



RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

Executive Director's Report

Steve Hootman, Executive Director/Curator

In my nineteen years in the Pacific Northwest and at the RSBG, I have never seen a spring like the one that we are now experiencing. The mere fact that I can still say “experiencing spring” on May 18 as I write this report, is itself quite strange since normally, most of the big floral displays of rhododendrons (*augustinii*, *williamsianum* and even *yakushimanum*) have finished by this late date and it is officially “summer” in the garden, with lots of new growth and the appearance of woodland perennials such as ferns and hostas. This year, heading into late May, we still have bright red flowers on *R. barbatum* (typically finished by mid-March) and the *yakushimanum* floral buds have yet to even show signs of opening. *Rhododendron augustinii*, typically flowering in mid-April, did not even have the decency to be in full blossom for our big Mother’s Day weekend event and plant sale. In addition to our well below average temperatures, nearly constant rain throughout the spring has inhibited activities in the garden such as planting and we are now racing to get plants in the ground before our long, dry Mediterranean summer kicks in. In addition to our own garden observations, many long-time residents and gardeners in this region have commented not only on the lengthy delay of spring, but the paucity of flower buds on our rhododendrons and other plants. I think this is probably due primarily to the cool, moist growing conditions we experienced last May and into

summer. One very positive aspect of this not particularly floriferous spring is that, following this “year of rest,” next year’s flower display should be spectacular!

The very cool and wet spring we have been ex-

periencing has greatly impacted our attendance, both in daily gate and gift shop receipts and at our various spring fund-raising events such as the Spring Plant Sale and the previously mentioned Mother’s Day Event. We have a fully stocked Gift Shop and Plant Sales Pavilion awaiting the customers we are expecting once the weather improves a bit. Speaking of the Plant Sales Pavilion, this year we were finally able to hire an intern, Laurie Krone, to maintain this area and its plants and to work weekends to answer questions and help people select the items they are looking for. This has been of great assistance since the bulk of our visitors appear on the weekends and the vast majority of them know very little about all of the exciting things we have for sale.

In addition, we have hired Heather Ford as our Horticultural Intern, assisting both in the garden and in the nursery. Heather has been a great help already and we are hoping to keep her on as long as possible. Both interns come to us through the Horticulture and Landscape Architecture program at the nearby South Seattle Community College.

Dennis, Atsuko and I have just returned from a marvel-

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Steve Hootman and Atsuko Gibson at the ARS convention.

SPECIES PROFILE

Rhododendron beanianum Cowan 1938 & *R. piercei* Davidian 1976

Steve Hootman

For early color in the garden one would be hard-pressed to find a finer shrub than *Rhododendron beanianum* or its close relative *R. piercei*. Both species provide a bounty of bell-shaped flowers in the earliest of spring, occasionally blooming as early as late February but generally March and into early April in the RSBG. The bright blossoms range in color from crimson or scarlet to carmine and even pink. In addition, both species possess attractive leaves with a deeply rugose upper surface and a dense reddish-brown indumentum coating the lower. This combination of excellent ornamental foliage and early-season brightly colored flowers provides an excellent example of why many people prefer species to hybrid rhododendrons.

I remember my very first visit to the RSBG back in February of 1992 when I observed *Rhododendron piercei* for the first time. Having just moved from the Washington D.C. area I was surprised to find it and many other species in full flower. The scarlet blossoms seemed to glow in the misty gloom, a potent reminder that true spring would be arriving soon. The sheer diversity of winter blossoms displayed with such simple beauty in the RSBG collection confirmed that I had made the right choice in moving to the Pacific Northwest.

Rhododendron beanianum was first introduced to the west by Frank Kingdon Ward who found it in 1926 while exploring the remote and rugged mountains of Upper Burma near the border with NE India (his numbers 6805 & 6829). This species has only rarely been collected in the wild and is known from only the area mentioned above and adjacent Arunachal Pradesh, India. It occurs from 9,000 to 11,000 feet in bamboo thickets, forest openings and in steep rocky ravines.



R. beanianum ac74-115_sl2787.

Rhododendron piercei was long known as *R. beanianum* var. *compactum*, illustrating how closely related the two taxa are. It was also first introduced into cultivation (1933) by Frank Kingdon Ward (KW#11040). He found it growing between 12,000 and 13,000 feet on the Dri La in SE Tibet near the border with NE India, not far from where *R. beanianum* was collected. Until very recently, this was the only collection of this seemingly rare species.

