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# The Vireya Venture

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Issue No. 69 March 2009

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## Editorial

As with the previous issue of The Vireya Venture newsletter the distribution of this Issue #69 is way behind schedule and we regret this very much. It has occurred because there has been almost nothing sent in to make up a newsletter since last October – no letters, news items or articles. So, again we have had to write articles ourselves and reprint items from previous issues. Sorry about this but if you don't send us anything to include in T V V this is all we can do.

The last issue included articles on potting mixes suitable for vireyas – it was the main topic. However, we received only one small feedback email about those articles. No corrections or additions. We can only guess that you readers are not as interested in that topic as we thought.

Many of you will be aware of the terrible bushfires here in Victoria in early February, in which 210 people lost their lives, thousands of homes were destroyed and vast areas of forest were turned into wastelands, with extensive loss of wildlife. We extend our sympathy to all those with family or friends who were affected.

We won't dwell on those fires but we do include here an article on the damage that such extreme weather conditions can have on vireyas, what can be done to help them recover and how they are progressing. The loss of a few vireyas is trivial compared to what many have suffered but it reflects the hope we all have for a return to better times.

Part of this issue is devoted to providing information about new vireyas recently registered with the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK. Dr Alan Leslie, the International registrar for Rhododendrons, provided the list of registrations for 2007 and also provided relevant information, mainly the formal description. We have sought additional information from the collectors, hybridisers, growers and registrants and photos so as to make the report more interesting. We plan to do this as an annual article – so you can all keep up with the new plant material being added to collections around the world.

Please email or write and tell us your local vireya news, what you are doing with your vireyas or interesting items you have seen/read. Also please include photos. Please send your emails/articles/letters to:

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*Vireya photo sent in by Richard Gilmour-Smith who lives in Melbourne. He writes that his plant, probably a cross between *R. lochiaie* and *R. laetum*, flowers prolifically. He keeps in a large pot under a large deciduous tree (*Gleditsia*) which is pendulous to the ground. The heat and dryness this summer have dispelled his problems with powdery mildew, but one of his large-leaved vireyas, *R. Eastern Zanzibar* which has always had a hard time over summer, is certainly suffering with the conditions this year. His strategy is to always have a few new struck cuttings coming along - just in case it doesn't survive.*

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## Garden Visit by Local Vireya Group

November 2008

The local Vireya Group of the Victorian branch of the Rhododendron Society of Australia – an informal gathering of people interested in vireyas – conducts regular garden visits to see what other enthusiasts are doing and to chat about vireyas. In November last year they visited the garden of Andrew Rouse in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and were treated to a wonderful display.

Andrew has a new vireya glasshouse full of small and mature plants and many others planted outside in the ground. Centre stage in the garden is a large gum tree (eucalypt) set in a lawn with garden beds scattered around. He has put much effort into collecting, storing and distributing water throughout, which is essential with our current restrictions on the use of town water.



Andrew focuses on producing new hybrids of small-leaved and -flowered vireyas and he is interested in producing plants that people find attractive. He had a selection of these small-flowering and small-leaved plants sitting on display on a table and he sought people's opinion as to their merits – most seemed excellent.

Inside the glasshouse Andrew has many mature plants and a well-arranged system for both germinating and growing on small vireya seedlings.

Thanks to Mike Hammer who took along his camera we present here a selection of photographs of Andrew's garden and glasshouse.



*Views inside Andrew's vireya glasshouse.*

Mature plants    ↑

and a well-organized setup for raising  
vireya seedlings    ↓



*The selection of small-flowered vireyas that  
Andrew wanted us to evaluate*



## Vireyas Under Extreme Conditions

The weather conditions that occurred here in Victoria on the main fire day of the recent bushfire episode– Saturday 7 February – were the hottest in Melbourne’s recorded history, 46.4°C (115.5°F), with a hot northerly wind gusting up to 150kph. In other areas in Melbourne suburbs and the surrounding country it was even hotter. The day had been preceded by a week of very hot weather (several days over 40°C), over a month without any rain and 9 years of severe drought. So, gardens were already under stress before that day arrived.

