
The Vireya Venture

Issue No. 57 June 2005

Editorial

It has been a relatively quiet time for us over the past few months – in terms of vireya rhododendrons. And, based on the few contributions to T V V that have come in, I have to suspect it may have been a quiet period for many of you too.

For us the highlight has been the annual Vireya Show held in March by the Victorian Branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society at a local community centre. The show was a great success, even though the number of public visitors was down.

A particularly interesting feature was the number and quality of new hybrids displayed by Brian Clancy and his daughter Geraldine Roelink, several of them with a lovely scent. Brian's hybridising principle has been to always use the very best forms available and this group was no exception. It included several seedlings from crosses of *R. Gardenia* Odyssey with *R. javanicum*, *R. aurigeranum* and *R. superbum* and crosses of *R. superbum* with different hybrids.

At the Vireya Show Simon Begg, editor of the Victorian Branch's newsletter, discovered an interesting flower stem similar to *R. tuba* and *R. rhodolecum*, but with flowers larger than both. It came from the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda (30km east of Melbourne) in a bunch of cuttings brought down to help the display. The plant probably came from one of the early collecting expeditions to New Guinea.

Simon sent photos, a flower and leaves to Lyn Craven in Canberra for identification. Lyn thinks it is probably a wild-collected plant, and a species rather than a hybrid. He classified it in Subsection *Solenovireya*. However, he is doubtful about the taxonomy for this group because there are wild-collected plants in cultivation that do not fit the descriptions.



The unknown white-lobed, pink-tubed Solenovireya discovered by Simon Begg at the ARS Vic Branch Vireya Show.

Lyn noted that most of these species are based on very few collections and does not think Sleumer was able to come up with a sufficiently robust classification/taxonomy such that subsequent collections can always be fitted into his concepts. And, there are not enough well-documented collections available to sort out the problem.

Lyn suggested a label "unknown white-lobed pink-tubed *Solenovireya*". Simon put down several cuttings and in time he hopes to conduct a selfing and hybridising program.

We definitely need more email, letters, notices and articles for the next issue of T V V. Just throw down a few lines and tell us what you are doing. Add a photo if you have one.

Please send them to:

Graham and Janet Price
208/283 Spring St
Melbourne Victoria 3000 Australia
Ph: 03 9639 4493 Fax: 03 9639 5480
or preferably by email to: lithic01@bigpond.net.au

An Email from Austria

from Hansjörg Brentel

19 March 2005

Dear Graham,

Now I am back from a new travel to Irian Jaya. I was in Wamena in the highlands of west-Papua. The high mountains south of the Baliem Valley are now closed again for tourist (the Indonesian army have problems with the Free Papua organisation) and I can go only around the Baliem Valley.

I have not found as many plants as last year. I was on 4900 m high Gg. Trikora, where I found *R. correoides*, *rubrobracteatum*, *subcrenulatum*, *saxifragoides*, *pusillum*, *haematophthalmum*, *culminicolum*, *gaultherifolium*, *glabriflorum*, *caespitosum*, *brassi*, *versteegii*, *flavovirides*, *gaultherifolium* var. *expositum*, *roseiflorum* (not sure), *agathodaemonis*, *cililobum* (or *oreites* or new) and a red flowered new species.



R. glabriflorum, Lake Habbema, 3200m, Irian Jaya

I live in the Austria/Tirol area near Innsbruck. I have a wintergarden and a greenhouse in the garden and most of my Vireyas in a ground bed, only the smaller one in pots. It is easier for handling and watering when I am not home. I make no hybrids from my plants, I like only species.

Best wishes
Hansjörg

Email address:
aon.912002871@aon.at

Ed. Its wonderful to receive such up-to-date information about current plant collecting Hansjörg. It must be great to go on such expeditions and know that you are contributing something to science and to the collective knowledge about plants. Thank you.

