

THE NEWSLETTER of
THE SIBERIAN, SPURIA and JAPANESE IRIS GROUP
of the British Iris Society

No. 9.

July 1981.

THE OBJECTS OF THE GROUP

1. Communication between members in Great Britain and Overseas.
2. A means of exchanging ideas, plants, seeds etc.
3. To assist beginners in growing Iris and to offer help with problems.
4. To report on Hybridisation.

EDITORIAL

The late date of this Issue is due to the fact that we have decided to include a Report of the Iris Show (R.H.S.) The two Newsletters will, in future, be sent in February and July.

We welcome three new Members - Mr. D. J. Lerner, Mrs. Iris Radford and Dr. Marion Wood - and we hope they will enjoy joining our 'band of pilgrims' devoted to growing Sibirica, Spuria and Japanese Iris, and in due course let us know of the Iris they grow in their gardens.

Two items for you to take part in :-

1. Prof. M. E. Bowley's question concerning I. Mirza Citronella (see R.H.S. Show Report)
2. The Popularity Poll being taken by the American Spuria Iris Society.

I hope we will have your usual good response please.

Good Gardening Take care. J. T.

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Dear Fellow Members,

It gives me pleasure that I can begin this letter with more heartening words than the last time. The Treasurer reports good news on the financial side and our Membership is steadily increasing. With this in mind, we have asked Jack Vennor to join us on the Committee, and this he has kindly agreed to do. We welcome him and thank him for the interest he has taken in the Group.

The British Iris Society's Main Show at the R.H.S. Hall in June was very successful. Iris Species were a big feature this year, due no doubt to the late date and the weather. Strangely though my I. Brevicaulis, which

I have been able to exhibit for several years, did not bloom until a few days after the Show, and is still putting up the odd flower. I have had the best display of Sibiricas and Spurias ever, and most Species have done well. So - in spite of our peculiar weather earlier in the year, we have had quite a good season. I am however, keeping a sharp look-out for stem and rhizome rot, that but-bear of the Tall Bearded.

My very best wishes to you all.

Hilda Goodwin.

GROWING OLD

Ruth G. Conley.

It has taken several years for me to be able to see any virtue in the garden we have created on the levelled sand dunes in a hub of modern development. We had left such a rich garden in Kent and for a lifetime had been used to far reaching views of trees and fields. It was a lucky break that found this little property of half an acre within a few minutes of our daughter's residence.

The plot was waist high with weed (mainly ragwort) when we bought it and taming the raw sand into a soil with some semblance of fertility and building a garden has been costly and time absorbing. Bought-in top soil proved a disaster which we could have done better without and an annual distribution of about a two inch thick layer of peat is still necessary as it gets washed through the sand together with any fertiliser or farmyard manure — but the soil improvement is slowly becoming perceptible.

We brought with us the best two hundred named varieties of T.B's and many of our own best seedlings. The surviving named varieties (of the late 60's and early 70's — old soldiers now) form two broad bands on either side of a wide grass walk and the seedlings, now established clumps, grow elsewhere in the garden borders.

We had a band of sibiricas alongside a flagged path which did surprisingly well and when it became necessary to thin them, we were able to give a large quantity of excess plants to the Wild Fowl Trust at Martin Mere. We are considering bringing our present stock up to date and should be glad of any suggestions as to which varieties to procure and of possible sources.

We have been unable to find a spot where unguicularis will settle happily. The most flourishing planting appears to be in the most unlikely situation at the foot of an archway of pyracantha where a path leads off from the semi-circular lawn. The clumps in "favourable" places are reticent of growth or bloom.

Ochroleucas have done well here, some reaching majestic heights, e.g. a hybrid "Ticehurst", given to us by Philip Hutchison and cherished for his memory, raises its flowers almost six feet into the air. Douglasiana, innominate and tenax make reasonable clumps and bloom well though all are now veteran varieties. The few surviving Kaempferi and ensata please us but in spite of a longing to repeat our pool and cascade, we have been unable to site one without spoiling other features in our "new" garden.