You can imagine that these are not conditions conducive to the happy cultivation of vireyas. We have all experienced hot days before and know that vireya leaves will get burnt by exposure to direct sunlight if they have low water levels and their leaves cannot maintain turgidity. So, we usually try to make sure that they get a watering in the early mornings of very hot days. I wasn’t in Melbourne on that disastrous Saturday and so had to rely on a watering that I gave my vireyas on the previous Thursday.

As is our want here in Australia, many enthusiasts like to plant their vireyas in the open garden, sometimes with a light shading from overgrowing trees but often fully exposed to the sun (or at least morning sun), wind and rain (when we ever get any). Many of my vireyas are planted in exposed garden beds because they have better growth habits and flowering responses. Well, up till now the experience had been positive.

*Below is a photo of the vireya bed exposed to direct morning sun where extensive burning occurred. On the right the plants have some protection from overhanging trees and here less burning occurred.*

The purpose of this article is to show what can happen under extreme conditions and to show that there is sometimes hope for a positive outcome. Many vireya collectors around Melbourne suffered like I have and each will have their own story. This is just mine.

I know that vireya collectors in other parts of the world suffer from the direct opposite type of weather - heavy snow falls and extreme cold weather. I have no experience of vireyas in these cold conditions – I only know about hot dry conditions.

I almost cried when I returned the day after the bushfire day and saw my vireyas – a mass of dark brown desiccated leaves and stems. The photo below shows what I was confronted with.

Every vireya that had been exposed to the direct sun and the hot drying wind was severely burnt. Some were so badly burnt that they just shrivelled up and died completely, especially the smaller plants. Those that didn’t die had their outer leaves and stems burnt dark brown. Plants which had some shading, even dappled shade from overgrowing leaves, suffered less, but they still had burnt leaves and dead stems.

Even though all the brown dead tissue looked terrible I decided not to cut it off immediately but to try to support the plants’ own recovery mechanisms by simply giving them a good watering on alternate days for the next three weeks – keep the roots moist so at least they didn’t suffer any more stress. I also decided not to try to stimulate the roots with fertilizer or seaweed soil tonic – I was concerned it may be too much of a shock too soon.



It was difficult standing there each day watering dead brown leaves and hoping for a response. I guess there was a degree of denial in me – they can't all just die, some must survive.

Well, some did survive. After a few weeks of regular watering I noticed that some previously dormant buds in leaf axils on the lower sections of branches, below the burnt sections, were beginning to swell. Fortunately we have a rainwater collection system at my apartment block so I had plenty of water available and wasn't limited by water restrictions.

About a month after the burning when several new shoots were emerging I decided it was time to remove those that were totally dead and to give all the remaining plants a heavy pruning. I wanted to reduce the load on the roots and not let the plants waste energy trying to grow shoots too far out on damaged branches.

Working out just where to cut was the most difficult part. If I only cut off the burnt pieces and left the branches too long then the new shoots would emerge out near the ends and the resulting plants would be tall and lanky with bare lower branches and exposed roots. Better to reduce the size of all the plants by cutting low down and making the bushes more compact. But, if I cut too low the plant may not grow new shoots so far down and I might lose it altogether.

Also, different plants progressed at different rates. After 3 weeks some were showing obvious signs of recovery, but other are showing no signs even now, 6 weeks after the event. So, each plant had to be assessed individually.

Where possible I pruned branches back to a whirl of somewhat healthy leaves with intact axial growth buds. If there weren't many good branches left on a plant, just bare stems, but growth buds were emerging from these leafless stems, then I left them. If there was no sign of bud swell I left the plant unpruned. I left as much leaf material as possible on each plant, even partially burnt leaves. I figured if



there was any green tissue at all it might the plant by providing some level of energy from photosynthesis. The sorts of things I was looking for, particularly the emerging new shoots, are shown in the accompanying photos.