A Letter from Queensland

from Geoff Anderson

6 April 2005

Dear Graham and Janet,
Thanks so much for sending us a copy of the new T V V. You guys are a pair of stalwarts for taking on this task. I sincerely wish you every



R. versteegii from Trikora Valley, Iria Jaya.

Idendification has been made for me by Dr. George Argent from the RBG Edinburgh because I am only a hobby-botanist, not a professional.

I found *R. glabriflorum* 3 years ago at 3200 m in the Oranje mt. near Lake Habema. It was a wonderful site. This was only the second discovery of this plant, the first time by J .Smith in 1915 (1 plant) in another area. I send you another picture of this plant.

From most of these plants I have seedlings or cuttings. *R. glabriflorum* is now 0.7 m high. I am not sure when the first flowers will come but maybe it will come in flower this year.

success. Its good to be in touch again, albeit at a distance, after such a long time.

When we went overseas in 1989 we gave all our vireyas, some 70 odd, to the Olinda Garden except for about four that we had planted out at Ringwood East ([a Melbourne suburb - Ed](#)). When we came home in 1991 we couldn't get access because the tenant wouldn't move out.

When we eventually got access in 1992 we found only one vireya still alive. This was a hybrid seedling of Graham Snell's – a konori x aurigeranum cross – that we had obtained when Graham sold off all his unwanted stock at Bayswater ([another Melbourne suburb – Ed](#)) before they moved to Maleny ([a town in SE Queensland – Ed](#)). This has a beautiful perfumed cream-coloured truss of some 14+ florets. We brought this to Maleny when we moved here. As Graham had never named this seedling I have named it after our youngest daughter who goes by the name "Jonesy".

Since establishing here we have been adding to our vireya collection with plants from the Snell's nursery, another one from Melbourne and a few propagated from cuttings obtained from friends. We now have a total of about 20 different hybrids and shortly plan to add to this with some more plants from Graham and Wendy. We also brought some 20 Asiatics up from Melbourne, but only 8 have survived. Asiatics will grow here but they don't thrive. Water is our problem as we are dependent on tank water.

As I get the garden here 'under control' and hopefully establish a bore, I hope to start a small species collection and to commence some hybridising. Meanwhile, as a sideline we are attempting to plant some 2,500 rainforest trees on the steep hillside above our house.

If your travels ever take you to Brisbane, please let us know as we are only about 80 minutes travelling time from Brisbane and we would love to catch up with you. Alternatively, you have our address and phone number – just let us know you are coming.

Best regards,
Geoff Anderson

Bald Knob
Queensland
Australia

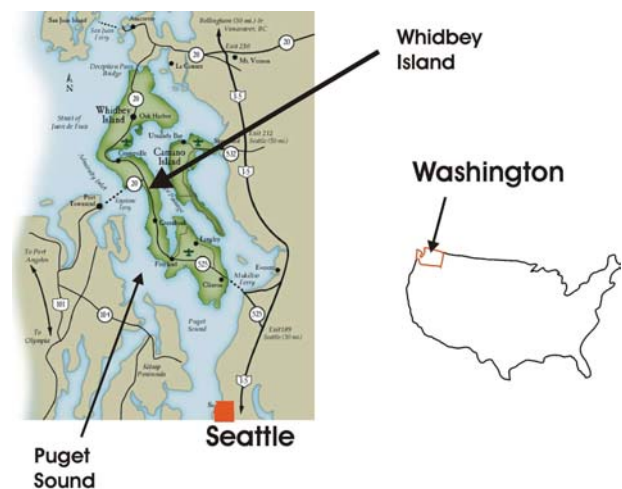
Two Emails from Washington

from Bill Hamm

23 April 2005

I was glad to receive an email from you about one of my favorite subjects - vireyas. I live south of Meerkirk Gardens in central Whidbey Island off Washington in northwest USA.

I know of only one other person on the island that has Vireyas and he lives in a different weather zone. I live on Mutiny Bay in a rain shadow so I have unusual weather for Washington State. I have been able to grow a seedling grapefruit tree for several years in spite of cold winters. It winters in a breezeway deck between my house and garage.



