

THE NEWSLETTER

What's The News?

Editor's Notes - Brita Carson

Important News

Comments From The Chair - Anne Blanco White

GBI Forum - Madeleine Bullock

Seed Distribution Officers

Books Without Dust - Alun Whitehead

Iris Encyclopaedia - Robert Pries

Name That Iris - Jennifer Hewitt

Officers of the Group

The Group for Beardless Irises

Issue No. 7 Spring 2011

Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

What a winter, what a spring or was that summer? Our good old maritime climate has been well and truly tested. For the second winter running the severity of the cold and length of time it lasted was a shock to the fuel bill, never mind the garden. It was evened out by the heat of a completely dry April except that I think the fuel prices quietly rose while we basked in sunshine with summer temperatures. However, as I have threatened to move country if we become independent I must beware talking politics and stick to irises.

Up here it is usual to assess damage after a wild wet winter, to check where branches and stems were broken, but this time any damage has been caused by freezing temperatures. Most of the early irises were happy in solid ground with snow on top and have bloomed on time and in character.

But for me, the PCIs will always be my "limiting factor" to a successful iris year and even although the majority look healthy, they haven't increased and some have been reduced to a single leaf and I still lose at least a quarter of them every year. A closer inspection made me think it might have been slugs or mice that have nibbled at ground level rather than the usual wet weather which we haven't had. It wasn't until the mice ate my first packet of peas that I remembered to go gunning for them. But Father Philip may have found the cause and the possible cure. He came down from the Monastery in Perth with a huge boot-load of replacements. This monastery is where the infamous brother strimmed all Father Philip's PCIs to tidy up the garden. It obviously did them the world of good producing strong, healthy plants, with very shiny long leaves, which had had many flowers judging by the number of seed pods still firmly attached.

The individual clumps were large and we started to attack the area with spades although pick axes would have been quicker. The soil was almost solid. So much for my original back breaking preparation of the soil adding half a ton of grit and a half ton of bark shredded to a fine mulch. Where did all the mulch go? Never take lightly that seeming contradiction of "a moisture retentive well drained soil". One day I may even get it right myself. So now I have to give them a top coat of deep mulch to keep in moisture which I hope will fall in the next week or two.

The heat wave of April produced a mini Chelsea in my garden, with so many genera in flower all at the same time, that it made me wonder when autumn would arrive. There was no time to drool over a clump of lovely double white *Trillium* when the Siberians were starting to flower. The bearded were shouting at me to look at them. I had started a diary in January listing everything as it came into flower but gave up when there were so many

around the garden all flowering at the same time by the end of April. I hope it will be many years before that happens again. The garden looked gaudy not displaying the usual subtlety when they all form an orderly queue for their turn to flower. On the bright side the weeds were confused and the aphids had trouble multiplying at their breakneck speed although I did spend a morning removing caterpillars from the rose leaves. Does anyone have a solution for sycamore seedlings? Has anyone tried to stir fry them?

As usual I'm apologising for the lateness of this Newsletter but I've needed a break to get the soil under my fingernails. Seed germination has been good already this year but this is always where I find I have too much to do to get them pricked out and keep the seedlings going. The secret of getting fast and good results is to keep the process moving without any pauses. I always end up a year behind because I don't do this. Looking at some seedlings from a few years ago reminded me to throw out seedlings which aren't good enough to keep.

In the middle of June we had a visit from a VIP irisarian and her husband from Australia. Robyn Brader (formerly Rohrlach) and John made the trip to Scotland after enjoying an organised garden tour which started and finished in Bath. Already they had been in France and Spain with Nigel Service doing some plant hunting and Robyn will write a report for the *Review* and *Year Book* later in the year.

The Siberian Iris Collection was looking good with only a few plants not in flower mainly because they are still too small. In *The National Plant Collections* directory it is available to view in June and first half of July but this year it should have read the end of April and May instead, although it was still going strong for most of June. Robyn spent a day taking photos and names of the flowers and in return, I learnt a great deal about irises generally and how they grow in Australia. Robyn's main love is species but her knowledge of all irises is outstanding. I think she has grown every species that she was able to acquire over many years and if she couldn't get plants she has grown the seed. Unfortunately Australia now has strict laws governing plants going into the country and also which seeds can be imported so iris enthusiasts have to use what is already available and growing in Australia for their hybridisation programmes.

Spurias - yes, success at last. I couldn't believe it when I saw it in flower. It was only a simple *I. crocea* look-a-like but to me it was a sight to behold. It is probably a seedling from Margaret's BIS seed sown years ago and brought to the garden from the last garden. But it seemed to tower above me, perhaps it could be a 'Shelford Giant' seedling. I will take heights, sizes, and accurate colours next year. There were leaves of other spuria plants but no flowers but there is a moral here to never give up trying.

