



The Review

The Group for
Beardless Irises

Issue no 12 Autumn 2015



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Front Cover - *I. 'Francis Cabot'* (Tony Huber, R. 1998) Spec-X (versata)
 Inside Front Cover 2 Siberian irises hybridised by Bob Bauer/John Coble
 in the hose-in-hose form with multipetals
 Top 'Rigamarole' (Bauer/Coble, R. 2000) light lavender pink
 Bottom 'Kaboom' (Bauer/Coble, R. 2001) tet. rich navy blue.

Editor's News

Brita Carson

I always wait until Anne has sent her message before I start my news. This usually shows up any real differences in the weather between north and south of the country. The weather has a vital role up here in Scotland on how the irises bloom, are then pollinated and set seed. I understand what Anne means by a blank season with nothing outstanding to report. On the other hand up here we had an unseasonably, bitterly cold spring which continued all summer into autumn when all of a sudden the sun shone producing unusual warmth that was too late to be any good for blooms although it was useful to finish ripening the seed pods and a few sibs flowered again or finished flowering their original blooms, 'Peter Hewitt' being one of them. Jennifer hybridised 'Peter Hewitt' and this year it has been my "star performer". As for other stars I would like to add Jeff Dunlop's 'Tranquility Base', 'Dear Currier' and 'Dreaming of You'. These are all tets and another tet 'Moon Dazzle' (Bob Bauer & John Coble, 2005) is a clean frilly white (officially called ruffled), very pretty. 'Tranquility Base' and 'Dear Currier' are two colours that are extremely difficult to describe but just stunning as though blue was mixed on a palette with several other colours added. 'Dreaming Of You' has an overall effect of soft willowy yellow, but officially yellow and light yellow with no romantic overtones. It looks as though the tets had a better bloom season this year. The dips just didn't show off in the same way, blooms were patchy, opening in dribs and drabs.

Sadly we have lost two well known hybridisers this autumn, Lech Komarnicki from Poland and Tony Huber from Canada. Lech was 81 and Tony 89. Hybridisers are not plentiful and to lose two means valuable new plants won't be coming from them, not only that but both were excellent sources of results of their experience and experimentations. Each had built up a knowledge that is not equalled by many others. Crossing plants, sowing seed and waiting for flowers takes years which we all know needs hard work and patience, but to do that by crossing different species is well above the ordinary dedication.

There are articles in this *Review* showing our appreciation of all the work they have done for many years. Lech gave away lots of his plants that he had hybridised, all having interesting origins. Tony also enjoyed making wide crosses of species and these he sent to us as seeds for the seed pool. We will miss both of these hybridisers and would like to send our condolences to their families. I have included photos of a few of their creations which might inspire someone to take on their work. More photographs can be found by searching the web. Tony was a runner-up this year in the Randolph Perry Medal with 'Currier McEwen'. This medal is for the best American/Canadian inter-species hybrid (SPEC-X) iris.

We would like to thank all the seed donors for so kindly sending us seed this year. It would be a great help if anyone can spare some seed next year, no matter what the quantity. We seem to go from lean years to years of harvesting large quantities. The members also like seed that has been hand pollinated so it is a good chance to try your hybridising skills. It does make you realise how important it is to keep records of the names of your irises so that you can accurately name your crosses.

I have included the only two beardless British Registrations for this year and also the American Award winners for those who don't see the *Bulletins* of the American Iris Society. It is interesting to show the way some modern irises are going in America but see how Olga has a clever way of producing plants that look modern but still retain the classic *I. sibirica* look. Philip is trying a new policy next year; putting his best irises together and then letting the bees do the rest. It could be a new/old method and there have been many successes over the years with bee pods.

There is good news from the number of hits to our website. This year up to the end of October there had been a total of 6934 visits, 3885 of those were unique visitors and most of these came in the following order from Ukraine and then USA, Germany, Israel, Japan and finally GB. The most publications downloaded this year were *Dykes Handbook of Garden Irises*, 2462; *Dykes on Iris*, 1301, and the 2013 *Review*, 640. Bernadette Adams (page 28) invites members to think about having their gardens and irises put onto video which would then be transferred to YouTube. I noticed my daughter thought this would be a good idea. Time for us to use the internet a lot more to attract new younger members.

My sincere thanks to all those who have contributed articles and photographs to this *Review*. Please do get in touch if you would like to write for the *Review* like Bernadette and her idea for videos to go on YouTube.

New address for **Jennifer Hewitt**

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Chairwoman's Message

Anne Blanco White

This has been rather a blank season in the iris year: shows were over and it was a question of waiting for seed pods to ripen. 'Slowly' is the operative term and even now I have one batch grimly determined not to finalise anything until I have safely taken off for the Antipodes which means that I have nothing to report in connection with the BIS AGM. One thing, particularly noticeable with the spurias, is that the pods started to split and then, because of the rain, the seeds began to rot in the pods. Is anyone a dedicated diary writer who has records of pod "ripenings" over a period of years and would share their observations with us? The wider the range of iris groups and diarists the better. If global warming is going to complicate this part of our work, the more we know and the sooner we know it the better. I do remember from long ago regularly reading a gardening publication which was mainly addressed to those who went in for their local Hort. Soc. Shows and one recommendation that regularly cropped up was the use of umbrellas over show spikes of dahlias and chrysanthemums to protect the flowers. We may need to do something similar for our seed bearing spikes and when you think of all those "blown out" umbrellas littering the streets . . . all the same some of those spurias can reach 5ft.

A recent visit to Wisley which included an inspection of the Dutch iris trial moving into another year – and it is currently the sole iris trial – showed a rather patchy start to their growing season. Interestingly, it was the plants which did best last year which are showing real promise now. There is a major problem here of course: basically, these plants are grown intensively in Holland for the cut flower markets of Europe. Plants sold in England for gardeners are a very small part of the whole output and in practice they are not trialled over there for continuous growth in one place. The bulbs are dug up every season and only the biggest replanted to be certain of marketable spikes. Inevitably over time virus troubles will set in and a particular cultivar has to be replaced by a newer, and probably very similar, cultivar which has been trialled over there for consistent performance until it too goes bad. The interesting thing is that there are one or two extremely old cultivars which still persist and are worth trying as garden plants. When the trial is over we'll see if we can make recommendations for you. In the meantime, give the bulbs some serious feeding at planting time. Have you read Sidney Linnegar's article in last year's *Year Book*?

At a rather different level, it is worth watching both in catalogues and elsewhere for the new Canadian reticulata cultivars. Alan McMurtrie has been breeding for decades now and many of his introductions are appearing over

here. It cannot be long before other breeders will follow his lead. As to my garden, there are two interesting problems. The first is my climbing potato - *Solanum crispum* - which I think has two aims in life. The first is to grow down to a level where it can conveniently act as a support for the canes of my potted Evansias and the second is to see off the *Akebia quinata* which has similar intentions in its turn. This garden isn't big enough for the two of them. It's a pity as the *Akebia* is fun and the *Solanum* spectacular.