I am most interested in species because of their wonderful leaf patterns as well as their blooms. I am planning to try some of the hardiest vireyas - as soon as I determine which ones are the hardiest.

Thank you for including me on your mailing list. I look forward to receiving the next issue.

from Bill Hamm

18 May 2005

Sorry I did not answer your e-mail sooner, but I have been doing research on vireyas. The spring issue of the American Rhododendron Journal has an article about breeding vireya rhododendrons for cold hardiness. The A.R.S. website has an extensive listing with pictures of vireya. Its address is: www.rhododendron.org. There seems to be lots of interest in the challenge of growing them here.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation [www.rhodiegarden.org] also has some in their 2005 catalogue, so I will start by looking

there first. I hope to grow species only as I am not interested in outwitting mother nature. I am planning to grow one plant in the house and another outside of the same species.

At present I am collecting information and preparing a place for them. My Fox Encyclopaedia has some information and I will check the information on the internet. This should be fun. Talk to you again soon.

Bill Hamm whammm@freeland.net

Ed. OK T V V readers, do any of you have some advice for Bill about which vireyas are most cold hardy and likely to survive winters on Whidbey Island? Please send in replies.

An Email from Hawaii

from Sherla Bertelmann 13 April 2005

Aloha Graham & Janet,
I had every intention to contact you after receiving your first issue of T V V. And today I picked up the March issue! Where did the time go!!! This time I'm responding right away before "time" does its disappearing act on me again.

I love the photos you ran in the first issue. The one of Lyn Craven was especially exciting to me as I have had email contact with him and found him very courteous and tactful. This second issue is just as good. I must compliment you on your "ed: comments" and your efforts to get more info from folks. Makes your newsletter feel more inter-active and personal.

Before I go on further I should introduce myself. I am Sherla Bertelmann, President of the HI Chapter-ARS and owner (with my husband, Richard Marques) of a vireya nursery (Pacific Island Nursery) here on the Big Island of Hawaii.

*Sherla
Bertelmann
and Richard
Marques
(photo taken
from their
website)*



There is so much I would like to share with you and your readers over time. Right now let me start with telling you about our HI Chapter's vireya seed program. I took over the vireya seed distribution program from Bill Moyles in 2000. I receive donated seed from hybridizers all over the world. It is then sent on to any one who requests it for \$1 (US) per packet. Would you please let people know about our program? I can email or snail mail a list of what seed is available.

Graham Snell visited us in Hawaii in 2000 and brought with him seed from 24 of his crosses. Mitch germinated the seed and we distributed many seedlings at our monthly meetings. Since the end of last year some of these seedlings have begun to bloom. A couple stand out, among them Bold Janus x Gardenia Odyssey, Gardenia Odyssey x Bob's Crowing Glory and Highland Peace x Gardenia Odyssey. I'm sure there will be several good seedlings worthy of being registered from these groups. And to think there are still another 20 or so groups to begin blooming!

Many of John Rouse's crosses also made their way to Hawaii. Mitch Mitchell mentioned a couple of those that he registered. Mitch also registered Haulani (*hellwigii* x *lochiae*) and Kapo (*hellwigii* x Ne Plus Ultra), two more of John's crosses. A beautiful deep red recently bloomed for us of (pink hybrid x *hellwigii*), which may also be one of John's crosses. It is a real beauty and a deep darker red than most - I like a blue-red versus an orange-red.

The photo of *R. glabriflorum* by H. Brentel is beautiful!! And I loved hearing about *R. kawakami* growing in a bathroom. There are several folk in Germany that are growing vireyas. Martin Monthofer of Bremen in Germany is a young vireya hybridizer. I've had 4 different colors come from a cross of his; *arfakianum* x *laetum*, a red, an orange, a pink and white, and an orange/yellow.

No matter who the editors T V V has always been of interest to me. I hated to see it end. Again, thank you for stepping up to keep T V V going. If it is easier for you to email us our copy, to Richard & Sherla, please do so. Besides it being easier for you we get to have those wonderful photos on our computer - great!

