

THE NEWSLETTER

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Officers of the Group

The Group for Beardless Irises

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Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

I had hoped to have this newsletter finished and off to you before the Siberians started to flower but they were too quick for me and there are lots flowering. The *Newsletter* is the publication when I like to nag you to do some pollinating. This idea, as far as I know, has not been widely advertised and is only taking place between experienced breeders but I hope to send some pollen of Japanese irises to a friend for him to do some species crosses with his Louisianas. It will be tricky and may not be successful first time but it will be worth experimenting. If anyone would like to try the idea themselves with Siberians please get in touch with me. No need to be species crosses just Siberian to Siberian. I would ask, in return, that you let me know the results (firstly only if the cross took, and secondly if it germinated and a resulting flower would be wonderful but that will be many moons away) for me to print in either the *Newsletter* or the *Review*.

I do not have a list of cultivars or when they are flowering so you would need to be happy to take what is available this year. I would need to know some details of what you would like - diploid or tetraploid, colour if possible, frilly or formal, tall or short, or any other special wishes. If we could get into emailing I could let you know as soon as new ones come into flower. Please check out Jennifer's article on tweezers to help you do some pollinating. Please also check the requirements needed to register new cultivars.

On a more gentle activity Jill Whitehead advises on a garden to visit which she went to see last summer. An article in the RHS magazine *The Garden* is Bryan's Ground, a garden at Stapleton (nr. Presteigne), Herefordshire LD8 2LP where the orchard grows large blocks of Siberian *Iris* 'Papillon' underneath the fruit trees.

The Garden this month is naturally advertising the magic of Chelsea and all things nice so I was surprised to read about the survey on the New Zealand flatworm. I thought it had eaten its fill of worms and died out. I remember the horror of finding out that they were in the Edinburgh Botanic. It gave me nightmares fearing an attack in my own garden but now my nightmare is the large Spanish slug which was already here when we moved. I go out and pulverise as many as possible as a nightly crusade but, as they say, more just come to the funeral the next night. It becomes a real nuisance trying to keep plants as slug proof as possible. I wonder if anyone has any ideas.

Please email if you would like to try the pollen exchange. Please email about any gardens you visit that show off Beardless Irises. Please email your gruesome ideas to reduce the Spanish slugs.

Note from the Chair

Anne Blanco White

Those of you who are members of the BIS, as well as this Group, should have received both a Summer Show Schedule and additional papers from myself and the Executive Committee.

As to the future of the BIS, it is in the hands of members and I hope that you have read the papers carefully and replied. For the present the Society is being run by a small, dedicated group of officers who sincerely hope that next year it can be restored to full activities again with a properly elected President and Secretary as well as a new *Year Book* Editor. If members return the survey, then it will give us a guide to what changes may provide the best results. If you haven't responded then please don't delay any longer: our gallant Acting Secretary has a great deal to do.

For the Summer Show I can only hope that the irises will be more co-operative than those which should have been on display for the Late Spring Show. That was a mini-disaster with about half a dozen exhibits. The only consolation was that there have been previous shows which were as bad and Sidney Linnegar was driven to recalling one at Vincent Square where the Show had to be cancelled on the morning because of a total lack of exhibits.

Whether or not you have any belief in global warming as such, it is clear that there are drastic changes in progress and it is a matter of importance that we observe and record changes in plant survivals, flowering and fruiting dates in different parts of the country especially if we want the plants we love and grow to survive for future generations.

London Life

Huh! We've had almost as much trouble as you have elsewhere this winter though I can't recall actually reading about avalanches on Parliament Hill. I spent around three months in Australia and New Zealand in the late autumn having been despatched to help in the judging of the NSW Iris Society's Show. That was extremely interesting. The show was held in a largish hall of about the same size as the Wisley Hilltop Centre and it was very well filled. In a way it was very similar to one of our own summer shows with TBs, Sibs, PCIs and LAs. The last were displayed with the vases placed on a runner along the floor so that you could look down at the flowers rather than crane your neck upwards. The quality of the spikes was very good and it is clear that there is some serious breeding going on in that area in all varieties of irises. The PCIs were particularly interesting in that they are getting very ruffled just as the TBs did in the northern hemisphere some decades ago and there is a real risk that the petals will become so convoluted that the flowers will have difficulty opening.

