The Review

The Group for Beardless Irises

Issue No 9 Autumn 2012

Two of the new Siberian hybrids from Jan and Marty in the new colours. Above ‘Paprikash’ and below is ‘Jerry Murphy’.

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Front cover photo 'So Van Gogh' - ©Jan Sacks

Editor's Notes
Brita Carson

What a pleasant change it would make *not* to have to comment on the weather but it has been another year of problem weather. Britain has had floods affecting most areas at different times. It shouts out hydro-electricity but millions are spent on wind turbines instead. Australia is having heat that would melt the roads here. No-one can work outside after 10 am. Bush fires are raging causing fear and emergency cases to be packed. Not long ago New York suffered horrendous damage by Hurricane Sandy. One theory blames the sea warming up by half a degree so the hurricane gathered more energy from it and travelled further north to hit America much higher up the east coast and with more force than usual. The sea warming will also affect the direction of the Gulf Stream for us, which in turn will mean colder winters, especially harmful for the westerly gardens that have mild winters. Those tender plants aren't going to like it.

Where does this leave the irises trying to cope with changing climatic conditions? It could be a good time to diversify into different species particularly those that enjoy damp to very wet conditions. Jeff Dunlop has his version of rain hats so you can have no excuse to stop hybridising. Mark Haslett is getting into serious hybridising with water-loving Louisianas after becoming the proud holder of the National Collection. Congratulations to him. The Carters of Rowden have good news for their wetland iris introductions being included in other gardens which will keep them safely in circulation.

Alun has timely warnings to be heeded by us all in an article you must read. Olga's irises didn't enjoy the wet summer but it is easy to forget she suffered drought and even a hosepipe ban at the beginning of the year. It isn't all gloom though. Jill has found out about a native *Gladiolus*, *Gladiolus illyricus*, which grows in the New Forest. Philip and the iris from Noti - is it a natural stable hybrid? Anne is seeking any reports from you about the results from seed from a wide cross.

To raise your spirits check out the *GBI* offer on new Siberians, page 18, kindly sent over to us from Jeff Dunlop, several years ago. The profit from the sales is for the use of the *GBI*. The irises are ready for lifting and splitting this year. Don't forget seed sowing both from Janet's list and from Alun of PCIs, page 21. The spurias don't have a mention this year. We don't like the lack of sunshine and neither do they.

Congratulations go to Jan and Marty for another Morgan-Wood medal winner with 'So Van Gogh'. It is one of their new colours, a cross between 'Sarah Tiffney' (1999) and 'Banish Misfortune' (1999).

Currier McEwen produced the first good yellow and this has been used extensively to mix with the other more common Siberian colours of blues, purples and lavender. Pigments don't mix as on a palette but rather overlay each other creating stunning effects. Look at their website (Joe Pye Weed's Garden) to see the full range of their new colours.

Carry on gardening
Anne Blanco White

This year's weather shifts has given the meteorological writers a splendid opportunity for going into historical disasters and it is surprising how far back records genuinely exist for such occurrences. Anyway, it has been a poor year for seeds mainly because the high humidity has meant that pollination simply did not take place. At one stage I thought I would literally have only a couple of Evansia seed pods. Then there was a nice dry fortnight and my local bugs made hay to produce a decent harvest after all. Not many bees and I don't recall many hoverflies either, but something did it. The same happened with the spurias later in the summer: those that flowered in damp conditions were sterile and those which had a dry spell did well.

But what did surprise me in October was a few Junos. They took a really dim view of the flowering season mostly by not even trying to flower at all. The foliage was poor quality and died down early. Frankly, I thought I had lost the lot as they would probably rot over the summer. Not a bit of it. On dying down, they were put away as usual in a relatively cool and sheltered plant stand. They stay dry there, but any ambient humidity does prevent the soil in the pots from totally drying out. So, when I came to salvage anything that might be left I shook them gently out of their nice, friable soil to find lovely plump root stocks and the earliest forms beginning to grow on. Very satisfactory. Then an awful thought crossed my mind - where was *I. winogradowii*? I've had those bulbs for years and they are very patient for there have been times when they barely survived neglect but came back to flowering and over the last few years they have done well. One of the few retics that positively likes to be kept damp all year round and this summer did produce some very dry spells. I regret to say that one thing that can reduce my family to helpless laughter is my cry that "I've lost an iris".

Well, it took the best part of an hour before the label in a soggy pot alleged its contents were the wanted species. And lovely plump bulbs they were with lots of tiddlers all of which were moved to a much larger pot in the hope of a passable show next spring. In the main, I keep their pot in a shaded place where it can get rained on through the summer, but I don't usually water them though I do seem to have done so this year. All the same, if this year's bug populations are anything to go by it will be pollination by paintbrush next time.

Then I collected some PCIs which were potted up and neatly parked in a suitable place. The next thing was excavations. The mess was cleaned up, but the morning after I looked out of my window to see a squirrel hard at work. All I could do in pyjamas was make rude noises from the garden door. Luckily I had mentioned this possibility to an avid bird watcher and he recommended a deterrent which I bought. I sprayed the area which the squirrel probably used for access as soon as I was dressed and, by sheer luck, came back after breakfast in time to see the creature bouncing along the fence until it reached the sprayed area when it stopped dead and sniffed. Doubtfully it sniffed again and then sadly turned away and skittered down the fence. The stuff works very well, but has to be re-applied after rainfall and is no good against birds. I suspect it is the

blackbirds which are digging up my repotted plants, but it may be pigeons or one of the Corvine family.

These in a way, though, are what we expect of our garden lives. What we don't expect are the outbreaks of pathogens we have suffered over recent years together with the ash disease which is prevalent today. A speaker from the Plant Health department of DEFRA recently made clear that we, as gardeners or enthusiastic trail walkers or cyclists, have a part to play. As we visit arboreta, the gardens of stately homes, or the countryside in general, we can pick up a great deal of infected material without ever knowing it in the heavily ridged soles of our fell boots or trainers. It is very important that we should clean those soles as thoroughly as ever we did in the days of the last big foot and mouth outbreak before tramping that debris to other areas and so spreading any infection. The two situations are analogous and it is up to conservationists and gardeners to take precautions and to persuade others to do the same. Horticultural hygiene is the key to slowing or stopping these infections even when we can't stop them starting.

The Seed Exchange Officer
Janet Miller

As expected there is a shortage of seed this year. I don't know anyone who isn't complaining about the wet weather but, obviously, some have had it worse than others. 2012 was supposedly the year of the slug but thankfully, I have not noticed many. Maybe having a flock of ducks has helped!

I have been sending out seeds throughout the year and have made friends with lovely people in Spain, Germany and New Zealand and they have contributed to the seed exchange this year. It is always interesting hearing how people in different countries cope with difficult weather situations and it is very kind of them to send in seeds so soon after joining the society. I also want to thank all our members who have taken the time and trouble to package seed for the exchange. A special "thank you" to the officers of the other various iris societies who have sent us packages of seed. These additions have greatly increased our range.

There is an interesting article following from Anne Blanco White discussing the results of seed sowing from the *GBI* exchange in 2004/05. Bloom time from seed sowing takes many years of patiently waiting but some very interesting results can be obtained and it is essential to keep your seeds not only named but also well documented so that you can share in exciting results when you are searching through records.