Do you receive our HI Chapter newsletter? You are more than welcomed to take our

articles to share. I've been pushing vireya seed and recently spotlighted several of the new blooms from Mitch's and Graham's crosses.

One more thing to share with your readers. Our HI Chapter is planning our 3rd Vireya Seminar. This one is scheduled for Feb. 18 & 19, 2006. Graham Smith of Pukeiti is one of our featured speakers. There will be more info coming out as available.

Aloha for now,

Sherla Pacific Island Nursery
pacislenursery@interpac.net
www.pacificislandnursery.com

Ed. Sherla, thanks for the note about your vireya seed distribution program. I'm sure readers will want some seed.

An Email from New Zealand

From Graham Smith 13 April 2005

Dear Graham and Janet
 Many thanks for sending Issue 56 of T V V which I enjoyed. The colour pics make it very attractive and bring the text to life.

Pleased to see Mitch and Sandy Mitchell looking so well. He writes to me to say he is still breathing but I am not sure if he has this message on autoscript! I am going to visit them next February for the Vireya Convention in Hawaii and I hope many others will be able to go and make it a memorable occasion.

Congratulations for breathing new life into the old newsletter and I hope it continues to thrive on a good diet of interesting articles from around the world. I will endeavour to put something in print for you sometime?

Susan Worthington, Pukeiti watercolour artist, has done a series of wonderful Vireya species botanical paintings. There are more than 40 and Susan is taking them to the UK to exhibit at the Birmingham Horticultural Exhibition this summer. If any of you have a chance to go you will see something very special.

Kind regards

Graham Smith,
 Pukeiti Director graham@pukeiti.org.nz

An Email from California

From Barbara Campbell 20 April 2005

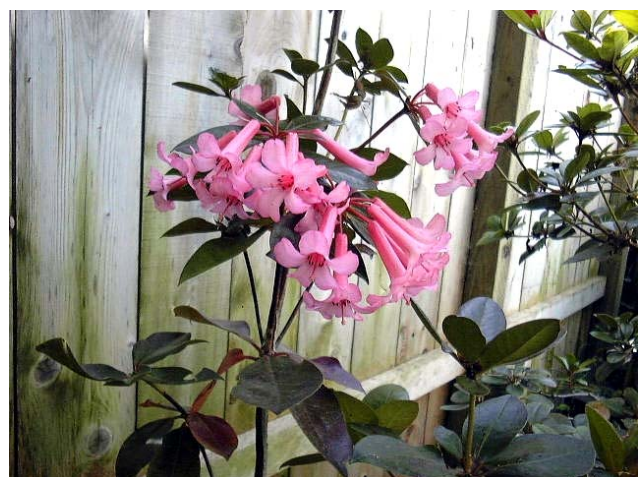
Hi Graham,
 Your issue #56 came through and I really enjoyed it. Lovely to get such good pictures.

I am quite happy at present because I won a first and a second place for the two vireyas I entered in our California Chapter show last weekend. They are kept between a 6 foot fence and my house so they are pretty much protected from browsing deer.

The first was Lawrence Tatum and the second was a wonderful pink. The picture of Lawrence Tatum was taken last year. This year's foliage is a darker green. I cannot find my camera so I have to use this picture.



R. Lawrence Tatum, from Barbara Campbell



"a wonderful pink"; from Barbara Campbell

Had an interesting thing happen the other day when visiting a friend in Orinda. He showed me his vireyas in his green house and said they had just sat there for years until he put some chicken manure on them and they have been

blooming like crazy since then. I always thought chicken manure was a big NO NO! Does anyone else use it?

Barbara Campbell, bjeaNC@comcast.net
California

Ed. Barbara, I have heard of people using chicken manure on vireyas, but only well matures manure, not fresh stuff. Do any other readers of T V V have any experience?