However the second interesting problem affects a number of plants, but not those two. Hampstead and Highgate villages are at opposite ends of a narrow hill which for some reason has a very high iron content in the soil. It also has large numbers of natural springs and as a result heavy rains bring quantities of iron-laden water down to our gardens. As a result of reading the article on foetidissimas by Graham Rice in *The Plantsman*, and various pieces of advice from others, I did some hard thinking and research on the internet. The trouble there is getting the right form of words, but sure enough I found an article on the consequences of too much iron for some plants and a recommendation for a manganese compound. The plants which have benefited most conspicuously are my runner beans! But so have some of the irises. I'm not entirely happy about the foets, but the flower bed evansias which I was beginning to worry about are more cheerful and so are some of the species pogons. Some pogons don't seem to mind, the spurias are quite happy and also, I think, the sibiricas. My impression is that one of the Polish plants was very unhappy and having been repotted for the winter is looking a lot more cheerful. Snowdrops and cyclamen spread like real weeds, but I'm sure that even Croc. Tom. resents the iron and it isn't the only bulb. Oh dear, I'd better keep records and I hate diaries.

What did put on a fine display was *I. 'Bazylissa'*, (Lech Komarnicki, R. 2008) a species cross, with a leisurely flowering period to allow all the flowers a good show of their blended shades of purple. When this becomes more widely known and grown I hope it will be a real Dykes contender.

Sadly since Anne wrote this article Lech has died. Anne's photograph of I. 'Bazylissa' is on page 11. There is a tribute to Lech written by his son and after that my tribute to him about his iris work.

My Father Lech

Forgive me that I will not write much about irises. My knowledge is insufficient and these few words below will explain, at least in part, why that is so. You, Iris Lovers, know much more of my Father as an iris hybridiser than I do. But I would like to say a few words of a man as I knew Him.

When I was young, I heard a Japanese story about Sensei who achieved perfection in his art. He passed on his knowledge to the new generation of apprentices and then handed his academy over to his best student. He took his pilgrim's stick and bag and vanished into the horizon. He was searching for a new master and began to study a completely new area from scratch, eventually achieving mastery status again. I always recall this story when I think of my Father.

It is probably not known, that Lech was an actor and stage director. As an actor he performed in all the major theatres in Poland and he ended his career as a member of National Theatre in Warsaw. His stentorian bass voice (an F two and a half octaves below middle C was his mid-range pitch) was frequently heard on Polish Radio and one of the broadcasts was awarded with Prix Italia – highest award for a radio programme. It was about two Nürnberg masters: Veit Stoss and Johann Pachelbel, and in the grand finale the famous Pachelbel Canon was used as a background to the Konstanty Ildefons Gaczyński's poem about Stoss. The director told my Father that they got it on tape and that he is going to edit it, so the poem's verses will match the music phrases. "That will not do. The result will be disappointing", said Lech. "Just play the music in my earphones and I will read the poem to the music", and he did so. The effect was incredible; you would never tell that those two works of art were written as unrelated pieces 250 years apart.

As a stage director he staged plays from Molière to Oscar Wilde and Friedrich Dürrenmatt. He was also known as opera director and worked with the best Polish conductors (Wisocki, Krenz, Michniewski) and singers (Betley, Ochman, Hiolski). When he was asked to stage Moniuszko's - 'The Haunted Manor' - in Germany, he learned German in three months. Two years later he learned Spanish to be able to work with local artists of Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, where he directed 'King Roger' by Karol Szymanowski. The production is still famous and remembered, and after more than 30 years from the performances I am still asked by opera aficionados, if I have any recording of it. No, I do not.

After the premiere, the members of Teatro Colón Choir gave Lech a gift – a very beautifully edited copy of Martín Fierro, Argentinean national poem by José Hernández. One of the managers was present when the

representatives of the ensemble gave that gift to my Father. The manager approached and asked my Father gently if he realised just what had happened. “Well, it was a very nice gesture”, answered Lech. “That is what I was supposed to hear”, said the manager. “You have no idea. You may be pleased to learn, then, that you are the first stage director for 20 or 30 years to have received that gift from the Choir.”

Lech never missed the occasion when he spotted it – in Buenos Aires he noticed a young boy, a student of Teatro Colón’s Advanced Arts Institute, who was practising *grands battements*, to him they were as easy as chewing gum. “How many of them can you perform uninterrupted?” asked Lech. “As many as you wish, sir”, answered the boy. In the finale of the opera Lech gave the young dancer his first solo on the stage.

The name of the boy was Julio Bocca*.

And then, all of a sudden, at the age of a mere 55 (an experienced male actor at that age usually has his best 15 years ahead of him), Lech dropped the theatre, the opera, the radio. He just left the building and never looked back.

He began to plant irises.

Irises were his life-long fascination. Every May he would make visits to the Botanic Garden in Warsaw to see the bloom. Sometimes he took me with him and I remember that as a boy I was surprised how much he knew about the flowers that were in fact non-present in our home. But then my Mother got a garden plot, or to be more precise, an allotment rented from her employer. It was 10 by 10 metres in size and my Mum wanted to grow some carrots and so on, but Dad asked for a small bed for irises. And so he planted some.

The further story is like an old joke I read in one of the iris magazines: the herbs were first to be dropped in favour of colourful flowers, then carrots and peas. Tomatoes stood bravely for a season. Then it was decided that nobody really liked the grass. The collection grew every year and Father was allowed to convert all grass strips in the plot to his own iris beds – the full bloom looked much nicer than grass and it took less effort at the end of the season. When the plants started to outgrow the spot, they were handed over to other gardeners. But even that was not enough. 20 years ago Lech bought the property and moved there.

Here he had enough time and land to start hybridising irises. It took a lot of patience and strength before getting the results. At first he concentrated on TBs, if that is the name. You know that better than I do that tall bearded irises do not grow well in Central Europe. They were developed in US and had no immunity to the various diseases that local species are not vulnerable to. Before Lech became noted for his hybrids, he became an expert in the area of plant diseases. And it was his expert opinion that tall bearded irises have no

future in his garden as there is no way to prevent the diseases. Only a few TBs are left in the garden, the few that are equipped with natural immunity. Lech's attention turned to the other kinds of the vast family that was more suited to the climate. Once he made that decision, it was only a matter of time before there would be results.

He was fascinated with tetraploids, as a gate to the crossings that would not be possible without it. The fridge was full of strange containers with something organic in – it looked like a creepy sci-fi movie. For safety, the containers were adorned with skulls and crossbones drawn by Lech, one must admit, not without talent.

It was at the turn of the century that Lech, thinking of the possibilities, came up with the idea of developing new species of irises. The possibility was that two tetraploids would be crossed and then the resulting plants would be crossed further to obtain homogenous new species.

Frankly, I crossed my fingers for this project to fail. At that time I was searching for scientific methods that I applied to music and that resulted with a complete theory of sonata form that finally worked. Also, it should be noted, that as a student I took part (as a simple field worker) in the project of developing a fertile Triticale. I knew how important it was to have proper preparation of the bed and maintain a strict register of crosses.