Important News

I am so late getting this newsletter to you that instead of advertising the GBI day at Aulden Farm, I'm reporting what a very successful day it was with 73 iris enthusiasts attending. We all enjoyed two very good speakers and visited two lovely gardens. Jill and Alun Whitehead did a wonderful logistical job of organising the proceedings and even the weather. A full report will be in the *Review* later in the year.

The AGM of the BIS, Saturday, September 10, Wisley AGM - 11.00 am. Memorial Lecture - 2.00 pm.

The next news of importance is to advertise the AGM of the BIS. And not just the AGM but to advertise that an excellent speaker is coming from Germany. Dr. Tomas Tamberg is going to give the first *Bryan Dodsworth Memorial Lecture*. Bryan died in 2009. He was an important hybridiser of bearded irises producing 12 Dykes Medal winners which were featured in the *Year Book* 2009. The flowers are exceptionally outstanding in colour, style and substance and it is most unlikely that anyone will ever produce that number of Dykes Medals again. This is the first time that this lecture has been given in Bryan's memory.

Tomas retired from work as a nuclear chemist in 1999. He spent his life in the fields of nuclear fuel analysis and analytical chemistry but after retiring moved his concentration to the fields of irises and hemerocallis. Great care and precision must be in his blood but his garden has a soft romantic feel to it with many herbaceous plants among the irises and day lilies.

His talk is entitled "*New hybrids forever?*". These hybrids are no ordinary ones but hybrids crossing the species boundaries with intriguing names like Calsibes, Versilaevs, Sibtosas and Chrysatas and lots more crosses of beardless species. It is interesting looking at the GBI and BIS seedlists to work out what the various combinations are that he has produced.

Even better is the news that the lecture by Tomas is free of charge but of course you have to get into Wisley. (RHS members free and BIS members read the newsletter.) There will be a charge for tea, coffee and cakes afterwards. It is also the Flower Show at Wisley so it will be a good day out.

New Seed Distribution Officer

We are pleased to introduce a new seed officer who is happy to take over from Madeleine this Autumn. All seed donations and seed orders should be sent to Janet Miller. See page 8 for details.

Date for 2012 Weekend June 2-3 Wisley. 90th Birthday Celebrations of the BIS. Lectures on both days and the Summer Show. Keep this weekend free for a bonanza of irises. More details in *Review* and *Year Book*.

Chairman's Note

Anne Blanco White

The first thing is clearly to congratulate Jill and Alun on their efforts towards our Group for Beardless Iris Day: they achieved a full house well in advance of the last moment and even provided the weather to stay fine until it was time for tea. Brita's publications have backed them up splendidly and the only surprising thing there is that she has time for all that when her wild life activities keep her so busy.

Apart from that, the Group continues in good form. Madeleine Bullock has fortunately found a replacement to take over the Seed Distribution and who hopes to keep it in the same excellent order running smoothly and effectively. And following on from seeds, of course, is the matter of seedlings. We would like more of you to try and breed new cultivars. It isn't just a matter of getting them into commercial circulation – it's a matter of seeing what can be done to persuade various irises either to hybridise where you wouldn't expect them to do so or to see what colour variations can be achieved. Special selections take time: it really is a matter of "over and over again" until you succeed, but thinking out the possible combinations is an excellent way of exercising the little grey cells in the brain and a lot more fun than many of the alternatives.

Carry on Gardening.

Huh! This was not a good winter for me. I did my knee in during the autumn and so all too many plants were not replanted or, indeed, planted at all. Worse still, several which would have been the better for more serious protection had to lump the snow and frosts. One non-iris which I did give serious protection to simply threw its roots in and died. Pity, I must try and find some more seeds of it somewhere.

But bitter as the winter was, and this garden is a frost pocket, there has been a surprisingly good reaction. Last summer I threw out a number of dim *sibirica* seedlings and this spring I have been rewarded by 'Mrs Rowe' returning to active life having fought it out with 'Walter Butt'. 'Walter' himself put on a splendid display any time the weather permitted. Several more *spurias* are proposing to flower so I expect there will be more expulsions. A plant masquerading as *Olsynia douglasii* turned out to be a dwarf *sibirica*; quite a nice little plant and they were popular some decades ago, but disappeared when people thought they preferred the taller and beefier forms. The seedlings I had waiting for space are growing on happily with plastic drink bottles placed to give them water conveniently. As soon as I can reasonably replant them there are several *Evansias* waiting for growing space. At present a defective tap in my kitchen is dripping steadily

into a bucket and that water is dished out to the saucers on which the pot plants stand. All the same, a number of plants do seem to have had the flower buds damaged by frost so that the flowers are misshapen.

