The Irish Garden Plant Society

Newsletter No. 115 *January 2010*

In This Issue

Photograph on Front Cover: Embothrium coccineum.
The Chilean Fire Bush flourishes in sheltered gardens along the Irish coast and is seen here at Rossdohan in Co Kerry. Photograph taken by Seamus O'Brien.

Editorial

This year marks the 10th anniversary of 'A Heritage of Beauty' by Dr. E. Charles Nelson, undoubtedly a book that all IGPS members should have on their bookshelves. A small number of books are still available either at the Education and Visitors Centre National Botanic Gardens Glasnevin or by contacting any committee member. Now selling for €15, this is a great investment.

Mary Bradshaw also celebrated a 10th anniversary. Last October was her tenth year as coordinator of the Leinster Plant Sale, the most successful annual fund raising event of the Society. As has been the case in each of Mary's ten years, 2009 was a great success, with a wide selection of good quality plants and bulbs for sale and circa. €4,000 raised for the Society. Thank you Mary.

It is hoped to publish Moorea later this year. Articles can be forwarded to Patrick Quigley, his contact details are on page 8 of the Newsletter, he will also be pleased to hear of any fund raising ideas, as it is a costly publication. A very enjoyable table quiz was organised by Sarah Angel and Rita Craigie at Hamwood House in Dunboyne, this raised €1,400 for the Moorea account. Patrick would be glad to hear of similar ideas.

Finally on behalf of all his friends in the IGPS I want to wish Brendan Sayers a speedy recovery and good health in 2010. Happy New Year to all, and many thanks to our Newsletter contributors.
Mary

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Copy date for the April Newsletter - 18th March 2010

Keith Lamb Explains How Blueberries Came to Ireland

It was during the nineteen forties that an American friend sent three or four blueberry bushes to Professor Sherrard at the Albert College on the north side of Dublin.

As the soil there was unsuitable I arranged to plant them in a peat bed at Woodfield, our home in the midlands. The bushes grew well but we learned the two major hazards in their cultivation. One was that the berries are eagerly eaten by birds, so we had to net them. As, for example with strawberries, a large scale planting will leave enough for the grower and the birds.

The first research planting was made at Johnstown Castle, Wexford. Although the soil there is not peaty, it is acid – an essential for the culture of blueberries. The growth of the bushes was further assisted by mulching the rows of bushes with sawdust, a frequent practise in America.

Nine cultivars were included in the trial, with twelve or fifteen bushes of each cultivar protected from birds. The yields were measured for nine years. Bluecrop was the most productive cultivar, the yields increasing yearly from less than half a pound per bush in 1963 to eighteen and a half eight years later. Bluecrop was not only the most productive cultivar but was also judged to be the best flavoured.

Gary Dunlop describes Brachyglottis brunonis: An almost unknown small attractive tree

Groundsel is a weed much loved by budgerigars apparently, if not by gardeners. It is not a particularly handsome plant, but as weeds go, it is fairly innocuous and easily removed. Would anyone reasonably want to grow a groundsel tree if such a plant existed? It does not sound like a plant of any aesthetic, or horticultural merit. Such a plant does exist, and it does have garden merit. It is a rare endemic from Tasmania, where it is found growing on the slopes of Mt. Wellington.

This plant was first described by Joseph Hooker, as *Centropappus brunonis,* in 1847.[1] having established a new genus for the plant, apparently because the pappus i.e. hairs or bristles attached to the seeds of Asteraceae, were stiffer on this new plant than the soft hairs which were more common in other members of the family in the same region. It was subsequently

transferred to the much larger genus of Senecio by J.H.Willis, in 1956 [2], becoming *Senecio brunonis,* before it was subsequently moved again into an older genus Brachyglottis, which was established in the mid 18th century by the Forsters, father & son, who accompanied Lieutenant Cooke on his second voyage around the world, as *Brachyglottis brunonis*, by the Danish botanist B. Nordenstam in 1978.[3] This small tree was fully described and illustrated under the name *Senecio brunonis* in Vol.2 (no.62) of the Endemic Flora of Tasmania, which was instigated and financially supported by Lord Talbot de Malahide, who added notes to the first five volumes regarding some of the plants described that were in cultivation.[4] Unfortunately he died before the last volume was published, and which included a tribute to him by Professor Stern. Rather surprisingly, Bean does not mention the plant at all, and even in the Supplement, which mentions the transfer of several New Zealand plants from Senecio to Brachyglottis, by Nordenstam, omits their Tasmanian relative. [5] Perhaps even more surprising is the absence of this endemic tree from a local book on Tasmanian flowers and plants.[6] This small tree has also escaped the attention of the International Dendrological Society, and so does not feature in the new book on trees, introduced in the last few decades.[7] It even escaped the attention of Charles Nelson in his encyclopaedia of plants and cultivars with Irish connections. [8] Despite being in cultivation for over 40 years, this tender tree has remained below the radar of botanists and dendrologists in Great Britain and Ireland.

It was Lord Talbot who was responsible for the only introduction of this rare tree into cultivation. He raised a few seedlings in 1964 of which only two survived with him, though he had given another two away. His two plants survived but had not flowered by 1969 when the tree was included in the second published volume of the endemic flora. However, his plants eventually flowered and he raised some additional seedlings, which he distributed to various keen gardeners and suitable gardens including Mount Usher and Mount Stewart. The only other mention of this plant traced in print in Great Britain and Ireland was by John Anderson who was head gardener at Mount Usher at the time, but subsequently moved to Inverewe for some years before taking his present position at Exbury. He mentioned *Senecio brunonis* briefly in a short article on some lesser-known plants, in Plant Heritage the journal of the NCCPG.[9] He noted that it was difficult to root from cuttings but easy from seed collected and sown after flowering

Brachyglottis brunonis is a small evergreen tree up to about 5m tall, though as it sheds the previous years foliage each year it gradually results in a light canopy over bare branches and trunk. It is likely to be short lived as it becomes increasingly spindly after 10-15 years, and ceases to be attractive. It has narrow dark green and glossy but slightly viscous leaves which have a

feint aroma of honey, though the melliferous scent is stronger in the flowers, or when the foliage is crushed The chrome yellow flowers are presented in quite large dense clusters at the end of the branches, in June and July, and make a surprisingly attractive display. As Winfred Curtis notes it requires *'fairly high rainfall but also good drainage'*. [4] The cool and humid, if not always wet, summers in Ireland seems to suit it admirably, as with many Chilean plants. Its natural habitat on Mt. Wellington apparently strewn with dolerite boulders suggests that it grows in relatively poor acid soils, though if Milo Talbot was able to grow it in the ground at Malahide, it will tolerate being grown in alkaline soil. Nigel Marshall, the head gardener at Mount Stewart, raised quite a few plants of *B. brunonis* over the years and had planted out a small grove just outside the Italian garden where they formed an attractive backdrop, especially when in flower. I chanced to see and fortuitously photograph them at their best around about the millennium, and shortly before they went into a relatively fast decline, possibly accelerated by several periods of drought in successive years. A year or two before, Nigel had kindly given me one of his surplus plants, which I'm glad to report is still growing and flowering well. Shortly after getting the plant, I happened to mention it to Jeff Irons, who had apparently been trying to introduce the plant into cultivation for about 20 years, but without success. Fortunately Nigel was able to spare another plant, which I sent to Jeff.

References:

1 Hooker, J.D 1847: Hooker's London Journal of Botany Vol. 6 p.124

2 Willis, J.H. 1956: Muelleria 1 (3)

3 Nordenstam, B. 1978: Opera Botanica 44:30 A Societate Botanicus Lundens Lund Copenhagen.

4 Curtis, W. & Stones, M. 1967-1978: The endemic Flora of Tasmania Vols 1-6. Aerial Press, London

5 Bean, W.J. 1980-88: 8th ed. Trees & shrubs Hardy in the British Isles 4 Vols & Supplement.

6 Simmonds, M. & Wapstra, H & A 2008: 4th ed. A Guide to the Flowers and Plants of Tasmania. for Launceston Filed Naturalists Club, Reed New Holland Sydney.

7 Grimshaw, J & Bayton, R. 2009: New trees. Kew, London

8 Nelson, C. 2000: A Heritage of Beauty. Irish Garden Plant Society, Dublin.

9 Anderson, J.1995: Some lesser-known plants in our gardens. Plant Heritage, the Journal of the NCCPG.

This article has also been submitted to both Pentachondra the Journal of the Australasian Plant Society, and Borderlines the Journal of the Half Hardy Group of the Hardy Plant Society.

The Joy of Nerines by Joe Kennedy

I enjoyed the interesting article by Charles Nelson in the October Newsletter on *Nerine bowdenii* in Irish Gardens and the lovely painting on the front cover. About ten years ago I started to hybridise Nerines. The initial reason for this was because they flower in the autumn and the Primroses, which I have been hybridising for more than thirty years, bloom in the spring. I am obsessed by breeding but a limit is being reached where I cannot cope with many more. I was given a nice little Nerine called Crystal by Helen Dillon many years ago and started by using it, just to see what would happen. It is smaller in every way than Bowdenii with a nice rounded frilly flower in a different shade of pink. I crossed it with *N. flexuosa* 'Alba' which was doing well with me. I also did the reverse cross. The results were all taller than either parent with flowers similar to Crystal but paler pink and frilly. No whites appeared in the offspring. I then brought Bowdenii into the equation and did all sorts of crosses just to see what would result. Nearly all of the hybrids are tall with pretty flowers with frilly petals and are a paler pink in colour. One hybrid of Crystal and Alba came with pale lemon yellow foliage about seven years ago. This is a very nice foliage plant but so far has refused to flower. The original bulb has increased to more than fifty but no flowers. Its siblings have been flowering for a few years so I presume that it will have similar flowers. It has kept its yellow foliage very well. It takes four or five years for the bulbs to reach flowering size. I am growing them all outside now. This may not mean that they are totally hardy as I live on the north coast of Ireland where the Gulf Stream keeps frost to a minimum. The wind is the biggest problem. I did no crosses this autumn as I am becoming swamped with hybrids. There are dozens of bulbs to come into flower in the next few years. Nevertheless, I found myself grouping a whole selection of hybrids close together so that, perhaps, the bees or the wind may produce a better hybrid than those that I have been responsible for.

Unless a hybrid is better in every way than anything that has gone before, I do nothing about it. Breeding is a slow business. I have been breeding primroses from Old Irish stock for more than thirty years, thousands each year, and it is only now that I am getting the strains that I have been seeking. I also liked the illustration of the old Irish primrose, Kinlough Beauty, on the back cover of a previous newsletter. It is one that I used originally in my Primrose breeding programme.

A Letter from the Chairman

January as I'm sure most of you know is named after Janus, the Roman god of doors and gates and so also of beginnings, and just as the two faces of Janus looked both backwards and forwards, we often find that this time of year is when we tend to look back at the year just ended while also looking ahead to the future, fired with New Year resolutions and hope for the year ahead. Unfortunately our memories of 2009 are tinged with sadness as we recall the loss of (at least) two great friends of the IGPS – Anna Nolan whom we remembered in the July Newsletter and Therese Murphy, our late Munster Representative, who sadly passed away at the start of September. Both were a joy to know and their loss will continue to be felt deeply, not least by their families, but also by their many friends within the society. On a less melancholy note, there have been some happy times for the society in 2009 – we may not have had much sun, but the silver gilt award for our display at Bloom and visits to some beautiful gardens have helped brighten our lives. None of these can happen without the hard work of our organisers and committee members in the regional groups, but unfortunately this work seems to be falling to fewer and fewer people and we need to get more members involved to help spread the workload. All of the regional groups require additional support so if you would be prepared to get involved at a local level, please get in touch with your regional committee. It may be a cliché, but really, the more you put into the society, the more you will benefit. At last we are starting to get things moving with our website, Noeleen Smyth who has come back on to the National Committee, has worked hard to update the site and hopefully we will be able to make much more use of it in future. Those of you who have looked at the site will know there is a section on it for profiles of Irish cultivars. We need people to help with this section, writing up profiles of individual plants to build up an archive of material. If you would be willing to help with this, please get in touch. Some of you will be aware that we have been experimenting with using email to keep in touch with members – sending out a reminder of forthcoming events each month. So far this has gone smoothly with no apparent glitches and the response has been very positive. If you have not yet received any of these bulletins and you would like to be added to the list, please send an email to patrick.quigley@live.co.uk giving the email address you would like us to use. Your email address will not be passed on to others without your express permission and will not be displayed in the emails sent out to the group. The list will not be made available to any commercial organisation. The messages which we hope to send out on a regular basis will be: monthly reminders of

forthcoming events in each of the regions; urgent notices of changes to event details; notices for special events e.g. publicity fliers for the plant sales.