My hostess, Mrs Niland, had a fascinating garden up in the Blue Mountains: firstly, it was extremely steep at about 95° to the horizontal. Lots of trees, but

plenty of light and irises intensively planted with shrubs and perennials and also some small, inter-connected ponds. It was rather early for the best displays and I could only regret that I wouldn't see it a little later. We went to see Graeme Grosvenor and John Taylor's totally different garden too. This is on flat ground with a small lake. There were masses of dwarf and median bearded irises as well as glorious displays of PCIs. It is an astonishing work of art. The more so as it is effectively all their own work over a very few years and well furnished with shrubs and trees as well as irises.

I finally came home at the beginning of December to find that most of my *reticulatas* had already flowered as, I later discovered, had most other people's in the south and the juncos were taking a dim view of the warm winter as well. Naturally, anything that hadn't flowered before the new year decided to wait until after the Early Spring Show. Since then bad has gone to worse. I had real hopes of my *Evansias*. Then there was a lovely sunny week just before the show followed by a day of cold rain on the Friday which put paid to any hopes I had. One of my last foetidissimas has precisely one leaf left which suggests that it isn't totally defunct yet. Then there is the minor entertainment of an *Evansia* seedling which I thought I had lost last year. It isn't the plant I was hoping for, but still: in a quiet way it was extending its canes, colouring them aubergine and indicating it was proposing to flower. I watched it half-heartedly and when it was in flower I looked more closely: there are only two spikes and each one had a tendril at the extreme top. Careful inspection of the original photos confirmed that it really is *I. 'Twiddle'*. Now when this plant first occurred with a tendril on every spike, I began to find tendrils on many other cane *Evansias*. Certainly *I. confusa* can do it occasionally and there's another in the garden, though I've forgotten which, but they only have one example to a plant, not on every spike. I meant, if the plant had survived, to stake each spike to see if the spike would take a hold of the stake for effective support in heavy winds of which I have lots here. Now it will have to wait until next year. All the same there is a sillier story connected with a *Dietes* seedling. There were about five seeds of which, having had the standard soaking process, one showed a rootlet. So I potted them up. Nothing happened and after a couple of weeks I gently disturbed the soil surface only to find that I had uprooted That Seedling. I gently replanted it and a day later an indignant seed had sent up a nice green leaf tip to make sure that didn't happen again.

We are, of course, encouraged to make life easy for the birds in our gardens. For many decades I have been accustomed to being bullied by the robins when I went out to work. One of the oddities of moving to this address ten years ago is that there wasn't a robin to be seen. Two years ago a robin appeared and it was clear that there was a nest. Last year they were still around. This year I have only to go out in the garden to have the robins make it quite clear that I should start working so that they can collect worms. And there are now robins out front too which come rushing around any time I go near the wheelie bins. All the same there is no way they are going to do anything about the greenfly on the iris leaves; I must do the squashing.

A Useful Tip

Jennifer Hewitt

With the prospect of moving to a much smaller house there was a lot of “stuff” to be sorted out and not all of over 42 years’ accumulation could be taken. So a good bit of rereading went on, especially of journals. Among them were those of SIGNA (the Species Iris Group of North America), fascinating and full of information including items I’d read but forgotten. One seemed so useful that it really should have registered when first seen and could have saved me a fair bit of searching at hybridising time.

All too often I don’t have enough hands when trying to hold tweezers, a little dish containing pollen collected from another Siberian (it’s usually a Siberian with me but the same happens with other beardless irises) and the flower I’m trying to pollinate. With a stigmatic lip it’s often necessary to hold back the crest of the style arm because with a fresh flower the lip will not yet have bent away from the style. So one hand is likely to be holding the dish with anthers, and the crest, while the other clutches the tweezers holding an anther. Pollen deposited, it’s all too easy for the tweezers to slip out of my grasp and plunge vertically into the clump where they are not easy to spot. Until, quite recently, I found among DIY tools, sets of four pairs, my one and only pair were absolutely vital and had to be found however long it took.