Also, I left all the leaf and stem prunings on the soil around the plants so as to act as a mulch. In a couple of weeks I plan to add lots of sheep manure around the plants and on top of the soil to increase the level of mulch and add some slow-release natural fertilizer..

Now, in mid-March, many of the plants are showing good signs of regrowth. I will cut burnt leaves off next month after the plants have acquired sufficient new green leaves for me to be confident they will survive



*Photos above and to the left:  
New shoots emerging from dormant growth buds either below old flower pedicels or from old leaf stem axils.*

Elsewhere in southern Australia vireyas and other cool-climate plants, like temperate rhododendrons, deciduous azaleas, camellias and even large trees such as plane trees (genus *platanus*), have suffered leaf burn as bad or even worse than mine have. We are all sharing the pain.

But, we are not as badly off as those who lost their homes, their loved ones or were injured. So we will be thankful for whatever recovery we can get.

With global warming virtually inevitable we expect more extreme hot weather and apparently continuing drought in southern Australia. Maybe we just have to set up some form of shade to help protect our vireyas on those very bad days. We will keep trying.

Graham Price



## New Registered Vireyas

Each year a selection of new vireya rhododendrons are registered by the International Registrar of the Royal Horticultural Society in the UK. The full list of registrations is now published and available to the public (see the next article).

The formal description of the new vireya registrations for 2007 are presented here together with photos and background information from the people involved. There were eleven (11) new registrations in 2007 by 5 different people from three different countries. Limitations on space mean that about half the new registrations are included in this issue of T V V and the remaining entries will be included in the next issue.

### 2007 Vireya Registrations:

The first two new registrations were by Mitch Mitchell who lives in Hawaii.

**1. 'Mino';** cv. *Lepidote rhododendron*: *konori* (s) X ('Doctor Herman Sleumer' x (*macgregoriae* x *aurigeranum*)). Hybridised (1999), Grown to first flower (2006), Named (2006) and Registered (2007) by R.A. (Mitch) Mitchell, Hawaii USA. Flowers 5/flat truss, tubular funnel-shaped, 115 x 120mm, with 7 wavy-edged lobes, opening inside light purplish pink (68B); outside light purplish pink (68D) at margins, changing to strong purplish red (58B) going down the tube. Calyx 10mm long. Leaves elliptic, 115 x 65mm, broadly acute at apex, cuneate at base, margins flat, semi-glossy and dark yellowish green (139A) above, without obvious indumentums. Shrub with an open habit, 1.2 x 0.9m in 7 years. Flowers in Late January (in Hawaii).



Mitch Mitchell's newly registered vireya: R. Mino.

Below: The parents of R. Mino

R. Dr Hermann Sleumer and R. Flamenco Dancer (*macgregoriae* x *aurigeranum*)



**2. 'Sherla Bertelmann',** cv. *Lepidote rhododendron*: (*zoelleri* x *leucogigas*) (s) X *commonae* (red-flowered selection from Dolo Pass). Hybridized (1996), Grown to first flower (1996), Named (2007) and Registered (2007) by R.A. Mitchell. Flowers 7/flat truss, tubular funnel-shaped, 65 x 65mm, with 5 wavy-edged lobes, inside strong red (53B), outside strong red (53C). Leaves obovate, obtuse at apex, cuneate at base, margins decurved, semi-glossy and moderate olive green (137A) above. Shrub 1.8 x 0.9m in 7 years. Flowers in late June to July (in Hawaii).



Mitch Mitchell's second new registration: R. Sherla Bertelmann.

Below: The parents of R. Sherla Bertelmann

R. Harry Wu (*zoelleri* x *leucogigas*) and R. *commonae*



Below are the questions we asked Mitch and his answers:

**Mitch, why did you produce these two hybrids? Did you have a plan or were they just lucky outcomes?**

Having seen the parents I thought their combination might turn out to be interesting.

**Why do you think these plants are worthy of registering and what special features make them better than their parents or other hybrids?**

Both plants have flowers that are exceptional. I thought that the flower of Sherla Bertelmann is a lot more than interesting and worthy in my opinion to be registered. As the poet said "Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder."