Thus, knowing something about the methodology I was terrified to find out that the signs on the plot were readable only to my Father and that the plants were planted too close to each other resulting in rhizomes connecting to each other. The plan of the experimental field Dad drew was readable only to Him and the notes he took were written in the language of Klingons with notation system unknown in this Galaxy. I had to tell my Father the truth: even if he would achieve the goal, it would be of no scientific value whatsoever. The plant would be unsupported with valuable data and thus no one would be able to repeat the experiment to confirm the process was correct. It would be very hard to Dad, it would be very hard to me, and I really disliked the thought that all of the effort would end being unrecognised. Fortunately, Mother Nature had an ace up her sleeve. Everything went fine and the crosses were apparently successful – the ovaries grew, but there were no seeds inside.

This fable ends well and with a moral. For a true and devoted hybridiser, as my Father became through the years, it was not a failure. It was the experience. He became more than ever aware of which crosses are possible and which are not. He wrote extensively about it, and due to the kind help of Mrs. Anne Blanco White some of his writings are available to English-speaking readers. Concentrating on what was possible and practical, he achieved a lot, his crosses are now growing in many gardens worldwide and were awarded with the Bee Warburton Medal.

But the iris hybridiser never walks alone. When Dad received the Medal, he smiled gently and said “It would never have been possible without Tomas”. That was so typical of Lech, this simple, modest and straightforward recognition of the achievements of others. Dad referred here to Dr. Tomas Tamberg, whose friendship, seeds, irises, experience and advice were a good point of departure for my Father’s efforts.

The hybridiser’s proverb is that making crosses gives one a long life, as the hybridiser will never agree to die before they have experienced the results. The proverb is true. In 2014 he made a lot of new crosses. For 2015 he planned some others – I have a little notebook entitled simply Planned Crosses, with many notes inside, in Dad’s usual unreadable cipher. But his deteriorating health did not allow Him to make any crosses this year. In May He told me he was dying. His only wish was to be able to finish his last book about irises. He worked on that to his penultimate day. The will and strength of the spirit that won over the weak body were very moving. I helped Father in those last things – writing e-mails, sending proof-readings and so on. He did it. When proofs were sent to the editors, he was ready. He passed away peacefully in his sleep two days later.

Krzysztof (Chris) Komarnicki

**Julio Bocca is one of the most renowned Argentine ballet dancers.*

Photo Lech Komarnicki



*I. ‘Muzyka Nocy’ (Lech Komarnicki, R. 2003) Sib tet.
(‘Big’s Child’ X ‘Prussian Blue’)*

Lech Komarnicki (1934 - 2015)

Lech found a fascinating desire to make unusual and some might say almost impossible interspecies and interseries crosses. He wrote an article for the BIS *Year Book* in 2013 and I quote from *Interspecies Hybrids - Fascinations and Doubts*

“The fascination is easy to understand. The cross made for the first time is a journey into the unknown. The breeder cannot predict what will be at the end - the success or disappointment. Success means that a new plant is created, and the breeder will wait with excitement to see which characteristics from which parent the new iris will inherit, in the hope it will be an addition to the beauty of the irises.”

He was never slow to admit his own failures but said of some others

“I was amazed how strong is the wishful thinking which leads some hybridisers to registering hybrids which in reality do not exist.”

I find these words so generous to forgive those who are imagining their own successes which many would just condemn as dishonest. Generous was his middle name. He gave away many plants that he had hybridised and raised, posting them all over the world at his own expense. His crosses he did when he and his wife went to the country in the summertime when I expect Warsaw would be overpoweringly hot. He suffered vandalism at his summer residence and his tools were stolen so he had more than slugs to contend with. He tirelessly tried many crosses that others had tried before, interested in their results and the descriptions. His work was thorough and he would retry anything that was suspicious before querying their results.

Lech made up the names for the crosses and he had a formula that works. It is fascinating working out the crosses, an example - a sibto color - tetra sibto sa x *I. versicolor*. It is a wide cross uniting 3 species from 3 different series. A sibto sa is a cross between an iris from *Sibiricae* x *I. setosa* and add to that an *I. versicolor* and it follows the formula. These made up names are no longer Latinised so do not require to be in italics. They are usually combining the first syllables of the pod parent with the last syllables of the pollen parent.

Although we think of his main registrations being beardless he also hybridised some TBs, IBs, SDB, and MDB. Beardless species included Siberians both tets and dips, Chrysographes, Spurias and Spec-X with the water irises and almost everything else. To read his full booklet in English, type in Interspecies and Interseries Crosses of Beardless Irises, Lech Komarnicki or www.hort.net/lists/iris-species/mar12/msg00004/hybrids_lech_komarnicki_feb.2012.pdf



This iris is growing in Anne Blanco White's garden. Lech himself lists it under the heading of sibtocolor or, it is more simply described as a spec-x on the American wiki website. Spec-x doesn't tell the full story. First it was a sibtosa and then there was added *I. versicolor* to become sibtocolor.

To show my appreciation to Lech, I would like to give anyone plants that Lech hybridised as soon as they are big enough to split. I list the irises he sent me and ask you to email or write to me with your request.

Slavonic Beauty
 Anusia
 Wodnica
 Wczesny Poranek
 Zaduma
 Dorotka
 Cristobal
 Muzyka Noc
 Stone Flower
 Królowa Noc
 Fourth Generation
 Kolejny Krok
 Światło Księżyc
 Marek Antoniusz

If anyone else would like to donate plants of Lech's for distribution please email me.

Spec-X *I. 'Bazylissa'* (Lech Komarnicki, R. 2008)



Photo Tomas Tamberg

I. 'Strong Personality' (Lech Komarnicki, R. 2005)

This was seed from the BIS seed exchange - tet. sibtosa sdlg X *I. versicolor* - what Lech called a sibtocolor.

Dr Tomas Tamberg had been a great inspiration to Lech who had repeated many of Tomas' crosses. Tomas also grows introductions by Lech: tetra-sibiricas 'Stone Flower' and 'Giant's Shoulders' and from a cross between tetra sibtosa X *I. versicolor* - 'Strong Personality'.

Tomas says,

"This has produced a hybrid of incredible vigour with blue flowers. Lech's main interest was crossing all types of beardless irises with each other, especially the parents of *I. versicolor*, tetra-versilae, *I. virginica*, tetra-virginica and tetra-sibtosa. He has registered some hybrids from these groups as well as a lot of pure Siberian varieties. We do not know to what extent his registrations have found distribution among iris lovers, but from one of his remarks we have derived, that at least in Poland there is some distribution".

Lech was admired by everyone and he will be greatly missed by his fellow iris enthusiasts.

Tony Huber (1926 - 2015)

“Tony (Anton) Huber, well known Canadian hybridizer and horticulturist, passed away on October 26, 2015, at the age of 89. He was recognized throughout the world for his great variety of irises and collaborative work with organisations of many countries. Over the last 25 years, his enthusiasm, his energy and his passion led him to register more than 80 iris cultivars. He also participated in seminars and worldwide floral expositions, and wrote numerous papers. Besides irises, many of his cultivars were introduced to commerce, namely, a variety of *Spiraea*, *Rudbeckia* and *Heucherella*. He received many awards for his horticultural research and work.”

Tony was a very generous supplier of interesting iris seeds which he kindly sent to the BIS seed pool every year. He loved experimenting by crossing different species, some of which were very wide crosses, that produced unusual new plants. Although well known for his work on carnations, spireas and irises, he was only officially recognised in 1999 when he was rewarded with the Henry-Teuscher prize for advances in horticulture in Quebec.



