



The Group for Beardless Irises
Newsletter
Summer 2018



Editor's Notes

Brita Carson

What a summer this has been, the summer you dream of as a child when the sun shines all day, every day, and there is no rain and you can put off going to bed because it never seems to get dark. Roll the clock on and as a gardener this is a nightmare having to water plants and you are thankful when it is evening for an excuse to sit down. In Scotland I always expect to have plenty of rain when I can move plants without fear of drought but not this summer. This may not be so unusual for many members in the extreme southern parts of the UK, and I do admire how you all cope. Do we now have to worry about a monsoon and landslides?

I hope some of you are looking forward to a good crop of seeds. This is an exciting time, anticipating how many “takes” you have from your crosses or how many seeds each pod will produce when you see large fat pods although sometimes pods only have a few seeds. If you find you have too many seeds for your own needs please send any surplus to the seed distribution officer, Janet Miller (address on the last page). We always need lots of seed for others to grow. It would be interesting to hear what you think this particularly hot summer has done to your seed crop and how many bees and other pollinating insects you've had? My own crop looks promising but I didn't have the usual time to spend making crosses so it is a very reduced number of pods. Much more success individually but making at least 150 less crosses it is not possible to produce much seed.

Excitingly, I have extended flowering again from three regulars. These Siberians are all tetraploids but no extended flowering from any diploids yet. The first is 'Coronation Anthem' (Robert Hollingworth, R. 1990), a tetraploid, which gained a Morgan-Wood Medal in 1997. The second is 'Peter Hewitt' (Jennifer Hewitt, R. 2003) whose pod parent was 'Coronation Anthem' and the pollen parent was 'Golden Edge'. My third is another of Jennifer's, 'Madeleine Hamilton' ('Hoar Edge' x 'Reddy Maid'). After plenty of rain and returning heat forecast perhaps there will be more. 'Atlantic Crossing' has not had a good crop of flowers so may join the extended bloomers which it usually does.

In fact, for me, anticipation comes throughout the year from the time of the first flowers in spring/summer or the new flowers from crosses made earlier. Then comes the seed pods followed with the seed count. After the seeds are sown there is the wait for emerging seedlings and

I like to have several experiments, or simply ideas to try, on the go at the same time. Frozen pollen from last year had both good and bad results. There was no sign of any moisture in any of last year's little tablet containers. Pollen from generally strong plants, that produce good flowers and increase, was successful. I didn't have time to do sufficient crosses to make any reliable assumptions and I used only tets. This year I have frozen the pollen sooner with very fresh pollen and hope we have a long drawn out season next summer so that I can do more pollinating. This year using old containers for contact lens which, after first putting them through the dishwasher, should be a little easier to hold than the tablet containers although not much. And it is essential for me to try out pollen of diploids. Another idea came about accidentally when I found, a few months after summer, I had forgotten two pots of pollen sitting on the bookshelves in normal house temperatures so there would be a pollen and dust combination! They were tried but didn't work!! However it has given me another possible idea to try. I have tightly cling-filmed pots of pollen and put them in the cellar to overwinter. I will try that pollen next season keeping check on the temperature down there which shouldn't drop below 4°C.

The poor bees don't seem to have done so well and haven't pollinated very many flowers but I think there was a definite lack of flowers to reach maturity and buds dropped off or turned brown in the hot and dry conditions.

In *The Siberian Iris* by Currier McEwen, he quotes Norman C. Deno's findings for both *I. sibirica* and for *I. sanguinea*. All his experiments were worked above freezing so no seed was frozen. He gives some very specific temperatures to use for germinating seed.

Seeds of *I. sanguinea* germinated at 4°C after moist storage at 21°C. Light didn't help.

Seeds of *I. sibirica* germinated better when they were stored, sown and kept at 21°C, with light.

Unfortunately Deno doesn't give any conditions needed for crosses of *I. sibirica* and *I. sanguinea* or any crosses with *I. typhifolia*, the last addition to the Siberians and probably not classified then.

Currier closes his results section on seed sowing by using the experience of both Bob Hollingworth and Marty Schafer, neither of whom use any special cold storage or moist conditions but simply sow their seed soon after harvest with very satisfactory results. So until there are new results from research that is the advice for seed sowing Siberian irises. It is very reassuring to know simple methods are good. Planting indoors could cut out a year of waiting but that depends on the

amount of space available to overwinter them. It would be necessary to take sensible care of seedlings over winter so that they survive. If you have enough seed try sowing some immediately after harvest and some next spring. Try growing some Siberians in light shade to extend the flowering season. To start your experiments try using cultivars that you know are strong in growth and floriferous. And then please think about sending us some of your results which are always interesting for everyone to read.