I write this mainly for the members in the Northern Region where I know that the issue is of concern, but for those in other regions, please read on as this may well apply to you. The Northern Regional committee is becoming increasingly concerned about the low levels of support for the events over the past year or so. Numbers attending our garden visits have been particularly low – only around 12 people (including non-members) at most of the visits this year. Attendance at lectures is also quite low. Some of you may have noticed that we have reduced the number of events held each year; for example there are no events planned in the North during January or February and the November lecture which we had held at the Island Centre in Lisburn for several years has now been dropped. This is due to the poor attendance at these events. As you will appreciate, the costs to the society of hiring a hall, the fees and expenses for a speaker etc are unsustainable if only a dozen people turn up. Our Plant Sale used to be a major source of revenue for the society, yet this year the Northern Region only managed to raise around £300 (after the costs of the hall were taken out). This was certainly not due to the quality or the quantity of plants on sale it was purely down to lack of customers. We had moved to St Bride's Hall in Belfast in response to comments from members that they wanted an indoor venue and somewhere more central than the Ulster Folk Museum. Now it would appear that this is not suitable given such a poor response to the sale this year, in 2010, for the first time in many years we will not be having our own IGPS Plant Sale, instead we will be participating in the Rowallane Autumn Plant Sale.
I would therefore ask all of you:

- Do you consider the gardens chosen for our visits or the speakers we have selected for our talks, to be of a suitable standard, and on the right day of the week?

- Are the lecture venues of a suitable standard and conveniently located? Is the subject matter of our lectures of interest?

This is my first 'Letter from the Chairman' since taking up the post at the AGM back in May. I would like to thank all of you who have offered your congratulations (and commiserations) since then and, with your support, I hope I can live up to the standards set by my predecessors. For those of you who give your support and continue to attend our events and contribute to the work of the society, thank you very much indeed.
Best wishes for 2010 and beyond.
Patrick

Comments and suggestions can be sent to me: Patrick Quigley,
24 Areema Drive, Dunmurry, Belfast, BT17 OQG
or by email to patrick.quigley@live.co.uk

Seed Distribution Scheme 2010

Here we are again, ever hopeful and looking to 'what can I grow new next year?' The seed list has come up trumps again – how do our members do it, battling a third summer in a row of wind and rain and 'is this seed ripe yet I wonder' being replaced by 'will it ever ripen?'

As in the past 2 years, I have had great difficulty either finding seed in what looks like a ripe seed head, or even getting seed pods to ripen at all – August in particular was very bad. Despite that you managed to send in 294 seed packets, slightly less than last year, but an amazing total considering the weather – and 52 bulbs listed again, remarkable. I have included a few sent in too late to list last year that have no new seed this year – they are marked with a simple (08) after the name.

Not too surprisingly I have had to delete as usual some that I reckoned had no seed that reduced the list by 28. Then I needed to delete any duplicates – and this part always amazes me – another 28 go, but how do we get a mere 10% duplicates out of nearly 300! You're a marvel, a real marvel, the lot of you! I also received some vegetable seed, but decided not to distribute, they will probably not come true, and we should stay on the floral side. I have included the herbs sent in though, surely basil and variegated feverfew are also colourful (I know, so is chard and beetroot……)

So what is weird and wonderful this time?

Our first Cactaceae*, Opuntia ficus-indica* perhaps? Masses of bulbils of *Furcraea longaeva* (produced on the flower stem after flowering) will surely tempt many of you – I have planted the bulbils myself, and will send them as rooted plantlets. *Geranium caffrum*, with lovely silvery foliage. *Mirabilis jalapa* (variegated) said to be a real show stopper. I cannot remember when we last listed Rhododendron, this year we have *R. pumilum* for your rock garden. I must recommend the 4 Acacia as I sent them in from the zoo – *A. longifolia* with large leaves and flowering early in the year, and *A.retinodes* flowering mainly in late summer, and *A. mearnsii* looking identical to *A. dealbata* but flowering much later are all great, and quick too. The award for the longest named smallest plant

has to go to *Narcissus bulbocodium* subsp. *bulbocodium* var. *citrinus,* a wee gem of a spring beauty.

So many many thanks again to all our contributors, a gallant but actually small band of hardy perennials, and good luck to all you seed sowers – don't forget to bring well established seedlings to our plant sales in autumn, and maybe let the hard working Newsletter Editor know how well your seeds have grown.

Enjoy!

Stephen Butler
IGPS Seed Distribution Scheme
Curator of Horticulture
Dublin Zoo
Email stephencbutler@gmail.com

In Praise of November

Rae McIntyre

Looking over back issues of the *Newsletter* recently I was dismayed to see how often I have repeated myself in articles. I am always whinging about rain and could do so now, as I write this in mid-November, but what's the point? Ireland is a wet country and that's it. In spite of the deluges November has always been one of my favourite months which I know is strange; some people even think I'm quite mad but I'm used to that. I've definitely never written in praise of this month before.

By this time the worst of the messy leaf falling is over. Ash trees, that were only in leaf for four months in 2009, from the end of May until the end of September, are, of course, completely bare but I enjoy their stark silhouettes against a blue and pink-washed sky. The large beech trees on the garden's western boundary have lost half their leaves and the fallen ones are sticking to everything but those that are left are still highly coloured. Magnolias hang on to their leaves as long as possible and just change to yellow-green then

drop them within a day or two, almost as if they want to be rid of them. I love magnolias in winter because their soft, strokable furry buds are a promise of spring. *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata' is slow to lose its leaves as is its close relation *Cornus alternifolia* 'Argentea'. Both usually are leafy until about the third week of the month and then, like magnolias, drop them within a day or two.

The Japanese maples really earn their keep in autumn. *Acer* 'Osakazuki', which sounds like the name of a motorbike, is possibly the most flamboyant because both leaves and stalks are vivid scarlet. *Acer* 'Senkaki' (syn. Sangokaku) the 'Coral Bark Maple' has leaves that are soft yellow in November. Through the winter the stems are truly coral so its moniker is well deserved and they are breathtaking against the rare spectacular sunset. *Physocarpus* 'Le Diablo' is still hanging on to its medium-sized three-lobed purple leaves. All summer it provided a sombre note among jazzy hemerocallis and crocosmias but now in November, when the perennials are just a memory, it is making a commendable attempt at rivalling the Acers because its murky purple leaves are suffused with scarlet.

Every November seems to be different and this year the tree that's giving me most pleasure to look at is *Sorbus scalaris*. In previous years it was obscured by a *Malus* 'Profusion' that had sadly become diseased. When Andy cut it down in August the inside of the trunk was rotten. He dug out the roots and checked there was no honey fungus and we planted three rhododendrons in its place. I am now able to see *Sorbus scalaris* plainly from an upstairs window of the house so it's the first thing I look out at every morning. It's a most graceful tree of the *Aucuparia* type with wide, spreading branches that have an average of twenty-five little leaflets on each frond of leaves. It has been slow to lose its leaves. About a month ago they were still green but then the tips of each frond became vivid orange-scarlet, compensating for the clusters of berries gobbled by the birds. Now all the leaves are in full autumn dress in shades of yellow, orange, amber and scarlet.

Sorbus hupehensis (another *Aucuparia* type rowan) still has about half of its leaves but is a mass of berries. These are predominantly white, like porcelain, but there are some pink ones among them and the stalks are pinkish-red. I don't go in much for flower arranging, preferring to see flowers living in the garden rather then dying in a vase, but I was quite pleased with a combination of pink Nerines and *Sorbus hupehensis* stems I did for a church arrangement recently.

The birds don't eat the white berries because, apparently, they can't see them. November is still a berry-rich month even though many of the scarlet berries of cotoneasters have pieces pecked out of them by robins and blackbirds and there's a holly in the field at the end of the garden that birds have stripped completely bare. This year, in spite of all the rain, *Corokia buddlejoides* was the most floriferous it has ever been. The small yellow starry flowers have turned into dark red fruits. There are pink fruits on *Pernettya* 'Pink Pearl', black ones, as well as flowers, on *Viburnum tinus* 'Eve Price' and blue purple ones on the perennial *Dianella tasmanica*. The leaves on *Berberis thunbergii* 'Atropurpurea' have become as crimson as the tiny oval fruits.

Strange things have been happening like hellebores flowering since July but *Salvia guaranitica* stayed uncompromisingly leafy until the second week in October when it had one bloom hidden at the back against the west-facing wall where it is growing. It must have been acting as an advance party because, when it wasn't zapped by frost, others have followed and there is now a fairly good display of blooms. After my mother died last January I brought a variegated pelargonium of hers here. It had grown to about 3.5 metres tall in her heated greenhouse but the root wasn't much bigger than a grapefruit. I cut it back drastically, repotted it and left it outside all non-summer. When I was bringing it into the front porch I noticed that it had a dozen clusters of little red flower buds. Hopefully it will be in full bloom by Christmas.

Salvia guaranitica faces west in a right angle formed by south and west-facing walls in the yard. Beside it there is a climbing rose Blairi No 2 which has stopped flowering twice since July but after a rest it performs for another while; at the moment it is well covered in pink blooms. It's supposed to have finished flowering before its neighbour *Mahonia lomariifolia*, a very upright, supposedly tender mahonia has started. The latter was a tall, gangly adolescent with all its flowers at the very top. Now that it's matured it has spread and the flowers are nearly down to the base. They're going over now because the shrub has been in bloom since the middle of September. It is beside a *Myrtus luma* which still has a few flowers as well as plentiful shiny black fruits. Apparently these are edible but I'm a bit jittery about eating them. All the other mahonias in the garden are flowering. These are 'Charity', 'Buckland', 'Winter Sun' and japonica. The last species doesn't usually start until January so I'm hoping that it, along with the others, hasn't finished flowering by then. I need their cheerful, yellow slightly camphor-scented blooms at that time of year.

One bed of shrubs (I've said goodbye to the perennials in it) has had several shrubs that only started to get into their stride in October, albeit an unseasonably warm October at times. This bed gave constant bother because it was so badly infested with scutch/couch grass and was poorly drained. This has been covered entirely with one of those weed-suppressing membranes which I do not like in principle but I was in despair. On top of the membrane there's a 15 cm layer of mulch – recycled council waste – which annual weeds love but are easy enough to remove. At the risk of tempting fate all the shrubs have done remarkably well after a rather unpromising start. There are tough roses like the rugosas 'Blanche Double de Coubert' and 'Sarah van Fleet', *Rosa mundi*, and *Rosa pimpinellifolia* the 'Scotch Rose'. *Melianthus major* disappeared completely last winter and I was sure it had been killed in one of the many frosts but it's nearly a metre tall and a metre across. *Prostanthera cuneata* the 'Australian Mint Bush' was planted as a very young plant in the spring and recently has become covered in little white mauve-tinged flowers. *Fuchsia magellanica var. molinae* is supposed to be the hardiest fuchsia of all but has a reputation for being shy-flowering. It was that all summer but now the very pale pink flowers dangle from every stem. The hebes 'Autumn Glory' and 'Midsummer Beauty' have been flowering non-stop since August.

Elsewhere in the garden there is a 'golden-leaved' fuchsia – 'Genie' I think – flowering abundantly and the fuchsia 'Mrs Popple', who disappeared for a while during the summer under a large *Campanula lactiflora*, is strutting her stuff now that the campanula has settled down for the winter. The young *Eupatorium ligustrinum*, a recent acquisition bought as a result of John Joe Costin's persuasive article in an earlier issue of this newsletter, has been bearing its fluffy little white flowers since mid-September.

One tree that looks especially well in November is *Alnus incana* 'Aurea'. By the middle of the month it has dropped all its gold-toned leaves but still gives an overall impression of tawniness. The stems and leaf buds for next year are tawny but it's the abundant catkins that are particularly beautiful and ask to be studied in close-up. About 2 cm long they look as if a buff-yellow base has been overlaid with a fine red lattice pattern. It's pleasant to welcome back the bare trunks of birches without the clutter of leaves obscuring them.

Betula jacquemontii must be one of the most popular with its dazzling white stems. *Betula albo-sinensis* var. *septentrionalis* is more subtle with peeling bark that can't make up its mind whether

to be beige, brown, grey or pink. *Stewartia pseudocamellia* is supposed to have bark that peels off in large patches but even though mine has been here for at least twenty years it's still not doing so. This tall shrub or small tree is, like the advert for *Fry's Turkish Delight* used to claim – full of Eastern promise. A native of Japan it has quite prominent leaf buds now. In spring the flower buds develop but when they open out they're only there for about a week in July. Go away at the wrong time and the brief performance is missed. It does a hectic colour change thing for about a week in October and then drops its leaves quickly.