I. 'Step In' (Tony Huber, R. 2007) Spec-X (tet. versata)

"I started to hybridise plants as a hobby. Everything is a matter of patience," explains Tony, "You need to study thousands of seedlings, take notes, and then try and try again. It can often take more than 10 years to find a specimen that works."

"A hybridiser is never content because whatever he creates always has its shortcomings! In fact", he continues, "I'm giving nature a hand: in the natural world, plants hybridise among themselves. If they are moved, they adapt to their new environment and to their new ecosystem. That's all that I'm doing: I'm speeding up the hybridisations and I'm inventing new ones. Since these plants have more chromosomes and more genes, they have a better capacity to adapt themselves. I create plants that are going to survive current changing climates," he concludes.

"The more we create new plants, the more likely we are to get completely unexpected plant mutations. When that happens, we are so swept up in hybridising fever that we don't ever want to stop!"

"Mutation requires mutation and from that came *Spiraea* 'Gold Mound'"

The history of Tony Huber started for us when he arrived in Canada, in Quebec from Switzerland. He probably chose Quebec because it was moving to another French speaking country. He was already an accomplished horticulturist and he started work with the Perron nursery. Then nearly all the perennials produced from seed came from Holland. Tony Huber started to reproduce carnations using cuttings to keep the same colour and not producing any new hybrids at that time but soon he would be making his own crosses of a vast number of different species but not specifically irises then. He had many plant interests but suffered from flowering seasons being far too short and this curtailed what was satisfying to grow.

It was Tony Huber's work on *Iris versicolor* that contributed to it being adopted as the floral emblem of Quebec. Versicolor was a regular choice of his in his hybridising work.

He told his grandson, Dino, to always look to the future and never look back.

"There is no one else mad enough to continue my work!" he often said.

Hopefully there will be someone else who will take on the challenge to continue to make crosses with beardless iris species to produce lovely plants like *I. 'Francis Cabot'*.

**'Little Prince' (Tony Huber, R. 2002)
Spec-X (biversata) 'Bonavista' X self**



***I. 'Sauve Les Rivages'*
(Tony Huber, R. 2010)**

**('Flight of Butterflies' x *I. hookeri*) X
self**



I have included various quotations from Tony coming from different publications.

British Registrations for 2015

Beardless Irises



Sib. 'Kent Pilgrim' (Olga Wells, 2015)

A clump of 'Kent Pilgrim' Shows the very unusual red spathes.



'Wealden Delight' (Olga Wells, 2015)

Please note a new address and telephone number if you are contacting Jennifer Hewitt concerning registrations.

American Awards 2015



The Payne Medal for Japanese
irises

'Sugar Dome'
(Bob Bauer/John Coble, R.
2008)



The Founder of SIGNA Medal
Species irises

'Jin Yu'
(Jill Copeland, R. 2005)



The Randolph Perry Medal
Inter-species Hybrid, Spec-X

'Do The Math'
(Jill Copeland, R. 2007) This is
the result of a seed from
SIGNA sent by Tomas
Tamberg. He crossed *I.*
versicolor \times *laevigata* which
he then converted to
tetraploidy which I grew and
then crossed with 'Mysterious
Monique'. I have no idea what
the chromosome number is
hence the name.

The Eric Nies Medal for the winner of Spuria irises
'Missouri Morning' (O. D. Niswonger)

The Mary Swords Debaillon Medal for Louisiana irises
'Seminole Sunrise' (Harry Wolford)

The Sydney B. Mitchell Medal for Pacific Coast Native irises
'Bay Street' (Joseph Ghio)



The Morgan-Wood Medal 2015

'Humors Of Whiskey' (Marty Schafer/Jan Sacks, 2007)

‘Humors of Whiskey’ Marty Schafer

Bee Warburton used to tell me how Japanese flower breeders would look for the smallest change in flower colour, knowing that they could eventually spread that small bit of colour across the whole flower. It made a strong impression on me. With that in mind I was inspired to pursue a sibling of ‘Off She Goes’, 1998 and ‘Dawn Waltz’, 1998. It was not a beautiful flower. It was a dull lavender-pink over yellow, with irregular speckles, but it had a colour on the rim and shoulders that I hadn’t seen in a Siberian before – maybe gold, maybe orange. Two generations later, adding overlays like ‘Dandy’s Hornpipe’, 1999 and ‘Uncorked’, 2002 to the mix, came ‘Humors of Whiskey’ 2007. It surprised me that the change was not incremental, that is, building one area of colour on another painstakingly over many generations. It was more like an explosion. First there was this hint of colour, then it disappeared totally in the next generation, and then bam! in the next generation, the first brownish-orange Siberian iris. I was especially pleased that it was not speckled, but a lovely smooth colour. While it does lighten when the weather is hot, it can add to the charm to have the darker new flowers as well as the older golden flowers.

At the time it appeared as a seedling, there were no other flowers in our field of this colouring. Today it is common. We are quite close to an orange Siberian, not just orangey brown. Needless to say, I used ‘Humors of Whiskey’ in many, many crosses. Its children were interesting, but not remarkable. However those children were used extensively in breeding and have produced many wonderful irises including ‘Paprikash’ 2012, ‘Butterscotch Fizz’, 2013, ‘Cherry Fling’, 2013 and ‘Evening Comes’ 2014. It has two great grandchildren that will be introduced in 2016 that are quite bright and more easily described as orange than anything else. In addition there have been many wonderful breeders, including another great grandchild of ‘Humors of Whiskey’, S10-18-12A, which is the closest to true orange I have seen. While not introduction quality, I am again spreading its potential around the field.

Currier McEwen thought the road to orange was through classic yellow Siberians, by deepening the yellow to orange. His ‘Dreaming Orange’ was a pale yellow in which he saw hints of orange in the signal. I have also pursued this approach to orange and that is an incremental process. So far, progress is slow. Perhaps it will someday produce a purer orange colour. For now, combining pigments – pink, red, and blue-violet with yellow – is giving the most rewarding results.

Spuria - An Undervalued Iris?

Jill Whitehead

On a visit to Hidcote I saw spurias growing in the garden and it made me think how undervalued these irises are. I wonder if Lawrence Johnston planted them? It certainly is possible as I think the plants were *Iris* 'Monspur Cambridge Blue' which was registered in 1910 by Barr and Sons. Of course it could be a later planting once the National Trust took over the garden in 1948. Either way it was good to see them but why don't we see them more often. Back in 1990, our then Chairman Adrian Whittaker made a plea for us to grow more of these irises, but it seems that his plea fell on deaf ears. Even when we have had them in flower at Plant Fairs they have not been bought, whereas bearded irises are just snapped up, unless they are yellow! Equally so, if we look at British breeding, there are only a small number of spurias which have been registered in the last 15 years. In the Spuria Checklist, published by the Spuria Iris Society in 2009, I can only find nine British breeders listed in the section on Hybridisers and the majority of these were registered before 1990. Names like Amos Perry, John Fothergill, Barr and Sons and of course Sir Michael Foster but how many of their spurias are still available today? Some are, including 'Shelford Giant', raised by Sir Michael Foster and named after the village where he gardened. It certainly is very appropriately named when it can grow and flower at 7 ft. Although the height is dramatic it has a poor bud count and might not be considered to be an ideal choice for the border. It was given an AGM in 1994 and still retains that in the latest RHS listing. Spurias were trialled for the normal three-year period, the last from 2007-2009 and only two AGMs were awarded, although others are on hold awaiting availability.

