The Victoria Rhododendron Society *Newsletter*

Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria BC Canada V8R 6S4

February 2008 Twenty-eighth Year of Publication

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Meeting
7:30 pm Monday, February 4, 2008
Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria BC

SPEAKER: Agnes Lynn
"Chasing the Seasons with Local Wildflowers, Part 2"

February Refreshments:

Maureen Thomson, Herb and Iris Thorton, Norm and Jean Todd, Ruth Trelawny and Teresa and Bernard Turgeon are asked to bring wrapped goodies to February's meeting. Please phone **Nadine Minckler** at 474-1429 to confirm contributions. Help in the kitchen area is always welcome.

VRS 2008 SHOW AND PLANT SALE
First call for volunteers
MARK YOUR CALENDAR
SET-UP April 25th
SHOW and SALE April 26th
Volunteer sheets will be circulated at the February meeting

In This Issue

A Review of January's Talk
By Margaret deWeese

Dr. Norma Senn's talk on ten thousand years of agricultural history, titled: "Devious Plants- Manipulating Man for 12,000 Years", was filled with educational surprises covering a wide range of agricultural practices over the millennia in which mankind has played a role. Up to that point the plants evolved quite well on their own. Norma reported a sociological study of responses to scenes of terrains, and humans' most favoured picture was that of a savannah with a few trees at the perimeter, suggesting our tree climbing ances-

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tors used the trees for lookouts while hunting in the grasslands...fascinating stuff! The Dawn of Agriculture presents us with the facts that plants and civilization go hand in hand. There also does not appear to be just one location where agriculture began but a simultaneous rise in various parts of the world. Another fascinating statistic was that ten thousand plant species have, over time, been used for food, one hundred fifty plant species were regularly used for food and at the present day, only twenty plant species provide 90% of the world's foods.

Men used to winnow the best plants for growing to suit their nomadic lifestyles and so began the selection of plants which could survive a range of conditions. At the present day our cultivated plants are now unable to survive in the wild. They have high demands for water, fertilizer, frost protection and pesticides. I thought 'rust' was an underlying thread in Norma's talk. Rust seemed to start when the Romans moved the wheat from the middle east, westward to northern Europe where Stem Rust thrived on the introduced mid east crops. Over time crop failures led to starvation and ultimately may have been responsible for the fall of the mighty Romans. In our present age wheat stem rust continues to threaten modern wheat crops. Since wheat provides more caloric intake than any other crop in the world, including rice, this is a serious issue.

Potatoes were also a fascinating study. They originated in South America and made, and were responsible for, many trans oceanic voyages, including the mass migration of the Irish to North America. The potatoes, after thriving in the poor rocky soils of Ireland, were wiped out by “Phytophthera infestans", which led to mass starvation for the livestock and the subsistence farmers and their families. As the Europeans had not become totally dependent on potatoes but maintained their rye crops, they were not as affected until in the 1860's the volcanic eruption of Krakatoa darkened the skies round the world for three years and led to rust or "Late Blight", devastating agriculture in Europe. The fungicide, Copper sulphate, which could have helped stem the rust, was commandeered by Germany for the war machinery, and probably led to the fall of Germany in later years. In

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the present day temperature and humidity are carefully monitored and when the time is right, plants are sprayed to protect the plant by inhibiting rust growth.

Another intriguing piece of information is the remembering of potatoes in the Pacific North West tribal songs and stories as a time of plenty. Two varieties of wild potatoes from Peru, the 'Ozette ' in the Makah geographical region and the 'Haida' in the Queen Charlotte Islands, are being studied by anthropologists. These potatoes are believed to have been introduced by the early Spanish explorers.

Another frightening piece of information is the spread of banana blight or Black Sigatoka Fungus which is very bad news as bananas reproduce by offsets and therefore if the parent plant dies, that is it. How many millions of people will this fungus affect!

Now we are worrying about Sudden Oak Death or "Phytophthera ramorum".

What of the future? As climate changes produce areas of the world with less rain and others, including our own, with more, will we see greater levels of rust while other areas dry up? Food will just become more expensive as larger greenhouses will be needed to protect our food crops and water will be a much sought after resource.

Many thanks to Norma for such an interesting and thought provoking talk. I forgot to thank Norma for her hospitality to the VRS garden tour group when I was telling you about her interesting and unusual garden.

The Annual General Meeting

Elections of officers for the ensuing year are scheduled to take place at the AGM to be held during the March 3rd meeting.
If you are keen you could contact Dean Goard or Dick Pitfield.
Nominations should be submitted in writing to the Co-Chair of the Nominating Committee at least seven days in advance of the AGM, signed by the proposing member and authorized in writing by the person so nominated. Additional nominations to the Board, not to exceed two in number may be made from the floor at the AGM. No one shall be nominated for president or vice president until he or she has been a member of the Society for at least two years. Only full members of the ARS can vote or be elected to the Board.

Synopsis of an article by Steve Hootman & Lori Bennett of the Rhododendron Species Foundation on *Rhododendron edgeworthii* Hook. f.

By Bill McMillan

Species rhododendrons are usually grown for their attractive or fragrant flowers, their interesting and even beautiful foliage, or their smooth and glossy peeling bark. *Rhododendron edgeworthii* is one of the few species in which all of these desirable characteristics come together.

Members of subsection Edgeworthia, all have a dense woolly indumentum on the undersides of the leaves, a unique feature among lepidotes.

Joseph Hooker introduced *R. edgeworthii* into cultivation. He found it in the Himalayan mountains of Sikkim in 1849. In 1887, a similar species *Rhododendron bullatum*, was found by Delavay in Yunnan, and in 1917 the *R. sciaphyllum* was collected by Kingdon-

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Ward in Burma. Now all are assigned to *R. edgeworthii* with the names *R. bullatum* and *R. sciaphyllum* reduced to synonymy.