Another Japanese plant that gives a more extended and satisfactory performance is *Fatsia japonica*. It has highly polished palmate leaves and is covered in little creamy white flower heads that resemble miniature cauliflowers during October and November. Although it's supposed to be a semi-shade lover the older one in the garden is draping over a south-facing wall. I planted another one in the shade behind a *Cotoneaster frigidus* but it flowers scantily.

Stachyurus chinensis, unlike the Japanese maples, is not renowned for its autumn colour but it and the *Sorbus scalaris* I described earlier would get straight A's for their vivid display. The stachyurus is still holding on to its leaves that are all shades of yellow, orange and red and its stiff little tapering chains of flower buds are plain to be seen too. They will become tiny primrose yellow cup-shaped flowers opening out in February and can be there until April. It's a good all-rounder. Some supposedly golden conifers are only that in the summer months and then turn dull green in winter. *Pinus sylvestris* 'Aurea' does it the other way round which is why I value it. At this time of year the green leaves gradually become gold and stay like that until late spring. Conifers are regarded as being passé but I still have a few favourites in the garden. I even bought a new one recently called *Podocarpus* 'Kilworth Cream'. It's only a baby but it does have lovely foliage of green suffused with cream. Its big brother *Podocarpus salignus* with its long elegant, willow-like leaves is attractive at all times of the year.

The four different kinds of hamamelis, the three of *Daphne bholua* and most of the rhododendrons are well budded. *Rhododendron* 'Christmas Cheer', has been flowering since mid-October. Like supermarkets it tends to start early for the festive season.

A note on cardoons
by Barbara Pilcher

It was good to read Peter Milligan's article on cardoons (Newsletter No.114), and I hope his interest is a sign that they are back in favour. A stalwart of kitchen gardens in their hey-day, their status in Ireland in the past is I agree something to be investigated. I've propagated them for nearly 40 years – I remember them marching across our first country garden, looking resplendent as they do when in full silvery foliage. We had a constant trickle of curious people calling in to ask what on earth they were. As well as a common or garden *Cynara cardunculus* I grew a 'wild' form, wickedly spiny. Both were planted in the physic garden at Grey Abbey, Co Down for general interest – cardoons would have been eaten in Europe at that period, and potentially available here. I think the spiny one has since been removed because of presumed danger to the visiting public. I have grown some Italian cultivars in the potager at Lisdoonan including 'Gobbo di Nizza', hardy, with spectacular silvery white foliage and, among others, a spineless French cultivar. Incidentally, cardoons are the basis of a digestive, which has the reputation for lowering cholesterol. Maybe a future superfood then? (Treat this information with the usual caution.)

On several occasions I have blanched cardoons for eating in the cause of culinary science. We enjoyed the earthy flavour reminiscent of their close relative globe artichoke, but the latter are so easy to grow for the table they have won out in recent years. One difficulty with cardoons is to achieve the blanching before the plant has sent up a flowering shoot, not always possible when other tasks take priority. Fresh growth can be obtained by cutting out flowering shoots but plants for kitchen use are best sown annually in early spring for forcing in autumn. Maybe I need to clarify here that I refer to horticultural rather than culinary blanching. I find that tying up the leaf stalk bundle *in situ* surrounded by a few layers of corrugated cardboard and an outer layer of black polythene to exclude light works fine. The leaf tips can be left to protrude from the top. Timing is a matter for experimentation, generally a few weeks is sufficient. I've decided to give them another trial in the kitchen and will report on the results. Young shoots are wrapped up as described and ready for action in the October sunshine.

St. Colmcille and the Pilgrim Gardener by Seán Ó Gaoithín

Having lived in Glenveagh for many years, an interest has grown in the area, its history and the personalities that have coloured it. Fortunately for Glenveagh one of Irish history's most remarkable figures is intimately associated with the locality. This figure is the royal price and holy-man - Saint Colmcille. His celebrated birthplace is on a hillside at the very edge of the wild and rugged landscape we know today as Glenveagh National Park. His birthplace is commemorated by a great Celtic cross erected in 1915 by Mrs Adair who made many improvements to the Glenveagh estate that included the laying out the Gardens in the late 1880's. Glenveagh in Irish, *Gleann Beithe* means the "Valley of Birch Woods" and the great expanse of water that occupies the valley is Lough Veagh "Lake of the Birch"- filling the deep fold in the mountains that divides the Derryveagh mountains.

There is an older name for the Glen - *Gleann Fada Fan na Sealg* – which translates as 'the Glen of the Long Wandering Hunting Ground'. I feel this is what the Glen was likely to have been known by in Colmcille's time. We hear from Adamnan, his biographer, that Colmcille had a keen knowledge of deer hunting practices. In his 'Vita Columba' – there is an account of the Saint teaching a fellow Celt how he might kill a deer by using a spear (Book II, chap. 37).

Adamnan's text, written about the year 700 is actually three books – book one being an account of 50 of Colmcille's prophesies, the second book is an account of 50 of his miracles and the third book is an account of the holy man's last days. Reading through an English translation of the original Latin text I was surprised to discover in Book One – chapter XVIII – "concerning Laisran, the gardener, a holy man". The story goes he joined Colmcille's community of monks, thus fulfilling the Saints prophecy. Scholars of the text agree Laisran took the role of the gardener on Iona in Colmcille's time around the year 575.

This discovery was enough to rekindle an interest in learning all I can about the kind of gardening practiced in this early period. Old manuscripts dealing with Brehon law have proved a valuable source, local tradition in rural communities has also proved fruitful as has visiting the sites associated with Colmcille and the early Irish church.

Colmcille arrived on Iona in the year 562 in an ocean going currach with a crew of 12 disciples to found a new monastery on this westerly island off the Scottish coast. His first act was to climb to the highest hill to confirm he was out of sight of the Irish coastline. There he founded the celebrated centre of learning that soon became the holy of holy's of the Celtic Church.

Following in his footsteps I made my own pilgrim journey there in June 2008. I wanted to see the remains of the monastery and learn as much as I could about traditions associated with the saint. Of course I was curious to see if any archaeophytes (ancient plants) could be found linked to early gardens there. I was delighted to discover very well kept gardens kept by today's inhabitants of the island. Walking the whole island over several days visiting all the possible locations, I could find no plant that could be said to have been grown by the monks. I did however find an old guide book on Iona published in 1934, containing a fold out map with all the old gaelic place names marked. Studying the map I found four place names referring to gardens – *Garadh Dhiarmid; Garadh Sgolban; Gortean Beag & Garadh nan Caorach* These translate as Diarmad's Garden, The Garden of Thorns, Little Field or Garden & The Garden of the Sheep. I visited all these sites and at Gortean Beag I found a natural depression in the land surrounded on three sides by rocky out-crops, the forth side looking northwest onto a seaweed strewn beach. In the hollow were the distinctive marks of "lazy beds". A long-standing tradition on Iona associates this site with the cultivated gardens of the monks. I felt sure I was looking at the site of an early Christian garden.

I have discovered a wealth of native plant species with specific associations with Colmcille. In the city of Derry each year on the 9th of June Oak Leaf Day is celebrated in memory of the saint. At Durrow an inscribed stone above Colmcilles Well is inscribed "here angels shall enjoy my sacred cell, my sloe, my nut, mine apple and my well". In Gaelic tradition here in Ireland and in western Scotland there is a particular herb with close associations with Colmcille. Tradition has it that one time the Saint met a young man who tended animals in the hills who suffered from visions of evil spirits. Colmcille recommended the young man should wear St Johnswort to restore him to health. Tradition also holds that the Saint himself wore the herb and carried it with him.

Searching far and wide and digging deep into the wealth of literature on the period I have learnt a great deal about the plants and horticultural practices of the first gardeners in Ireland. We are very fortunate to have such a wealth of historical, archaeological and folklore material to draw upon. Perhaps most rewarding of all, are the wealth of early Christian sites we have access to and the remarkable stories they tell.

Old and undisturbed graveyards are often found where an early Christian church once stood. Occasionally old cultivated plants can be found that link back to the monastic garden. Hops have been recorded as surviving at old ruinous Abbey's throughout Ireland, as have Chives, Sand Leek, Alexanders and Marsh-mallow to name a few. It is a rare occurrence to discover a plant that may have persisted on the one site for a thousand years or more, but it does happen. Muckross Abbey near Killarney, Co Kerry has an ancient Yew growing in the centre of the cloister, local tradition has it that it is five hundred years or more old. Glendalough also has an ancient yew. Next to Dubh Reglis at Derry an ancient Yew once stood, and according to Manus O Donnell this was the very tree where Colmcille sang praises to the angelic host inhabiting the crown of the tree. Colmcille loved Derry and forbade the destruction of the beautiful oak trees that once surrounded the foundation.

John O Donovan's 1864 book 'The Martyrology of Donegal' contains in its introduction a latin text *"S. Lommani Episcopi nepotism S. Patricii.....in Midia et insula Loch-buarensis prope Portum Lomani extruxisse aediculam, quae extat adhue, in qua vivebat ex herbis potissimum Alexandricis, quarum ibi magna copia*", translated as "*St Lomman, Bishop, nephew of St Patrick, in Meath is said to have built a house on an island in Loch Hu near Portlomain, in which he lived for the most part on Alexander herbs, of which there is there in great abundance*". I wonder is the herb there yet?. Later in the main body of the text "*St. Fiachrach, an Eremite, Hermit in France, whose Feast Day is August 30th*" is listed among the Saints of Ireland. Fiacre, as he is also known, is celebrated as the patron of gardeners and of Paris taxi drivers. He is said to have lived in seclusion in a French forest where he sustained himself by gardening.

Caleb Threlkeld's 1726 text 'Synopsis Stripium Hibernicum' mentions Colmcille and Partick by name. He confirms an association between Colmcille and "*Hypericum adrosaemum"* quoting the herb by one of its Gaelic names "*Ted Colum Kille"*, Patrick is of course associated with *Seamar-oge* or Trifolium repens - White Clover.

It can happen that when soil is disturbed, seeds that have lain dormant for many years (century's perhaps), once exposed to light and air do germinate in order to complete their life cycle once again. Road works are a good example and it can happen that poppies, corn flowers, Charlock etc germinate and grow quickly into flowering plants. I discovered this for myself on an old cottage site when Charlock flowered for the first time in many years and set seed which I have saved. Threkleld gives an interesting account of Charlock, in gaelic "*Praisseagh Garuh*", "*called about the streets of Dublin before the flowers blow....used for boiled salad*".

I had the pleasure of visiting the Aran Islands in June 2009. On both Inis Mor and Inis Meann I discovered an abundance of early Christian remains and an equally abundant amount of "archeophytes". This in the new name given to plants (mostly weeds) that have naturalised as a result of having been in cultivation pre 1500. The growing conditions on these islands have made it particularly easy for *Allium babingtonii*, Charlock and Alexanders to thrive. These three wild herbs were all part of the vegetable diet of the island's early inhabitants – most likely the monks who also left behind such rich architectural remains. My most startling discovery on Inis Meann was a single plant of White Bryony growing at the base of a stonewall close to the present day Chapel. This area is believed to have been the location of an early monastery.

On one of my regular visits to Tory Island off the coast of Donegal I visited the old graveyard and discovered a mature Opium Poppy seed-head. This may have arisen due to a recent burial – I scattered the seed in my garden which in no time turned into a great bed of poppies! *Lavatera arborea* is another plant often associated with coastal and island habitats. On Tory it grows in a semi-wild state around the houses of West Town the same area once occupied by Colmcille's monastery. I wonder if it is a relic of ancient cultivation- grown for medicinal use?