**Why did you pick these names?**

Mino was named in honour of my daughter (it is the nickname for Mary Lou and was the way one of her cousins pronounced it when he was about 2-3 years old). For the other, I wanted to honour Sherla because of the many contributions she has made to our chapter and to the Vireya world.

**Will you make this plant available to the public?**

I always share the results of my hybridizing with Sherla and Richard and leave it up to their nursery to distribute in whatever way they deem appropriate

Eds. Thanks for the information Mitch. They are lovely flowers.

Here is the next vireya registration – this time a complement back to Mitch.

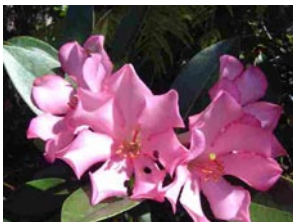
**3. 'Mitch Mitchell',** cv. *Lepidote rhododendron* : 'Cephas' (s) X *zoelleri* (Bovee's V300). Hybridized by R.A. Mitchell (2001), Grown to first flower (2005), Named (2006) and Registered (2007) by S. Bertelmann (2005), Introduced: Pacific Island Nursery (c. 2008).

Flowers 5/flat truss, tubular funnel-shaped, 100 × 110mm, with 5 wavy-edged lobes, inside deep yellowish pink (43C) surrounding a large, central, star-shaped marking of pale yellowish green (4D), shading to light greenish yellow (4B) in the throat; outside of tube light greenish yellow (8C), with broad, deep pink (48A) margins; slightly scented. Leaves elliptic, 140 × 65mm, obtuse at apex, cuneate at base, margins upcurved, semi-glossy and dark yellowish green (139A) above. Shrub 1.1 × 0.6m in 5 years.



Sherla Bertelmann's registered vireya: *R. Mitch Mitchell*

The two parents of *R. Mitch Mitchell*  
*R. Cephas* and *R. zoelleri*



Following are the questions we asked of Sherla and Mitch (as he was the hybridizer) and their answers:



Sherla Bertelmann and  
Mitch Mitchell

**Mitch, why did you produce this hybrid? Did you have a plan or was it just a lucky outcome?**

I am very fond of *Cephas* and it seemed that it would make a good parent in some of my crosses. This one was the first of 3 or 4 crosses and, to my knowledge, is the first to bloom so far.

**Sherla, why do you think this plant is worthy of registering and what are its special features that make it better than its parents or other hybrids?**

Now, why did we choose this clone? There are several criteria we look for. The first is the flower - is it a WOW flower and what makes it different from others that it should be registered? We also look at the growth habit, the natural one where we haven't pruned but allowed it to grow till flowering. Does the foliage look nice, does it get spots? What about overall look, leggy, spreading, etc? We look at how long it took to flower - is it an early bloomer? What about the number of flowers per truss? Does it bloom frequently? Are there lots of buds at one time or just a few?

The "Mitch Mitchell" we chose was the largest of the group, after flowering it came back into bloom quickly and it is easy to root. It is what we call 'living' versus 'stagnant', meaning the flower changes after it first opens. This one gets larger with age and the colour deepens too. It also does that illusion thing that vireya do. I'm referring to how the stamens can influence the colour of the flowers. When "Mitch" first opens there is a light green tint in the throat area. This changes later to a more cream colour.

Why is it 'better than its parents'. This hybrid carries the *zoelleri* trait in its size and bi-colour. The *Cephas* parent must also be given credit for flower size and perhaps its more red than orange colour. I love both parents, in particular *zoelleri* which grows and blooms like a weed here. It's an excellent parent.

**Why did you pick this name?**

We've been looking for a plant to name for Mitch. We've grown out many of his crosses and it only made sense that the plant we named after him come from one of his crosses. Others are nice but often are similar to another hybrid or may pull towards one parent only. Good examples are *R. goodenoughii* hybrids - most we've grown out are white with *goodenoughii* leaves and flower shape.