Although there are only boxes for 20 different packets of seed on the seed form, you are welcome to request more and send the appropriate money, also including more substitutes. The last two Dykes medal winners were Tetraploid Siberians and seed from them is available in this list. What might they produce? There are numerous seeds from different coloured flowers of inter-specific crosses which may grow into something very special (and which may not of course) and even second and third generation crosses.

My thanks to all members who buy seeds and as always would everyone please save seed for me for next year. It is your generosity that keeps the seed exchange healthy with plenty of great seeds for members to grow and enjoy. As I write this, snow is falling but I, for one, am looking forward to a much better year without either drought or flood conditions and maybe even some sun! Here's to a productive year with our irises. Why not write in and tell us about your successes later in the year.

Treasurer's Report
Alun Whitehead

The accounts for 2012 are still in preparation, but there is nothing likely to cause concern.

Please remember that a subscription increase was agreed last year, mainly due to the 30% rise in the cost of postage over which we have no control. We introduced a two-tier hard copy rate for Non-UK members with the low rate band receiving the Newsletter & Seed List by email where we thought the extra postage costs made sending such items uneconomic.

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Calling All Iris Breeders
Anne Blanco White

I hope you have all read Lech Komarnicki's fascinating paper on inter-specific hybrids on the BIS website - if not you should do so. At all events, he has been trying to find some information about seeds which appeared in the 2004/05 *GBI* seed lists. These were hybrids of *spuria* cultivars with *I. lactea* raised by Charles Jenkins of the AIS. This is such an improbable cross that almost any species minded individual would say it is impossible. However, Philip Allery promised to try and find out if anyone had germinated any of the seeds and, if so, what the results had been. Unfortunately, it was around this time that Philip's health broke down and he was unable to do anything.

So the first problem is: did any of you germinate any of these seeds and, if so, what was the result? Please do let me know what happened.

Unfortunately, Charles Jenkins died about a year ago so we are unable to consult him. However, it is as well to establish his credentials: he was a long established and highly regarded breeder of *spuria* hybrids. I can only think that having both them and the *lactea* in flower at the same time induced him to cross them. Tony Hall, of Kew, remarks that DNA work suggests that lacteas are very far removed from spurias and that what I now have to tell you is very peculiar.

Although doubtful that some useful information will emerge from members' results, I hope someone will prove me wrong. However it occurred to me to email Bob Pries, who is building up the AIS Iris Encyclopaedia, to see if anything had come his way because a lot of odd information could be sent to him. We did better. Bob replied:

> "I know quite a bit about the cross you mention. It is all quite intriguing. Charles Jenkins died about a year ago, but several years back he contacted me with some peculiar results from this cross.
>
> First I should mention that Charles was no backyard tinkerer. He was a professional geneticist that had been involved in wheat research for most of his life. I have not checked his publications but I believe there were many and well respected. So when Charles said he did something I think we should all listen. He was a meticulous researcher and splendid observer and the story I am about to tell would have gone unnoticed by most of us.
>
> Charles was interested in the possibilities of bringing genes from *Iris lactea* into his spuria breeding which was extensive. He carefully made crosses and the results of *spuria* x *lactea* gave plants that looked like *lactea*. No *spuria* traits could be observed. Many would have stopped there. But Charles did second generation crosses. Again most of the plants looked just like *lactea*. But one peculiar thing was noted. Several seeds produced double embryos. When the two plants arising from a single seed were grown to flowering, one of the twins looked like *lactea* and the other looked like *spuria*. Charles was amazed. He repeated this again and again with the same results."

He was reluctant to publish this since he did not believe his findings would be believed. I believe him. He wrote a paper for the AIS but withdrew it. He had sent me a copy. I am sure there must be genetics papers reporting something similar in other plants but I have not done that research and this may have broken new ground. If so it probably would tell geneticists something very valuable once it was understood.

Charles Jenkins told Lech of his crosses, and Lech, too, is of the opinion that he would have been meticulous in his observations and that they could be accepted. The second problem is that this is a type of cross that it would be very interesting to have repeated preferably by a number of growers. One characteristic of interspecific crosses is that first generation seedlings tend to closely resemble the pod parent which can be disappointing if you expect a mish-mash of assorted plants. It is the second generation that raises hope as there may be 'odd' seedlings which in turn will produce something really worthwhile. Some trouble inevitably arises when the first generation plants turn out to be sterile and it is necessary to convert them to tetraploids which are fertile. Unfortunately colchicine is not a chemical to be recommended for amateurs to use.

Random Notes
Jennifer Hewitt

Reading the GBI *Reviews* or *Newsletters* always provokes thoughts. Responses come to mind which don't always get transferred onto paper, but this time I'm hoping that a few may be of use or interest to someone who might also put, whether in the old-fashioned pen or up to date by computer, something on paper? I must admit that I'm taking advantage of seeing proofs and thus having advance knowledge of what appears on other pages but am not being critical even if I disagree. We all have different experiences in different situations, so things can be true for some people and not for others.

I've read Lech Komarnicki's article and been very impressed, both by his own experiments and his collecting information from so many sources. It is clear that although success is more likely if tetraploid parents can be used, there are degrees of both male and female fertility in first and later generations of diploid hybrids, more so than I had thought.

Is this how Tony Huber has been able to produce generations of his hybrids which produce fertile seed by open or hand pollinations? I cannot remember that he has mentioned converting seedlings to tetraploidy and at least some of the parents which are wild-collected must be diploids (there is the query over *I. versicolor*). If my memory is faulty I welcome correction – checking would delay writing this. Now there is the news of Charles Jenkins raising further generations from his original *Ii. spuria* x *lactea* seedlings. I have several of Dr Jack Ellis's 'Seuver...' *(Ii. pseudacorus* x *versicolor)* hybrids and have never had seed but Anne has listed some from 'Seuver Punch' in the current *GBI* seed list. And *I.* x *robusta* 'Dark Aura' sometimes produces a few seeds.

What I have noticed on my plants is that anthers are usually missing, or tiny and distorted with no visible pollen, so it seems they are male sterile, but could pollination by other irises (species? cultivars? with plenty of obviously effective pollen?) produce seeds? There's a project for summer 2013 – weather permitting!

I read the article by Lech not on a website but in the Winter 2012 issue of *SIGNA*, the journal of the Species Iris Group of North America. Somehow I've been sent two copies and one will go to the GBI library so if you want to read it and have no access to a computer, you can borrow it. Or if you want a copy of just the article, send me £1.50 plus a large 2nd class stamp and I will do it – any surplus money after covering my expenses will go to Group funds. My address is on page 32 and the library copy is with Brita.

Survival for Gardeners
Alun Whitehead

With the stopping of commercial growing of impatiens, and the likelihood that fuchsias may go the same way, gardeners must be aware that their world is changing. One pathogen could be enough to create havoc with a favourite genus. In the autumn, 2012, the RHS arranged one of its Specialist Society Days and I think some of the ideas from the DEFRA (the UK agency responsible for plant health) talk will be enlightening.

