe none until I found out, know that Peter (who is well known for his knowledge of the Middle Eastern bulbous plants) has for many years been nurturing his *Lithops*. He invited Lida and me to see them at the end of the month. He keeps

these plants in a modestly sized greenhouse tucked to one side in his garden of well-tended mature shrubs. But what a display! Several hundred pots of which around 40% were in flower with more to come. But the camouflage patterns on the leaves are fascinating at any time. What is remarkable is that the patterns on each variety are obviously related, but never identical. I asked Peter to tell us more:

### *Lithops*

*Lithops* is the Greek word for a stone and the common name for these plants is 'living stones'. Now part of the family *Aizoaceae*, formerly *Mesembryanthemaceae*,

### Peter Sheasby

they are desert or semi-desert plants from western South Africa and Namibia. They resemble the stony desert pebbles in which they grow and are therefore well

camouflaged and often difficult to spot in the wild, particularly in the dry season when they shrink in size. They have a globular plant body about 1 inch in diameter and over very long periods of time they clump up to form larger colonies. They increase by division, but this does not happen every year and some can remain as single or double heads for many years. They often grow in hilly regions on local farms and access to many areas is very limited. They can form local colonies of a particular species, but this may be many miles from another colony or species.

In cultivation in the UK, they flower in August to October, and in South Africa it is after the rains come in September. There are about 40 recognised species, but each species can have named forms depending on the surrounding pebbles where they grow. They have been studied in detail by Desmond Cole and his wife, and he has recorded and collected from most of the South African populations. He has provided seed from this collection on a worldwide basis, and has written a very useful, well-illustrated book on the subject (published in 1988). This covered all the species, forms and cultivars known at that time, but other cultivars have been developed since. I have been growing Lithops since I was a teenager and at its peak I had about 900 pots (typically about 3 or 4 inches in diameter). Now it is much reduced to about 600 pots! The plants are very slow to increase, and some can stay as a single head for tens of years. Others will slowly divide and may

eventually form a clump of 10-15 heads. In the UK they flower most years, but always with a single flower from a head. These flowers are very short stemmed and daisy-like in form, and they are yellow or white in colour. Related South African succulents called *Conophytum* are more variable in colour with magenta and orange added to the yellow and white. In the UK the plants need to be grown in a frost proof greenhouse with some winter heat, and they need to be completely dry, without water, from November to April. During this period the plant body shrinks, and a new head grows when watering resumes in the Spring. They are grown in a very gritty compost with at least 50% chick grit and the rest a light, sandy compost. In the growing season they are watered about once a week, but any spots of water on the plants must be removed or the sun will cause a burn mark. Many of the plants will produce a seed capsule depending on insect fertilization, but a small paint brush to transfer pollen can help! The seed will develop and ripen in the capsule and can be harvested at the end of summer the following year. If sown in the Autumn in a sandy compost the seed will usually germinate quickly, but the young seedlings are very delicate and will damp off if they are too wet. Watering is best carried out from below but should always be quite limited.

There are a few species that produce strongly coloured or marked plants in the wild such as the green *L. lesliei albinica* or the



purple *L. optica rubra*, but most of the unusually coloured forms are cultivars.



*Lithops dorothea*

Many of these are green or purple such as *L. olivacea* 'Bacchus' or *L. salicola* 'Red Olive' in purple form, or *L. julii* v. *fulleri* 'Fullergreen', *L. hallii* 'Green Soapstone' or -

*L. otzeniana* 'Aquamarine' in the green range.



*Lithops otzeniana* 'Aquamarine'

All Lithops are slow-growing and need time and patience. Some of my existing plants are ones that I obtained in the 1960's and 1970's and, in some cases, they still have only one or two heads!