**Will it become available to the public?**

We are propagating it for sale from our nursery. We have several more seedlings from this cross and a few



have bloomed, but many still have not. At this time the sister seedlings will more than likely go into our garden as a private collection.

#### **What plans do you have for further hybridizing?**

We are watching several groups of seedlings for potential winners. Many are from Graham Snell's seeds. One group recently planted in our garden is Harry Wu OP has a diverse colour range (most in deep orange to gold), size and shape. I don't think there's a bad one in the group. Harry Wu is a fabulous parent for hybridizing, but maybe that has to do with *zoelleri* again?

Eds. Great to learn about your thinking in regards to hybrids Sherla.

Here is the next vireya registration – again from Hawaii.

**4. 'Golden Retriever Mandy',** cv. Lepidote rhododendron : ('Gardenia Odyssey' × *laetum*) (s) X ('Gardenia Odyssey' × *laetum*). Hybridised (2001) by G.L.S. Snell, Grown to first flower (2006) and Introduced (2007) by Pacific Island Nursery, Named and Registered (2007) by R. Kruppa, Hawaii.  
Flowers 6-7/flat truss, tubular funnel-shaped, 57 × 65mm, with 5 wavy-edged lobes, brilliant yellow-green (149B) in bud, opening inside vivid yellow (14A), aging in 9 days to strong orange-yellow (17A); outside vivid yellow (14A), aging in 10 days to vivid orange-yellow (21A); unmarked. Calyx minute, green. Leaves elliptic to obovate, 108-120 × 35-51mm, acuminate at apex, cuneate at base, margins upcurved, semi-glossy and moderate olive green (137A) above, moderate yellow-green (138B) below, with small dark scales below (not visible to the naked eye). Flowers long-lasting (8-10 days on the plant, 12-15 days as cut flowers). Flowers Mid August and perhaps also in February to March in Hawaii. (Known locally as "(Mr Snell's) 'Meadow Yellow' F2").



*Richard Kruppa's hybrid R Golden Retriever Mandy*

*R Gardenia Odyssey* x *R. laetum*, which was selfed to produce *R. Golden Retriever Mandy* (it is F2).



#### **The questions and answers from Dick Kruppa:**

##### **Dick, why did you produce this hybrid?**

Sherla Bertelmann and Richard Marques gave me this magnificent yellow-flowering vireya. The cross was made by Graham Snell in 2000 and it was labelled "Meadow Yellow F2 from seed 2000". When it boomed for the fourth time in September 2007 they encouraged me to register it, so with Graham Snell's permission and enthusiastic support from Neil Puddey I did so.

##### **Why do you think this plant is worthy of registering and what are its special features?**

It has a rich pure yellow coloured flower and a wonderful compact growth habit. It is now in bloom for the 7<sup>th</sup> time. In January she produced 3 trusses and now in February it has 30 buds in various stages of development, assuring it will bloom through March and maybe into April. It blooms sequentially from fresh new growth twice a year, so taking cuttings, pruning and pinching out only makes it bushier and increases flower production. These are what make it a such a wonderful vireya.

##### **Why did you pick this name?**

When my Golden Retriever companion of 13 years, named Mandy, died in 2006, and Sherla and Richard gave me the plant I decided to name it to commemorate Mandy. I believe this is the first time a vireya has been named after a dog variety.

My vet found these lines of a lovely poem which I had engraved on Mandy's headstone, which is situated among vireyas.

*"Grieve not, nor think of me with tears, but laugh and talk of me as if I were beside you. I loved you so - 'twas heaven here with you"*

##### **Will it become available to the public?**

Pacific Island Nursery get all the cuttings I can take from it. They will have them in their next catalogue and should have a big supply by mid or late 2011.

##### **What plans do you have for further hybridizing?**

I have already registered another vireya, in the 2008 year, this time named after my departed wife Lois. It is Herbert Adler x *leucogigas*. It has a brilliant pure pink flower.

Eds. Thanks for the info and the photos Dick. A lovely remembrance and a beautiful vireya.