Firstly, you have to feel sorry for DEFRA, because as well as the general practice of shooting the messenger, their public face is often that of *having to shut the gate after the horse has bolted*. And what is all the fuss about? Sudden Oak Death seems to have passed? If you walk round the woods there are still plenty of healthy oaks. Unfortunately, common names can be very misleading. *Phytophthora ramorum* generally infects thin-barked species such as viburnums and rhododendrons, but it is very serious in some larch plantations. It spreads by spores and the chief means of infection is footwear. Gardens open to visitors are at risk. You will see a tendency for shrubs and their leaves to be pruned away from paths or grass borders introduced to act as buffers. This is rather depressing for those who like the garden to have a wild or natural feel. But don't overestimate the risk; a well-known nursery was infected and the source was traced to a cycling holiday. The employee didn't clean his shoes before returning to work. The lesson for gardeners is simple – clean your footwear, especially after visiting gardens or woods. Spores remain viable in the soil for up to 10 years.

Unfortunately, spores are light enough to be spread by wind. When you see the buzzards circling in the sunshine, the thermals lifting them will also lift the spores and scatter them over a large area. The English Channel stops being an impenetrable barrier. This is a rare circumstance thankfully but a photo of a wood entirely devastated was shown and this could not be blamed on just foot traffic.

Ash die-back has hit the headlines in the UK and its seriousness cannot be overestimated, but it highlights DEFRA's difficult position. Ash die-back has been known for many years and so when someone said "ash die-back", the reaction was "Oh yes we know about that" and with limited manpower and resources you can understand it. Everyone was more concerned with the threat that the Emerald Ash Borer might pose should it arrive in the country. That this new ash die-back was a different pathogen was not immediately evident. At least ashes self sow so rampantly, if any tree is going to become resilient to the disease, it is.

It is not just gardeners that motivate the concern for plant health. DEFRA is much more interested with food security. It was pointed out very clearly that the days of Food Mountains in Europe are over. Any serious disruption to the food crops will affect our diet. A lunchtime sandwich containing an infected tomato infected a large tomato crop in the south of England with virus – a very expensive sandwich. Imports of tomatoes from at least one country have now stopped completely. When we import irises, one of the things that they look for is Tobacco White Fly and we have heard people arguing that this is ludicrous as the species isn't hardy. But when you know that it is a carrier for 600 different pathogens, it doesn't need to survive to be dangerous, a single suck will do. For our purposes, importing irises when they are dormant (without leaves) will make our relations with DEFRA easier. The complete removal of leaves is problematic with irises but leaving only the growing tip would be the nearest that would ensure the survival of the plant. Otherwise it would reduce us to getting only bulbs and corms.

Of course, it is not just the obvious plant material that can cause problems. The Asian Longhorn Beetle has been found in furniture, and the wooden pallets from Spain are heat treated to kill the pinewood nematodes. The Asian hornet did not manage to cross the Channel this year but what about next? This year we have enjoyed a huge colony of European hornets in our bathroom roof (near the visitors' toilet!) without incident – I doubt the aggressive Asian hornets would have been so accommodating.

As the Chairman of the Specialist Societies' Day left his comments were "really scary" as are the threats to our gardens. However, the vast majority of garden plants are unaffected. As a nursery we were well aware that daylilies were endangered *en masse* several years ago by daylily rust, an import from Asia, but this proved to be non-hardy. We still have a couple of elms going through the 10 year cycle of coppicing, despite Dutch Elm disease, so it is worth keeping the risks in proportion. We might be lucky.

Gladiolus illyricus - a native?
Jill Whitehead

Did you know there is a native *Gladiolus*? I certainly didn't and must admit it came as a bit of a surprise to see *Gladiolus illyricus* listed on the Natural History Museum database for native plants. Gladioli are not the sort of plant that you think as being native but ignore the flamboyant garden hybrids and think of delicate species. But what counts as native? You can get into deep water calling a plant “native” as there are many definitions of the term as I soon found out. So I consulted a rather well-thumbed and certainly “dog-eared” version of *Collins' Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers* and true enough it is listed and given 3 stars, a rating which is given to real rarities, growing in only a few places. Then there was further consultation of *Flora Britannica* by Richard Mabey, my favourite author on wild plants, and it looks like a genuinely wild species.

Gladiolus is a large genus of cormous plants in the Iridaceae family with over 250 species, a wide geographical spread, and was introduced into cultivation towards the end of the 16th century. Often thought of as mostly hailing from southern Africa, they are also found from southern Europe to western Turkey. However most of the familiar garden varieties are hybrids of species of southern African origin and not hardy.

G. illyricus is found in the Mediterranean area, Western Europe, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and southern parts of England, usually flowering April to July depending on locality. It is considered a crop weed in areas around the Mediterranean and was historically recorded as occurring in northern France. Clive Innes in *The World of Iridaceae* describes the flowers as small, pink, purplish pink, reddish-purple or purple, 3-4cm long. He goes on to suggest that the variation that occurs, in leaf, height and flower colour could lead to a case for a separate subspecies and it seems that others agree with him as authorities differ about the taxonomic rank of the wild *Gladiolus* in Britain. However, there has been research undertaken into the genetics of European gladioli by Aeron Buchanan at Imperial College, London, and the results are still inconclusive.

G. illyricus was originally found by a Mrs Phillips, on the Isle of Wight on July 7, 1855 in a “wild tract of copse and heath, called the Apse or America woods” but was last seen there in 1931. It is now only recorded in a small area in the New Forest found by Rev. H. Lucas in 1856. William Robinson in his book *The Wild Garden* (1870) refers to it as having been recently found. He suggests that it was a favourite plant in many gardens before it was found to be a British native and then soon dropped out of favour. Folk are still snooty about native plants in our gardens but with moves towards more natural garden planting perhaps this attitude will

change. Henry Bury, writing in 1951, had this to say:

> "The wild *Gladiolus* still survives. But one wonders how long it will be allowed to remain; for in plants, as in women, beauty is apt to be a 'fatal gift', and there are always plenty of vandals ready to dig up and carry away any attractive plant."

Thankfully people's attitude to the collecting of wild plants has also changed and legislation has helped the wild *Gladiolus* which is now protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, which makes it illegal to pick, uproot, destroy or sell such species.

Recently the e-Monocot group which is formed from members of RBG Kew, Oxford University and the Natural History Museum, with Kew acting as the lead, had a foray into the New Forest in search of the wild *gladioli*. The New Forest is the largest remaining area of lowland heath in Europe; it was given National Park status in 2005 but dates back to the time of William the Conqueror. They looked at various sites where it had been reported that *G. illyricus* had been seen, at first meeting with no success. But once "they got their eye in", so to speak, they soon spotted quite a good number of mature plants and some younger plants as well. It seemed it favoured those sites in more open areas of bracken but perhaps it was easier to spot? It is obviously dependent on the density of the bracken which is often damaged by spring frost and in those years the cover would be sparse allowing in more light, which, in turn, would promote flowering and would aid pollination. But the sparseness of the bracken would have the detrimental effect of more grazing; it seems that the poor gladioli cannot win! What would be the ideal solution would be alternative years of denser and lighter bracken cover, thus striking a balance. The gladioli are pollinated by bees and butterflies, in particular the Large Skipper butterfly, but are renowned for having a poor seed set, suggesting that vegetative methods of increase by cormlets is the most successful. It is suggested that it can be found in sites that bluebells and wood anemone inhabit.