An Email from Victoria

from John Godfrey 20 April 2005

Dear Graham,
Moving from Red Hill (on the Mornington peninsular SE of Melbourne - Ed) where asiatic rhodos, magnolias, deciduous azaleas and camellias did well but vireyas struggled, to nearby Dromana with a view of the sea has brought the vireyas to life; unlike the others.

Jack Wilson gave me some vireya seedlings and rooted cuttings 7 or 8 years ago - amongst them was *R. Gardenia Odyssey* (at that time called simply "Gardenia"). It flowered for the first time in 2003 with a truss of 17 creamy white flowers with the tropical perfume of frangipani. It began flowering again in June 2004 and provided one or two trusses every few weeks for the next six months, the most spectacular being a truss of 22 creamy white flowers at end of November.

The puzzling feature was the change in flower colour. In July - salmon pink and heavily veined. In September - pinkish throats fading to a creamy yellow at the petal margins. November and subsequent flowers had creamy throats and ivory white petal margins.



R. Gardenia Odyssey in July 2004



R. Gardenia Odyssey in September 2004



R. Gardenia Odyssey in November 2004

Change in flower colour is not that unusual in some vireyas, but the marked colour shift in *R. Gardenia Odyssey* with the changing seasons sent me back to the textbooks and, with a rush of blood to the head, I thought it would make a good article for The Rhododendron Newsletter (Vic Branch ARS). That is, until I delved deeper and realized that the genetic determinants of flower colour, which are difficult enough to grasp, are just the beginning of some complex physiology and biochemistry. Needless to say that first scribbled draft is still here in front of me!

Variation in form is perhaps not so complex and I enclose a picture of one of Graham Snell's crosses : (*laetum* x *macgregoriae*) X (*laetum* x *aurigeranum*) from back in 1987. Graham brought the seedlings to a meeting at Olinda still in the germination tray, which created something of a scuffle amongst members eager to grab some.

My dozen seedlings grew on at Red Hill and a few survived. These have taken on a new lease of life in the ground at Dromana having survived two hot summers and are now about 2m high. The differences in flower form

between the plants is quite marked - the smaller flowers must have received a bigger dose of the mac genes.



Different sized flowers from Graham Snell's R. laetum hybrids.

In 1992 I collected seed of *R. rugosa* on Mt Kinabalu and it was germinated by Jack Wilson. A plant has flowered for the first time.



Photo of R. rugosa from John Godfrey.

Only two of these plants survived the rigours, first of Red Hill, then in pots which kept blowing over down here at Dromana. Putting them in the ground only worsened their plight and this plant (see photo), which I have recently re-potted, is now the only survivor.

Cheers from John Godfrey
jwhaoma@alphalink.com.au

Ed. Wonderful photos John. Don't let that last *rugosa* die.

In the above email and in two earlier emails the vireya hybrid *R. Gardenia Odyssey* is mentioned. To help everyone understand the issues surrounding this plant and its name I include here a copy of an article first published in "The Rhododendron" Journal of the Australian Rhododendron Society, Volume 33, 1993. The article is included here with permission of its author, Lyn Craven.

Bringing a conclusion to confusion: Rhododendron 'Gardenia Odyssey' by Lyn Craven.

from "The Rhododendron", Journal of the Australian Rhododendron Society. 33: 11-12.

There is a particularly beautiful vireya *Rhododendron* now becoming more widely available to Australian gardeners as nurserymen develop stocks for sale. The inflorescence of this plant is especially well-illustrated by Bob Withers in Graham Price's book on Rhododendrons in Australia (opp.p28, Price 1998) where the caption states "Rhododendron gardenia. A spectacular vireya species from New Guinea". However the plant is neither *R. gardenia* nor a species.