An important criteria for any plant which is awarded an AGM is that it must be listed in the current Plant Finder. But what of more current British breeders, in the last 15 years? Jennifer Hewitt registered 'Cherokee Lace' in 2001. Olga Wells contributed 'Wealden Canary' (R. 2005) and 'Wealden Sunshine' (R. 2006). Berney Baughen registered 'Philippa Baughen' named after his granddaughter in 2006 and Richard Goodey registered 'Ambesten Evangeline', 'Ambesten Molly Mae' and 'Ambesten Sarah-Alice' in 2006. Finally since the Spuria list was published, Cy Bartlett registered 'Luca Chard' in 2010. So come on all you gardeners and hybridisers, let us see more spurias used and available to us all.

Perhaps at this point, I should make it clear that I am only thinking about the *Iris spuria* hybrids, I have not considered the species, the nomenclature of which seems to be a minefield. I will leave that to the botanists to discuss. As I have hinted much of the later breeding work has been done in America, but it was Sir Michael Foster who started experimenting with

spuria hybrids and worked closely with John Gilbert Baker, head of the herbarium at Kew Gardens. His first recorded spuria cross was 'Monspur' in 1882, which he wrote about in *The Garden* (1890) describing the various seedlings obtained from crossing *I. monnieri* with the pollen of small, but dark flowered *I. spuria* of unknown origin. The convention at the time was to use a piece of each species epithet to create a new name. A useful contrivance but nowadays the Horticultural Code bans this type of cultivar name as it causes endless confusion. Sir Michael's work was very important because it brought together three spuria species, although *I. monnieri* is now thought to be a hybrid from *I. orientalis* and *I. crocea*, and became a base for the development of the spuria hybrids. It must have sparked some interest because the nursery Barr & Sons then introduced several new plants and Foster later registered 'Shelford Giant' and 'Dorothy Foster' named in honour of his wife. Writing in 1914, E.A. Bowles was full of praise for these early spurias; he first saw *I. monnieri* as a flower arrangement at Canon Ellacombe's home, Bitton Vicarage. Needless to say he left with a large division to plant in his own garden and rated it highly along with *I. 'Monspur'*. In the 1940s Eric Nies from California took up the gauntlet and his first cross was *I. orientalis* with 'Monspur'. Further crosses were made and it was his enthusiasm that really started the interest in spurias and also the formation in 1952 of the Spuria Society, a section of the American Iris Society. From then on other hybridisers continued building on this base and the Eric Nies Award was instigated. Although now renamed the Eric Nies Medal it is still awarded by the AIS to spurias. This year it was awarded to Dave Niswonger for 'Missouri Morning' which is light blue with a gold blaze on the falls. Dave is no newcomer to the award as he started breeding spurias in 1967 and has won this award 15 times!

We grow a number of hybrids on our 'allotment', originally just to trial them in our heavy clay and have found that they work well. They tend to get rather neglected as our time is more likely to be given to the Siberian Collection. In fact at one point they were competing with stinging nettles. The spurias triumphed and flowered well, and I am pleased to report that they are now growing in slightly better conditions! In our experience spurias don't like to be disturbed - they are not the sort of plant you can move each year whilst you decide on your current planting likes and/or dislikes. They like good, rich fertile soil and a place to call home. In many ways the flowers look like Dutch Irises on a larger scale and the rhizomes are quite happy to be buried, in fact they usually pull themselves down. In a mild winter the foliage grows strongly and can stand at a height of some 18" at snowdrop time which can be a real bonus in a border. We find that they flower about the middle of June, the upright foliage providing a good foil for earlier flowering plants. The seed heads are also decorative so they make a useful vertical statement in a sunny or even a part-shady herbaceous border.

We do grow a number of Dave Niswonger's, including 'Cinnabar Red' and 'Chocolate Fudge'. Funny how we are drawn to certain names and anything 'chocolaty' must be a winner, well in my book anyhow! 'Chocolate Fudge' is a very apt name as it has deep brown standards and falls which are golden yellow with a dark brown rim. Of the two, I think 'Cinnabar Red' seems the stronger plant, but perhaps that is just in our soil. It is a deep mahogany red self with a yellow signal. Barry Blyth from Australia who is a well-known breeder of bearded irises has also been breeding spurias for about 20 years. We grow 'Poet's Love' and 'Twilight Mode', which is quite distinctive with very dark blue standards and navy blue falls, infused gold, it almost seems to shimmer in the sun. 'Betty Cooper' and 'Imperial Sun' were both raised by Eleanor McCown, another prolific breeder from California. She and her husband were ranchers in the Imperial Valley, hence the name. 'Belise' is something quite different, a dainty flower on a shorter plant at around 3 ft. or 90cm, one of the first to flower for us. It is a cross between *I. maritima* and *I. carthaginiensis*, raised by Marc Simonet from France. It certainly is quite distinctive with very pronounced veining on the lavender blue falls and grows well for us. 'Lenkoran' was by George Rodionenko, a blue-violet with the falls heavily veined white. 'Lenkoran' is a really good doer, with good bud count and very fertile, which is great news for the seed exchange. What I also like about spurias is the size of the seed pods - no fiddly little seed but a good size and pods which split open easily. So much more user friendly, especially for my aching thumbs!

The advice for sowing seed is that much improved germination is from two year old seed, which we find works well. However Adrian Whittaker suggested using the seed when it is 'green', literally straight from the pods when or before they split. We have tried this but still favour the older seed. You just need to be careful when planting the seedlings out; they don't like to dry out. Other than that, we certainly find them easy plants which need much less work than many other irises. Spurias are one of the few irises which have nectar and therefore bumble bees and other insects are very attracted to them. The nectar forms on the outside of the ovary at the base. We have seen wasps trying to bite into the flower to get at the nectar.

The GBI seed exchange has spuria seed for sale, so why not give it a go and report your successes back to us. Out of interest Adrian registered 'Harvest Shadows' in 1984, and I wonder if anybody still grows it, it would certainly be interesting to know. Oh, I nearly forgot, they were once called the 'butterfly' iris - very appropriately I think!



Spurias can create very beautiful tall clump effects. There are newer ones growing very much shorter being registered each year.

Above 'Betty Cooper' (Eleanor McCown, R. 1981):
(photo by Jill Whitehead)

Below 'Steely Don'
(Terry Aitken, R. 2012)
(photo by Kevin Vaughn)



Iris and the Hookers of Kew

Brian Mathew

William Jackson Hooker and Joseph Dalton Hooker were father and son, both of them directors of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in the 19th century in succession. W. J. Hooker was appointed to the post in 1841 and served until his death in 1865 when J.D. Hooker took over until 1885.

Interestingly there are two *Iris* species bearing the name of Hooker, the North American (E. Canada and N.E. USA) *I. hookeri* and the western Himalayan *I. hookeriana*. Although these two names are very similar they are not identical and so, under the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, they can be deemed not to be homonyms but both acceptable and valid specific names. The names may be similar but the plants are certainly very different.