Wouldn't it be great to know that this species was on the increase and spreading even if it was only in the New Forest. We are asked if we find a colony or a plant to notify Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC). To my mind the question of whether it is native or not is not as important as preserving and encouraging it and I hope you agree.

The photograph on the back cover was taken by Fred Ramsay of the Natural History Museum in the New Forest in 2012. I would like to thank Fred and the Natural History Museum for kindly giving us permission to reproduce the photograph here.

Hybridising Innovation
Jeff Dunlop, Maine

This article was first published in the 2003 Fall issue of The Siberian Iris. *Jeff has very kindly allowed us to include it here and has also updated it to be a 2012 version (additions are in blue). This is a much sturdier version of rain cover to the one discussed in the last Newsletter using milk cartons and canes.*

Crossing Siberian Irises on a rainy day, or even a sunny day with an afternoon thundershower, can be a great waste of the hybridiser's time if the crossed flowers are left unprotected. My experience is with Siberians but breeders of other types of irises, or even other flowers, may also find this problematic. Usually pollen grains are washed out of the anthers and out of the stigmatic lip after a cross was made, resulting in very few or no takes under rainy conditions. In the worst case, rain for the entire season, production of most new crosses for the whole year might be lost to rain. This is an unacceptable situation for hybridisers who insist on the opportunity to make progress in their breeding work every season.

In southern Maine this season, only three or four days seemed to be lost to rain for those with unprotected crosses. We felt very bad for our friends in Massachusetts where the rain seemed never to end during June. Weather forecasts are checked here at least once a day during the bloom season and each time we viewed the regional radar, there was rain again, or the threat of rain, across Massachusetts. A bad dream realised.

So what's a hybridiser to do? In the past, a common remedy to protect crossed flowers from rain has been to cover the flower with a sandwich bag with the flange cut away - a dicey proposition at best. Bags not fastened are apt to blow off during a windy rain event and bags that stay on sometimes make a very hot little hot house if the sun comes back out, tending to bake the dark coloured flowers. A better, though more expensive technique is the use of many beach umbrellas as practised by Dean Cole and perhaps others. This seems to be a relatively effective way to protect many crosses from rain, depending on the money one is willing to spend. Even these can be a "blow away" problem in heavy wind. Last year we put a makeshift tent over 1000 square feet of Siberians at peak bloom, which was very sketchy in the wind. Without doubt, other methods of protection have been tried as well. Clearly a better and more effective method would be nice, and some folks in Massachusetts might tell you fairly necessary.

On June 22, 2002, an innovative idea was proposed. In the morning, Dean and I had been down to Harpswell making crosses on Currier's Siberians in a heavy fog, which turned to a light rain by noon. We had each made about two dozen crosses, which later in the summer produced only one good seed pod apiece, for a whole morning's breeding work. Typical results. During the ride home as we reflected on our probable bad luck, I

told Dean what we need is something like a disposable plastic paint bucket fastened upside down on a dowel or rod which is adjustable in height to cover a crossed flower in the rain. Simple enough, something inexpensive but effective in keeping the flower dry. Together we talked it over and decided it just might work, then put the idea on the shelf for the rest of the season. Case closed.

Just as the 2003 season got well-underway we had the potential of several rainy days on the horizon. Time to swing into action and invent, devise and fabricate a cheap working rain cover. Twenty or more of these would be even better. Actually, 28 were made and used here during June and at least 40 will be on hand next season. This will allow 20 crosses per rainy day, each flower remaining covered up to 2 days.

This year (2012) more than 72 covers were in use. Assuming up to 36 crosses per day, this allows at least 24 hours of coverage after making each cross. Covers are now used for every cross, rain or shine. This not only allows for possibility of rain, but keeps the crosses cooler during very hot days.

Showing the plastic paint pot with the hole at the top and the slit above.

Thinking in terms of simple and inexpensive, I decided to use ¼ inch diameter pencil rod 5 ft. long for the upright staff. This allows up to 1 ft. in the ground and 4 ft. above ground for adjusting the plastic cup to proper height. Pencil rod is the smallest steel reinforcing rod generally available in the construction industry. It comes in 20 ft. lengths and unlike most larger size *rebar* (reinforcing) is smooth on the outside diameter. Your local supplier of foundation materials will probably have a pair of bolt cutters you can use to chop up the 20 ft. pieces to a desirable size for transport and later use. In this area 20 ft. is about $3.10, making a 5 ft. piece about 80 cents.

Even longer rods would be safer if there was any danger of children playing anywhere near and hurting themselves.

Now for the cover. Disposable plastic paint buckets were checked out at Walmart and the Sherwin Williams paint store. The 1 quart size appeared to be just barely big enough, 43 cents each at Walmart and 49 cents each and slightly thicker at Sherwin Williams, both are translucent. Prices have increased since 2003 by about 20% but each rain cap is still under $2.

About 1-1½ inches down from the top edge of the rim, drill a ¼ in. diameter hole, then using a utility knife make a ½ in. long slit from the centre of the hole toward the rim. Leave at least ½ in. of plastic between the

rim and the end of the slit. Now drill a ¼ in. hole in the bottom of the cup where it meets the side, straight down from the hole in the side of the cup. Two holes and a ½ inch slit, and the cover is ready to be threaded onto the shaft.

Push the end of the pencil rod through the hole in the side, then through the hole in the bottom of the cup. The plastic cup should be formed slightly at the top rim to make the cup round again, rather than oval, after inserting the rod. This produces a friction or interference fit, of the cup to rod, so the cup can slide up or down to adjust to the correct height to cover the flower after the rod is stuck in the ground near the flower to be protected. Flowers should be covered before opening in the rain or before the rain begins if a cross needs protection later in the afternoon or evening due to upcoming rain.

This innovation is a simple two piece system, which is adjustable. The rain covers are very effective at keeping crosses dry. They also are a deterrent to foraging bees and when used on 95 degree days (°F), kept all coloured flowers cooler and vastly fresher looking than uncovered blooms. Those who are very resourceful will find that 2 stalks with blooms at different heights can even be protected with one cover. Minor drawbacks are rust on the steel rods and due to their conductivity, they should not be handled during lightning storms.

At first the bees were fooled by the covers, but now the cups are actually favoured by foraging bees, especially on rainy days. They have been quick to learn where the nice dry flowers are located. Therefore, it may be especially good practice to remove the falls on all covered crosses. Bees foraging on “fall-less” flowers are usually forced to land on the stem, away from the stigma, to feed.

Crossing in the rain, even under a beach umbrella is less than perfect fun,

but this idea may help produce good takes which otherwise might not be obtainable. Total price per unit is about $1.30 for materials, plus a little gas, time and labour. So let's say an extra $2 to get that really outstanding cross to take on a rainy day. Easily worth the price. It may not be out of the question to assume there could be new believers in Massachusetts already.

Breeding Technique– an alternative pollination

Many people, including some other hybridisers, have seen my method of crossing Siberian irises and a few have asked that I make it generally known. The chief attribute of this method, for me, is that it is relatively fast, enabling 40 or more controlled crosses in a morning. Fair to say, that other methods may be as fast for those practiced at a different technique. The average number of takes using this method with diploids is about 66% - 75%, and with tetraploids about 20% - 33%.