One minor entertainment was when I was trying to persuade some *Reticulatas* to set seed: I was just about to take a firm grip on one plant when I realised that a mid-sized bumble bee was clinging to a leaf. I decided that although the creature was probably dead I really didn't want to tangle with it so I took the pot back to where it had been. Alright – I hate going out in the cold which makes me ache all over so I have a little spy glass which enables me to be certain if something is flowering. I used that to keep an eye on the bee from inside the building. On the morning of the third day I thought the bee had moved, but decided against doing anything as I needed to go out. When I got back about an hour later I wondered if a drop of honey might encourage the creature and went to check that it was still around. It was not. The weather had warmed up just enough to enable it to take off. Certainly there was no corpse anywhere near the plant and there were flowers to offer some nectar or pollen so I hope it survived in good form. But it was not a good year for *reticulata* seed – I tried hard with the plants which flowered, but without any luck.

Now I need to anchor the runner beans and yellow climbing nasturtium against the wind and wait for the rain to make it possible to dig holes for those plants that need greater root space.

A couple of light showers have done a little good, but I could do with steady, gentle rain for a couple of days. Still, I suppose it is something that we haven't a hose order yet.

A New National Collection

There is a new National Collection of *Hesperantha coccinea* cvs held by Mr & Dr, D & P Ross, South Yeo Nursery, Poughill, Crediton, EX17 4LF

Hesperantha used to be called *Schizostylis* and are pretty star shaped flowers, the colours ranging from white to pale pink to very deep pink and the typical bright red, all of which add real excitement to the garden late in the year. They come from South Africa, East Cape Province and Zimbabwe and may not be hardy everywhere but can be successfully pot grown with winter protection from severe weather. The collection can be viewed in October and November but get in touch with the holders first to check it is suitable to visit. More information can be found on the Plant Heritage (used to be the NCCPG) website or on the South Yeo Nursery website www.eclecticplants.co.uk.

GBI Forum

Madeleine Bullock

In my role as Seed Distribution Officer I've had a number of emails and letters from Members wanting to share their successes and their failures with seed germination and iris growing. Many want to find out information about growing mediums, when to sow, to soak or not to soak, to store in the fridge or sow straight away. Some have special recipes for increased germination, luxurious growth or repeat flowering. In addition, there are many people interested in specific types of iris, many with wonderful pictures of expanses of irises in their own gardens, or individual pictures which fit into the "what's this" category – I've got a few of these growing in my own garden!

Well thanks to Alun we can now share information and communicate with each other about irises online on the GBI Iris Forum. I'm no iris expert, just a well meaning amateur, so I don't always feel qualified to offer iris growing advice. Now we can all benefit from the Group's joint knowledge. A sort of Group intelligence! Ask a question. You're bound to find someone out there with an interesting answer.

Can't wait to see the comments you post.

Do use the GBI Forum (www.britishirissociety.org.uk/phpbb). It could develop into a very useful iris growing resource.

Note on the Forum

Alun Whitehead

For those unfamiliar with forums, it needs to be said that people will need to register before they can post online, though they can see the posts without registering. This is a public forum and so anyone can contribute. As web membership is open to all, there is no conflict here. As we are all plants people it is felt that there is no need for a moderator (someone to vet the posts), but this will be kept under review. It goes without saying that you should be courteous at all times, even if you strongly disagree with a post. When you post photos, please use low resolution eg a file size below 150 Kb.

With people acknowledging that the scarce resources of time and fuel need to be managed better, it makes sense that the internet should play its part. Instead of travelling to meetings/gardens, to some extent they can come to us via the forum.

Seed Distribution Officers

We are very fortunate and would like to welcome a new Seed Distribution Officer who works full time but has agreed to take on this exacting job. Janet Miller starts now and this Autumn will be pleased to receive your donations of seed and deal with all the orders later in the year. Janet has been growing irises and many other plants from seed over a good number of years.

Her garden has a rabbit problem and she admits to concentrating on the RHS list of rabbit proof plants and would love to hear about any plants you have found to be rabbit proof. She keeps guinea fowl, geese, runner ducks and chickens so I'm sure slugs cannot be a problem. Her love of irises has been passed down from her grandparents who loved to grow irises.