Kenneth Cox of Glendoick Nurseries, Scotland, relocated this “species” while exploring the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh in 2000. Ken and I, along with several other expedition members, found another population in another location of Arunachal Pradesh in 2005. There was some debate as to the identity of the plants in this region—were they *beanianum* or *piercei*? They displayed characteristics of both species, with some plants looking very similar to what we grow as *beanianum* and some being closer to *piercei*. Weeks later, back at the RSBG, a close look at the indumentum under the scope revealed an obviously bistrate indumentum which would point (Continued on next page.)

Executive Director’s Report continued from page 1.

ous several days in Vancouver, Washington, where we attended the annual convention of the American Rhododendron Society. The convention was very well attended with close to 450 people enjoying the lectures, tours and plant sale. Two Gold Medals were bestowed very deservedly at the Saturday evening banquet, one to Kathy Van Veen and the other to our very own June Sinclair. Congratulations to you both!

With an almost completely new staff some adjustments had to be made over the last couple of years and a few small things may have “fallen by the wayside”—at least temporarily. Our new assemblage of people, however, has made great strides in many areas of the organization. We finally have a new logo

and a new map of the garden; we are once again producing seasonally adjusted “Self-guided Tour” pamphlets for the casual visitor; we are revamping the website and the newsletter; we are improving and reformatting all of our handouts, instructions and forms; and we are finally getting the office itself, both physically and managerially, organized. With the continued support of our fantastic volunteers, in the office, garden and nursery, we are making great progress in growing our organization into the professionally managed and world-respected institution worthy of your support.

We hope to hear from you and have a great summer.

to *piercei* although as is typical in finding these new populations, new questions have been raised about this species complex and the differentiation between the two is not as clear as it once appeared to be. The taxon in question was found growing on a high ridge of the Indian Himalaya amongst a rich assortment of trees and shrubs including the *Rhododendron* species—*campylocarpum* ssp. *caloxanthum*, *exasperatum*, *cinnabarinum* “Purpurellum Group” (may be a new species), *lepidotum*, *calostrotum* ssp. *riparium*, *sanguineum* (with which it formed hybrids), *mekongense* and *charitopes* ssp. *tsangpoense*.

These two species are members of the Haematodes Alliance within the large Subsection Neriiflora. Closely related species include *catacosmum*, *coelicum*, *haematodes*, *haematodes* ssp. *chaetomallum* and *pocophorum*. The members of this alliance are some of the larger members of the subsection and most tend to be a bit trickier in cultivation than some of the more commonly cultivated *Rhododendron* species. Being plants primarily of rocky, subalpine slopes in a very wet, summer monsoon environment at high altitudes, the members of this alliance demand excellent drainage in a cool, yet bright situation. Fortunately, the two species under discussion are much less fastidious as to their cultural requirements, performing admirably if provided with drainage and some light shade during the hottest part of the day.

Although very similar in general appearance, the two species are easily distinguished from one another in several features. *R. beanianum* is distinctively bristly (more or less) on the younger stems and petioles (leaf stems) with an indumentum composed of only one layer of hairs on the lower surface of the leaves. In contrast, *R. piercei* is not bristly and has a bistrate (two-layered) indumentum on the lower surface of the leaves. In addition, the upper surface of the leaves on the latter species is smoother and less rugose than is typical on the former. Also, as the older name for *R. piercei* would suggest, this species is generally a more compact and much wider spreading shrub whereas *R. beanianum* tends to be a more upright or rounded shrub in cultivation.

Both species are long-lived, evergreen shrubs that may reach up to eight or nine feet in height but are generally much smaller in cultivation. The branchlets of *R. beanianum* are glandular and bristly, those of *R. piercei* tomentose. The leaves of both species are elliptic to ovate or obovate in shape and up to four inches in length. The leaves of *R. beanianum* are dark green and deeply rugulose (“puckered” with impressed veins) on the upper surface, covered with a thick, dark red-brown indumentum on the lower. The leaves of *R. piercei* are much shinier and slightly less rugulose on the upper surface with a thick and wooly, pale buff-brown indumentum on the lower. The flowers of both species are tubular-campanulate in shape (like a narrow bell) and up to 1.5 inches long. *R. beanianum* has 6 to 10 crimson to scarlet or pink flowers per inflorescence while *R. piercei*

has 6 to 8 crimson flowers per inflorescence. Both species have a relatively small calyx (around one quarter of an inch) and a tomentose ovary.