Using freshly opened flowers up to about 2 hours old, remove the anthers with forceps from the flower to be crossed. Flowers being crossed might also have their falls removed so foraging bees have no landing pad. This I don't always do, however it may help avoid contamination of the cross from foreign pollen brought by the bees. Now, equally fresh anthers which are not yet dehisced, often with a piece of filament attached, are brought from the pollen parent and gently inserted top end first and pollen side down, into the stigmatic lip of the pod parent. The anthers typically are inserted about ⅛ inch into the stigma, which holds them by

friction or interference. Occasionally an anther will fall out after insertion, though most often they stay in place. Anthers must be very carefully inserted so as not to rip the stigma, but a little practice makes this critical step quite easy. Once the anthers are installed the cross is left to "take" as the anther and stigma both ripen independently to full viability.

How can this work?

As a general rule the anther always ripens and dehisces well before the stigmatic lip rolls down to receive pollen grains. The secret with this method, I believe, is at the interface between the stigmatic lip and the anther.

Most of the pollen on the anther outside the stigmatic lip dehisces within a few hours after insertion, and most of this may be too early to effectively fertilise the flower. The tip of the anther held inside the stigma appears to never dehisce at all. This can be observed later in the day, by removing an anther for inspection. The critical juncture then is a very small region on the anther right at the stigmatic lip, perhaps ⅛ inches long, where pollen grains become slowly exposed to air, ripening in intimate contact with the stigma as the stigmatic lip rolls down the ripening process. Even though this area is quite small, plenty of pollen grains are available to achieve fertilisation if the cross is compatible and environmental conditions are suitable.

Crossing with dry pollen on ripe stigmas may be significantly more productive than my "anther in the stigmatic lip" technique, if one wishes to use dry pollen which has been set aside (in the refrigerator) to dehisce. I have no data on this dry pollen method on percentage of takes. Generally, crosses made using this "anther in stigma" method appear to

This beautiful billowing white with green veins is a sibling of 'Dreaming Of You'. As lovely as the picture is, the seedling is not a very good increaser and can be variable in quality of bloom. Note the anthers carefully inserted pollen side down into the style.

accurately reflect the pod and pollen used when making the cross, rather than any outside influence from other "open" (wind-blown, bee or other insect) pollination methods.

Clothes pins used at the top of the rod are Dean Cole's idea and are informational. A clothes pin straight up at the top of the rod may mean "flower is ready to cross". A pin down from the top facing diagonally upward may mean "the cross was made today (even # day)". A pin down from the top facing diagonally downward may mean "the cross was made yesterday". Using more than a few covers at one time begs some sort of informational directory. The clothes pins, like the covers themselves, are an exercise in simplicity of purpose. Any questions please contact me.

The “anther in the style” method of pollinating Siberians. A colchicine converted flower from a cross of Bauer and Cobles’ ‘Lemon Veil’ x Schafer/Sacks ‘Impression’, X by a red seedling of mine with dark anthers.

Siberian Irises of Dean Cole & Jeff Dunlop
Alun Whitehead

A few years ago Jeff sent some of his Siberians, together with some of Dean’s, with the wish that they were more widely grown in Europe. They are due for splitting this year.

If you are interested in divisions, please contact Alun Whitehead at the email/address at the rear of the Review. I am sorry it will not be possible to send the plants outside the EU due to the high export costs. Net proceeds will go to the *GBI*. Check the website for new cultivars from Jeff and Dean at Fieldstone Gardens, one of the nurseries that sell their introductions. Look for Dunlop and Cole irises. You will see the flowers of the ones on offer by Alun who will be able to list the ones available when they are lifted.

Conversation
Jennifer Hewitt & Brita Carson

JH Protecting crosses in wet weather and a method that doesn't work for me. Years ago I made "umbrella frames" of wire mounted on tall canes with polythene bags drawn over them, wide open at the bottom but fastened to the canes at the top. None of the crosses took even though the flowers didn't actually get rain on them. It might be that pollen can be spoilt just by the air being too damp, even if the flowers are not obviously wet.

BC *While proof reading for me Jennifer has made some responses to the articles. It would be interesting to see if anyone else would like to add their results to help us build up a picture of what works and in which areas. I think Jennifer will suffer, as I do, from lots of days of dreich weather, when the atmosphere remains dank and chilly. These days would be a waste of time attempting any pollination hat or no hat.*

JH Brita's account of Terry Aitken making crosses in her garden had several points of interest. Personally I always remove the falls from the pod parents. The stigmatic lips bend forward 24 hours or less after a bloom opens and can be seen to be glistening and sticky, and are accessible; is it too late for another pollen to be effective? Probably, but I prefer not to risk it, especially if the style arms are close to the falls' hafts and a bumblebee, for instance, has to push in to reach the nectar, brushing against the lip. This is often true in diploids, though with tets. the style arms can be held more upright so the stigma isn't touched, which is even more true with bearded irises – the larger the flower, the less risk of contamination.

While diploid x diploid and tet. x tet. are certainly more likely to succeed and also yield more seed, diploid x tetraploid crosses are possible. Currier McEwen tried them with Siberians on a number of occasions and raised seedlings and I have done it myself. Nora Scopes raised 'Troika' from 'Floating Island' (D) x 'Silver Edge' (T). However the seedlings are invariably either diploid or tetraploid – it appears there cannot be triploids with 3 sets of chromosomes. And Currier never raised anything he thought worth naming, nor did I, and I'd call 'Troika' a very ordinary flower.

BC *Unfortunately none of Terry's crosses that he made "took" at all. I think, although it was a perfect day for pollination, it poured that night which is when I think the rain hats would have given the protection needed. So not even the bees had any success that day.*

Pacific Coast Irises 2012
Philip Jones

One might say that 2012 was an interesting year because it revealed what might happen to Pacific Coast irises when it rains all summer and the sun refuses to shine. In spring - you might perhaps remember - the sun did shine. Two or three very early Ghio irises flowered for me halfway through spring. And then the other Ghio irises also flowered but none of them set any seed. There were no bees buzzing about. Other irises planted out as seedlings two years ago looked very mature in spring and continued to look very mature throughout the summer but they did not flower. It was hard to believe.

The irises that I have had for some years flowered as usual but it was difficult to make crosses because it was so wet. Brita came up with the novel idea of protecting the flower before and after fertilisation with a half plastic milk bottle turned upside down with a cane running through the handle. It was very helpful but came too late – except for the last two crosses. But it will come in very handy next year.

I have registered the parent plant that is the starting point for my breeding programme - *Iris* 'Kinnoull'. A picture appears in the 2012 *Year Book*. I used it to make many crosses with other plants in 2011. The seedlings are looking very healthy at present but I am not expecting any to flower the first year after sowing. When I was in Birmingham, which had a low rainfall in the summer, iris seedlings would often flower the year after sowing but the year now passing - 2012 - has "dampened" my expectations.

Growing the species from seed requires even more patience and care. They seem to take much longer than the hybrids to come to flower and the leaves are often so small in the first year they can get lost or appear to have died. They seem to hang around doing nothing for two or three years and then they decide that life is worth living after all so they take a gamble and see if they have a future.