Iris hookeri is a relative of *I. setosa* and was for a long time regarded as a variant of the latter under the name var. *canadensis*, which was described by Michael Foster in 1903. It is now treated as a distinct species with the epithet *hookeri* taking priority. The name *Iris hookeri* is usually attributed to George Penny who was an Associate of the Linnaean Society and described as a botanical cultivator in the Epsom Nursery of Messrs. Charles, James and Peter Young. He appears to have been responsible for producing a catalogue of the plants cultivated in the nursery, known as *Hortus Epsomensis* (1828). A check made on 'part 1' of this work produced no mention of the species and I have not traced a copy of part 2, if it exists. However it appears that the plants listed were not given much of a description, if any, in this catalogue so the author citation is usually presented as Penny ex Loudon. This refers to J. C. Loudon's *Hortus Britannicus* ed. 2, page 591(1832), the 'ex' meaning that Loudon took up Penny's proposed name *I. hookeri* and established it as a valid name with a description. There is a complication in that Loudon states that some of the work in his book was by George Don, although it appears that the latter's contribution was only up to page 490 so it is probably best to stay with the citation Penny ex Loudon rather than Penny ex G. Don! All this will be of little importance to the *Iris* enthusiast who can continue to enjoy this delightful small *Iris* from eastern Canada and north-eastern USA without worrying about the complexities as to who described it. But why *hookeri*?

William Hooker had studied the flora of North America and published his two-volume *Flora Boreali-Americana* in 1840, based on the collections made on Sir John Franklin's Canadian and Arctic voyages, three of which took place between 1819 and 1827. The specimens studied by Hooker for his *Flora* were collected by the scientists on the expeditions, John Richardson and Thomas Drummond. It appears that George Penny may have named the *Iris* after William Hooker because he was an acknowledged authority on the North American flora and the fact that he was the editor of *Curtis's Botanical*

Magazine at the time (from 1826 to 1865). Hooker had depicted the species (his own painting, *Bot. Mag.* Plate no. 2886, published in 1829) erroneously under the name *I. tripetala* (*I. tridentata*), a quite separate species, so the subject of the illustration needed a new name to distinguish it from *I. tripetala*.

There is one outstanding problem to which I currently have no answer: Penny is alleged to have mentioned *I. hookeri* in 1828 in Part 1 of *Flora Epsomensis* but checking through an online copy of this work reveals no mention of *Iris hookeri*. Hooker's erroneously named painting appeared a year after this image was published, so why did Penny not tell Hooker the iris in the painting was misidentified and represented an undescribed species that he would name after him. Was there a Part 2 of the catalogue of the Epsom nursery containing *I. hookeri*? If there was it may well have been published a year or so after Part 1, which would make more sense of the dates.

It looks as if there has been an assumption that the citation "Penny ex Loudon", taken from Loudon's work of 1832, dates from 1828 because of the fact that Penny is known to have compiled the Epsom catalogue: this information is given in Sweet's *The British Flower Garden* Ser. 2, Vol. 2, 1833 where Penny's *Hortus Epsomensis* appears in a list of books. Has no-one checked this catalogue before for an entry for *I. hookeri*? Of course, if anyone has a Part 2 of *Hortus Epsomensis* on their bookshelf please do get in touch!

Iris hookeriana was named and described by Foster in *The Gardeners' Chronicle* series 3, part 1: 611 (1887). A few years later it was illustrated in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, plate 7276 (1893) and this illustration has been taken as the type "specimen" of the species. The explanation for this is presented in S. I. Ali & B. Mathew, *Flora of Pakistan, Iridaceae* (2000):

Foster (as above, 1887) stated that "I owe this plant to the kindness of my friend Mr. Max Leichtlin, who obtained it from Moravian missionaries at Lahul". J. G. Baker in the text accompanying *Bot. Mag.* t. 7276. (1893) states that "The present plant was obtained from Lahul by Herr Max Leichtlin, from the Moravian missionaries. It was sent to Prof. Foster in 1884 and our drawing was made from a plant which he flowered in May 1892, the developed leaves being added in July". In the absence of any specimen that could be accepted as the Type, it is proposed that the illustration, though executed at a later date, but prepared from the original material, may be accepted as the Type.

The justifications for the species being named after Joseph Dalton Hooker are several-fold. Hooker the younger was the driving force behind the 7-volume *Flora of British India* (1875-1897); *Iris hookeriana* appears in Vol. 6 (1892). He had himself undertaken extensive exploration in the

Himalaya, he was the Director of Kew Gardens and was the editor of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* from 1865 to 1904. Both Foster and the nurseryman Max Leichtlin were close associates and in contact with Kew over botanical matters.

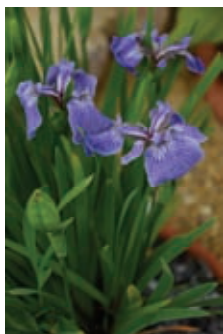
Two horticulturally worthwhile *Iris* species named after two very influential botanists.



Iris hookeriana at Saif Ul Maluk Lake above Naran, 10,500ft. Photo: John S. Ingham



Iris hookeri BM Cult Claygate



Iris hookeri

Archives, Film and Promoting the Group

Bernadette Adams

I have regretted that I've lost favourite plants and do not have a permanent record of them. These were sometimes plants that I had grown from seed and which had some pleasing variation, such as an unusual colour or perfume. Being a busy professional, it was often a case of "I'll take a photograph at the weekend", but of course the flower was past its best by then. As I moved from film to digital photography, the other "crime" was not backing up all of my digital photos. There is a particular favourite picture of *Meconopsis napaulensis* that I cannot locate anywhere. I am sad and annoyed about that loss.

These days I have two separate external drives where I back up my pictures. I hope my children think they are worth preserving when I have gone. However, next year I am embarking on a slightly different method of archiving. I am going to film my best plants, record some vital information about them, and post the edited films onto YouTube. I am reliably informed that, unless you choose to take them down, or they violate someone else's copyright, then your videos should stay up there, on the web, for posterity. YouTube is not solely for videos made by teenagers - I would suggest that you take a look at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y39NoTF6tHg> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jRvotqV2ZQ>

Unfortunately, there is a shortage of good iris videos posted on the web. Those that are there, are mainly concerned with bearded irises. It would be nice if we could have some videos posted displaying the glories of what British gardeners can produce. The Beardless Iris Group has a lot of expertise which could be spread and shared more widely.

As the Group has expressed interest in promoting beardless irises, and encouraging younger people to join the Group, I feel this could be a way forward. Video is one of the most successful strategies for marketing anything. If UK members would be interested in having their gardens videoed and posted to the web, at no cost to themselves, please contact me for further details. Of course all owners would have the final say over the content, and there would have to be scrutiny by some sort of Editorial Board before the Group's name could be associated with any videos.

I have no commercial interest in this venture, though I do have a professional video-maker at my disposal. My son has agreed to undertake this work as a personal favour to me (and he likes irises). Images of your plants and gardens will be preserved, and you will receive a copy of all the footage taken of your garden for your own personal records and usage.