The Chilean Fire Bush – Continuing
A Tale by Seamus O'Brien

On the 8th of May 2007 I was trekking along a lava field beneath the snow-capped Volcan Llaima in the Araucanía Region of southern Chile. I was travelling as part of the Glasnevin Chile Expedition (GCE) and had temporarily left my colleagues from the National Botanic Gardens (Kevin Kenny, Paul Maher and Peter Meleady) to explore scrubby vegetation on the edge of a river of black pumice. It was autumn in Chile and the weather was gloriously warm with blue skies and the forested ridges above us were aglow with fiery autumn colour. It was my first time to explore the Andean flora and I was excited at the prospect of meeting so many garden favourites in their native haunt. Many of the surrounding plants were familiar to me. Twenty years ago, when I first entered horticulture at Multyfarnham in Co. Westmeath, my classmates and I were introduced to a fine young tree of *Nothofagus antarctica* in front of

the college building. Beneath Volcan Lliama (the most active volcano in South America) grew several species of Southern Beech including the Antarctic Beech and the more commonly encountered *Nothofagus dombeyi*. *Gaultheria mucronata* (syn. *Pernettya mucronata*) was abundant in more exposed areas and on the sun-baked pumice it formed low shrubs to no more than 70cm (27in.) tall. These closely knitted plants were adorned with large succulent berries that varied in colour from pink to violet-purple. Several other favourite garden plants came into view, but one left me guessing for quite some time. On the edge of a Southern Beech and Monkey Puzzle forest were upright, fully deciduous shrubs of about 2m (6.5ft.) tall carrying russet brown obovate-lanceolate leaves to less than 5cm (2in.) long. It wasn't until I spotted several pendant woody follicles, packed with thin, disc-like winged seeds that I realised I had met with the Chilean Fire Bush, *Embothrium coccineum*.

The Chilean Fire Bush was discovered by a Polish-born German botanist of Scottish descent, Johann Reinhold Forster (1729-1798) and his son Georg Forster (1754-1794). Forster senior was the naturalist onboard Captain James Cook's second Pacific Voyage (1772-75). He had been invited to join the expedition by the British Admiralty when Sir Joseph Banks withdrew but Forster's relationship with Cook was problematic and he was very often not allowed sufficient time to thoroughly botanise the regions explored. Forster, father and son, discovered the Chilean Fire Bush in Tierra del Fuego and in Forster senior's book *Observations made during a voyage round the World* (1778) he described his find as: 'A scarlet flowered shrubby plant of a new genus, which we called *Embothrium coccineum*'. The genus was formally described by the Forsters in 1775 shortly after the return of Cook's Expedition and the epithet *Embothrium* derives from the Greek *en*, in, *bŏthrĭŏn*, a little pit; alluding to the anthers position in the pits of the calyx and the Latin *coccineus* meaning scarlet. In its native Chile and Argentina, *Embothrium coccineum* is a highly variable plant forming either an evergreen, semi-deciduous or deciduous suckering shrub or a tree to almost 10m (33ft.) tall. It grows twice that size in coastal gardens in Ireland and like Rae McIntyre I disagree with John Joe Costin's statement that poverty and neglect are the conditions this tree needs in order to thrive or that it needs poor soil. The finest embothriums in Britain and Ireland are found in well-sheltered woodland gardens with deep, rich soil and high rainfall i.e. the west coast of Scotland and Wales and coastal regions of Ireland, Cornwall and Devon. The black pumice it grows on in central Chile is certainly not devoid of minerals and supports a rich surrounding flora and further south in the Lake District and on the island of Chiloé, the Chilean Fire Bush digs its feet into deep, humus rich soil. As for its sensitivity to phosphorus and other minerals, we are growing our Chilean *Embothrium* seedlings in a general slow release fertilizer here at Kilmacurragh without

any damage and at Mount Congreve in Waterford where it is grown in hundreds in the estate's commercial nursery it is treated similarly with good results. Other members of the Proteaceae have been grown in the same manner here at Kilmacurragh and I know of several species of *Banksia* in Kerry gardens thriving in rich acidic soils.

Just how many species of *Embothrium* there are is a matter of debate. While some floras still accept up to eight species the current view is that *Embothrium* is a monotypic genus with one highly variable species, *Embothrium coccineum*. Other species formerly included in the genus like the Peruvian *Embothrium grandiflorum* for example, have been assigned to another genus, *Oreocallis*. *Embothrium coccineum* has had a number of varieties tagged onto it in the past, though two of these have been reduced to Groups and the yellow flowered var. l*utea* might perhaps be better viewed as a form. The Groups at least are useful from a horticultural standpoint. Belonging to the Proteaceae, a family that is mainly distributed in the Southern Hemisphere, this family is almost totally restricted to Gondwanic continental blocks. Many members of this very showy family provide links between the floras of Australasia, South Africa and South America. Take for example the genus *Gevuina*; of three species one is endemic to Chile (*Gevuina avellana*) and two other species are found in New Guinea and Queensland.

The family Proteaceae is broken into five subfamilies and *Embothrium* belongs to Grevilleoideae (which like the subfamily Proteoideae bears "Proteoid roots" mentioned by David Jeffrey in the October Newsletter). The subfamily Grevilleoideae, regarded as containing the most primitive members of the Proteaceae, is further divided into four tribes and one of these, the Embothrieae include showy genera like *Telopea, Grevillea, Hakea, Oreocallis, Embothrium* and *Alloxylon*. Another member of the subfamily Grevilleoideae include *Banksia*, which belongs to the tribe Banksieae. Most genera belonging to the subfamily Grevilleoideae thrive in milder Irish gardens irrespective of phosphate levels. Try growing *Lomatia ferruginea* in poor soil for example. It will soon fail and this group do need good garden soil to succeed. On the other hand the subfamily Proteoideae are a little more tricky and are definitely sensitive to phosphates when young but I know several gardens here in Ireland growing *Protea, Leucadendron* and *Leucospermum* (all members of the tribes Proteeae and Leucadendreae) in ordinary garden soil with excellent results.

Here at Kilmacurragh *Banksia ericoides, Banksia integrifolia* and *Protea cynaroides* grow in the 18th century Double Borders in rich, sticky deep brown earth above a bed of basalt and all grow with great vigour. Likewise at Glasnevin both *Banksia* and *Protea* grow successfully out of doors with

little special treatment. Members of the Proteaceae occupy a wide range of habitats varying from temperate and tropical rainforest, to grasslands, shrubland and alpine meadows, in some cases (but not always) on acidic, well-drained, nutrient poor soil. This has led to the myth that all members of the Proteaceae must be starved in Western cultivation. Quite the contrary, members of this group do not deserve their difficult reputation and gardeners should not be frightened away from this showy band of exotics.

The inflorescence of the Chilean Fire Bush is typical of the subfamily Grevilleoideae, bearing simple or branching racemes of paired flowers. A close inspection of the individual flowers will reveal that they are not broken into a clearly defined calyx and corolla, but appear as a perianth that emerges at first as a tube-like flower and then splits as the blossom matures into four recurved segments. Four sessile stamens are carried in the tips of these segments and a long style projects beyond the length of each flower. The fruit is a woody follicle containing ten or more winged seeds. The foliage of the Chilean Fire Bush is highly variable both in shape and length; even on an old tree here at Kilmacurragh leaves on some branches are lanceolate and obovate on others. Flower colour is relatively consistent with a slight variance between orange-scarlet and striking crimson-scarlet, though in southern Chile both white and yellow flowered forms occur. In its native Chile *Embothrium* is naturally distributed from Region VII (The Maule Region to the south of Santiago) to Region XII (Tierra del Fuego). Within those regions it grows from the coast to the tree line in the Andes. It occupies a similar long range along bordering parts of Andean Argentina. In Chile it is variously known as Notro, Ciruelillo, Fosforitoand and Treumún names that originated from the Mapuche Indians on who's territory this tree grows. Pollinators of *Embothrium coccineum* vary from region to region. On the island of Chiloé in southern Chile for example, two species of birds, the passerine flycatcher and the hummingbird are the main pollinators. Across the Andes in Argentina the tree is visited by hummingbirds and two species of long tongued tanglewing flies during flowering time. Trees within many wild populations of the Chilean Fire Bush are self-incompatible and highly dependant on pollinating agents for a good seed set.

My first introduction to *Embothrium coccineum* was at the island garden of Ilnacullin (Garinish Island) back in the summer of 1991. On Garinish it had been planted decades previously by Murdo MacKenzie, the famous Scottish Head Gardener who arrived on the island in 1928. One of the commonest garden trees in the nearby village of Glengarriff is the Chilean Fire Bush making an amazing display there every May and June. A few months later I was working as a student at the Talbot Botanic Garden, Malahide Castle where the Chilean Fire Bush also grew. The Malahide tree

had been planted by Lord Talbot de Malahide (1912-1973) in a raised bed (Malahide's soil is very limy) that had long before been filled with rich, acidic soil imported from the Wicklow mountains. Lord Talbot's tree grew in the shelter of an enclosed yard within the walled garden and there it grew with reasonable success. Lord Talbot's love affair and success with Southern Hemisphere plants was such that in the 1960s he travelled to Chile to collect plants for his garden at Malahide. Despite its relatively low rainfall Chilean plants grow remarkably well at the Talbot Botanic Garden and a glimpse of the huge specimen of *Berberis valdiviana* (probably the most beautiful of all its clan) that grows in a sheltered glade near the castle is enough to prove this point. On the 17th April 1961, Talbot was plant hunting near Valdivia and one of his collections was of the Chilean Fire Bush. On his return to Dublin he sent seeds to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh. Through correspondence and seed exchange, Talbot maintained the largest private botanical network of his time and swapped seeds and plants with most of the major botanical collectors and growers of the time. In the following year, 1962, for example, he sent a pan of *Embothrium* seedlings to the Slieve Donard nursery in Co. Down. By 1966, only five years after his Chile Expedition, one of his Valdivian *Embothrium* seedlings flowered in the acidic nursery at Malahide and he had it planted into the garden. Not content with his own collections, Talbot received seeds of *Embothrium coccineum* from Viña del Mar, a city to the north of Valparaíso. Since the Chilean Fire Bush is not native to this region it is likely that he received seeds from the Jardín Botánico Nacional where an extraordinary range of native Chilean plants are grown.

In 1993 I learned just what the Chilean Fire Bush was capable of when I moved to manage Glanleam on Valentia Island. The trees on Valentia had been famous for near a century or so and by the time of my arrival the 18m (60ft) tall trees with trunks over 0.5m (20in.) in diameter, were covered with tens of thousands of spidery scarlet blossoms. Glanleam's embothriums had been planted by Sir Peter Fitzgerald, the 19th Knight of Kerry (1808-1880), who was a keen gardener and acclimatiser of plants. Fitzgerald bought his first embothriums from the English nurserymen Messrs. Veitch (founded in Exeter in 1808 with a further branch established at Chelsea in 1853) who had a policy of employing professional plant hunters to collect for them. Their first collector was a Cornish man, William Lobb (1809-1863), and during the 1840s he travelled twice through South America paying particular attention to the flora of temperate southern Chile. It was in 1846 while travelling on his second expedition for Veitch that he collected seeds of the Chilean Fire Bush, thus introducing it to cultivation. Lobb is thought to have collected his material near Valdivia, on the island of Chiloé (where the Chilean Fire Bush reaches its greatest dimensions), or on the mainland facing it. His original introduction flowered at Veitch's Exeter nursery just seven years

after its arrival in Europe. On the 8th October 1878 Sir Peter Fitzgerald purchased two further plants of the Chilean Fire Bush from Thomas Smith, the manager of Messrs. Rodger, M'Clelland & Co. near Newry in Co. Down. Between 1859 and 1862 Smith had worked in Veitch's Chelsea nursery and so he would have been very familiar with *Embothrium coccineum*. The plants at Newry may have been descended from further reintroductions by two other Veitchian collectors, Richard Pearce who travelled through Chile in 1862 or indeed George Downton who collected *Embothrium* seeds in southern Chile in October 1871 before heading north to pay a visit to the little-known Juan Fernandez islands in 1873. Richard Pearce concentrated his efforts in central Chile, along the coastal Cordilleras and into the interior to the Chilean Lake District. Pearce was enchanted with the latter area:

> It is of the most charming description – gently undulating meadows covered with a carpet of short grass, placid lakes reflecting from their smooth surface the mountains around, foaming cataracts and gentle rivulets, deep gorges and frightful precipices, over which tumble numerous dark, picturesque waterfalls reaching the bottom in a cloud of spray, high rocky pinnacles and lofty peaks, surround one on every side.
> Nor is the vegetation less interesting. At an elevation of 4,000 ft. the vegetation exhibits a totally different character from the coast. Here one finds Antarctic Beeches (*Fagus antarctica* and *F. betuloides*), (sic.) which constitute with *Fitzroya patagonica* (sic.) the large forest trees. The *Embothrium coccineum, Desfontainea spinosa, Philesia buxifolia,* (sic.) three species of *Berberis*, *Pernettya* and *Gaultheria* are the most abundant of flowering shrubs, whilst the numerous pretty little rock-plants meet one at every step with their various forms and colours.