## The Vercors

Celia Sawyer



In late 2021 I signed up for a Greentours trip to The Vercors in

the French Alps from 26 May - 2 June '22. A month previously, on



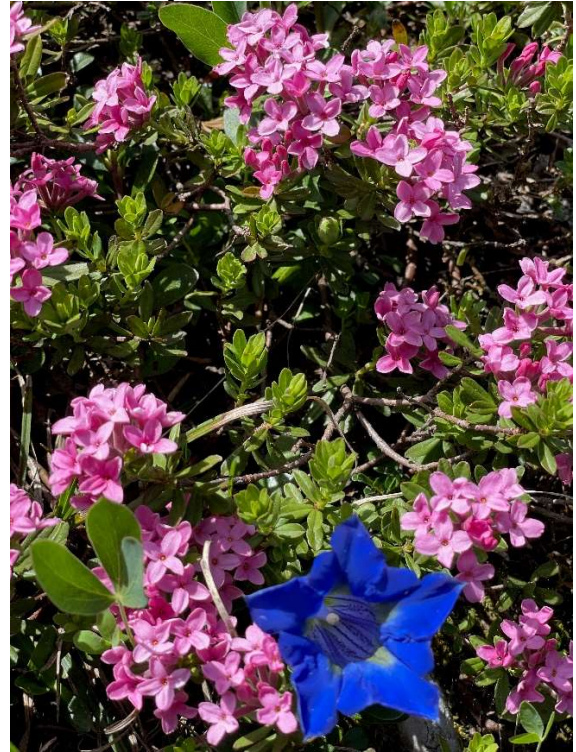
our visit to Ashwoods Nursery, I was talking to Robin Aplin who said that he and Heather were going to France and after some discussion it turned out that we were going on the very same trip. Not only that, but it transpired that we were the only three in the party, which meant that we had our leader Stefano Doglio's undivided attention! It was the most superb holiday, the first day was incredible and we felt that perhaps we had peaked right at the start, but every successive day held more delights and there were never any disappointments. Orchids of all kinds abounded, the star of show being several amazing groups of



*Cypripedium calceolus*, there were eyewatering numbers of *Gentiana acaulis* and *Narcissus poeticus*



turning the area white as snow. The wildflower meadows were magical, especially the one with *Salvia pratensis* as far as the eye could see, the scenery likewise, with mountains and limestone pavement too where -



*Daphne cneorum* was growing in profusion. Unfortunately, we visited the most florally rich spot on a dull day which would have been bearable, had there not been a force 9 gale blowing, we struggled at times to remain upright. I could have stayed there for hours but we were getting a considerable battering and called it a day. There were so many other fabulous plants, far too many to mention in this short piece and some gorgeous butterflies. We all got on extremely well and I thank Robin and Heather for their excellent company.

## Some special plants

Geoff Oddy



*Tanacetum leontopodium*

This lovely plant with its dense woolly stems and leaves comes from the Pamir mountains in Tajikistan. I obtained my plant from a member of the Kent - Tunbridge Wells Group in 2006 but I have never seen it for sale from any UK nurseries or at shows that I have been to. The only listing I see now is on the Jellito website with a 'Sold out' note. I kept this plant in an alpine house throughout the year in a clay pot sunk about 50% in the plunge. The pot was kept fairly dry particularly in winter months and watered fairly sparingly while in growth and it flowered well each year making a good exhibit for our Annual local show. I managed to keep it for 5 years eventually losing it during the winter of 2011/12. I collected seed and germinated 3 seedlings one year, but they all showed different leaf character and none as nice as the parent plant, however I didn't manage to keep the seedlings for more than a year. I looked upon this plant as quite difficult to maintain due to its sensitivity to

watering and I was pleased to have maintained it for the period I had it.



*Verbascum acaule*

This dainty little *Verbascum* is a perennial evergreen from Greece and was obtained from Pottertons but is not currently listed by them. Mine was growing in a shallow trough and stayed very prostrate with the flowers sitting on the rosette of leaves. Unfortunately it disappeared in its second winter. In my ignorance I presumed it was a biennial and had not taken steps to collect seed or try root cuttings that I see recommended for *Verbascum*. I looked upon this plant as one that should be easy to maintain as I have other *Verbascum* - 'Letitia', *dumulosum* and *arcturus* that are more robust.



## Tony Twigger

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of long-term member Tony Twigger on Friday 21 October 2022, his wife Jean said that he died peacefully after a short illness.

Tony served on the committee for many years, becoming Programme Secretary in 1994, then Hon. Secretary in 1997 until 2007 when he resigned from his role but continued to sit on the committee until the end of 2021. He was always friendly and cheerful and was very generous with his knowledge and his plants. We still have a *Nasella trichotoma*, a very attractive grass which he gave us about 24 years ago, it quietly seeds around and is

## Celia Sawyer

easy to remove if it is in an unwanted place. I always think of him when I look at it. He will be greatly missed.



## Member's Achievements



Celia Sawyer receiving the 'Ferrier Charlton Award', from David Morris (AGS President) for her coordination and organisation of volunteers for restoration work at Pershore.

**Celia also won a First (See cover photo of *Paeonia saueri*), two Seconds with the next two photos**



***Weldenia candida***



***Crocus speciosus***

**And a Third in the Annual AGS Photographic competition with her close-up photo of *Pulsatilla Grandis*.**



***Pulsatilla grandis***

**Later in the year Celia had two successes in the Facebook Virtual Flower Show with pictures of Autumn-flowering *Crocus*.**

**Sue Bedwell won several cups at shows: Pershore :- Henry Hammer cup  
Loughborough (Early) :- Beacon trophy  
Loughborough (Autumn) :- Wirral trophy and Crosshall goblet.  
At the AGM she was awarded a Bronze medal and the Clifford Crook cup.**