Apparently the plant was introduced to Australia from the Netherlands by Bill Mearns of Wollongong, New South Wales. Bill (personal communication, pre-1988) stated that the original Dutch grower derived the name, 'Gardenia', from a perceived similarity in its flower colour to that of *Gardenia globosa*. The inference was that the plant was of garden origin. Subsequently, in Australia the view developed that the plant represented the species *R. gardenia* Schlechter. For example, it was treated as a species in Price (1988) and in Withers (1991). In the later reference, Withers states "R. gardenia was received by Bill Mearns

from Welensky, a forester in West Irian in 1973. It is considered to be a true species by Bill Mearns, although some growers of vireyas consider that it is a natural hybrid."

The plant certainly is not *R. gardenia* Schlechter; in Sleumer (1966) it keys to *R. konori* Beccari from which it differs, *inter alia*, in the shape and colour of the corolla. Seedlings from selfed seed of the plant are variable and different to the parent according to Graham Snell of Maleny, Queensland (Snell, personal communication, 1992), suggesting that segregation is occurring. My view is that the plant is of hybrid origin and is either at the F1 or F2 level or is an example of incomplete introgression. It seems very likely that *R. konori* was one of the original species involved.

As regards a name for this plant, which should be in the garden of every serious vireya grower (even those who prefer species to hybrids!), the available evidence indicates that a cultivar name needs to be provided instead of a botanical name. The epithet 'Gardenia' is not valid under Articles 27(a) and 31(a) of the current "International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants". As the plant has already been introduced commercially (Snell, personal communication, 1992) use of the word 'Gardenia' in the registered name would be advantageous. The name 'Gardenia Odyssey' has been selected therefore and has been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society, the registration authority for *Rhododendron*. The word 'Odyssey' reflects the nomenclatural journey upon which the plant has been.

References

- Price, G.P. 1988. "Rhododendrons and azaleas in Australia". (Australian Rhododendron Society Victoria Branch Melbourne)
- Sleumer, H. 1966. *Rhododendron*. In 'Flora Malesiana' ser.I, 6: 474-668. (Noordhoff, Groningen).
- Withers, R.M. 1991. A history of the introduction of vireya *Rhododendron* species into cultivation in Australia. *The Rhododendron* 31:2-15

Ed. The photos of *R. Gardenia Odyssey* in John Godfrey's email above are excellent examples of the inflorescence of this wonderful plant. A copy of this article, a description of the plant and another photo can be found on Chris Callard's website: www.vireya.net

An Email from Tarree

From Kel Dagg

March 25, 2005

Dear Graham & Janet,

I had intended to return our "response" to the Vireya Venture you forwarded late last year. However with the stress of Christmas and the hospitalisation of my wife for a couple of weeks things seemed to be lost somewhere.

We have been growing Vireyas for about 15 years here in Taree on the mid-north coast of NSW. We are about 180kms north of Newcastle (~360km north of Sydney) and have a semi-tropical climate - humid and hot in Jan-Feb and mild dry winters.

We had a nursery and for a few years and propagated and sold vireyas. During that time we built a new home and established a new garden, concentrating on camellias, azaleas and vireyas. From time to time Enid and I will try to give some details of our experiences.

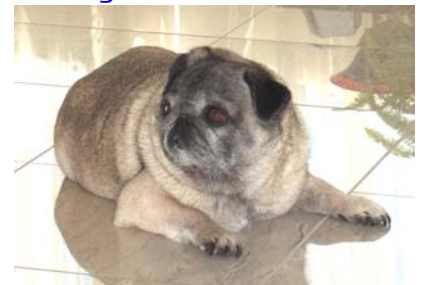
I would be quite happy to receive The Vireya Venture by e-mail. However, in the past I found that newsletters sent by an Orchid Society I belonged to were not acceptable as the Secretary included pictures of orchids and I could not open the attachments. I do not know what programme he used but several members had the same problems as me.

Enid and Kel Dagg,
TAREE NSW

Email: kld2@tsn.cc

Ed. It is with deep sadness we have to advise that our much loved Pug, Minnie, passed away last Monday morning. She will be greatly missed.

So, it's a last goodbye from Minnie.



The next Issue of The Vireya Venture, Issue # 58, is scheduled for production and distribution in September 2005.