I am concerned that continuous damp in the summer will not suit the species because in their natural habitat many of them experience months of dry weather after flowering in May and June. Even in the winter they are under snow whereas we, who survive on the edge of the Firth of Forth, are likely to be having "a bit of damp" when there is hard ice a couple of miles up the road.

In a report in the Fall *Almanac* of the Pacific Coast Native Iris for 2012 there is an account of a journey made by some of the members after their annual convention in southern California. In eight days they travelled from Santa Barbara near Los Angeles up through California into Oregon and then on to Washington State. In eight days they viewed virtually every species of Pacific Coast Iris and most of them were in flower. Towards the end of this iris pilgrimage they visited Eugene, Oregon, to inspect the Noti

iris. Articles in the spring and fall *Almanacs* for 2012 by Ken Hixson have introduced us to what may be described as a fixed natural hybrid between *I. chrysophylla* and *I. tenax*.

Ken was able to take each characteristic of *I.* x noti and identify it with one of the two parents. For example, the flower was very close to the ground with no length of stem – just like *I. chrysophylla* whereas the stem of *Iris tenax* is 40cm or more. The colour of the flowers was bluish or wine coloured whereas the flowers of *I. chrysophylla* are always pale yellow or cream. However *I. tenax* has a wide colour range from white, yellow, pink to blue and dark purple.

What is interesting is that this natural hybrid grows among *Iris tenax* and yet there does not appear to be any crossing between the two plants. The Noti iris flowers earlier than *I. tenax* but there is still some overlapping. Among one hundred plants Ken discovered only one possible intermediate plant with a short two-inch long stem. Otherwise there seems no natural crossing between what appears to be a natural hybrid and one of its parent species. It's a mystery.

It is sometimes said that the perianth tube has something to do with it. For example, *I.* x noti measures 5-12 cm in length which is the same as *I. chrysophylla*. *I. tenax* is 1cm or less. Dr Lenz pointed out that two examples of species that occupied the same ground but did not cross with each other - *I. hartwegii* with *I. macrosiphon* and *I. bracteata* with *I. chrysophylla* - were examples of a very long perianth tube next to a very short perianth tube. He writes: "Perhaps the type of pollinating agent and pollination mechanism contributes to species in these cases." (Lee W Lenz: *Hybridisation and Speciation in the Pacific Coast Irises*, p. 304.)

There is, however, one further problem which is that the short perianth *I. tenax* and the long perianth *I. chrysophylla* cross happily with each other to give us the Valley Banner hybrid as well as *Iris* 'Coburg Cream' which Ken also writes about in the Fall *Almanac*. So why not the Noti iris?

I have a book on my desk A. J. Richards: *Plant Breeding Systems*. It is rather long. 529 pages. I may be away for some time.

PCIs

Seeds for some PCI strains have been received but with the proviso that the seed does not become generally available through the seed exchange. If you are interested in growing the seed and sharing the results, please contact Alun Whitehead.

The Noti Iris 2012
Brita Carson

A small extract from *Noti Iris: The Sequel* by Ken Hixson written for the *Almanac* of the *Society for Pacific Coast Native Irises*, 2012. Ken has done some practical research, in the field, on the Noti iris and the whole two-part article makes intriguing reading proving there is still plenty to discover about irises. This is by kind permission of both Ken Hixson the author and Gareth Winter the editor. If you grow PCIs, a membership to this Society would reward you, with not only excellent articles, but also the ability to buy PCI seed. Digital membership is only $7.00 annually.

> "In the last volume I recorded my attempts to come to an understanding of exactly what the Noti irises are. My effort here is to try to describe the plants called Noti iris.
>
> Even the name is confusing - this population has been historically presumed to be a hybrid, but may be as valid as any currently accepted species. In that case *Iris notiensis* would be acceptable as a species name but is unpublished. *Iris* x *noti* would be proper for an "ancient, introgressed hybrid," but is also not valid, as this name has also not been published. The informal name of Noti iris has persisted for many years; yet even "Noti iris" is inaccurate, as this iris does not presently live in or within half a mile of the town of Noti, Oregon. Most of the present plants are closer to Elmira, Oregon. The proper name for this population is still to be agreed upon.
>
> After spending time looking at Noti iris during this flowering season, there appear to be some discrepancies between existing plants and historical descriptions. I found that once you have seen the Noti iris and know what to look for, the differences between the Noti iris, *Iris tenax* and *Iris chrysophylla* are obvious and can be seen at a glance."

Ken made several visits to where he expected to find the irises. The first bloom time was on his second visit, April 14, 2012, and at least 75 plants were in flower. Flower colour was varied similar to the variations of *Iris tenax* in the same area; "pale blue to violet-rose and some good blues, with no whites and only a few with yellow midribs on the petals which could have come from either presumed parent".

> "Plants were short, as expected with tops of flowers averaging 4 - 6 inches tall. Flower size appeared to be slightly smaller than *Iris tenax*, with smaller floral parts."

In Ken's own garden his first PCI in flower was on April 23, 2012, to help you compare how the timing varies with your own garden. Ken made many trips to take specific details especially to see if any back crossing had taken place between the Noti iris and *I. tenax* or *I. chrysophylla*. He also took sizes of seed pod, shape, size and height from ground level. His work was very interesting and makes fascinating reading for us. However for Ken it may not answer the questions but rather produce more questions to answer.

National Collection of Iris Louisiana ssp & Hybrids
Mark Haslett

Earlier this year I decided to apply to Plant Heritage for National Collection Status for my expanding collection of Iris Louisiana. The collection currently holds over 100 cultivars and forms. I hope to have in the collection examples of all the species and some of their many coloured variants which I'm working on importing from a fellow collector/conservationist in the States.

I submitted my plant list and application in March and the co-ordinator visit was arranged for June to access the collection. I had my fingers crossed the LA irises would bloom after all the poor weather we'd had. They can be temperamental flowerers, but to my relief a number did bloom and were in flower on the day of the visit. The assessments went well, - my visitors were amazed at the different colours and size of blooms as they had never seen them flower before.

A few weeks passed after the visit and one Saturday an envelope, from Plant Heritage, popped through our letterbox. I opened it nervously and to my delight they had granted me full status. I am hoping now I have achieved collection status it will help to open doors so that I can continue to improve the collection which in turn will help to promote these wonderful irises. I would like to thank all the members who have helped me with plant material to achieve this Collection.

If anyone has any interesting or old LA cultivars I would love to hear from you as I'm always looking to add new material to the collection. And I am hoping to start my own breeding programme this year to produce my own cultivars. Two cultivars I'm missing, if anyone can help me please.
Iris laevigata 'Mottled Beauty' and *Iris versicolor* 'Mysterious Monique'.

Australian LA 'Postmaster'

The Rowden Irises
John Carter

As many of you may have seen in various newspapers, RHS Rosemoor is starting a National Collection of the many irises that we have bred at our Nursery here in Brentor, Devon. For over twenty years we have been breeding and selecting a large range of water-loving and ensata irises, and it is very exciting for us to know that now they are all going to be preserved for future generations in such a prestigious garden. It has also been reported that we are retiring. We and the Nursery are still very much alive and open for business. In fact, we have been busier this last season than ever before and our sales of irises have kept us propagating all summer. Orders for 2013 are already flooding in.