All of these early introductions however proved tender and only really succeeded in the very mildest coastal gardens in the British Isles and Ireland. On the 5th of May 1879, less than a year after he had bought his embothriums from Newry, Peter Fitzgerald received a letter from Lord Lansdowne, who gardened at Derreen in Co. Kerry. Lansdowne wrote to the old Knight exclaiming that "we have had a disastrous winter, particularly speaking at Derreen; Fuchsias all cut down, Veronicas killed, flax damaged, Embothriums done for …"
To Lansdowne's letter Peter Fitzgerald replied that: Tho' he was the very last man in any part of the 4 Kingdoms of England, Ireland, Scotland and Valentia that I felt disposed to crow all over, I still could not help a kind of unconscious triumph at finding that I had escaped almost scatheless from the ravages of last winter …

The Chilean Fire Bush presently growing here at Kilmacurragh is descended from a tree acquired by Thomas Acton from Messrs. Veitch in 1876 and it prospered under the watchful eye of Thomas and his sister Janet. The Veitchian collector and Curator of the Trinity College Botanic Gardens, F. W. Burbidge, was, as previously stated in this newsletter, a great admirer of the garden at Kilmacurragh and had the following to say of Thomas and Janet Acton's Chilean Fire Bush following a visit to the garden in 1893:

> And here, in a sheltered nook under the great Beech trees, is a jungle of lower shrub-growths; but above all is a healthy *Embothrium coccineum* from Chile, but here on Irish soil, throwing high and wide its leafy shoots and branches wreathed with clusters of its vivid scarlet flowers – hundreds of bunches of a colour that would kill the hue of a scarlet zonal *Pelargonium*. What a regal beauty is this shrub, as thus seen healthy and perfect in a spot that reminds one of the Colonus of Sophocles, since, like that fair place, this South American rarity is set "In a covert of green glades, unvisited by scathing sun, unvexed by any storm." To see this glowing *Embothrium* thus set in green tracery, is a sight "fairer than rubies," and one but rarely enjoyed. But the sun is setting low, and gilding the Ash boles, and burnishing the silvery lustre of a swan who is fussing his wings on the lake below. The deer are wandering away to rest, and yet we are loth to part from this flowery paradise and its grassy glades and dells of feathery native ferns. There is just one last glimpse at the scarlet clusters of the *Embothrium* through the leafy Limes …

William Watson, a former Curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew visited Kilmacurragh in June 1906. He had been invited over to Ireland by Sir Frederick Moore and both men spent a fortnight visiting the gardens at Castlewellan, Kilmacurragh, Mount Usher, Narrow Water, Saint Annes, Fota, Belgrove, Derreen, Rossdohan, Ashbourne House, and several gardens in the Dublin area. Of Kilmacurragh he had the following to say:

> The garden of Mr. Thomas Acton is the most interesting in Ireland. Here there is little evidence of keep, but there has been much judgement in the planting, and generally things look happy. The soil appears to be deep and rich, and there is plenty of water. The great feature at the time of our visit was a tree of *Embothrium coccineum* in full bloom – it was 35 feet high with a spread of 30 feet, the trunk 15 inches through, and covered with flowers; this was planted as a baby about 30 years ago by Mr. Acton.

William Jackson Bean, another former Curator of Kew and a noted authority on woody plants from temperate regions, travelled to Kilmacurragh on several occasions and wrote an account of his visit in

February 1913 in the *Kew Bulletin* for that year:

> In the middle latitudes of Ireland there appears to be nowhere so remarkable a collection of rare and tender trees as that at Kilmacurragh in Co. Wicklow. … The collection was largely formed by the late Mr. Thomas Acton, who was one of the keenest of all plant lovers ever in Ireland, where there is now a considerable community, encouraged and fostered by that admirably managed centre, Glasnevin. On Mr. T. Acton's death, Kilmacurragh descended to his nephew, Capt. Acton, in whose hands the collection of trees and shrubs is being admirably maintained. One great charm of the Kilmacurragh plants is the semi-wild surroundings in which they are placed. They do not stand isolated on trim lawns, as at Castlewellan for instance, but occupy openings in the woodland, of which, indeed, they form a part. Each style of treatment has its charms, but to one like myself, whose habitual surroundings are of the neat, trim, and essentially garden type, the untrammelled order of things at Kilmacurragh appeals with perhaps undue force. And behind it all is that sense of satisfaction engendered by the rude health of the plants… But after all, in overhauling one's notes, one finds that it is the Chilean trees and shrubs more than any others that give to the grounds at Kilmacurragh their greatest distinction. The vegetation of temperate South America seems to find in the Irish climate conditions as congenial to them as perhaps any other part of the British Isles (sic.) affords; in this respect at any rate it equals the climate of Cornwall or the West of Scotland. Is there anywhere, for instance, a finer *Embothrium coccineum* than the one at Kilmacurragh, 40ft. high with a trunk 18in. thick and sending up suckers 20ft. away? …

Charles Frederick Ball, the Assistant Keeper at Glasnevin, was another regular visitor here and in 1914 (shortly before he and the Acton brothers fatally departed to fight in the Great War) he penned the following in *Irish Gardening*:

> CHILEAN TREES AND SHRUBS – Irish gardens in favoured localities are particularly suited to these, and Kilmacurragh possesses two, which are probably the finest in the United Kingdom (sic.). Mr. Watson, the Curator of Kew, when visiting this garden … seeing a specimen of *Tricuspidaria lanceolata* (sic.) 18 feet high and 10 feet through, with branches weighed down by red flowers, exclaimed: "I never before saw such a plant." Again in June it is well worth going all the way to see *Embothrium coccineum* covered by brilliant scarlet flowers, 40 feet high, and with a trunk 18 inches thick …

In later editions of *The English Flower Garden* William Robinson warned of *Embothrium* flowers being damaged in late frosts in Devonshire gardens but stated that "It thrives near the coast in southern Ireland and in Wicklow at Mr. Acton's but soon perishes in less favoured places." The *Embothrium* that Burbidge, Ball, Bean and Robinson wrote of blew over in a storm during the autumn of 1931 and Charles Acton (1914-1999) sent a section of the trunk to Lord Headfort for his botanical museum at Headfort House in Kells, Co Meath. The fallen tree was soon replaced by one of its many suckers. This tree, like its parent, toppled in a gale many years ago, but continues to grow. It currently has a trunk length of about 9m (30ft) and a diameter of c. 38cm. (15in.). We have plans to remove a smothering thicket of *Gaultheria shallon* at its feet, to allow the old tree's suckers to survive and be transplanted to other areas of the arboretum.

Hardier forms of the Chilean Fire Bush appeared on the scene in Britain and Ireland in the late 19th and early 20th century and in 1892 Sir John Ross of Bladensberg received a long-leaved form, *Embothrium coccineum* Longifolium Group from a gardening friend, Arthur Soames of Sheffield Park in East Sussex. Sir John gardened at Rostrevor in Co. Down, a region of Ireland famous for the range of tender plants that succeed there. This new form proved hardier than previous introductions and carried masses of orange-scarlet flowers along its branches. *Embothrium* thrives in the mild County Down climate and has formed sizable trees at Castle Ward and Mount Stewart. In 1926-27 the English plant hunter, Harold Comber (1898-1969) visited the Argentinean and Chilean Andes. The son of James Comber, Head Gardener at Nymans in Sussex, Harold Comber had previously worked at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and sent his seed collections there to be distributed to the expedition's subscribers. The syndicate had been organised by the Hon. H. D. McLaren (Lord Aberconway) who gardened at Bodnant in Wales (Bodnant, now a National Trust property, holds the National Collection of *Embothrium*).

Comber introduced *Embothrium coccineum* Lanceolatum Group from the Argentine province of Neuquen, where *Embothrium* reaches its most northern range in Argentina. Plants there grew at an altitude of 914 to 1,524m (3,000 to 5,000ft) in a climate that is harsher and drier than the Chilean side of the Andes and this group is said to be the hardiest of all the embothriums. The Lanceolatum Group was first found by the Spanish botanists Hipolito Ruiz (1754-1816) and José Antonio Pavon (1754-1840) in the coastal range near Concepcion during their 1777-78 expedition. Under the reign of King Charles III of Spain, three major botanical expeditions were sent to the New World and on the first of these, Ruiz and Pavon explored the floras of Chile and Peru. The Fire Bush they discovered near Concepcion was shortly afterwards called *Embothrium lanceolatum,* now *Embothrium coccineum* Lanceolatum Group. This particular Group is less evergreen than previous introductions with small narrow, lanceolate leaves and with tightly packed racemes produced along

the branches. *Embothrium coccineum* Lanceolatum Group seems to be the most popular and most easily available fire bush in gardens at the present time. *E. coccineum* (Lanceolatum Group) 'Norquinco'was raised at Bodnant from Comber's C. 387 which was collected in the Norquinco Valley in Argentina. Comber's field notes for this collection stated: 'shrubs 4 to 18ft. high. Flowers good scarlet. Common on shadier hillsides in sandy loam and well drained places. Grows freely from suckers, large areas often covered by the same plant'. Comber also reported having seen a yellow flowered form.

Another famous collector from this time was Clarence Elliot (1881-1969), a former student at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and founder of the Six Hill Nursery (from where the well-known *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant was raised) in Hertfordshire. Elliot explored the Andes of Argentina and Chile, and the Falkland Islands in 1927. From these regions he introduced a host of exceptionally good garden plants including further material of *Embothrium coccineum* Longifolium Group. Despite its variability, surprisingly few cultivars have been selected. Apart from *E. coccineum* (Lanceolatum Group) 'Norquinco', a second cultivar, *E. coccineum* (Lanceolatum Group) 'Inca Flame' is generally available and seems to have been first made available by the New Zealand nursery, Duncan and Davies. Of more rounded habit than 'Norquinco', it also bears more rounded leaves and vibrant orange-red blossoms.

The Holy Grail for plant collectors travelling through Chile and Argentina are the white and yellow flowered forms. The yellow-flowered form, which is sometimes referred to in Chile as *Embothrium coccineum* var. *lutea*, is far from common but seems to be most frequently encountered in the Chilean Lake District. 1971/72 the Beckett, Cheese and Watson Expedition to the Andes found a grove of *Embothrium coccineum* on Chiloé island in which there were four yellow flowered trees. Kenneth Beckett described their discovery as follows:

> It was a dull, dampish day in November 1971 when John Watson, Martin Cheese and I were heading north up the island of Chiloé towards the ferry at Ancud, ready to return to mainland Chile. About 19km south of Ancud we passed by areas of evergreen forest dominated by large embothriums, their red blooms visible through the gloom where the forests stretched away from us up the hillside. Among the trees I spotted two patches of yellow. Without pausing to consider I yelled 'Yellow embothriums'. The landrover shuddered to a halt and we scrambled out. Sure enough it was the yellow form of *Embothrium coccineum* known to occur in several areas of southern Chile and reported by Harold Comber and other previous collectors, though as far as we knew, this was not a recorded site....

Seeds sent back to England germinated well from this collection (C. & W. 5019) and while some seedlings produced typical scarlet blossoms others did sport fine displays of primrose-yellow blooms. Back in Ireland, Lord Talbot de Malahide received seeds in November 1972 from this collection (and from a deciduous form – C. & W. 5212) but how they fared is not recorded. Talbot, alas, died less than a year and a half later and was not around to bring his seedlings to a flowering stage. No yellow flowered seedlings from C. & W. 5019 seem to have survived in cultivation. In March 1976 Sir Harold Hillier received scions from a yellow flowered tree growing in a public park in the town of Purranque near Osorno, and was successful in grafting two plants. Hillier named the clone *Embothrium coccineum* 'Eliot Hodgkin' and stated that the leaves on this tree were deciduous and narrow and resembled Comber's Norquinco form but with the flower colour resembling that of *Jasminum nudiflorum*. Sir Harold kept his most delicate and rarest treasures in a teak glasshouse behind the scenes and alas his golden Fire Bush may have been stolen, in any case it never made it into his arboretum and the yellow flowered 'Eliot Hodgkin' is now extinct.

In his book *Trees for all Seasons*, Sean Hogan reports that on the lower slopes of Aconcagua in western Argentina there exists a rather low growing yellow flowered form of *Embothrium coccineum*. In recent years cuttings were rooted in the United States and plants were distributed there. Hogan even received a plant himself but it died and he doesn't know of any surviving plants in the USA. It seems that the yellow *Embothrium* is a highly elusive creature! But all is not lost. In March of 2009, a collaborative expedition between the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Millennium Seed Bank and the Forestry Commission travelled to Chile on a highly successful collecting trip. The expedition's mission was to strengthen the Chilean temperate collections on public display at the RBG, Kew, Westonbirt Arboretum and Bedgebury Pinetum and to conserve seeds in local, national and millennium seed banks for future generations.