If you would like to find out more about how this process would work, please email me at: drbadams11@gmail.com

Louisiana and Water Iris Collections

Mark Haslett

2015 has been an interesting year for my Louisianas, the milder weather we had earlier resulted in early bloom which made some colourful displays with Louisianas blooming beside other water loving irises.

Disappointingly, the number of blooms was greatly reduced but then it is one of our challenges which many in the States don't have where they bloom without fail year after year. Here in the UK it can be every 2 to 3 years depending on the vigour of the plant and the wonderful unpredictable UK weather. To get the conditions right with the right balance of feeding and water is not easy and changes every year.

Among the Louisianas which put on an attractive display this year were good old 'Black Gamecock' and 'My Friend Dick', both very dependable. Another was one of Bert Bailey's seedlings which has large blooms and makes a startling impact among water irises. The Louisiana collection continues to grow as I have added some more Heather Prior cultivars to the collection and hope to add some new ones from the States next year.

My breeding programme is ongoing with a number of seedlings coming through which is exciting waiting to see what the flowers will look like, my latest seedling bloom is a wild type flower and seems to have vigorous growth which I intend to grow on before registering. Seed set this year has been tricky which I think may have been down to the weather and has resulted in less seeds to play with but hopefully the seed set will be better next year. The water iris collection has been expanded and now includes some cultivars from Europe just to help add more interest to the collection. I am also growing on a large batch of seedlings of my own crosses in the hope of producing some new water iris cultivars. This will build on the work of John and Galen Carter who had the original Water Iris Collection in Devon and I have promised to keep members informed of my progress and how they are blooming here in Essex.

Some of the water irises which are really performing well for me this year have been *versicolor* like 'Rowden Gavotte' and 'Rowden Cadenza', while some *pseudacorus* have decided to take over the world and need to be restrained but others are naturally slow in habit.

At the moment I am working on a website for the Collections which will be up and running live in the coming months and will feature a gallery of many of the irises in the Collection for visitors to enjoy.

“The Special Ones”

Philip Jones

I am gradually arriving at a collection of PCIs that are special. My “special PCIs” are the result of discarding about half of what was a large number of plants grown from seed. About four or five years ago I ordered the seed from all the sources I could find. You could say that it represented everything available at the time. As I was discarding and selecting I was able to give the plants more room and so this year photographing them became a main gardening activity.



Iris 'Kinnoull'

Beautiful unnamed seedlings from seed of *Iris 'Kinnoull'*



Now in November as I look at the pictures I can consider what was so special about “the special ones.” The pictures shown today are the most obvious candidates. There are some others that are quite different and not particularly beautiful but which I feel need investigating. The most elegant flowers are those where the standards seem to have a folded formation. These were seedlings that resulted from crosses with my *Iris* ‘Kinnoull’. This is the purple flower with upright pale standards that are slightly folded. The fold is more pronounced in the yellow, the lavender, the cream and the white offspring and siblings.



More seedlings from ‘Kinnoull’.

There is nothing odd or unusual about these flowers. They simply look elegant. The shape and the colour are all-important.



There are also three plants that have a cushion-like formation. The lavender one is perhaps the best example. I am particularly pleased with the way the style branch at the centre of the flower plays a decisive part in the overall effect. It is white and the serrated edges or crest makes for an attractive lace like effect. This is a completely different shape to the folded standard ones, but it could easily be considered "the people's favourite." There is also a pinkish buff form and another one

that is different because it has four petals, and four sepals and four styles.



There is one plant that I consider special even though - as they say - it is nothing special to look at. What is special is that it had a flower bud showing on July 22. I have taken seed from it this year. Another plant I took seed from can be seen in the photo. It is the one with two white flowers that stand proud of the leaves. For some people this feature alone would merit a mark of approval as the all-important feature. (A few seeds will be available from this and the July flowering plant in the seed list.)

There are some irises I selected which seemed odd rather than attractive. In five plants the flowers were very narrow with striped petals and sepals in pink and lavender. One flower is a little wider than the others and seems to me particularly attractive. But the whole seems to have possibilities. They have a special style that could be isolated and given time they might come to be recognised as a “special one.”

The flowers of these plants also have a wider formation than most of the other PCIs. That is to say the standards are not particularly upright. The impression is more horizontal than vertical. This has been noted as typical of *I. tenuissima* and *I. purdyi* and also *I. hartwegi* subsp. *pinetorum* and *I. tenax* subsp. *klamathensis*. There is a nice description of this in Victor A. Cohen's *A Guide to the Pacific Coast Hybrid*. p33. He was

“able to see *I. purdyi* in a fairly pure and true state. Quite a number of plants were in flower on a hillside, growing in considerable shade. The flowers were rather pale, at best a rich cream colour, but they were all very large and flat, somewhat reminiscent of some large flowered *Clematis* hybrids.”

This is clearly something for the future. We leave you with a couple of photographs of two of the species – *I. purdyi* and *I. tenuissima*. I have some seedlings of *I. chrysopylla* that are also horizontally inclined. Over the Christmas period I will be searching through various seed lists in order to feed what could be described as a growing fixation.



Photographs have been kindly supplied by the Society for the Pacific Coast Native Iris. Our thanks to them and to Kenneth Walker who took the photos.

Beardless Irises ***A Plant for Every Garden Situation***

Kevin C. Vaughn

ISBN: 978-0-7643-4906-5

A new book to review on *Irises* is a very exciting thought.

This book is like a good novel that once you start you don't want to put it down, but then as you read onwards, you don't want it to come to an end either. The author has, he said, pitched it to appeal to everyone, the iris enthusiast or the seasoned gardener. There is plenty of fascinating knowledge to get out of this book. I feel it is at my level. Could that apply to everyone who reads it? Is that the secret of it? It makes you feel secure in your own knowledge and yet every time you read something else you didn't know, and you can find something readily, you understand it and think, I must remember that or, I must make sure I do that next year.

He talks about the early English bee pod hybridisers who started around the 1900s producing nice new cultivars until they realised they could produce more exciting new plants by doing the selective pollinating themselves and now, each year, new plants arrive being totally changed from their ancestors. Who can deny what tantalising improvements there have been in colour, style and sophistication bred mainly by American hybridists. History is included in each chapter to enhance the "where we have come from" to the "where we hope to go". Kevin is himself a very important hybridiser of great merit who has produced an enormous number of delightful seedlings.



A breakthrough in spuria breeding. Kevin's own hybrid seedling with frilly petals in both standards and falls. It is causing a real stir at the moment; the iris world full of admiration but he is quick to give praise to other hybridists naming them and their cultivars.

I have included only two of his seedlings to demonstrate his scientific skill in choosing good parents and his artistic skill in selecting good plants. For all who want more there is the science of genetics, chromosome counts, diploids and tetraploids all told in down to earth language rather than anything too scientific to confuse.

Each group has its own chapter and each is just as important as the other. It is satisfying to read as much enthusiasm from the author for irises like *I. versicolor* as *I. ensata*. Kevin has hybridised cultivars of all the species at some time but he is first to admit his failed crosses when he had hoped for something special; it is reassuring for all would-be hybridists to learn that not every cross is successful, but never to give up. The chapter on hybridising is excellent and tells it all. Repeat bloom and longer flowering cultivars are continually used in crosses and successful results would help to publicise all irises and make them more attractive for many to grow. Petals and multipetals are becoming easily achievable, mainly in Siberians and Japanese, but breeders are getting closer to this goal in all the species. However there is still plenty of room for newcomers to add their new trends. Look out for examples of breeding lines.