Ruthenica is a nice little cushion, while tectorum spreads abominably though it blooms but little. Delavayi does as well as the sibiricas, spurias are satisfactory and both laevigate and pseudacorus make bold groupings. Wilsonii and setosa had become insignificant and I think we have now discarded them. Foetidissima increases rapidly and is valued for the elegant seed pods which ripen well. Reticulatas did very well for a few years but their numbers have decreased. Was this loss contributed to by the large doses of peat?

We get good results from massive plantings of xiphiums and xiphioides, though the latter can become too dry. It is difficult to water the garden once it is dry as the sand has a great surface tension and refuses to accept water until this is broken.

Our success with the little known iris confusa, tub grown in our Kentish home, has continued here in the north west. We are annually delighted with the attractive sprays of orchid-like flowers and would recommend this form of cultivation to our friends in the group.

Despite our misgivings, early disappointments and sadly, failures, we have finally contrived to develop an iris garden in this unlikely coastal sand. We have found the iris to be a more accommodation horticultural friend than we had ever suspected. We trust that our continued devotion will give us many more years of colour and beauty to add a welcome touch of sheer luxury to our lives.

TREVOR NOTTLE'S LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA

Having told you in January of the method I use to sow the seeds, planting out is usually done at the end of the Winter, while the ground is still boggy-wet and there are still heavy Spring showers to get the seedlings away to a good start. This seems particularly important with Spurias, as they often 'hang fire' if there is any dryness at setting out time. Louisianas and Siberians seem to be more tolerant of some dryness and establish themselves without early drenching.

As far as possible I like to plant seedlings at the four leaf stage. Some pots of *Spurias* have been held back for 2 years and stood still for that time, moving away well, once planted out and watered heavily through the first Summer. I plant my seedlings close together, 2" - 4" usually, and they seem to do well in close company with each other. Mostly I plant in full sun on a very gentle slope, but I have planted *I. Setosa* and Pacific Coast Iris successfully in light shade, provided that there is a free movement of air among the plants. I do not trim the foliage nor add anything to the soil. Generally speaking I do not fertilize my plants at all. Sometimes they get a dusting of cold ashes from the bonfire, but this is a haphazard method, which disposes of the household waste rather than a thoughtful provision of Potash and Phosphorous. Labelling is a problem for many. My method is to use small plastic labels, written with the pencil provided. I bury the label below ground at the start of each row. They are still readable after 4 years. One side has the Species name or cross, the other gives the source and date and any numbers. All planting of seeds I enter in my garden Diary, adding any interesting notes, details of notes, letters and collections from growers in America, France, Germany, Israel and Great Britain. Now I wait for the 'follow up' when they flower. The process of selection, rejection, disposal and dispersal of my plants, and that 'as they say' is entirely another Chapter.

(Thank you Trevor for your detailed information, we eagerly await your next Chapter. Ed.)

THE B.I.S. EARLY SHOW - June 6th

Jennifer Hewitt

Thanks to the generally early season, there was a good display of Siberian hybrids and *sibirica*, *spuria* and *chrysographes* species, and Group members' entries included some not often seen. In Class 12, for 5 spikes *sibirica* hybrids, congratulations to Cass (Mr. G. E. Cassidy) on gaining first prize in the face of fierce opposition. His flowers were all in perfect condition and included a fine spike of COOL SPRING which had two branches and showed that older varieties can hold their own against newer introductions. This light blue, a white, the reddish NOTTINGHAM LACE and the deep purple VALDA showed a good range of colours in this section. The late Alex Back would have been pleased to see VALDA doing so well, as it also appeared in Ray Jeffs' second-placed entry. It is a very rich colour and has a neat, sharply-edged white signal. KOBALTBLOU (Tamberg) was another in Ray's vase; this is similar in colour to VALDA but with almost no signal and lighter-coloured styles. He also included MOORSEE (Berlin).