Water Iris

We began breeding our own because we found that there were very few water irises available for sale and these were mainly blues and yellows, with some far too thuggish for the average garden pond. At first we concentrated on unusual colours but then we became more selective and chose plants that were reliable, of larger flower size, of attractive foliage and were more suitable for our customers' requirements. As a result we have produced eight new *Iris laevigata*. The first to tick all the boxes was 'Violet Garth', a stunning deep violet single, named after Galen's grandmother. Next came 'Richard Greaney', a clear sky blue and called after our first grandchild. 'Liam Johns', an interesting almost translucent white single is named after grandson number two, and 'Finlay Cameron', a wild eye - catching blue and white double completes the family connection as he is our youngest grandson.

Iris laevigata 'Violet Garth'

Whilst talking of the 'family' irises it is perhaps a good place to relate here a very sad story regarding 'Violet Garth' and 'Richard Greaney'. In 2002 we were invited to send irises to the first Wetland Iris Trial at Wisley. We were thrilled about this because living so far away in the West Country we could no longer attend the London Shows, and they are all at the wrong time of year for our irises. So this seemed a wonderful opportunity to show off some of our new varieties and hopefully get feedback on how we could improve them. Alas, this was not to be. As you know it is a three-year trial and after about nine months we got a call from a friend to say that our two *Iris laevigata*, 'Violet Garth ' and 'Richard Greaney', both looked dreadful! Not what we wanted to hear! A frantic call to the Trials Office confirmed our friend's report but on questioning we discovered that the laevigatas were being grown on a raised bed, watered by trickle irrigation and that the compost was far too alkaline for them. We were rather shocked by this news as laevigatas are true water irises, acid loving and happiest with a covering of water. However, the Trials people were very helpful and promised to move them straight away to the Rock Garden where they assured us that there was plenty of water. We couldn't get to Wisley to see them until the third year, and by pure coincidence went on the same day that the Trials were judged. We eagerly sought out our two laevigatas to see how they had done, but after several hours of searching we could only find 'Richard Greaney'; flowering it is true, but horribly stunted as he was growing in a concrete pocket where the water was totally devoid of oxygen. We were dismayed as he bore no resemblance to the lovely two-foot high vigorous plants in our ponds at home. Of 'Violet Garth' there was no trace and we still do not know what happened to her, as the Trials Office confessed that they had no record of where she had been moved to! How they could have "Trialled or Judged" her remains a mystery!!! We are glad to report that on his return home 'Richard' soon flourished again, given the correct growing conditions.

Among the other laevigatas we have bred are the beautiful and striking single white 'Rowden Starlight', and a nice opaque white double 'Rowden Seaspray' with tiny rosebud-like standards.

I. l. 'Rowden Starlight'

I. versicolor 'Rowden Allegro'

I. v. 'Rowden Descant'

I. v. 'Rowden Melody'

The only *Iris pseudacorus* we have registered is 'Rowden Brimstone', similar to *I. p*. var. 'Bastardii' but a more lemony yellow and with slightly twisted falls. Once established, she is proving to be quite vigorous.

We now move on to one of the most neglected species in the UK, *Iris versicolor*. These are such charming irises, forming large clumps in time but never invasive, and very easy to divide if necessary. They are, we find, much less temperamental than laevigatas: more tolerant of variations of soil and water conditions, they quickly settle into a new abode. They are very floriferous and bloom for up to six weeks during May and June. They rarely attain a height of more than two feet and some have beautiful glaucous green foliage.

Over the years we have produced twenty-nine varieties in a wide range of colours from deepest almost black purple to white with light blue veining. Also magenta, pinks, soft lilac, mottled and striped ones, claret reds (similar to 'Kermesina' but with different markings and differently shaped falls), and true blues.

There are far too many to list here but a visit to our website www.rowdengardens.com will show you a number of them. Unfortunately we have found it

very difficult to reproduce the correct colours in the pictures. We find digital photos are not nearly as good as the old 35mm slides particularly for purples and reds, but of course digital is excellent for recording irises because you can rush out again to retake one if you find a dog has walked by as you click the shutter, or a foot has strangely appeared in the shot! It is also interesting to note that we have often filmed an iris three times on the same day, in morning, at midday, and late afternoon and you would not recognise it as the same plant, so different are the colours and flower shape in the pictures!

Iris ensata

When we started the Nursery we found a number of customers had

I. ensata 'Rowden Amir'

Japanese Gardens, so they asked for Japanese Irises. We duly bought in stock and soon discovered that the descriptions in the catalogues did not always match the plants when they flowered! No matter where we went in

either the USA or the UK we found that the names seemed hopelessly muddled. Finally in desperation, we decided to grow our own, as this way we could be certain of matching the plant to the correct name.

So we began the exciting process of sowing seed, growing on, waiting with bated breath for the first flowers, deciding which to keep and which to discard, then trialling for several years to see if our "stars" really were worth naming.

One of the difficulties we have experienced is in getting different irises to flower at the same time so that we can compare one with another. Here in the very wet West Country we suffer from the biggest and most voracious slugs and snails, and over the years we have gone nearly mad as we find that precious buds, just about to open, have been neatly eaten off and we have to wait another year to evaluate our latest "baby". It is extremely frustrating. We have tried every sort of slug pellet and spray and even some years ago resorted to acquiring some ducks. Sadly even they found our slugs and snails too large to handle, only deigning to eat them if we cut them up first! After the ducks had trashed a number of our ponds we decided to give them away to a more suitable home.

Despite these setbacks we have produced around fifty new ensata varieties. Whilst all our versicolors have musical names, i.e. 'Rowden Cadenza', 'Rowden Symphony' and so on, with ensatas we have gone imperial, with names like 'Rowden Amir', 'Rowden Caliph', 'Rowden Queen' etc. The one exception is 'Rebecca Johns' named after our only granddaughter. She decided to be different to the boys and asked for an ensata not a water iris, to be given her name. We find giving names to plants is much easier than trying to remember numbers, especially as we get older!

As we propagate all our iris now only by division, and are assiduous in deadheading them every day we feel confident that what we send out is what it says on the label. Even so one can have surprises, usually pleasant we are glad to say. A few years ago we were astonished to find a lovely large flowered deep red versicolor growing in a bed of *Ranunculus*. It was, and is, quite unlike the other reds and has been given the name 'Rowden Anthem'. How its seed got into that bed, far away from the other versicolors is a complete mystery, but a nice one.

National Collections

We have always been involved with the NCCPG (now Plant Heritage) and in the early 1990s we applied for and were awarded the National Collection of Water Irises. We have never had a National Collection of Ensatas; that is held by Malcolm Pharaoh at Marwood Hill Gardens near Barnstaple, who has a number of the Rowden Ensatas.

Our Collection comprises over a hundred different species and cultivars of *I. fulva*, *I. laevigata*, *I. pseudacorus*, *I. versicolor* and *I.*

virginica, although, of course, not all of them are “Rowden” irises.