Rhododendron edgeworthii is typically found at elevations of 6,000-13,000 feet where it occurs in a wide range of habitats. It can be quite common on cliffs and rocks in forests but is usually seen as an epiphyte in the tops of large trees.

The rose-colored flower buds open in late spring to reveal wonderfully fragrant white, white flushed pink or pink flowers, sometimes with a yellow blotch near the tube base. Typically with 2-3 flowers per inflorescence, the funnel-campanulate corolla can measure up to three inches (5 cm) in length and up to five inches (8 cm) in diameter. The large and often deeply lobed calyx ranges in color from pink to green tinged with pink to red. It is usually covered on both its outer surface and margins by a more or less dense tomentum.

In cultivation of *Rhododendron edgeworthii* excellent drainage is the most critical factor. When planted in the ground it is a good idea to add generous quantities of coarse organic and mineral material. A sandy soil in a raised bed works well as does a well-rotted old log or stump to mimic the natural epiphytic habitat. Hardy to about 10°F., *R. edgeworthii* is often grown as a container plant in areas that drop below this temperature with regularity. An orchid growing mix or similar material is ideal to keep the roots healthy.

Light shade from tall coniferous or deciduous trees would be an ideal location with the added bonus of extra protection from frosts under the conifers. This is one of the few rhododendrons resistant to weevil attack due to the natural production of chemicals in the foliage which repel the adults.

Charles (Charlie) Manlius Johnson – May 1, 1936 to December 29, 2007

by Ev Vaneerden

Charlie died unexpectedly in St. Paul's hospital in Vancouver surrounded by his family. He is survived by his wife, Sue, son Tom (Heather Ramsay), daughter Karen (John Stephenson), five grandchildren, sister Claire Shaw, and brothers Ken and Bob (Betty), many well-loved cousins, nieces and nephews, and numerous personal and professional friends. He was a generous father, friend and colleague.

Charlie graduated from the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Forestry in 1962, after which he joined the British Columbia Forest Service (BCFS) and served that organization in various locations and capacities, culminating with his appointment as Director of the Silviculture Branch in 1980.. He loved silviculture (establishing, tending and maintaining forests). .

In 1988, he left the BCFS to found an employee–owned forest nursery company, Pacific Regeneration Technologies Inc. (PRT), together with colleagues and employees. Through his vision and leadership, the company grew and expanded to such an extent that the company was taken public through a listing on the TSX as Income Trust in 1997. That company was ultimately spun off, and continues to expand production. Charlie retired as President of PRT on September 1, 1988, 10 years after the company was founded.

Charlie was a true "Plants Man". His love of plants extended far beyond trees and forest vegetation. True to the family tradition, he had a particular fondness for rhododendrons and dahlias and had a

productive vegetable garden. Charlie and Sue recently established a Rhodo Glen around a beautiful pond and waterfall at their Lost Lake property. Some of us were privileged to have a tour of the Johnson rhododendron gardens in 2007.

Charlie had a very full life and leaves a legacy of multiple interests, including generous donations to a number of causes. We will miss him dearly.

A Gathering in Charlie's honour was held at the Highlands Caleb Pike House on January 4, 2008. To help celebrate Charlie's life and his love of gardening, please join his family on May 18th, 2008 from 1 PM onwards to enjoy his beloved Rhododendron garden at 635 Lost Lake Rd in the Highlands, Victoria

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Snow

by Alec McCarter , reprinted from January 2002

When I awoke this morning, a dusting of snow had arrived during the night. It has transformed the familiar green and colourful surroundings to a black and white, green and white paradise, best seen from the comfort of indoors.

The Hoheria has repelled the snowfall and remains tall, graceful and green. The white pussy-willows of the stellata Magnolia are enhanced by a capping of snow, their grey branches appear darker. The apple tree's silhouette is grotesque while here and there, a few late Calendula strike orange notes above the white. Long spikes of yellow Mahonia sparkle gold against the white encrusted jade-green leaves. An errant Fennel, not usually visible against the dark earth, shows vividly its lacy form, bronze against the new background. If the weather should get colder, it will be lost. Nearby, two striking curly mallows grasp at a dusting of icing sugar. Figs, having fallen to the patio, each bears a thick topping, round confections that, alas, are not edible except to hibernating slugs.

On the wall at the feeder, roofed by a slab of cedar to protect the grain below from the wet, hungry Juncoes, their black hoods relieved by bright yellow beaks, vie for grain with a Towhee. He flirts his tail and flares his wings, displaying vibrant colours, nervously jittering with every movement. A single starling, his beak totally unfitted to breaking seed shells, nevertheless eagerly fills his belly with millet and crushed corn. At least he has satisfied his hunger for the moment.

The cat that appears each morning, hoping to augment his breakfast, is absent today. The weather is not too cold for him to be out of doors. Perhaps he does not like the icy slush on his feet, or is afraid that his footprints will betray his secret lair below the feeder. An untrained hunter, he has failed to catch so much as a feather – but he is a source of amusement to me – the watcher.

The pan of water, beside the feeder is frozen – a junco has just skated over the surface of the ice. Will he know to ease his thirst with snow if the rising sun does not melt his drink soon?

Snow clouds fill the sky but here and there pale blue is seen above the white and there the clouds are turning pink. The lawn is mottled with white. Insulated from the warm earth below by the grass on which it sits, the snow will soon melt. On the bare soil, most of the snow has already gone.

SEASONS OF THE RHODODENDRON Theresa McMillan

Winter, drooping leaves in cold and snow

Later, spent flowers ready to be deadheaded

Spring promise, flower bud and leaf bud

Summer, fine bluish new growth

Spring, glory in full bloom

Autumn, older leaves yellow and fall off