After my *faux pas* using (possibly soon to be banned) “plastic” cotton buds for hybridising, the “people” seem to have forced the change to all paper ones which you can buy in “Superdrug”.

The number of hits of people downloading our publications.

Countries Hits in 2017:

Poland	9203
Ukraine	7200
UK	5704
United States	4830
Israel	3528
Germany	2056
Russia	1146
China	966
Canada	668
France	516

Last year 23,541 publications were downloaded and a further 6,372 read online.

Report from the Chair

Anne Blanco White

This year having been even odder than 2017, I should tell you that my fig seedling is growing nicely in its planter out front. Of course, it won't flower let alone fruit for years to come, but the *Iris japonica variegata* that keeps it company have survived in good order.

When I came out from deep hibernation after the winter it was mostly too cold for any serious gardening by me and after that it was far too hot. The temperature out back rose with grim determination to 30°C and I stayed indoors in the through draught. I did do a little repotting and that has been quite successful with an *I. formosana* briskly coming into flower for the second time this year. I think I must mark that form clearly as a remontant though it wasn't a patch on the *I. pseudacorus* var.

mzchetica which I was given some thirty years ago by Dr. Rodionenko. Now, in general, it has flowered much like the plants we grow in this country, but as you can see from the photo this year it excelled itself. Granted there are clearly two flowers there, none the less, they are not quite what one would expect. It did not set seed probably because the weather was too hot and humid and on present form it is unlikely that I shall see



it flower like that again. An offset with conventional flowers set seed and time alone will tell if anything interesting will happen. Perhaps I should take one of the replanted offsets indoors and park it in the fridge during February.

In fact this has been a bad year for seed altogether – either very humid, without rain though, or too hot and dry. The Evansias tried gallantly but the pods didn't develop; one batch of sibs is going to be a nuisance next year because they will spill seeds every which way. One plant which seems to have tried over the last few years is the Morning Iris, or *Orthrosanthus* form. This engaging charmer opens its flowers about my breakfast time and has closed them all by lunch time. A nice blue and has modestly produced a pair of seedlings. The problem is to collect the seeds. And my foetidissimas are doing quite nicely with generous doses of manganese sulphate. It is well to remember not to powder the leaves of the plants though a generous dose on wet soil is a good thing.

Remember too, that if you are replanting after you get home from your holidays you should not only dig a nice deep hole, you should also fill it with water which is then allowed to drain away before you put the fresh plants into it. And in some areas you will need to continue watering until there is plenty of good rain. And give serious consideration to plenty of flowering spikes for the flower shows to encourage visitors to join the Society.

Ed. Husband Tom was reading Anne's article and queried whether it was manganese sulphate or magnesium sulphate (Epsom Salts), which tomato growers would get from the pharmacy to give their tomatoes to enhance the colour, just before showing.

But Anne replied that she did mean **manganese sulphate** on her soil.

"I live in Hampstead at one end of a hill with Highgate at the other. My mother gardened here on an either "they grow or they don't", but I think the drainage was a bit different then. The whole hill is riddled with springs and although clay based is iron and sand capped. Back between 1914 and 18 it was intensively excavated for foundry work.

The local stately home is Kenwood and one owner, finding an irregular spring, solemnly built a fountain over it which only "founted" after prolonged heavy rain so whenever that happened us children dashed over to see it and sample the water to see if it was still as nasty as ever. It always was. More entertainingly at the bottom of the garden was a small spring fed stream. Naturally this would dry up in good summers leaving small fairy tale beaches each side in bright orange from the iron salts. Longer ago than that though, there is a pond known as the Vale of Health used by London's washerwomen. It was said that there was a very low death rate during the plagues and I always reckoned that as insalubrious as that water must have been it was the chalybeate content that bucked up their health.

No matter, there was a small azalea in our SHP garden at this end of the hill which came with a recommendation that it be given extra iron which it took for about three years for me then to forget to do and it continued to thrive. Then there was the matter of the lawn-mowing son who complained that the top left corner of the lawn was permanently soggy. Well you can imagine my reaction to that, but I did go and check and he was quite right. Now our houses had semi-basements and the house drains were lower still. I dug a little hole in the flower bed which proceeded to fill with water and drain exactly as if someone was emptying a hand basin. So I mentioned it to the then neighbour, who being a consultant at the nearby hospital nearly had a conniption. But he got a builder in from their maintenance staff who, with some bewilderment, inspected the land drain we installed so that we would use the path in bad weather, but he proceeded to enlarge the hole. The toads thought this an excellent move. After some time, Archie caught me in the street one day and very apologetically said there was no hope of getting anything in writing from his builder who was clearly a direct descendant of the navvies who built our canals, but the man had actually tasted the water and said it definitely wasn't from the drainage system. After which history was revised and I forgot about the iron.