Travelling on this expedition was Ben Jones, an arboriculturist at Westonbirt, and he related the story of an interesting find to me recently. On the 23rd of March team members from the expedition were exploring an area near the town of Entre Lagos in the Chilean Lake District. Not far from the town, along a farm track on the edge of an orchard they found a single *Embothrium* sporting yellow blossoms. A few seedpods still clung to the tree and out of these 56 seeds were extracted. Back in England these seeds were x-rayed in a forestry research laboratory and of 56 only 20 seeds were found to be viable. The good news is that seedlings from this tree are flourishing in the UK. Since this tree grew in an orchard with

no red embothriums in the near vicinity there is a good chance that it will have been self-pollinated and will therefore produce some yellow seedlings.

The latest Fire Bushes to enter Irish cultivation are our collections from the 2007 Glasnevin Chile Expedition. The bulk of these collections were made around Lago Conguillío in the Araucanía Region. In our Field Notes GCE 07119 reads as follows: "material collected from a 2m tall shrub. This population was fully deciduous, leaves 5cm long, foliage golden brown. Grew on pumice with *Araucaria araucana* and *Gaultheria mucronata"*. GCE 213, which grew on the same volcanic slopes carried the following description: "a 3m tall deciduous shrub of upright habit, grew on pumice". GCE 07157 grew in a woodland setting at slightly lower altitude in the same region was thus described: "a shrubby 2.5m tall tree, grew on the edge of *Nothofagus alpina* forest." Further south, at La Union near Valdivia we encountered *Embothrium* again this time growing on deep, rich soil at significantly lower altitude, our notes described GCE 07218 "a young tree by roadside, 4m tall with *Drimys winteri* var. *winteri"*. All of these collections are now growing here at Kilmacurragh, though none have yet been planted in the arboretum.

The Kilmacurragh seedlings from the Araucanía Region fit the description of what some Chilean botanists call *Embothrium coccineum* forma *andina*, which is said to grow on the slopes of Volcan Llaima at altitudes between 400-1500m. (1,312 – 4,921ft.) – exactly where we found our plants. The Chilean forma *andina* is probably nothing more than *Embothrium coccineum* Lanceolatum Group and Volcan Llaima where we made our collections is not such a great distance from the Argentine province of Neuquen where Harold Comber visited in 1927. Of these seedlings GCE 07119 bears long lanceolate leaves, far longer than the parent plant in Chile, as I write these seedlings have taken on an amber autumnal hue and appear to be fully deciduous. GCE 07123 has long lanceolate leaves but appears to be evergreen, as does GCE 07157. Seedlings of GCE 07218 from the temperate rainforests around La Union near Valdivia however is fully evergreen and carries both lanceolate and rounded leaves, as does the old Veitch tree that grows near the Double Borders at Kilmacurragh. These seedlings will probably not flower for another five years or so and since we collected our *Embothrium* seeds "blind" i.e. without seeing flower colour, who knows what shades might arise, perhaps a yellow, or maybe even the elusive white! Watch this space.

With thanks to Anne James (formerly Malahide Castle), Ben Jones, Westonbirt, John Grimshaw, Colesbourne Park, Roy Lancaster (formerly Hillier Arboretum).

Regional Reports

NORTHERN

Thursday October 22nd 'Our Woodland Heritage' by Patrick Cregg

Patrick Cregg, Northern Ireland Director of the Woodland Trust, gave a most interesting and informative lecture. This was a joint lecture with Antrim Borough Council and due to refurbishment work at Clotworthy Arts Centre, we were relocated to the new and impressive Antrim Civic Centre. The Woodland Trust, established in 1972, is the UK's leading woodland conservation charity and depends on its 300,000 members and supporters. In 1996, the Northern Ireland branch was founded and now cares for 52 woods. The Trust has four key aims: i) No further loss of ancient woodland; ii) Restoring and improving the biodiversity of woods; iii) Increasing new native woodland; iv) Increasing people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland. Patrick explained to us that unfortunately, NI is right at the bottom of the European tree league, having just 6.4% of woodland, compared to the European average of 44%. Also, much of NI's woodland tends to be non-native, dense coniferous plantations. A 5 year project was set in motion to research NI's woodland and create a record of ancient woodland (land continuously wooded since 1600, just before the Plantation) and long-established woodland (land that has been continuously wooded since the First Edition Ordnance Survey maps of Ireland were produced in 1830-44, but which cannot be proven ancient). 2,700 sites were surveyed, gathering information of tree canopy, hedgerows, flora, fauna and historical features. We were all shocked when Patrick informed us that the results of the project showed NI to have only a tiny fraction (0.08%) of ancient woodland compared to 2% in England. Since the 1960's, we have lost 273 of our oldest woods, and the main reasons for this loss is due to: 60% agriculture, 13% development and 27% other reasons, such as golf courses. Ancient woods are irreplaceable. Over centuries they have evolved rich and complex ecosystems and are home to many vulnerable, rare and threatened species. As they have been relatively undisturbed, they often contain important historical features, such as ice houses, bridges and follies, that tell us about our past. Also, the woods are some of the most beautiful and tranquil places to walk in and enjoy. Within these old woods, magnificent ancient and veteran trees can be found. Patrick suggested that maybe the gnarled bark on some of these trees, such as the oaks and chestnuts, were

not good enough and managed to escape the axeman's axe. Also there are 41 species of plants significantly associated with NI's ancient woodland, such as *Ajuga reptans* (Bugle), *Ranunculus ficaria* (Lesser Celandine) and *Angelica sylvestris* (Wild Angelica). Around 3,500 hectares of ancient woodland in NI have been replanted with fast-growing, non-native conifers. The process of felling and replanting, and the heavy shade subsequently cast by closely planted conifers, all take their toll on the fragile wildlife and ecosystem that depends on the stable conditions provided by ancient woodland. Thankfully, the Woodland Trust is now trying to restore it back to what it should be, by planting more native trees. Also, the Trust is calling for the NI Assembly to pass legislative protection for ancient woodland. Felling licences have been called for and the Trust has also welcomed the Dept. of Agriculture and Rural Development's intention to double NI's woodland cover over the next 50 years.

Patrick's talk will have stimulated many of us to explore some of NI's wonderful ancient and long-established woodland. For further details of where to find these woods, go to www.backonthemap.org.uk

Barbara Kelso

LEINSTER

Saturday September 5th Irish Cultivar Conservation Day.

Brendan Sayers, always the gardener with a great commitment to the IGPS, arranged this seminar day so that members might address again the organisation's policy of conservation of Irish cultivars and gardens. It was, regretfully, very badly attended. The day began with a message from our current chairman, **Patrick Quigley** about the important part amateurs have to play in achieving the aims of the organisation. All members have skills, horticultural and administrative which we can bring to bear collectively to further these aims. Patrick urged us to listen to the experts who were to address us. The first of these was **Charles Nelson**, introduced by Brendan as the man with most knowledge and inspiration behind the IGPS. Charles began by assuring us that as a botanist in 1976 at the beginning of his career, he had much to learn about Irish nurseries and cultivars. He has done much painstaking research in the intervening years and (as we know) produced many scholarly works on the subject. These were researched with first hand information from e.g. the Slieve Donard and Daisy Hill nurseries. The publication of "A Heritage of Beauty"(2000) was the most relevant of his works to the present seminar but the IGPS must not now sit back and do nothing. Information is out there, discoveries are to be made. He suggested the following methods:

Search through books and old periodicals for references to Irish plants, cultivars, and exhibitions.
Search newspapers for references to new cultivars, shows etc.
Search through old plant catalogues - there is a checklist of nursery catalogues in the National Botanic Gardens library. Search through on-line plant lists. Set up a database of Irish Cultivars. The Society must consider doing this and seeking someone to manage it. Check out taxonomy and nomenclature to ensure that past error can be eliminated and that there are standard specimens to back up nomenclature. Use the RHS Action Plan for conservation of plants in cultivation. It does contain some errors but can be downloaded and utilised.

Our next speaker was **Peter Wyse Jackson** currently Director of the NBG and a founder member of the organisation. He spoke on the Biodiversity Convention and the conservation of ornamental plants and cultivars. There is a huge crisis in Plant Diversity worldwide. Around 400,000 plant species exist of which 60,000-100,000 are threatened. Les than 20% of the world's plants have been comprehensively assessed and the impact of climate change already bearing down on us may make 25% of Irish flora extinct. Ireland signed the Convention of National Biodiversity in 1992 and ratified it in 1996. Biodiversity conservation is a common concern of all mankind but each country has sovereign rights over its own biodiversity. Each country is responsible for its own conservation and decisions are taken at national level. Each country is then obliged to implement a national plan. The current Irish one is out of date but a new draft is due for the end of 2009. The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation aims to halt the loss of plant diversity worldwide by 2010. A working list of known plant species worldwide is to be 80% complete by 2010 and 10% of worldwide flora should be in seed banks by 2010. The National Plant Conservation Strategy for Ireland makes no mention of the importance of Irish Cultivars and ornamental plants, but Ireland has played a key role in guiding the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation. The 4th Global Botanic Gardens Congress will take place in Glasnevin from 13-18 July 2010. So what is the NBG's role in Irish Cultivar Cultivation? It holds an existing collection of Irish cultivars. There is ongoing development and maintenance of plants associated with Glasnevin and Kilmacurragh, plants with a particular heritage, horticultural and other value. Ongoing support will be given to the development and conservation of Irish cultivars now and in the future.

Our next speaker was **Dr. Noeleen Smyth** of the National Herbarium, whose title was "Irish Cultivars from Native Species." Noeleen began by defining a cultivar as a cultivated variety which has come about by human, not natural, selection. Cultivars may have been developed from wild

selections, from clones, from inbred lines or as F1 hybrids. Noeleen gave us some examples e.g. *Arbutus unedo* our native strawberry tree, has been cultivated since the late 1500s in Ireland. Its nearest "relative" is to be found in Brittany with others in the Mediterranean region. *Arbutus unedo 'Glasnevin'* is a distinctly narrow-leaved variety and is believed to have been one of the early plantings at Glasnevin, 200 years ago. Other examples include *Ulex europaeus* 'Strictus' which originated at Mount Stewart and *U. gallii* 'Mizen Head' which is prostrate and mat forming. *Calluna vulgaris* 'County Wicklow', a double -blossomed ling was found on the shores of Lough Dan by Meta Archer in 1933. *Rosa x hibernica* is now considered extinct in the wild. *Saxifraga hartii* has been downgraded to a sub-species, *S.rosacea subsp.hartii*. *Salix hibernica* is probably a sub-species and not endemic. *Sorbus scannelliana* was confirmed in September 2008, five specimens of which are known and recognised in Killarney National Park. If you decide that you know of a new cultivar, you must publish it in a recognised journal or register. It must be described in full, and accompanied by a photograph. Use Roman case lettering with single quotation marks for the cultivar name.

During our lunch break **Mary Rowe** had a large selection of Irish cultivars for sale - not in the NBG but in the accompanying Teagasc facility. Attendees were glad of the opportunity to purchase and some left over plants were donated to the Leinster Plant Sale for October 11th After lunch Brendan welcomed us back and reviewed the action taken by the society since 2004. We need to decide how to proceed with a formal strategy, which can be easily followed, and which will allow the preservation programme to proceed through committee changes in a professional manner. Strategy and analysis of cultivars has to be worked out. Funding, staffing, expertise from the Horticultural Industry and interested members must be sought. Priorities have to be set.
Priority 1. Immediate action to be taken. The example given here is of *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Newryensis' of which there is only one known labelled plant in the NBG and it still needs to be propagated.
Priority 2. Low numbers in existence but action must be taken soon. Examples given were *Anemone nemorosa* 'Green Dream' and *A.nemorosa* 'Hannah Gubbay'. Some funding has been "ring-fenced" by the society. Also, An Bord Bia, the Heritage Council, and various Horticultural Trusts might contribute finance/sponsorship. Expertise might come from society members, the Horticultural Industry etc. Staffing has yet to be decided.