This is stated to be from colchicine-treated *I. setosa* seed but the flower, which is a deep blue-purple with a large white and yellow signal and white interveining on the falls, looks much more like a *sibirica* in form and size. However there are two branches and these are placed and held like those of a *setosa*. A very interesting iris, though reactions to it varied. Cass is also to be congratulated on his vase of the Cal-Sibe hybrid and first-ever Dykes Medal winner, MARGOT HOLMES, which was placed third in the class for any other section hybrids. In the class for Californian hybrids Jennifer Hewitt was first and Anne Blanco White second, both with vases of seedlings showing the range of colours in these irises.

REPORT ON THE IRIS SHOW. R.H.S. Hall, 16th/17th June 1981.

You will appreciate that I have only extracted for report the awards won by our own Members, with one or two items worthy of mention.

Our Chairman, Hilda Goodwin won the Donald Patton Trophy for her glowing *I. Chrysographes* 'Rubella' and a 3rd Prize for her *Spuria* Hybrids, which were really beautiful.

Our Librarian, Jennifer Hewitt, was awarded the William Herbert Bowl for a lovely collection of *I. Kerneriana*, *I. Versicolor*, *I. Virginica*, *I. Delavayi*, *I. Pseudacorus* (Dwarf Form) and several forms of *I. Chrysographes*. Also a 1st Prize for (2) *I. Forrestii* Hybrids. (2) *I. Chrysographes* Hybrids and (1) *I. Dykesii* Hybrid, and a 3rd for 'Elmeney' and 4 *Sibirica* Seedlings - a truly wonderful effort.

'Cass' (Mr. G. E. Cassidy, B.I.S. Secty.) received the Angela Marchant Trophy for his stately *I. Pseudacorus Bastardii*, *I. Foetidissima* and *Variegata*, *I. Orientalis* and *I. Breviceaulis*. A 1st for his *Spurias* 'Shelford Giant', 'Good Nature', 'Ruth Cabeen' and 'Little Down'. His excellent 'Shelford Giant' was Highly Recommended.

Ray Jeffs gained a 1st for 'Tamberg', 'Kobalt Clan', 'Sea Shadows', 'Cambridge' and 'Limeheart' and the Spender Challenge Trophy for 'Limeheart', 'Sea Shadows', 'Cambridge' and 'Tamburg'. Congratulations!

Helena Butcher's *Sisyrinchium Striatum*, K.K. Balls and Tetraploid took a well deserved 1st Prize.

I noticed Hilda's 'Dreaming Spires', 'Orville Fay' 'White Swirl' 'Limeheart' and 'Blue Mere', also 'Holden Clough' that most unusual Iris.

Mary Tubbs showed 'Gerald Derby' and Tomas Tamberg some beautiful *I. Kaempferi* Hybrids and Tetraploids. *Sibirica* 40 chromosomes and a deep purple hybrid.

Marlene Ahlburg's 'Regentide' and 'Mauve Mood' looked good as also did

Mrs. V. Butcher's *I. Milesii*.

Eckard Berlin brought over Tetra Pseudacorus and T. Delavayii Hybrid also T.J. Pseudacorus.

Helena Butcher showed some of Alex Backs' Seedling Spurias, I hope I find some of these in the seedlings I am growing.

Anne Blanco White had 'Orville Pay' and a very nice 'Valda' in one section, also 'Splashdown' and Chrysographes Hybrids and Holden Clough in another.

I would not like to have had to choose between all these beautiful 'Species' Iris. It certainly was the best display I have ever seen.

Congratulations to everyone.

One word more ... Prof. M. Bowley, Secretary of the Species Group, pointed out to me I.Mirza Citronella, which as its name implies is yellow. Confusion arises because many seedlings produce 'blue and white' flowers with maybe a touch of yellow. If you have grown it and found this so, please write in and we will compile a report for the 'Species Group'. I may say we have a few packets in the seed list.

Joan Trevithick.

SEED SIZE OF MINIATURE JAPANESE IRISES

Currier McEwen, M.D.