We would like to thank Madeleine for all the hard work she has done so efficiently; sourcing, receiving, sorting and then dealing with your orders and sending them out so quickly.

Madeleine is able to stay on the committee and help out whenever she can. She hopes to co-ordinate a successful Forum for not only GBI members but anyone who has a gardening problem that they would like to have some help with the answer. She will be delighted to get this Forum started.

Books without Dust?

A look at the way we read about irises

Alun Whitehead

As a member of the Group, you will have seen that the CD contains old Newsletters or parts of books and you are probably thinking how inconvenient it is to read lengthy text on the computer screen. And I think we would all agree with you. However, when you learn that Amazon in the States sold more e-Books last year than paperbacks, something has fundamentally changed and it is worth taking a closer look.

The problem with reading on the computer is either the posture, unless you have a comfy laptop in your armchair, or it is the glare. The computer monitor is backlit making the screen appear bright. You can adjust the brightness of the screen or buy a cover, but for some people this doesn't work and there is no avoiding that looking at a computer screen for long periods is best avoided. In recent years, *Readers* have become available using "E-ink". This is a plastic surface which shows an image or text, but uses reflective light in the same way as a book. For instance, Amazon's *Kindle* is about the size and weight of a paperback and is relatively easy to use for reading text. When I started thinking about this article, I was going

to write the reassuring comment that as the *Readers* can only display in black & white, it would be several years before they would replace the coffee table colour book or glossy magazine. Wrong! I see Hanvon will be producing a colour *Reader* this year. I understand the colours are muted and it is slow, but you can be certain that others are already working on improved versions.

The advantage a *Reader* brings is the avoidance of piles of books. Instead of that unsightly pile by the bed you can have a whole library to choose from in a small neat tablet. The modern *Readers* can use wireless connections to download new books or newspapers. Living as we do in a rural location, we can appreciate that it will avoid a drive into town just to see a paper. Over the winter my natural curiosity has led me in different directions and I am grateful for the wide range of material already freely available without travelling miles to find it. I just wish this had been possible years ago. As with all computer devices, searching of text becomes possible and an ever-ready dictionary is always at hand. Think of the muscles saved in not having to reach for the Shorter Oxford or any other weighty tome. And if your eyes weaken or you fancy a change, the choice of font can be yours.

The main drawback is obvious. People have grown accustomed to flicking through real physical pages and resist change. There is the joy of wandering along bookshelves and coming across something which you would never have thought about searching. A relative working for a large book chain has every faith in the public's continued wish to browse and buy. I would not have questioned his view until I heard about the volume of eBook sales on Amazon.

How should we view this from our own Group's perspective? At the moment, the *Reader* I purchased to try out only takes certain file formats. As it is paperback size, any images larger than this will display badly. Many archives are being scanned as images and assembled in PDF files for viewing. So this type of file is problematic. The *Newsletters* on the last GBI CD were converted into text format and should not have this drawback – though it is more time consuming to set up. From my initial use of the *Reader*, the better format seems to be mobi and there is a free program available on the web, Calibre, which will convert PDF files for you.

For the sceptic, there are still some straws to clutch. The size of many of the current *Readers* is small; the colour will be poor and the eBooks expensive etc. However, as usage grows we have seen how rapidly improvements have been made in other spheres and how prices have fallen. The walls of our house are lined with books which belie how our hearts feel, but I am not Canute and can recognise what is about to happen. Enjoy a wander through those dusty shelves whilst you still can.

Iris Encyclopedia

Robert Pries

I love books. I have always dreamed of a reference that would bring all information about Irises together in one place. I can remember prior to the turn of the millennium discussions about millennial checklists but nothing ever happened. Today I dream of a tome that would not only have every plant name with a description but images also. That dream is becoming a reality. Of course it would be very expensive to produce such a book and would take a lifetime.

But all that has changed with the internet. Now we have online Encyclopedias like Wikipedia. Why not an Iris Encyclopedia? As many of you may know, it is in the process of happening. Irisarians from all over the world are working together to produce the ultimate Iris reference. We estimate there are about seventy to eighty thousand names, botanical and horticultural, including synonyms. Presently there are sixty three thousand registered Irises. In about 20 months we have put up 32,000 pages each with a separate cultivar or species. On July 1, there were 279 contributors of about 30,000 images. But someday we expect a half million images because every name can have 20 or more images attached. Of course this Encyclopedia will only become what we make of it. But the entire Iris world is invited to participate.