The solution was so simple. Marty Schafer described how he hung his tweezers from a cord round his neck. Blindingly obvious and frankly it doesn’t take a genius to think of it. Just someone with more common sense than me ... Admittedly I have yet to see just how I’ll attach tweezers to cord: can I drill a hole through the metal, or tie unbreakable but thin thread round one leg? Because of the imminent move I did no crosses in 2015 so haven’t tried any method yet but if you read this and think “Ah” and work something out, please let Brita know.

Ed. I sent Marty an email to check up on the tweezers and below is his reply.



“I use a reverse action tweezer that opens when you put pressure on it, etc. In this tweezer the arms are crossed in the center, which leaves a hole to put the string through. The point is sharp enough to gather pollen from the anther and broad enough to carry it to the next flower.”

Thank You Marty.

Treasurer's Report

Alun Whitehead

The most surprising thing when putting this set of accounts together was how stable the last two years have been. It is probably there to lull us into a false sense of security, but we might as well enjoy it whilst it lasts.

As you can see, the closing totals of the aggregated accounts are almost unchanged over the period. The high cost of the *Review* expense in 2014 was caused by it including the cost for 2013, i.e. covering two years, rather than just one.

	2014	2015
Subscriptions	317.00	302.61
Donations	11.50	1.00
Seed Sales	160.00	260.00
Plant Sales	74.90	0.00
Newsletter Cost	-32.94	-37.58
Review Cost	-670.06	-317.92
Interest Received	0.60	0.60
PayPal & Bank Charges	-10.86	-14.01
Website	-7.79	-77.77
Postage	0.00	0.00
Total : Net change at bank & PayPal:	-157.65	116.93
Opening Total Bank Balance:	3240.09	3082.44
Less net decrease in funds	-157.65	116.93
	3082.44	3199.3
represented by:		
Closing Treasury AC Balance less uncleared cheques:	1045.74	1046.34
Closing Current AC Balance	1833.64	1723.27
Closing PayPal Balance	203.06	429.76
	3082.44	3199.37
subs paid in advance	387.00	335.00

Correction: The closing Seed Sales, Total Bank Balance & PayPal Balance in the 2013 *Newsletter* were understated by £28.24. What is even more pleasing is that on updating the budget (see below), it is almost identical

with that given two years ago. It was good to see that the printing costs for short runs have been getting more competitive. It was always a worry that if the website became dominant and the hard copy members declined, that the unit cost of the latter would rise steeply. Luckily, this does not seem to be a worry as things currently stand. Accordingly, there is no need to change the subscription rates. I would like to thank Roger Norman, Chairman of NCCPG Herefordshire Group for kindly checking the accounts.

	UK	Europe	Outside Europe
PayPal Fee	0.30	0.40	0.40
Review Printing	2.5	2.5	2.5
Envelope	0.04	0.04	0.04
Postage	1.20	3.70	5.00
NL Printing	0.15	0.15	0.15
Envelope	0.04	0.04	0.04
Postage	0.55	1.52	2.25
Totals	4.78	8.35	10.38

Website viewers	Unique Visitors	Visits
2012	3091	5005
2013	3473	6887
2014	4353	9539
2015	4246	7693

This shows a slight decline in 2015 after reasonable increases in previous years. The most downloaded file last year was Dykes' *Handbook of Garden Irises*, but all *Reviews* and *Newsletters* were being downloaded, not just the recent editions, e.g. *NL 05* from 1979 was downloaded 549 times compared to *Review 2013* downloaded 713 times. Most of the publications were each accessed over 200 times proving that web publication does keep the articles alive. The countries that downloaded are Germany, United States, China and Great Britain in that order. The slight decline in website usage is disappointing. However, there is so much information which has become available on-line recently that it can be truly intimidating. In the old days, what a struggle it was to get an article from a library. Now it is so refreshing to find so much academic information so readily to hand. Long may it last.