Then when I moved here the first plants to die off were the foets. If I caught them soon enough I could revive them in a flower pot but they died off again as soon as they were planted out. A number of other evergreen irises took longer over the process, but I lost a number of species of them too. Then I remembered that these flats, which are 1955ish, are on the flood plain of the old Tyburn River. It was fed by

springs from up Fitzjohns Avenue and indeed still exists in a culvert. But equally anything in a pipe will come down the outsides in really wet weather. So I took to google and tried the obvious iron and plants routine, but only got the usual lists of plants which need it added. Then I went for iron as a poison and got a really helpful article on manganese treatment, which has made a great difference as long as I remember to do it.”

Treasurer’s Report

Alun Whitehead

This report covers the two years to 31st December 2017. As you can see below, the 2016 figures flatter us in that the *Review* costs totalling £245.80 were paid in 2017, and some 2017 charges of £193.89 were paid in 2018. So the large increase in monies held in the bank will translate to a smaller increase. The overall financial position has remained remarkably stable. We must thank Janet Miller whose seed sales make a significant contribution. Please continue to support her not just by buying, but please also donate your spare seed.

	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>
Subscriptions	229.00	131.50
Donations	9.50	0.00
Seed Sales	240.00	277.96
Plant Sales	0.00	0.00
Newsletter Cost	-50.00	-49.68
Review Cost	0.00	-245.80
Interest Received	0.62	0.44
PayPal & Bank Charges	-12.78	-15.22
Website	-7.79	0.00
Postage	0.00	0.00
Total : Net change at bank & PayPal:	408.55	99.20
Opening Total Bank Balance:	3199.37	3607.92
Plus net increase in funds	408.55	99.20
	3607.92	3707.12
represented by:		
Closing Treasury AC Balance	1046.96	1047.40
Closing Current AC Balance	2286.77	2186.27
Closing PayPal Balance	274.19	473.45
	3607.92	3707.12
subs paid in advance	317.00	206.50

I am grateful to Roger Norman who once again has kindly been our independent financial reviewer.

***Iris sanguinea* – an apology**

Alun Whitehead

Carl Linnaeus described *Iris sibirica* in 1753 and later Hornemann described *Iris orientalis* (now *sanguinea*) in 1814. There was some confusion as to forms, but Dykes in the *Genus Iris* (1913) sets out the differences quite clearly. He went on to state that:

“By hybridisation, plants intermediate between these two extremes can easily be obtained and the best garden plants are probably those that combine the growth and inflorescence of I. sibirica with the larger and more brilliant flowers of I. orientalis”.

And that is the origin of many of these garden irises. As a hybrid it would be misleading to describe them as one species or the other and so they are collectively referred to as Siberian irises.

That was over a hundred years ago, but, oh boy, does confusion still remain! You will find *Iris sibirica* seed for sale on the web and the photo shows a flower of *Iris sanguinea* type. You will find a National Collection of *Iris sibirica* but does it contain any? Many nurseries list hybrid cvs under *Iris sibirica* ‘XYZ’. In fact, the misnaming is so prevalent it makes me feel like that Inspector Frost title – *A Minority of One!* Fortunately, it is not that bad and I am not alone in my view despite the impression otherwise. *The Plant Finder* which sets the lead in nomenclature would label a Siberian as *Iris* ‘XYZ’ (sib) nowadays, though in the past it has used the misleading titles. Hopefully, this misnaming is mainly a UK disease. A similar problem relates to *Iris reticulata* where some cvs are listed under the species, but really are hybrids between species – they are more likely to be referred to as Reticulate Irises as time goes on.

With Dykes’s comments in mind about hybridising, I looked at the different Siberians in the garden this year to see which of the species traits were coming through. I was flabbergasted by how much they relied on the flower type of *Iris sanguinea*, with its spathes still green or flushed red (giving it its name), the two terminal flowers often giving an almost symmetrical effect. What I often failed to observe was the potential for increased floriferousness which some *I. sibirica* parentage can provide. Most had the two flowers at the terminal bud, with a single flower on the branch which *I. sanguinea* can produce if growing well. So overall the flower character of *sanguinea* dominated and the absurdity of them being labelled as *I. sibirica* became very clear. I think *sanguinea* deserves its apology – don’t you?