For best results in the garden, I would recommend planting these species in a raised bed (unless you have exceptionally well-drained soil throughout the year). A coarse organic mix with gravel or coarse sharp sand would be ideal with an additional coarse organic mulch applied as needed. Regular watering is essential throughout the growing season as these plants receive copious amounts of precipitation during this period in their wild habitats. Little supplementary fertilizer should be necessary if organic mulches are maintained. Both species are rated as hardy to + 5°F. and from our own experience at the RSBG, I would have to say that is a fair approximation. Some damage was sustained when we reached + 4°F. in 1990 but no loss of life occurred and the plants are now quite large. Both species come into flower just as spring begins to awaken, typically around March here in the RSBG.

Rhododendron beanianum was named for Mr. W. J. Bean, the former curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in England. Mr. Bean was a world-renowned expert on woody plants (1863-1947). A form of this species with cardinal red flowers (from KW#6805) received an Award of Merit when exhibited by Col. Lord Digby of Minterne, Dorset in 1953. *Rhododendron piercei* was named for Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence J. Pierce of Seattle, Washington, well-known *Rhododendron* collectors and long-time members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. Mr. Pierce is also a Past President of the RSF.

ACCESSIONS IN THE RSF COLLECTION:

R. beanianum

- 1973/027 Greig – Dark red flowers.
- 1974/115 Robbins – Carmine-rose or “translucent watermelon” flowers.
- 1975/265 Wood – Red flowers.
- 1976/005 Caperci – Red flowers.
- 1977/683 Horlick – Very deep red-brown, bristly stems and indumentum.
- 1992/121 Bodnant:Berg – Dark pink flowers.

R. piercei

- 1965/247 Stronachullin
- 1974/030 Robbins
- 1976/210 RBGE
- 1999/362 KW#11040:Glendoick
(all with bright scarlet-red flowers)

NOTE: Plants grown from seed collected in the wild under the number APA#060 will be accessioned into the collection this year for preservation and evaluation.

REFERENCES:

- Chamberlain, D.F. 1982. “A Revision of *Rhododendron*. II. Subgenus *Hymenanthes*.” Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Vol. 39(2): pgs. 386-387.
- Cox, Peter A. & Cox, Kenneth N.E. 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species*. Glendoick Publishing, Perth, Scotland. pgs. 108-112.
- Davidian, H.H. 1992. *The Rhododendron Species*. Vol. III. Timber Press, Portland, OR. pgs. 79-91.
- Hootman, S.E. – Unpublished Field Notes 2005
- Rhododendron Species Foundation: Records – 1964 to present.

From the Nursery

Dennis Bottemiller, Nursery Manager/Propagator

Recently, I was fortunate enough to attend the International Convention of the ARS in Vancouver, Washington, with many friends from around the world. I always enjoy these events but this one seemed especially good. The highlight for me was touring all the gardens. All but one out of the six that I went to were new to me and a couple of them I had been meaning to see for a number of years. It is great fun to look at what accomplished gardeners do with their space and the plants they lustily acquire. Several times I found myself nearly running to see what Steve or Hartwig had found and the resulting discussion/argument was always interesting, some resolved, some never will be. I love being around people who are passionate about plants and gardening. The most satisfying thing for me was to see so many unusual plants being grown and that many of them had been grown in specialty nurseries like ours. I sometimes lose sight of the fact that once a plant leaves my care that it takes on new and greater meaning for the gardener who grows it in that special spot. Seeing that same plant every day in the nursery I often think of it as just part of the crop and it is good for me to get out and re-gain some garden perspective.



Tim and Kate Culbertson.

Granted, I do work in an exceptional garden and see all the things we grow in their mature state, but it is very different seeing our plants in someone else's garden. So, as we move into summer and begin to assemble all the offerings of our fall catalog I will imagine how our plants will look in your garden!

This past March we had a visit from Tim and Kate Culbertson from the Bay Area in California. They made the trip to RSBG to collect herbarium specimens of rhododendrons in cultivation for the U.S. National Arboretum Herbarium in Washington D.C. From Tim: "The U.S. National Arboretum Herbarium is a permanent reference collection of dried plant specimens necessary to taxonomic studies relating to agriculture, medicine, science, and education; fields where documentation and correct identification of plants is essential. This collection serves as a descriptive index for the identification and verification of plants, including material from germplasm sent to this country by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) plant explorers and others who have scoured the world in search of new and better plants. The herbarium is the official depository for documented specimens of USDA plant introductions, including food, drug, forage, industrial and forest plants. This herbarium is one of a few in the world with a primary mission of supporting taxonomic research and identification of cultivated plants including cultivars, hybrids and other elite plant materials of use to man."