**Colin Sykes won 5 Firsts and 4 Seconds in a variety of classes at several shows**

**Christopher Snelson was successful at Loughborough Autumn Show with his plant of *Pleione* 'Confirmation'**





**Sue Bedwell being presented with the Clifford Cup by President David Morris at The AGS Annual General Meeting**

## **Chairman's Report**

**Avril Hughes**

**2022 has been an excellent year for the society. With Covid restrictions no longer in place from March 2022 we were able to resume a normal programme and enjoy meetings and visits to wonderful gardens. We have also welcomed several new members to the group, so membership is still healthy, and we maintain a strong presence at monthly winter meetings. Meeting in person means we can enjoy buying plants from members and take part in the raffle, which help our finances.**

**With the Pershore and Loughborough early shows resuming, several members entered**

**plants for the show and gained awards, cups, and trophies.**

**The monthly volunteer gardening continues at the AGS gardens in Pershore. We now have a core of volunteers, with several from Oxford AGS, who meet regularly (usually on the last Thursday of the month) to do whatever is needed. This meant the garden opened for the NGS further raising the profile of the main society.**

**Members receiving the AGS journal in September will have seen that Celia has been awarded the 'Ferrier Charlton Award' for her coordination and organisation of**

volunteers. Well-deserved and congratulations from the society. Anyone who thinks they may enjoy helping please contact Celia, John Graham, or me.

Unfortunately we did have to resume talks by zoom for two months in January and February due to the hall being used for Covid vaccinations. A further zoom meeting was necessary in March, due to the speaker contracting Covid. Our winter programme was:

8 September 2021 Kurt Vickery, 'A Tulip hunter's weeds' plants that were seen whilst touring leading for ten years.

13 October 2021, Jim Jermyn, currently at Branklyn Garden, Scotland, took us Botanising in the wonderful Dolomites.

10 November 2021, Tom Freeth, from Kew Botanic Garden, gave us an interesting historical look at the Alpine Houses of Kew.

8 December 2021 we held the AGM followed by mince pies; sadly it is no longer possible to offer Mulled Wine, but the evening finished with a short talk by Charles Shi with the second part of his time at Kew as a student.

12 January 2022, members evening: short talks were as follows; John Graham, 'Some Dicots in Iran,' Caroline Jackson-Houlston, 'The Fungi in our garden' and Malcolm Brownsword with 'Orchis and Other Flora in The Chilterns'.

9 February 2022, Adrian Young informed and entertained us, about his collection of dwarf conifers and the wide selection of plants he grows at Waterperry.

9 March 2022 Raz Chisu gave us a wonderful visit to Transylvania and Romania showing a wide range of plants, and views of meadows.

13 April 2022, our last winter lecture, Tom King, showed us some special bulbs and alpines grown during his time at Wisley and Rosemoor

Our visits and summer programme started early in 2022, with a visit to Waterperry on 16 March 2022 to see Adrian's wonderful collections but also of his dwarf conifers and other alpines. The rows of potted saxifrages demonstrated the care and detail taken within the collection.



*Saxifraga* at Waterperry

28 April 2022, saw 40 members visit the private garden of John Massey at Ashwood's nursery. This is a plants man's garden set with a backdrop of the canal. John Massey took us round the garden giving us a very personal tour. There were special plants everywhere, but we especially enjoyed the crevice garden created during lockdown.

28 May 2022, the annual conversazione was held by kind permission of Mike and Ann Collins in their lovely garden. This



is also full of unusual plants with many areas grown for shade plants. Afternoon tea followed by a plant sale was also enjoyed. Thank you first to our hosts and thank you to Celia and Walter for making platters of delicious sandwiches, as well as members who contributed with cakes.

22 June 2022 was a double visit to Gloucestershire. Firstly to the garden of Catherine and John Armitage, their wonderful garden in Winson, with orchids in the meadow, and a woodland walk by the river is a gem.



**Candelabra *Primula* by the River Colne**

Large shrub roses were throughout the garden. Close to the house were more formal areas and a newly planted alpine bed. Members were treated to a delicious lunch before going to the second garden of Nick and Mel Tanner, Ampney Crucis, another wonderful garden divided into rooms giving it an intimate feel with large billowing borders of

summer colour. To finish the day we were treated to tea and homemade cakes.

20 August 2022, our final event was the social evening by kind permission of Sue Bedwell at Monkshead, Bletchington. Conditions were extremely challenging with drought over summer, but there were many interesting plants in bloom throughout the garden. After visiting the garden, a superb supper was served in the village hall at Weston on the Green and again finished by a member's plant sale. There are too many people to thank individually, but a huge thank you, to all who helped make the evening such a success, from getting tables and chairs out, to contributions for supper or clearing away in the evening.

There are many members who help make the society such a vibrant and successful group and I would like to thank them for the support they give, but especially to Sylvia Oldcorn, Ann Mowat and Joy Barrett for the raffle. However personal and special thanks go to Celia Sawyer for her tireless work, beyond what most secretaries would do, but her commitment enriches our group greatly.