Last year after a bout of ill health, we felt it would be good to make arrangements for a Duplicate Collection or two, as one never knows when nature or some other catastrophe can strike. Only this spring an uncharacteristic very late hard frost wiped out nearly eighty per cent of our ensata selling plants.

We are glad to report that one new Water Iris Collection is now well on its way to being completed in Essex. This will be held by the very enthusiastic and knowledgeable Mark Haslett who already holds the recently awarded National Collection of Louisiana Iris. Whilst we were making arrangements with Mark we heard that RHS Rosemoor was interested in having a Scope Collection of all our Rowden-bred irises for a new waterside area that they were developing. So September (2011) we travelled up to Torrington and were thrilled when we saw what they were planning. A beautiful stream was to be widened to create a pond with a large damp area surrounding it. Heaven for our plants and perfect for both the water irises and *Iris ensata*.

Thanks to the good offices of Mercy Morris at Plant Heritage HQ and our Devon Coordinator Edna Squires, arrangements proceeded swiftly, and in May 2012 the first batch of twenty-three different irises was planted. In June another twenty-two were collected to be planted out next spring. Eventually we hope the total will be close to a hundred varieties.

Just recently in September 2012 we were again invited to Rosemoor to see how things were progressing. We were overwhelmed. It is going to be so beautiful and everything that has been planted looks extremely happy. Now we find that they are going to extend the site to encompass maybe another pond and certainly more damp areas, which is very, very exciting.

We hope that this display will enable, not only the general public, but some of the iris fraternity as well, to see what we have been working on here at Rowden for the past twenty-five years. We know that we are too far away for casual visits and even our Open Weekends are never very well attended (the weather often doesn't help. In 2011 we experienced thunder, lightning, hail, snow and vicious gales over the two days in June!), so it would be lovely for these beautiful plants to be able to flaunt themselves and get the recognition they so richly deserve; proving that the UK is just as good at producing irises as Germany or the United States of America.

News from Kent
Olga Wells

Sitting here in late January looking out over the snow-covered garden it is difficult to remember last season's irises. I remember the incessant rain of course. Who doesn't! Encouragingly I can see fresh young fans of the spurias sticking up above the surface of the snow; also some dieramas are holding their own, though they may show signs of suffering from the cold later on. The spurias did best of my beardless last year for flower power, good growth and seed production. The same cannot be said of the Siberians, with one or two exceptions, they were rather disappointing. I can only put this down to the previous dry season of 2011 followed by a dry autumn and winter putting us in the drought scenario of March 2012. Although fed, and mulched as best I could manage, they never put up a good array of blooms. I thought they would enjoy all that rain, but no, the stems were a bit short; the flowers slug chewed and tattered as it was also windy much of the time. Hardly any seed was set due, I imagine, to the rain and few bees around. It was a puzzle to find any to send to the seed exchange. 'Stephen Wilcox' was one of the exceptions. It really is a "never fails" plant. I am hoping all the wet from last year will encourage better growth and bloom in 2013 on all the sibs.

Before the cold snap there were a few *I. lazica* flowers nestling in my huge patch and one lonely flower on my New Zealand form. The other varieties are keeping their heads down right now. Usually *lazica* is one of the last to flower in my garden. I'm afraid I neglected to cut the foliage back in late summer of all my unguics (I blame keeping up with the horrific amounts of weeding) so they, and 'Mary Barnard' in particular, are looking a bit tatty. I'm looking forward to picking a few of these fleeting blooms as the weather warms up.

My PCIs did OK again and always give a pleasant surprise when a clump leaps into full bloom. They too are a joy to pick. But all in all a disappointing season for flowers and seed.

Import - Export
Brita Carson

It was a bit of a shock hearing what is about to befall all the ash trees. From reports it looks increasingly likely that a repeat of the elm tree disaster looms ahead with very little that the individual gardener can do other than inform the authorities if you find the disease has attacked any ash trees.

I am in favour of all the restrictions on incoming plants into the country. I am pleased that plants are held in quarantine to safeguard country and garden. But is it working? It doesn't appear to be.

On the other side of the coin. I ordered some of Jan Sacks and Marty Schafer's fantastic Siberians that are hitting the high notes just now. Jan and Marty are the first hybridisers to introduce these new colours and they will be a

talking point for visitors if they visit the Siberian National Collection here. They add a new dimension and as most of them are candidates for the Morgan-Wood medal they will one day be added to the Collection. What excellent pod and pollen parents they will make. This will stop the cynics saying all Siberians are blue.

Having thoughts of a complete change of irises for the reed/iris bed, I have now set my heart on ensatas, after finding that the water irises had really got out of hand. It took both of us working for several days to clear the reed bed of irises and reeds. They will probably reappear this year but we will attack again until it is clear of them. So to start building up a variety of ensatas I sent an order to Terry and Barbara Aitken. Terry was our speaker last year, at Wisley, and an article by him will appear in this autumn's *Year Book*.

Both orders were dispatched within 4 days of each other, cleared customs in America and arrived in this country in a couple of days. Terry and Barbara's was still ahead by 4 days and arrived at the Coventry Hub with the required phytosanitary certificate. The plants are supposed to be released after inspection. The inspectors are supposed to check plants every week. Unfortunately I didn't ask USPS for any proof that the plants were in Britain although I did keep track of it on their website and they will no doubt have records. I also didn't keep the outside of the box with dates and proof of arrival. Barbara told me that other European countries had received their orders in just over a week.

We eventually collected both boxes of plants from the UPS depot after they had been in the Coventry Hub for over a fortnight. The ones from Aitken's Salmon Creek Garden being an extra four days, nearly three weeks. I think there were two reasons. First it was the August bank holiday which is not a good time to expect any work to be done. Secondly, there is only one day in the week when the inspectors from Fera (Food and Environment Research Agency) inspect live plants so if you miss that day it will have to wait another week. I wrote to my MP (Member of Parliament) to complain and eventually I received a reply, via him, from the House of Commons. The letter stated that the Hub in Coventry hadn't kept the plants too long and as I can't really prove otherwise I will leave it this year. Another requirement to check on is the EC/GB number from the package.

This is a tale which I'm still hopeful will have a happy ending and the plants will pick up and grow for me, although it is unlikely that they will be very strong this year and need plenty of TLC. The moral of the tale is to keep every scrap of information until you receive your order safely in one piece.

I would not want to put anyone off ordering irises from another country but just remember to keep everything connected with your order. As long as we are allowed to import plants into this country then it will improve the diversity of the new hybridised plants we produce. If the plants are going to be kept for that length of time it may be wise to order for autumn planting. I will certainly be sending more orders to America and perhaps one day British hybrids might even be sought after enough to be exported elsewhere.

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Proof Reader - Jennifer Hewitt. My very grateful thanks to Jennifer Hewitt who is always so kind proof reading for me. You would enjoy some of my howlers but thanks to Jennifer I won't have to suffer that embarrassment.

My sincere thanks to all the contributors of articles and photographs for this edition of the *Review*. Please do get in touch if you have something to say and would like to write for the next edition.

Iris versicolor ‘Rowden Cadenza’

Iris SPEC ‘Rowden Gavotte’

Gladiolus illyricus, a native *gladiolus* found in the New Forest and photographed there in 2012.