Descriptions and photos of the remaining new vireya registrations for 2007 will appear in the next issue of T V V.

## The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist, second edition (RHS, 2004)

For the first time in more than 45 years the names of all rhododendron cultivars have been drawn together into a single publication. This new Register and Checklist incorporates a record of names known to have been used for cultivars or Groups (formally known as grexes) within the genus *Rhododendron* up to the end of December 2002. It covers all azaleas, azaleodendrons and vireya rhododendrons as well as the core of hardy rhododendrons. All names published in the 1958 Register and the forty subsequent supplements are included, together with a very large number of additional uses of names which have come to light in the course of ongoing research. In all some 28,000 uses of names are recorded. Nearly 700 are vireyas: ranging from the early Veitch hybrids through to the burgeoning stream of new cultivars from the southern hemisphere.

Duplicated uses of names are treated individually wherever they are known to have occurred. Whilst the registration system exists to try and prevent such duplication (and it has certainly helped to reduce their occurrence) no such voluntary scheme can hope to eradicate the practice of re-use entirely. It will be of value to *Rhododendron* enthusiasts to have such multiple usages highlighted with as much information provided as possible to distinguish one from another.

Botanical nomenclature and classification followed in reporting on parentage and origin of the cultivars and Groups follows the *Rhododendron Handbook* 1998 (RHS, 1997). This is based on the revision of the genus pioneered by David Chamberlain and James Cullen and published by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The vireya treatment in the Handbook represents an updated account of this section by George Argent.

When the information is available each entry lists details of parentage, the names of those involved with the raising, naming, introduction and registration of each cultivar (and the relevant dates), combined with a description of the plant. Clearly if all the information listed by the Register comes direct from the raiser or introducer this will be authentic and thus the Register builds up to be a valuable resource beyond its purely nomenclatural function.

The system of International Cultivar Registration, organised under the auspices of the International Society for Horticultural Science, exists to try and prevent name duplication and to ensure all names are formed and published according to a set of international rules (contained in the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants*). The RHS has acted as ICRA for *Rhododendron* since 1955 and makes no charges for its

services, which include provision of a smart registration certificate once a new name has been registered.

However, this is a voluntary system and if it is to work and to produce useful results for the horticultural community the co-operation of all concerned is required. It should be emphasised that the Register is not there just to account for the names of the best cultivars, but all names in use. The Registrar is not responsible for assessing a plant's value or distinctness: that must be the concern of the raiser/introducer and that is the stage when vigorous selection should be practised! Unfortunately vireya breeders have not always set a good example by registering their plants and it is due to the generosity and hard work of a number of enthusiasts (Chris Callard in particular) that the Register & Checklist contains all that it does in this regard. If the ICRA has been at fault in not promoting itself more effectively to vireya growers it is hoped that this note and the appearance of the new Register and Checklist will help bring it to the attention of more of those who share the enthusiasm for these tropical beauties. Anyone able to add to the published accounts or point to errors is strongly encouraged to write to the International Registrar.

The new Register and Checklist is currently available from the RHS at £90.00 (post free in EU, plus postage elsewhere). Orders should be sent to Simon Maughan at RHS Publications, RHS, 80 Vincent Square, London SW1P 2PE (Email: [simonmaughan@rhs.org.uk](mailto:simonmaughan@rhs.org.uk)). Discounts are available for orders of 5 or more copies. The International Rhododendron Registrar (Dr Alan Leslie) can be contacted at RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB, England (Email: [alanleslie@rhs.org.uk](mailto:alanleslie@rhs.org.uk)): registration forms can be obtained from this address or directly from the RHS website at: [www.rhs.org.uk/plants/registration\\_rhododendron.asp](http://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/registration_rhododendron.asp) It is planned to publish Annual Supplements to the Register with the first one due out in 2005 actually covering the years 2003-2004.

That is the end of Issue #69 of T V V. We hope that you enjoyed it. Graham and Janet Price



*It's goodnight again from Buster and YumYum. They're bushed so they curled up in a corner beneath my desk.*