“Surprised”, a garden to visit in late June

Jill Whitehead

Sometimes you are pleasantly surprised when you least expect it. Last June, we dashed down to Cornwall as we needed photos for a talk. As we had a short time to spare before our journey home we decided to visit Godolphin Garden, a fairly recent acquisition for the National Trust, (NT). It is an unusual garden, very different to a “normal” NT type garden. It is very relaxed with a definite wild feel, but that is not to say not cared for. The house dates from the 1600s but is used as a NT holiday let so is only open on certain days. However, the stables and the King’s Room are open and the old ‘Piggery’ has been converted into a small tea room. Parts of the house have been demolished over the years and the ruins just add to the romantic atmosphere. The Godolphin family made their money from copper and tin mining and the estate is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The gardens are a rare example of a medieval garden and were designed, as was the house, for visitors to be entertained royally. I found it a very refreshing garden with the air of being real, not over renovated or even immaculately kept. Some NT gardens feel like sterile parks but there is none of that feeling here. You almost get the feeling that the owners have just popped out and you are being allowed to wander whilst waiting for their return. In the Side Garden, several long borders were filled with *Iris latifolia*, the English Iris. I believe it was ‘King of the Blues’, a rich dark blue, under-planted with a powdery-blue hardy geranium. The combination of the two blues was stunning and a very pale pink old fashioned rose was threading its way through, giving a little highlight here and there. The mound of the geranium foliage softened the stems of the iris, hiding the rather unattractive leaves, a perfect combination. Aquilegia had obviously flowered earlier and the occasional foxglove was adding an extra vertical accent.

The English iris was also planted in another border but this time combined with yellow loosestrife, the flowers picking up the yellow splash on the falls of the irises, both glowing in the sun. Simple but striking, but then a blue and yellow combination is usually a winner!

The King’s Garden is a 16th century privy garden, rather special, being completely enclosed. The old stone walls, adding to the feeling of antiquity, were full of pennywort and ferns on the shadier side while the south-facing walls were home to bee boles filled with traditional woven skeps. The bees were buzzing and the perfume from the old-fashioned sweet peas was a pleasure for the senses.

Iris latifolia is from north-west Spain and the Pyrenees and found in damp grassy places. It is called an English Iris because in the 16th century Matthias de l’Obel saw plants growing in England, near Bristol, passing this information onto authors such as Dodoens and Clusius and the name has remained, very confusingly! It is a bulbous iris, which is planted in the

autumn, with long leaves which appear in the spring. The flowers are large, with often two to each bract. The general advice is not to let them dry out too much in summer and they will flower towards the end of June.

I have tried growing 'King of The Blues' here in grass but unfortunately they did not survive, a combination of the heavy clay and the very tough grass which is mostly couch. However, I have seen them naturalised in grass but the conditions are usually vastly different from mine, impoverished soil and the introduction of yellow Hay-rattle to depress grass growth. I tried yellow rattle but the couch won, so will have to persevere with that challenge. Being determined to try again especially as books often say "easy to grow", I have planted 'King of the Blues' in a mixed border where the clay has been "tamed" to a certain extent. At least it has had copious top dressing over the years. So we will see if they perform as well as they were at Godolphin, fingers crossed.

Godolphin's information leaflet is titled 'A Door into the Past' and I couldn't agree more. It is near Helston and has some breathtaking views from the top of the hill, allowing you to see both the south and the north coast – weather permitting!