A seedling from John Taylor, a PCNI (PCI). What a show stopper it would be in a large clump.



“A plant for every situation” is the boast and it certainly provides all of those but when you don’t have such a wonderful climate or lovely weather what we need are all the solutions to our variety of problems and this book is essential to trawl through until we have the answers. I don’t think there is one group of species that the author hasn’t grown himself and registered seedlings of, so he has the experience to talk about them all. Having lived in many different parts of America with lots of challenging climatic conditions he can speak with authority on what grows and what doesn’t.

At the end of each chapter there is a list with descriptions of a few old favourite irises and some of the new ones that have still to become must haves. There is also a list of all the reference books and articles that Kevin has used in the chapter, researching the facts, so he speaks with the conviction of many.

To say that this book inspires is an understatement. It makes you want to get out, plant and grow irises immediately; to decide on good pod and pollen parents and what to cross; and to pollinate and produce new cultivars from different species.

This book captures that elusive quality which makes compelling reading.



Kevin's pure white *I. versicolor* seedling.

Throughout this Review there are more photo illustrations that can be admired in the book, e.g. inside cover both at the beginning and end. Another example in Jill's article on Spurias, photo Kevin Vaughn.

Amazon is the easiest source to buy this book at just under £20.00.

Brita Carson

Siberian Doughnuts?

Alun Whitehead

The common advice for Siberian Irises is to split them when a hole appears in the middle of the clump and they start taking on the shape of a “doughnut”. This advice has been offered many times, but it was only whilst weeding that I started to think *why?* There is an older bed in the field ready for replanting and, in two of the clumps, the central rhizomes by growing on top of the previous rhizomes had left themselves high and dry. Left to their own devices, they would naturally wither and die, and a central space in the clump would result. The outer rhizomes were growing well in the soil without a problem.

What immediately sprang to my mind was the advice for *I. ensata*; to plant deeply as there is a tendency for future rhizomes to grow on top of the previous. Why not apply the same logic to Siberians? Looking back there are a couple of pieces of anecdotal evidence in support of this. Firstly, I received some plants from a cold continental climate and the planting advice was to plant the rhizomes deep to protect them from the extreme cold (which we in the UK don't usually experience). Always ready to experiment, I tried this with several “clumpettes” and they took an extra few weeks to emerge, much to my concern, but the clumps have been healthy ever since with no sign of a central void. Secondly, I transplanted a couple of small divisions into the Collection beds and they were struggling with uncharacteristic weak short growth. It is easy to blame the cultivar, but one was ‘Shakers Prayer’ which is a vigorous grower elsewhere. Was it virus – a term often applied to strange leaf growth? I replanted both pieces deeper in refreshed soil, and both are getting back to their normal growth.

The actual depth used will depend on your growing conditions. In the experiment the pieces were planted about 12.5cm/5ins below soil level. Our subsoil is generally about 30cm/12ins down and when transplanting mature clumps, allowing for say a 20cm/8ins root ball, placing the crown 7.5cm/3ins below soil level is probably the maximum possible. On a more friable soil it would seem feasible to plant deeper. If you have a sole rhizome or small piece you might be kinder and plant in a shallow depression and let nature or yourself back fill gradually over time.

Not all clumps show the doughnut effect. Is it perhaps that they take longer to reach that stage? However, the effect will only be produced where a rhizome cannot change its direction of growth 180° and re-

colonise the middle. Likewise, if the exposed rhizomes had the ability to shoot from buds lower down below the soil level, the void would not occur. Is the exhausted soil in the centre another factor?

A garden is a strange environment for a plant. Nature relies on the survival of the fittest, with seed scattered and siblings taking over around and replacing their parents. In the garden, it often feels as if we are striving for the survival of the weakest. If we were talking about *ensatas*, then nature has two mechanisms for aiding the plants. Firstly flooding or water flow refreshes the soil. Think of the extreme case of the Nile Valley which floods each year bringing with it fertility. *I. sibirica* also tends to grow along water courses and may similarly benefit. Secondly, in the case of *I. ensata*, seed is very light and is blown over a wider range than the heavier Siberian seed. To some extent, we as gardeners, provide similar functions by selecting seedlings and planting in new beds. We usually top-dress the Collection beds each year providing fresh nutrients – the equivalent of nature's flood. However, this is probably self-imposed labour. In nature, the annual dying down of the herbaceous vegetation would provide its own mulch. Just think of the build up of leaf litter in a wood; to a lesser degree this would happen in a garden if left to its own devices. Perhaps being less scrupulous in the winter clean-up might be beneficial – but perhaps I'll let someone else experiment with that!

I was interested in Brita's article on the plague of leatherjackets (NL 10) and Terry Aitken's on strange behaviour in *ensatas* (NL 11). We also had numerous leatherjackets enjoying the flower beds due to the wet previous winter. It was almost a good excuse to stop weeding. Let's face it, if you take all the weeds away, there are only the irises left to feed on! Dandelions were a favourite food source; pulling a root would often reveal several of the blighters and squashing them produced such a spray that a hair wash was needed. I never did get the hang of pointing them in the right direction. Hoeing does keep the soil pests down, but hoeing clay during very wet spells becomes impossible. Is there a connection with struggling Siberians? From reading Edwin Furnival's article (*BIS Year Book* 2009), reds were difficult for him to keep in wetter Lancashire and I have heard a similar comment from wet Cumbria. Whilst this may be down to botrytis could it be also due to an increase in the moisture loving pests? For us it is very difficult to keep some reds and whites happy – 'Sultans Ruby' and 'Anniversary' for instance. They tend to peter out in the beds, but grow well in pots. Is it just that the pots have an insecticide? I have only come across Terry's abnormal growth in an *ensata* once, as far as I remember.

Investigating a dead clump of 'Pink Frost', it had left a large wandering network of dead rhizomes going all over the place. However, I can think of

several Siberians which have grown in this fashion, sending out rhizomes further afield in a loose network, but not so in pots. This time it made me think of a couple of bearded irises where feeble elongated rhizomes grew one after the other in a straight line. On cutting them open with a knife, there was a small circle of rot, or was it a boring insect trail, which ran the length near the top of the rhizome. Could something similar be happening with the Siberians? I will have to wait until the next time to investigate further. The vast majority of Siberian irises grow with little bother – as always, it is the exceptions which catch our attention and interest.

Finally, should I have changed the title? The classic doughnut is a torus and it is only its annulus cross-section that it shares with some mature Siberian clumps. However, haven't you noticed how food and plants go well together? *Iris* 'Chocolate Fudge' and *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding' – so I still feel comfortable with the title. Jill once pointed out to an audience, that I had mentioned food four times in the first five minutes on a talk about Shropshire gardens, so alas there is a track record.

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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.

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Back cover: Seedling from *I. 'Kinnoull'* (Philip Jones)

Inside back cover: above spuria 'Adriatic Memories' (Kevin Vaughn, R. 2009) below: spuria 'Angel's Smile' (Kevin Vaughn, 2007). See Review page 34