According to Tim, rhododendrons are woefully under-represented in the national herbarium and he and Kate made an impressive effort toward improving it. Of course, nearly the entire time they were collecting flowers and foliage it was raining, making their task of drying them quite challenging. They took (Continued on next page.)

★ SPEND AN EVENING ★

under the
TUSCAN
Moon

AUGUST 12TH, 2011

5:30 TO 8:30 P.M.
ITALIAN DINNER
AUCTION
DOOR PRIZES

RSBG members and their guests are invited to join staff and board members for a memorable evening dining outdoors with friends under a full moon on a beautiful summer evening ... ah, the memories in the making!

MORE INFO: RHODYGARDEN.ORG

TICKETS REQUIRED IN ADVANCE

the rain in stride and managed to collect over 200 specimens to be pressed, dried and labeled for the National Herbarium. Thank you both for your work and hopefully you can return to collect more in better weather!

One more news item from the nursery: Our new summer intern, Heather Ford, is fabulous! She began a few weeks prior to this writing and is a great addition to our workforce. She comes to us as a graduate of South Seattle Community College Horticulture program and is a pleasure to be around—hard working, too. If you happen to be at the garden or nursery this summer be sure to find her and thank her for all the fine work she is doing.

Thanks Heather! Thanks again also to all of our volunteers who really keep us going, you know who you are!

From the Gift Shop

Cathi DuBose, Gift Shop Manager

“Do you have any gift items with ‘Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden’ or your logo on them?” The public has been asking for branded merchandise, and now I can happily report that we will be moving forward with developing a branding program to be sold at the Gift Shop.

We now have a new company logo that we can have printed on everything from our own candy bar, t-shirts, hats, pens and coffee mugs, to name a few. I promise to have something for everyone.

If you have any special merchandise requests, please drop by and share your thoughts with me.

Our spring merchandise is selling very well. The hot gift has been the garden glass pieces and our new line of candles from Trapp Private Garden. The light branches continue to be a customer favorite and our terrariums always get a second look.

Tours

It's not too late to schedule your group tour through the gardens. We have hosted a variety of clubs and organizations already this year. Call the Gift Shop at 253-661-9377 to schedule your tour today.

**Gift Shop Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. 6 days per week.
Closed Mondays**



Garden glass at the Gift Shop.

From the Library

RSF Garden Lovers' Book Sale - Summer 2011

Jean Cummins, RSBG Volunteer Librarian

Our Gift Shop now has gently used outstanding gardening books available for purchase. These treasures are duplicates from the RSF library.

The Rothschild Rhododendrons, a Record of the Gardens at Exbury, by Phillips and Barber, traces the origins and development of this famous garden, along with a descriptive register of its broad-leaved rhododendrons, deciduous and evergreen azaleas. There are 67 full-page beautiful color photographs.

Rhododendrons and Azaleas, Their Origins, Cultivation and Development, by Clement Gray Bowers, is a horticultural classic, the most comprehensive general work on all aspects of the culture of these magnificent flowering plants.

Azaleas, by Fred Galle, is an exhaustive account of the species and cultivars, with their culture, history, breeding lines, pests and diseases, along with landscaping, companion plants, and the use of azaleas in bonsai.

Rhododendron Hybrids, a Guide to Their Origins, by Salley and Greer, gives the descriptive “pedigrees” of over 4,000 named hybrids and selected forms of species, with color photos, parentage, hybridizer and date of the cross.

Dwarf Rhododendrons, by Peter Cox, Scottish nursery director, is a comprehensive guide to dwarf species and hybrids, covering every aspect of their cultivation and propagation, along with color plates and line drawings.

Rhododendrons in America, by Ted Van Veen, beautifully illustrated, describes species and hybrids, along with their culture—soil, temperature, moisture, feeding, preventing problems, and landscaping factors.

Exotica, Pictorial Cyclopaedia of Exotic Plants from Tropical and Near-tropical Regions, by Alfred Graf, has 12,000 illustrations, plant descriptions, origins, climate, geography, and a guide to care of plants indoors—1833 pages.



Email Newsletter

Please help us stretch our dollars further! Request to receive your newsletter by email and save the RSF the cost of printing and mailing. This is especially valuable if you are outside the USA. Just email Katie@RhodyGarden.org and ask to receive your newsletter electronically. Thanks for helping us make every dollar count.

CONTRIBUTORS - THANK YOU!