Pacific Coast Iris, *Iris* 'Blue Bossa'

I know everybody talks about the weather but sometimes you just have to do the same. Towards the end of February, I was totally amazed to see a flower on *Iris* 'Blue Bossa'. After all this is a PCI and I would not normally expect to see flowers until late April at the earliest but obviously the mild weather had tricked it into flowering very early; it has continued to flower throughout March and April. Now, at the very beginning of May I have counted 15 flowers and still there are buds coming. I have it planted in good Herefordshire clay, which naturally I have tried to improve and is shady for some of the day; it does not get any special attention except admiration from our visitors. 'Blue Bossa' was raised by Fred Webbing from Norfolk and was registered in 2006. Fred is a Jazz enthusiast hence the name, as Blue Bossa is also the name of an instrumental jazz composition from 1963. So, whatever you say it has certainly earned its place in the garden and rather disputes all the times I hear the public saying "the trouble with irises is their short flowering season" – they just need to grow the right ones.

SEEDS

Thank you all members who buy seeds, you contribute generously towards the money from the sale of seeds that goes towards running the website and other costs concerned with the Group. Donors please remember us at seed collecting time and send any spare seed to the seed officer, Janet Miller.

Registration of Irises

Hon. Registrar: Mrs Jennifer Hewitt, address on the back page.
Email:jennifer.hewitt135@btinternet.com

Names for British-bred rhizomatous irises are registered, via the BIS Registrar, with the American Iris Society. I will supply application forms on request or they can be downloaded from the BIS website: www.britishtirissociety.org.uk Two copies are needed, one for the AIS and the second for BIS records.

Please write **firmly and clearly** or complete the forms on your computer. If you obtain or download them before the flowering season you can see what information is needed and make notes and measurements.

CLASSIFICATIONS are: Miniature Dwarf Bearded (MDB) up to 8in/20cm; Standard Dwarf Bearded (SDB) 9-15in/21-40cm; Intermediate, Miniature Tall and Border Bearded (IB, MTB, BB) 16-27in/41-70cm; Tall Bearded (TB) over 28in/71cm; Siberian (SIB, diploid or tetraploid, 28- or 40-chromosome); Pacific Coast (CA); Louisiana (LA); Spuria (SPU); Laevigatae (LAEV); Species (SPEC); Species hybrid (SPEC-X); Japanese (JI, 3- or 6-fall, or more); Aril (AR); Arilbred hybrid (AB).

NAMES It is usually essential to give alternative names as so many are already recorded. If you have the *AIS Check Lists* please search them, or ask the BIS Registrar to search. You can check names via the AIS website, www.irises.org. If an iris is named for a living person a letter of consent from that person, or a parent for a minor, is required; permission from next of kin is needed for someone less than 10 years deceased. The word 'iris' must not be used in the cultivar name, even if it is a person's name. In general names should follow the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* and the BIS Registrar can advise on this.

PARENTAGE should be given back to the nearest named variety known.

FEES

Please make cheques payable to the British Iris Society and send them with your applications. The BIS Treasurer or the Registrar will advise on the amount of sterling depending on the current rate of exchange.

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS Although registrations can be processed in the UK at any time, applications must be **received** by the AIS Registrar by November 1st or they will be held until the following year. This means they must reach the BIS Registrar by the end of September.

PHOTOGRAPHS Please send photographs of all irises you register to the BIS Photographic Librarian (address in the List of Officers on the BIS website) who will advise on what is preferred. It is important that colours are accurate, for record purposes and in case questions of identification arise in future.

INTRODUCTIONS It is important to notify the BIS Registrar when irises are introduced, i.e. when they are **FIRST** offered for sale by a nursery in any country or via the BIS Sales List. The Registrar is very grateful to receive copies of catalogues showing introductions of British-bred irises.

The Registrar can advise if you wish to register bulbous irises.

More information will be available on the website but the Registrar is happy to help in any way possible.

Changes for Registrations – Please Remember!

Briefly, there is now an AIS fee of \$10.00 for each name so at present the total fee is £10.00 which covers the AIS fee and BIS fee of £1.50 but may change if the exchange rate changes drastically.

Ed—I would like to remind everyone to take plenty of photos of any proposed registrations so that you can keep a record for yourself as well as sending to the registrar and Photographic Librarian. As well as photographs plenty of measurements will be a great help to check each year the growth in height and clump size etc.

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