The Iris Encyclopedia originally began about 1990 when I was working on assembling checklists for SIGNA. I thought it might be possible to create a 5 volume work that would be illustrated showing the species and how they have been selected and developed into today's modern Iris classes. I actually have prototypes that were fairly far along to show to a potential publisher. I sent copies to Timber Press. But unknown to me my timing was bad, because they had just contracted for an Iris Encyclopedia, and they suggested I try again when that was out of print.

I continued writing and researching but it seemed like an impossible dream. Then my knowledge of the internet grew. I realized what may have been impossible for me to accomplish could be done with the participation of the entire Iris world. It would be an Encyclopedia that could be constantly improved and updated. And everyone could take pride that they helped in its creation.

I proposed the idea to the AIS board and the wiki was born. But it took three years to find the free software, install it and learn how to customize it. Wiki comes from the Hawaiian word for quick. It is a type of software for sharing quickly ideas among a community of users. I convinced the AIS board this should be a free service they would provide to the Iris World. Because the

AIS is the International Registration Authority for rhizomatous iris it was a perfect fit.

Not only can the wiki provide registration information it can provide much additional information gleaned from the knowledge and experience of Iris lovers everywhere. Things like: The translation of a name into its English meaning, The dates of bloom in different parts of the world, What special traits the hybridizer liked when he introduced it, Chromosome counts, etc. etc. The wiki format offers links between words. Someday each hybridizer's name will be linked to their autobiography. Parentages in the form of family trees and progeny can be displayed. Cultural notes, genetics, apocryphal tales, and who knows what! can make this an interesting resource. But as wonderful as the potential can be, it will only get there with hundreds of people adding what they know. Come visit and explore the Encyclopedia on the AIS website irises.org. It still is a long way from finished but there is already much to see.

Review and Newsletters Plea from the Editor

I would be very pleased to receive any material for future *Reviews* and *Newsletters*. It is difficult to keep up to date with all the happenings and iris news so it would be a great help if members email or write to me.

Material could be an article with or without photographs.

It could be some tips on cultivation that work for you.

It could be a question on cultivation if you don't want to be involved with the Forum.

All editors become stale after a while so please send me some new ideas.

Why Not Name that Iris? Jennifer Hewitt

If you've had seeds of cultivars from the GBI or BIS lists, have you had some pleasing results? If so, why not register a name for the best? It's very easy, only costs £1.50 per name, and you can be sure that you've not chosen a name already used which could make for confusion - nor can anyone else register "your" name. There's information in the *Year Book* and some is on the website (www.britishirissociety.org.uk) from where you can download the necessary form, or get one from me. Do contact me if you want help - address on page 12. I'd love to hear from you.

OFFICERS and REPRESENTATIVES

Chairman: Mrs Anne Blanco White,
1 Portland Court, 38 Belsize Park, London NW3 4ED
Tel: 020 7435 2700. Email: anne@blanco-white.demon.co.uk

Membership Secretary and Treasurer: Alun Whitehead,
Aulden Farm, Aulden, Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 0JT
Tel: 01568 720129 Email: cat@auldenfarm.co.uk

Editor: Mrs Brita Carson,
The Old Manse, Johnstonebridge, Lockerbie, Dumfriesshire, DG11 1ES
Tel: 01576 470647 Email: britacarson@btinternet.com

Seed Distribution Officer: Ms Janet Miller
Westwind, Main Road, West Keal, Spilsby, Lincs. PE23 4BE
Tel: 01790753557 Email: scottandben@westwind.fsnet.co.uk

Forum Co-ordinator: Madeleine Bullock
Lower Craddocks, Bringsty Common, Worcester, WR6 5UW
Tel: 01886 821451 Email: madeleine@madeleinebullock.co.uk

Southeast Region Representative: Mrs Olga Wells,
24 Westwood Road, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6BG
Email: olga.wells@talk.talk.net

Specialists:

Siberians; Mrs Jennifer Hewitt,
Haygarth, Cleeton St Mary, Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire. DY14 0QU
Email: jennifer.hewitt135@btinternet.com

PCIs: Fr Philip Jones,
Carmelite Monastery, Hot Pot Wynd, Dysart, Kirkcaldy, KY1 2TS
Email: Philiperding@aol.com

Spurias: Alun Whitehead, address above

Japanese: Mrs Anne Blanco White, address above

Louisianas: Mark Haslett
12 Strangman Avenue, Thundersley, Essex, SS7 1RB
Tel: 01702 558775 Email: markecp1@tiscali.co.uk

Laevigatas Mrs Galen Carter,
Rowden Gardens, Brentor, Nr Tavistock, Devon, PL19 0NG

Proof Reader

As always my sincere thanks to Jennifer Hewitt for proof reading the Newsletter.