How the species traits are reflected in the hybrid cultivars is a fascinating subject and one which deserves a fuller article. Hopefully this will follow for the Siberians and the other main iris groups.



Iris 'Grape Truffle' has a branch with pink tinged spathes and two terminal flowers per stem.



Iris 'Snow Prince'. A good example of the *I. sibirica* style with branches, more buds and withered spathes.

***Chasmanthe* update**

Jill Whitehead

Aren't gardening folk kind! After my *Chasmanthe* article in the 2017 *Newsletter*, two members contacted me and it seems to have struck a chord. One fairly recent member, John Mullen, sent me the following email:

Hi Jill

Having read your article on *Chasmanthe* in the *Newsletter* June 2017, I thought I must give it a try and swap notes with you and the others. Bit of fun and helps the world go round. So, I bought one each of *C. floribunda* and *C. floribunda* var. *duckittii* from de Jager based here in Kent. My garden is tiny, so that's quite enough, squeezed in a corner, out of the wind and sharing the sun with some tall leafy neighbours, including Evansias I picked up at the BIS Show sales. I gave them a good mix of grit, enriched compost and leaf mould. They have produced three healthy shoots per bulb. They may flower yet this year? Now end of July this week, but if not, happy to report fully in due course plus photos and hear from any other members growing them in whatever their terrain and climate. The South East seems to be another zone entirely.....well this year's weather at least.

Best wishes

John Mullen, Show Secretary - Kent Iris Group

No doubt John will report back on progress in due course, which will be interesting, as we can all learn from others experience. The other member, Wendy Farrell, offered to supply a plant – I felt like a kid in a sweetie shop! I know Wendy from her West & Midlands Iris Group days and Hardy Plant meetings and we have enjoyed numerous garden chats and even the occasional lunch! She first obtained her *Chasmanthe* seed from Silverhill Seeds (South Africa). You will know that Rod and Rachel Saunders who owned Silverhill were killed earlier this year whilst on a seed collecting trip. A very sad loss to the garden world. Wendy thought the seed was originally *C. aethiopica*, but as she purchased the seed some 10 years or more ago, she cannot be sure. She grew the bulbs on and eventually obtained two pots which she kept in her greenhouse. Up to last year they never flowered but then one pot flowered – hurrah! After my article she kindly offered to split both pots and share them with me, very scientific stuff! So, I also planted mine in two pots and left them in our cold greenhouse, which is open all year as the cat likes to sleep in there in the winter! Of course, Wendy's flowered but mine did not and now she thinks they are more likely to be *C. bicolor*. Next year mine will be brilliant, gardeners' optimism!

I would like to thank both Wendy and John for their contributions and look forward to hearing how they fair. If anybody else would like to make observations with us we would be very pleased to hear from them.

Beardless Iris Day 2019

It is probably a distant memory, but the Beardless Iris Day 2011 was very successful and even oversubscribed. Can we repeat it? Come and find out as the hall is booked for **Saturday June 1, 2019** at Hopelands in the historic village of Weobley, Herefordshire.

Plans are still in the making, but we would expect talks in the morning, lunch and then an afternoon visit to the National Collection of Siberian Irises and garden at Aulden Farm. The day is to be finished in the traditional way with tea and homemade cake. The talks will cover PCIs and Siberians as well as perhaps a more general Iridaceae subject. If you would like to get involved with thoughts or offers of help, please email Alun at admin@beardlessiris.org.

Weobley itself is a delightful village on the Black and White Village Trail, and there are numerous gardens in the area – you will be spoilt for choice if you want to turn it into a short break. Further details and booking instructions will be in the next mailing and on our website in due course, but in the meantime, please put the date in your diaries.



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My sincere thanks to all the contributors of articles and photographs for this edition of the *Newsletter*. Please do get in touch if you have something to say and would like to write for the next edition. My sincere thanks to Julia Carson, Marina Jackson and Alun and Jill Whitehead for all their help with proof reading and the technicalities of producing this *Newsletter*.

PRIVACY NOTICE

The Group for Beardless Irises of the British Iris Society does not collect or process sensitive personal data. The personal data we use is that needed to run the Group, i.e. names, addresses and/or email addresses of members, e-members and others using our facilities, together with any payment records where applicable. We may disclose details to the British Iris Society for planning purposes, but they, and we, will not disclose any details to third parties.

If you have any concerns, please contact us admin@beardlessiris.org or use the Membership Secretary's address in the current *Review*.

The photos on the front cover are the emerging flower head of one of Father Philip's new seedling PCIs. All photographs taken by Sister Gabriel, Carmelite Monastery, Dysart.