This led us into **John Joe Costin's** account of the vagaries of the nursery business and how fashions have changed in the last 50 years. This was fascinating and of course obvious that as gardens became smaller, plants had to be small, yet flower precociously and profusely. The public will not buy winter-flowering shrubs in the summer and 80% of all nursery plants

sold go for less than 10 euro! What is a nursery to do? Garden Centres also must make a profit. In 1969, 70 million roses were produced in the British Isles. This is with heavy use of sprays. Nowadays, less than 10 million roses are produced. The popular cultivar now is 'Flower Carpet' which needs no spraying. In the meanwhile, 320 million Surfinia Petunias sold in Europe last year.
So why do plants/cultivars become scarce?
Cost of seed e.g. *Davidia involucrata*.. Low viability of seed e.g. *Acer griseum*. Slow germination- *Veratrum nigrum* takes four years with no possibility of division. Spraying is not allowed anymore. Plants are then dropped from nursery catalogues because they cannot be kept "healthy".
A minimum of 10,000 plants is needed to launch a product. This is a very big risk for an unknown product which may meet with Market Resistance.

Our final lecture of the day was given by **Carmel Duignan** "Roses - some Irish Cultivars" These have been tried, tested and recommended by Carmel herself.
Examples: *Rosa* 'Souvenir de St. Anne's' which flowers for seven months!
R. 'Daisy Hill' - a once-flowering, large shrub.
R. 'Narrow Water' also from Daisy Hill nursery, flowers for 7 months and has vicious thorns!
R. mulliganii - grown by Brian Mulligan from Co. Down.
R. 'Irish Hope' growing in St. Anne's Park, a Harkness rose from 1998.
R. 'Dublin Bay' introduced from New Zealand by Sam Mc Gredy took 3 years to establish but is not too susceptible to blackspot.
R. 'Anna Livia' also in St. Anne's Park, known as the Millenium rose.
R. 'City of Belfast' grown by Mc. Gredy. and suitable for a mixed border.
R. 'National Trust' also Mc Gredy, a good hybrid tea even in rain.
R .'Arboretum'- a new rose by David Kenny of Carlow. It is low-growing with small glossy foliage.
Summary.
Existing strong ties must be maintained between the IGPS and the NBG, Glasnevin. Support for the identification of cultivars is available through the NBG Herbarium.
Undoubted commercial pressures exist and we must find a balance between what we have and what to preserve.
We must always cherish plants with Irish historical connections.

So what will the individual member do? I have decided that I will try to propagate *Philadelphus* 'Rose Syringa' (see pg.170 "A Heritage of Beauty") and hopefully have a few plants for sale at the Leinster Plant Sale in 2010. What will you do for your organisation, dear member? Perhaps you might let us know in the next issue of the newsletter?

Mary Bradshaw

Thursday September 17th Gardening with Mr Darwin

In the year of the 150th anniversary of the publication of "On the Origin of Species from Natural Selection" Matthew Jebb has lectured on the subject of Charles Darwin for many organisations. As usual he rose to the challenge and fascinated his audience.

Charles Darwin was a very astute young man. Even at the age of ten he recorded each time a peony bloomed in his father's garden. When he bought a house in which to raise his family he turned the garden into a botanical field station where he experimented with plants until his death. Darwin's "Eureka" moment had come while visiting the Galapagos Islands - he only spent three weeks there - when he realised that each island had a distinctly different species of finch and he began to question why they had "evolved" differently. Darwin took great delight in his own garden. After the success of "On the Origin of Species" Darwin who shunned publicity produced, on average, a "blockbuster" book every two years. Always independently wealthy he became very wealthy after the publication of these books, the vast majority of which were about plants. Darwin and J.D. Hooker (Kew) corresponded endlessly and grew plants competitively. Darwin grew mustard and cress in saltwater to see if they would survive and could be carried across oceans. Darwin studied native orchids and deduced that they all have a different pollinator. He then began to speculate about tropical orchids. He corresponded with Glasnevin, Kew, and Edinburgh on the subject and mystery of the pollination of *Angraecum sesquipedale*. Known nowadays as the "Comet Orchid" or "Darwin's Orchid", its species name means "one foot and a half" which is the length of its spur. Darwin hypothesized that there must exist an insect with a proboscis corresponding in length. Such an insect could reach the nectar at the bottom of the spur enabling pollination to take place. The scientific world laughed loudly but some 50 years after Darwin's death such a hawk moth was discovered, now named *Xanthopan morganii predicta*. Darwin experimented with weed patches in his garden (he drove his gardeners mad). He worked out that the greatest competitor of certain weeds is their own species. He grew 40 different varieties of peas. He crossed and backcrossed *Ipomoea purpurea* through 10 generations of inbreeding. He noted that the inbred plants reached a lower height, had fewer capsules and fewer seeds. He deduced that most plants are "happier" when they are outbred. Darwin noticed how *Drosera* species trapped butterflies. He demonstrated that traces of ammonia could be found within these plants' tissues which proved that the plants are insectivorous! Darwin also studied how the shoot-tips of plants move and describe an ellipse every few hours. Plants are designed to utilise light and humidity by this means. He realised that this was a chemical movement. He had discovered plant hormones without realising it. Darwin also

experimented with barnacles and snails. He was also interested in the breeding of pigs, dogs, pigeons, sheep, earthworms and man as we know! Matthew interpreted Darwin for his audience with great enthusiasm followed by 30 minutes of questions. It shows that even after 150 years people cannot get enough of his ideas.

Louise Butler

November 19th 'Gardening in the Golden Vale, A tale of Muck and Magic'

In 1989 Deborah and Martin Begley came from Oxford to live in the Golden Vale. Then began her tale of " Muck and Magic" at Terra Nova Gardens. She explained to us the importance of manuring and mulching. Manuring with pelleted chicken manure at all times of the year. Mulching with cocoa shells just before the gardens open to the public. Then the magic began as she took us on a picturesque tour of her garden. She emphasised the importance of forward planning. During the lecture she gave us useful advice on plants which are difficult to cultivate. *Cardiocrinum giganteum* grew well for her and she sows the seed every year, as this plant may take up to seven years to flower. She had seed for everyone in the audience. *Bechonaria yuccoides* flowered well for her too. *Lysichiton americanus* looked very reptilian growing in a foot of water among other water loving plants. *Meconopsis punicea* with its beautiful red flowers makes a good companion for *Lilium nepalense* growing on its stolons under trees. Deborah then showed us a bed of *Papaver somniferum*, sown broadcast, which was magnificent in their different colour forms. Following this we were greeted with the sight of many roses. The most remarkable was *Rosa* 'Summer Song'. *Rosa* 'Teasing Georgia' which she grows on a pergola was very unusual. Deborah likes this rose as it does not enclose the pergola and thus avoids shade underneath, which she does not like, while *Clematis* romps around with *Ipomoea* 'Sunrise Serenade'. Her plants take on their own personalities to create a restful ambience. This is helped by some of the changes made by Martin and Deborah in the past year. The most daring is the Thai Summer House which gives an air of modern outdoor living. She was able to show us how to create an exotic effect with the unusual and then the same effect with quite ordinary plants. Deborah has a great sense of style, design and a wonderful understanding of colour. Some beautiful little creatures live in this garden too, a mole, a wide variety of birds and some strange looking pigs. I really do want to walk along the new path if only to find out what is behind the green door!!!!!!

Marcella Campbell

Thursday December 3rd 'In Search of Yetis and Pink Poppies'

This was the Christmas lecture to the Leinster group and was very well attended despite on/off uncertainty re a public service strike. Noeleen Smyth described for us a private international trip to Bhutan organised by Martin Walsh in July 2008. Bhutan is a small country known as "The Land of the Dragon". Its motto is "Gross National Happiness". Climate can vary from Himalayan to Tropical. The dominant religion is Buddism. Bhutan was ruled by a monarchy until 2008 and now is ruled democratically. Everyone wears National Costume and there is great pride in national heritage. Everyone is aware of their distinctive flora and fauna. Buying and selling cigarettes is illegal. Visitors are welcome but all visitors must pay $200 per day. This serves to limit numbers but is not as exorbitant as it might seem in view of the services provided. Bhutan's population is around 2 million. Buddist flags fly everywhere and tsa tsa offerings (little pots placed in rocks to bring about rebirth) are to be found along the roadsides. Houses and trucks are very ornate. Noeleen saw no signs of poverty. The group was following in the footsteps of Major George Sheriff after whom *Meconopsis sheriffii* is named. Sheriff and Frank Ludlow trekked in Tibet (1933), The Himalayas (1934-36), the Black Mountains of Bhutan (1937) also in 1946, 1947 and 1949. Sherriff was one of the first explorers to be able to send home fresh seed by airplane. Our group travelled in July, the monsoon season and were permanently wet and cold by night but it is the best season for flowering perennials. They went on 3 different trails to Cheli La, Tiger's Nest and The Trek (5480m).

Noeleen treated us to some wonderful photographs of e.g. *Megacodon stylophorus* which she described as like a monster fritillaria. *Meconopsis paniculata* was growing in scrubby woodland and *Iris clarkii* along the roadsides. Also growing by the roadsides was *Cheilanthes bhutanica,* the lip fern and *Arisaema flavum*. *Smilacina atropurpurea* was to be found near Rhododendron forest. Many rhododendrons had flaking bark and their flowering season was just over. The team had to brave many narrow bridges, iced walkways, leeches on their heads and in their socks, bad-tempered yaks but it was worth it for the sight of *Notholirion macrophyllum* (translucent pink lilies) and the epiphytic *Drynara mollis*, the basket fern.

Bhutanese people do not like trekkers climbing into the mountains as they interfere with the gods. A large team of people followed the explorers providing food, drink, heat, camping materials, firewood etc. This left the group feeling secure and unlikely to get lost. *Lilium nepalense* was a roadside "stunner"and *Cypripedium tibeticum* with its dark burgundy colours also stood out. George Sheriff was also very interested in Primulas. Noeleen had some wonderful photos of *Primula tenuiloba,*

P.capitata, a stunning double flower, *P. glabra*, pinky blue, and *P.munroi*, white. Noeleen's "Yeti" manifested itself in the form of *Rheum nobile*. She had photos of it in various growth stages across the hillsides. After that came *Meconopsis sheriffii* which certainly lived up to its reputation. Ludlow had described it as "rose pink like the first flush of dawn on the snows". It inhabits screes and cliffs as well as alpine scrub at altitudes of 4,200-4,600m. Some Gentians were also noted and Saxifragas were in every nook and cranny. Also amazing was *Saussurea obvalata* like a smaller version of *Rheum nobile* and *S.gossiphora* which is very well protected from the cold by candyfloss-like hairs.

All in all this was a very difficult trek with altitude sickness, monsoon rains and difficult conditions. Noeleen however like a true stalwart said it was well worth it! Unlike the treks of Sheriff and Ludlow no seeds or plants were collected but memories and photographs also endure.

Mary Bradshaw

MUNSTER

Tuesday October 6th 'Organic Gardening'

The first meeting of the Autumn started with a round of musical chairs with the rooms at the SMA hall, due to a double booking. When we finally got settled, Darina had to give her talk accompanied by various anguished cries from the martial arts group exercising below in the hall. The distraction did not deter Darina from giving a very enthusiastic and interesting lecture.

Darina Allen runs a well-known cookery school in Shanagarry Co Cork and also runs an organic vegetable farm, where all cookery students learn how to grow their own vegetables. She believes that cookery students should all know how food is grown and produced. She pointed out that the secret of good vegetable growing is to nourish and improve the condition of the soil using good organic manure. The soil in the farm is also enriched by copious amounts of seaweed, which is collected from a nearby beach after a storm has washed it ashore. Most of the vegetables are grown in raised beds and a lot of them are grown in an enormous glasshouse, which helps by extending the growing season and protecting the vegetables from the ravages of the Irish weather.

The organic system is one which is cyclical, in that nothing is wasted. All scraps from the cookery school are fed to the hens and vegetable matter is

put into the enormous compost bins, the contents of which are regularly turned by a tractor. As the whole system is so highly organised, it means that the school is self sufficient in vegetables. The farm is run organically, no fungicidal or insecticidal sprays are used. Slugs are kept at bay by a very helpful duck that patrols the glasshouse and rotovating the ground is made easy by a number of pigs which are rewarded for their efforts by providing delicious pork for the cookery school.

At the end of the lecture, Darina was asked a number of questions by her audience indicating the level of interest in vegetable growing in what now seems to be the new growth area of gardening.