Contributions

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In Memoriam

ARS Tacoma Chapter In Memory of
Bill Brackman
ARS Tacoma Chapter In Memory of
Fran Rutherford
Brian & Cathy Keim In memory of
Brian Keim
ARS Connecticut Chapter In honor of
Richard Flavell

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Tammy Anderson	Helen Garrett	William Parson
Susan Bates	Teri Hickel	Stan and Rosemarie Ratcliff
Kelly and Bryan Bloss	Margot Hightower	Charles E. Sadler
Ronald Brightman,	Susan Hiles	Stefan Salomonsson
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Vickie Edwards	Dawn Mehrer	Delia Van Brunt
Ian E. Efford	Philip Mitchell	Patricia Wall
Farzad Farshi	Sandy Mullins	Elizabeth Ward

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Paul Thompson and Dennis Bottemiller.

Paul Thompson has been awarded the Volunteer of the Year trophy for his work at the RSBG. Dennis Bottemiller presented Paul with the trophy at the RSBG Annual Meeting on May 28. Paul has led the Thursday Crew, which has contributed over 2000 hours of labor on the new Rutherford Conservatory.

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

The RSBG Newsletter is published quarterly in winter, spring, summer, and fall by the Rhododendron Species Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Submissions are due by the first of the month, 8 weeks before publication. Email submissions to Newsletter Editor Sonja Nelson: sonjan@wavecable.com
RSBG website: www.rhodygarden.org

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Gift Shop: 253-661-9377



MEMBERSHIP FORM

Memberships (excluding Associate Level) include:

- Free year-round garden admission for cardholder
- Quarterly RSBG Newsletter
- Priority plant, pollen, and seed offerings (over non-members)
- 10% discount on RSBG Gift Shop and Plant Sales Pavilion purchases
- Spring & Fall Plant Catalogs & Yearbook
- Use of the Lawrence J. Pierce Library during business hours
- Voting privileges at the Annual Membership Meeting

Also available:

- **Associate (group) Memberships**
Please contact the RSBG office for more information (253) 838-4646

PO Box 3798
Federal Way, WA 98063

FAX: 253-838-4686
PHONE: Seattle 253-838-4646

EMAIL: Katie@RhodyGarden.org
Tacoma 253-927-6960

Today's Date _____

- Enroll me as an RSBG member! Extend my RSBG membership another year!
 My company matches contributions. Gift Membership
(I have enclosed the matching form)

_____ Mr. _____ Mrs. _____ Ms. _____ Dr. _____ **Check here if new or revised address**

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ Prov./State _____ PC / Zip _____ Country _____

Telephone _____ - _____ - _____ e-mail: _____

Membership dues are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. *Email correspondence saves valuable resources & dollars!*

PLEASE CHECK ONE:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> International (including Canadian) Student, Individual & Family members please add \$10.00 US for airmail service. All Funds must be in US currency drawn on a US bank. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$35 | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Check here if you do NOT want to receive newsletters & other correspondence by e-mail. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$250 | <input type="checkbox"/> Check here if you do NOT wish your name, address & contact information published in the annual membership directory. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$500 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$1000 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$2000 | |
- I have enclosed an additional contribution of \$_____ US to support the collection and garden.
 I would like information regarding gifts to the endowment or estate planning to benefit the RSBG.
 I'd like to volunteer. Please send information.
 Please send information on Associate membership for groups.

Payment Information

Enclosed is a Check made payable to RSBG. (US funds only, drawn on a US bank.)

Charge to: VISA MASTERCARD Expires _____ V# _____
3 digit #, located above signature

Account # _____ Signature _____

For Office Use Only:

New Member number _____ New Member packet sent _____ Date _____
 Entered in computer _____ Membership card sent _____ Promo _____

2011/06

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden
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New members - be sure to sign up for our members and guests "Evening in the Garden" event (see page 4). *Above:* Members Bob Dunning and Garratt Richardson enjoy a lively conversation at the 2008 event.

Volunteer Opportunity

Would you enjoy using your office skills to make a real difference for the RSBG? We have an opening for one skilled person, who would like to work one day per week with our sunny, enthusiastic office staff. Your skills in MS Excel, Word, Access, phones, filing and general organizational skills are greatly needed. We can be flexible with your schedule!

Email: Katie@RhodyGarden.org to schedule an interview.

RSBG CALENDAR 2011

- **August 12, 5:30 – 8:30**
"Under the Tuscan Moon"
7th Annual 'Evening in the Garden'
- **November 19**
RSF Fall Board Meeting
- **October 15–23**
Fall Foliage Festival and Plant Sale
- **December 9**
Volunteer Christmas Party