(Re-printed by kind permission of the Review of the Society for Japanese Iris)

Although I have hundreds of seedlings of what I refer to as miniature Siberian irises, i.e. flowers not more than three inches (7.5 cm.) in diameter on stalks seven to fifteen inches (17.5 to 37.5 cm.) tall, I have found only two miniatures among my seedlings of Japanese irises. These two sister seedlings, 73/22 A and B, came from seedlings going back to mixed seeds sent to me by Dr. Suichi Hirao and Mr. Arlie Payne in 1963 and 1964, and came from crosses made with no thought of obtaining miniatures in mind. Unfortunately their parents have been long discarded and my notes record merely that one was white and the other a marbled reddish-purple and I have no record of their size. The two miniatures are essentially identical in form, height and size of flowers, but one is white and the other wine-red. Both are single with flaring falls of open type. In both, the three inch (7.5 cm.) flowers are carried by fifteen inch (17.5 cm.) stalks.

I made a number of crosses of one by the other and each one selfed. A striking feature of the several hundred seeds from these crosses is their small size, measuring an average of 5x4 mm. in diameter compared with average diameters of 10x8 mm. for seeds from other diploids of standard height and

size of flowers. I have previously noted that similarly small seeds have been a consistent feature of those from my crosses of miniature Siberian irises and wonder, therefore, if this is a characteristic of miniature forms of both Japanese and Siberian irises. If this has been observed by others, I will appreciate learning of it.

We extend to Currier McEwen our most sincere sympathy in the tragic death of his Dear Wife last November, and hope that he has recovered from his injuries. Joan Trevithick.

POPULARITY POLL

The Spuria Iris Society of America are running a Spuria Popularity Poll. If you would like to take part, please write in and give your preference.

The winners of the 1965 Poll were :-

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Golden Lady | 6. Wake Robin |
| 2. Driftwood | 7. Wadi Zem Zem |
| 3. White Heron | 8. Morningtide |
| 4. Thrush Song | 9. Windfall |
| 5. Dutch Defiance | 10. Premier |

The address is 86a Grantham Road, Radcliffe-on-Trent, Nottingham.

This will be a Group effort.

THE SEED DISTRIBUTION

All Packets are priced at 5p. Please enclose a Stamped, Addressed Envelope when applying to :-

Mr. E. ELLIOT, 5 Braefield Close, KIRK HALLAM, Ilkeston, Derbys. DE7 4TS.

Section Laevigatae

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| I. Laevigata. | I. Pseudacorus Bastardii |
|---------------|--------------------------|

Series Sibirica

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| I. Sibirica Mid Blue. | I. Sibirica (Nottle Australia) |
| I. Sibirica 'Tycoon' | (Nottle Australia) |
| I. Sibirica 'Alba' | (Nottle Australia) |

Series Chrysographes

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| I. Chrysographes. | I. Mirza Citronella. |
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Series Kaempferi

- I. Kaempferi 'Ruby Red'

Sub-Genus Xyridion

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|
| I. Spuria X Dawn Candle | I. Spuria Ice Blue. | I. Spuria Surf Beach |
| I. Spuria Mixed (Parentage includes Dawn Candle, Kyah Gold, Jaquinet Boy, Russet Flame, Violet Vale and Captri Girl). | | |

These Spuria seed have been kindly donated by Trevor NOTTLE. If you have not grown Spuria Iris, this is a good way to start.

THE GROUP LIBRARY

Copies of the following American publications are obtained from the Hon. Librarian,
Mrs. J. Hewitt, Haygarth, Cleeton St. Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Kidderminster :-

Newsletter of the Spuria Iris Society

Reviews of the Society for Japanese Irises

Journals of the Siberian Iris

The Genus Iris subsection Sibiricae - B.I.S.

Alphabetical Table and Cultivation Guide to the Species ... B.I.S.

Please include postage when requesting items.

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Table 3.1. Membership of the various groups in the sample

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