Martin Edwardes

Tuesday November 3rd 'Plants of New Zealand'

An enthusiastic group gathered to hear Julia Kennedy talk to us on plants from her homeland, New Zealand. She began by showing us some slides of plants, which would be quite familiar to us in the garden setting, but Julia explained the importance of these plants in the medicine world where they are used in the treatment of various illnesses. It was fascinating to know that some of the drugs, which are commonly used for headaches etc such as Ibuprofen or Nurofen, actually come from the Salix family of plants. This was just one of the examples seen. Julia then moved on to the design aspect of gardening in New Zealand, where she showed us examples of gardens which took their style from the architecture of the houses to which they were attached. This is an important element of garden design because it is vital that the garden is planned, not in isolation but to complement the house which it surrounds. The whole impression was one of order, clean lines, simplicity of design and colour. There were a few important details to remember when considering a garden in New Zealand which would differ to planning a garden in the northern hemisphere. One criterion is to remember to buy a north-facing house. Because of the vast size of New Zealand in comparison to Ireland, there are different types of climate zones and terrain.

Julia told us that gardening really began in the homestead and isolated sheep stations and were often made and taken care of by the womenfolk. All the houses are wooden and the gardens were very manicured to suit the architecture of the houses. One interesting fact about *Pinus radiata* was that it is such a fast growing tree that many New Zealanders use them as a retirement plan! They can reach maturity in 20 years because of the high rainfall and climate. At another point in her lecture, Julia pointed out that there is now a serious problem of soil erosion where the trees are

being felled for the timber. There is also a serious problem with the large population of Possums that were introduced from Australia and are now regarded as a curse because of the damage they do.

Julia finished her talk on a poignant note, as she showed us what she misses most about New Zealand. There were two beautiful slides of trees. One, the lovely frothy *Albizia* which for us would be on the tender side and probably would never get to the size seen on the slide, and the other, the very controversial *Jacaranda* seen against an azure blue sky. A fitting note to end a most fascinating and informative lecture delivered with wit and humour!

Janet Edwardes

Tuesday December 1st 'Winter Interest in the Garden'

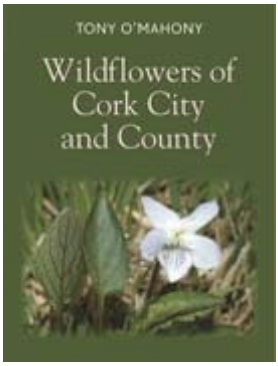
Subtle beauty can be created in the garden in winter by the use of varying coloured foliage, berries, and scented plants and plants with differing shapes. Peter Dowdall brought many plants to illustrate this, grouping them in sets of three or more. The yellow leaved *Ilex crenata* 'Convexed Gold' caught many peoples eye. When this holly is put with dark purple Phormium, or any dark green leaved plant and a white cyclamen, it creates a bright corner in the garden. The many different Phormiums with red, yellow, purple and green leaves also can make an area of the garden come alive. Also plants that are poles apart in structure can be set near each other, giving increased appreciation.

Lavender, rosemary and Daphne give lovely scent in the winter months. Peter encouraged us not to forget to cut back lavender and rosemary thus giving better plants. *Coprosma* 'Fireburst' with it's bright red and dark green centred leaves brings colour whether in a container or in the ground. Unlike *Photinia x fraseri* 'Red Robin' the dwarf *Photinia x fraseri* 'Little Red Robin' does not loose its red leaves.

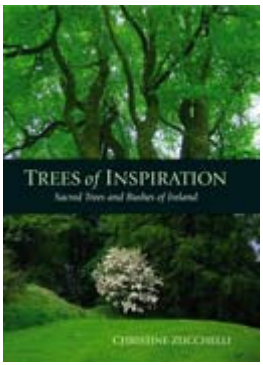
Peter also encouraged us to protect and entice wild life into our gardens, as about 60% of nature's wild life is to be found in domestic gardens. Bird feeding and nesting boxes were on display, as was a butterfly box. As slug pellets kill birds and hedgehogs as well as snails and slugs, he suggested we use slug traps, yellow sticky tape or copper strips around pots which gives them a little deterrent electric shock. Evergreen prickly leaved plants help to prevent predators from attacking birds hiding in the trees.

Rosemary Hickey.

Worth A Read by Paddy Tobin

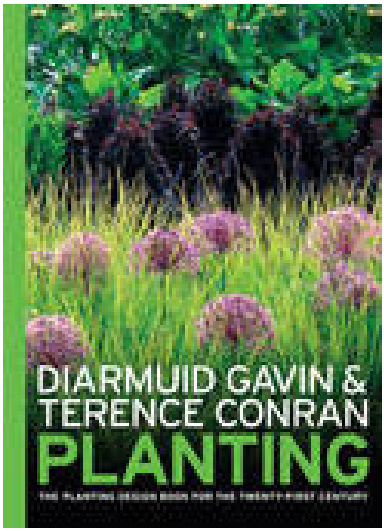


Tony O'Mahony has devoted a lifetime to studying the **"Wildflowers of Cork City and County"** and has been the outstanding worker in the field for this area. Here he presents the results of his work, a wonderfully encyclopaedic account the flora of the city and county. After an introduction, which recalls the history of the recording of Cork's flora, the author continues to describe the various habitats in his area and the plants found in each. This is not a guide to identification of plants but rather a guide to where one might find them in Cork City and county and, as such, should prove a most welcome book to the enthusiast. This book follows on extensive fieldwork and research and the findings are presented in a very accessible manner. ***[Wildflowers of Cork City and County, Tony O'Mahony, Collins Press, Cork, 2009, HB, 438pp, €29.99, ISBN: 978-1-84889-020-6]***



Another book of Irish interest, **"Trees of Inspiration"** is a remarkable work of research into the stories, history, folklore and legends of trees held sacred or of local importance throughout Ireland. Trees have held an important place in our society since Celtic times and were protected in varying degrees in the Brehon laws. Some trees marked places of assembly, others places of devotion while others marked locations of societal or religious importance. While talk of Fairy Trees, Rag Trees or Mass Bushes might now sound very out of date, it is certainly not the case and devotion to these continues today. This is a remarkable book, a work of deep research and a book which brings to us an area of Irish life in danger of being forgotten and lost. The book is illustrated with excellent photographs, good enough on their own to make the book enjoyable.
[Trees of Inspiration, Christine Zucchelli, Collins Press, Cork, 2009, Paperback, 220pp, €24.99, ISBN: 9781-84889-013-8]

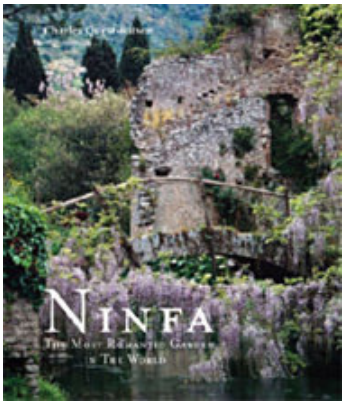
"Planting" by Diarmuid Gavin & Terence Conran is most definitely one which fits the "coffee-table book" description. Indeed, had it legs it could do service as the table itself. It is big, luxuriously illustrated with excellent photographs and it outlines the approach of the authors to designing and planning a planting scheme for the garden. The treatment of the subject proceeds through *Influence, Purpose, Structure, Colour, Season, Style* and *Conditions* as it offers advice on the best plants for every situation while illustrating the ideas with photographs from great gardens around the world. Wonderfully produced and visually very pleasing.



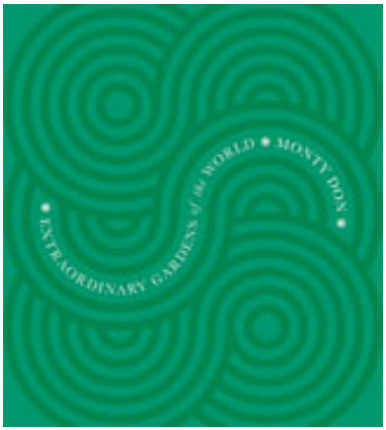
[Planting, Diarmuid Gavin & Terence Conran, Conran Octopus, London, 2009, HB, 272pp, £40, ISBN: 978-1-84091-529-7]

Now, here is a treasure! **"The Great Chinese Gardens"** is an outstanding book and one which I looked forward to reading and was not disappointed in the least. This was somewhat in the line of a drawing back of the bamboo curtain and, my goodness, what beauty and treasures lay behind. I found this book absolutely astonishing, utterly beautiful in its production and presentation and wonderfully interesting in its text. This is a choice book for anybody interested in gardening, giving an insight into the beauty of Chinese gardens which might be described as natural, intricate, subtle, refined, and spiritual, elaborate and, above all, as beautiful and this book shows all this so wonderfully well.

[The Great Chinese Gardens, History, Concepts , Techniques, Fang Xiaofeng, CYPI Press, UK, 2009, HB, 260pp, ISBN: 978-0-9556057-7-2]

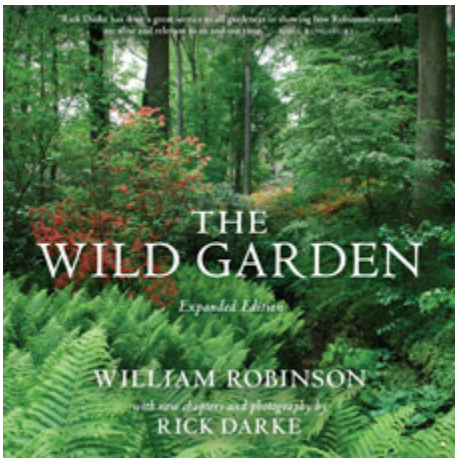


Oh, how I wish to visit this garden! **"Ninfa"** is a delight. Charles Quest-Ritson included a chapter on the gardens at Ninfa in a previous book and I was enthralled by it then so to see a full book devoted to the garden was a delight. In short: a medieval town was deserted and fell into disrepair to be uncovered and developed into a garden centuries later. The author gives an excellent history of the Caetani family from earliest days to the last in the line along with a detailed account of the development of the garden, its layout and planting right up to the present day when it is most certainly one of the garden treasures of the world. This is simply a gem of a garden and this book a wonderful testimony to its history and beauty. Fabulous photographs; excellent text. Simply outstanding! **[Ninfa, Charles Quest-Ritson, Frances Lincoln, London, 2009, HB, 128pp, £25, ISBN: 9-780-7112-3047-7]**



You may recall the television series, *"Around the World in 80 Gardens"* – this book, **"Extraordinary Gardens of the World"** is an offshoot of that programme. While the programme was being made Monty Don and the camera crew also took many still photographs and Monty kept notes of the many beautiful gardens visited. This book is a product of those photographs and notes and that is, quite simply, what it is - photographs, excellent photographs, and notes on the many gardens visited. It is a pleasant book. The gardens are organised and grouped thematically: Personal, Spiritual, Natural, Botanical, Historical, Edible and Communal and this gives a little organisation to the book. The photographs are excellent and the text is personal, reflective, concise and insightful. Monty Don is an enthusiastic gardener and an enthusiastic lover of gardens and the joy he feels when visiting these wonderful gardens is evident throughout. Enjoyable! **[Extraordinary Gardens of the World, Monty Don, Weidenfeld & Nicholson (Orion Books), London, 2009, HB, 272pp, €36, ISBN: 978-0-297-85638-2]**

Valerie Easton, the author of **"The New Low-Maintenance Garden"** seeks to advise busy gardener on how to garden in a new way that saves time and resources without giving up their favourite plants or settling for a garden that lacks sophistication. It is a response to the fact that there is a great interest in gardening but many people are short of time to engage with their gardens. Interesting, well-presented, good photographs, sensible ideas which we could all use. The author is a weekly columnist for the *Pacific Northwest Magazine* of *The Seattle Times*. **[The New Low-Maintenance Garden, Valerie Easton, Timber Press, London, 2009, HB, 284pp, £20, ISBN: 978-0-88192-916-4]**



When William Robinson first published "The Wild Garden" in 1870 it was a forceful challenge to the gardening style of the time and proposed a naturalistic approach to gardening. The book was republished repeatedly right through Robinson's lifetime. Rick Darke considers William Robinson's thoughts on gardening as relevant today as when first written and in his introductory essay outlines Robinson's importance in the evolution of garden design and explains his relevance for today's gardeners, designers and landscape professionals. Following Darke's essay, William Robinson's original *"The Wild Garden"* is reprinted in full. Rick Darke has previously written *"The American Woodland Garden"* (2002), where his thoughts were very in line with those expounded by William Robinson. He obviously admires and concurs with Robinson's ideas and represents them well here. **[The Wild Garden, Rick Darke/William Robinson, Timber Press, London, 2009, HB, 355pp. £20, ISBN: 978-0-88192-955-3]]**

The Irish Garden Plant Society

'The Holy Grail of plant hunters travelling to Chile and Argentina is the yellow form of the Chilean Fire Bush pictured here near Entre Lagos by a recent UK expedition'. Seamus O'Brien.
Photograph Ben Jones, Westonbirt.

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