I would like to thank the committee, for their support, hard work, expertise, ideas, and advice, which ensures we have a wide range of winter talks and summer events which everyone can enjoy. Nigel is relinquishing his role as Treasurer at the AGM, which he has held since 2006. I'm sure the group joins me in thanking him for

**his careful stewardship of our finances and membership, ensuring we are in a secure financial situation. He is going to stay on the committee for an additional year. Also, on behalf of the committee and members, thank you to Malcolm Brownsword who has retired as editor of 'The Fritillary'. During his tenure he transformed the newsletter into the professional format we enjoy today. John**

## **Secretary's Report**

**Despite Covid still being very much in evidence, we have managed to carry on almost as normal which is very good news.**

**Our small team of volunteers who began in May 2021 to improve the garden at the AGS Centre at Pershore, continue the good work and The Director, Tony Bryan, is delighted with our efforts. It is still a work in progress, but the irrigation scheme was upgraded at the beginning of the year and the large central bed has been totally re-done and is now a dry, Mediterranean bed, to reflect the changing climate. This is gradually beginning to fill out with surprisingly few losses during the heatwave. The first NGS open days were held in May and June, although it had been hoped to attract more visitors. Those who did come enjoyed the garden, trough planting demonstrations, plants for sale (including Aberconwy and Pottertons on one day) and homemade cakes. A huge thank you to all involved for your ongoing hard work. If anyone else would like to join in, we normally**

**Graham and Christopher Snelson have agreed to continue production of 'The Fritillary'. It does though need articles from the wider membership to maintain a range of articles and photographs.**

**We can look forward to another varied and full year in 2023**

**Celia Sawyer**

**meet on the last Thursday of the month, do please let me know as you would be most welcome.**

**Those of you who are members of the main AGS will have read in the September Journal that the Society is in an unsustainable financial position and has been subsidizing the membership from capital assets for some considerable years. It is reaching crunch time and difficult changes are going to have to be made to keep it going. If you are not a member, perhaps you would consider joining as numbers really do need to grow as much as possible. Recommend us to a friend, or several. Do look at their website [alpinegardensociety.net](http://alpinegardensociety.net). This is a wonderful society promoting alpine plants and it would be utterly tragic to lose it.**

**Dates for your diary in 2023: -**

**AGS Snowdrop Day at Lilleshall - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February (see AGS website for details).**



**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1.00-4.00pm £20 to include tea and cakes. Private group visit to Thenford Arboretum to see their vast collection of snowdrops (600+).**

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February - AGS Pershore Show, details nearer the time.**

**NGS open days at the AGS Centre, Pershore - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 11.00am-4.00pm, Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 11.00am-4.00pm, Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2.00-6.00pm.**

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2.30pm - A private group visit to Admington Hall garden, Admington, Shipston-on-Stour, CV36 4JN. tbc.**

**Private garden visit in July- tba**

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 6.00pm, Social Evening by kind invitation of Ann Mowat, Honeoye, South Green, Kirtlington, OX5 3HJ, after walking round Ann's lovely garden we shall have supper and the plant sale at the Village Hall which is just a very short walk away.**

**Thank you all for your ongoing help and support to make this such a friendly and lively group**

**Not the Dolomites:**

**Steve Clarke**



*Gentiana nivalis*





*Trollius europaeus*





Meadow with *Campanula rotundifolia* and *Hedysarum hedysaroides*

Steve took these pictures during his visit to the French and Italian Alps this summer. They are a taster for

his short talk ‘Not the Dolomites’ at our Members’ Evening in January. Not to be missed!

## Oxford Area, Alpine Garden Society Facebook Group

Inspired by Celia Sawyer’s circulation of our members photographs via email during lockdowns, we set up our Facebook Group. This provides a means for people to post photographs of interest to other members.

An example is Raz Chisu’s post about the trip he co-led to The Peloponnese this autumn.

There are some of you who may be wary of using Facebook, but this is a Private Group with limited membership and is safe. If you’re interested in joining but still have concerns or would like advice, please ask at one of our meetings (preferably after the talk).



**Posts may be of general interest, like this one shared by Adrian Young.**



**Others may be about individual plants, gardens, or meetings with other alpine enthusiasts, like Avril's above.**

**Hearty thanks are due to everyone who has contributed to this issue. The articles and photographs from first time contributors were especially welcome.**

**If you would like to contribute an article for the December 2023 edition of 'The Fritillary,' please contact:**

**Either,**

**John Graham, E-mail [johngraham368@gmail.com](mailto:johngraham368@gmail.com)**

**Or,**

**Christopher Snelson, E-mail [christophersnelson@me.com](mailto:christophersnelson@me.com)**