



Plant Heritage

CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Cornwall Group Newsletter. December 2019

2019 and all that!

It has been a good year for Plant Heritage in Cornwall, we are delighted to welcome some new members to the group and our events through the year have been well attended and very enjoyable. The committee still has a vacancy for a secretary and in addition anyone who would like to help out on the committee in any capacity would be very welcome.

The year started with our annual meeting, held at Heligan in January. We were very grateful for the opportunity to meet in this remarkable garden and equally pleased to welcome some of the gardeners and staff to our meeting.

The formal part of the meeting was quickly followed by a presentation on the theoretical issues surrounding grafting. Plants will only be conserved successfully if we can propagate and distribute them. Many of our rarest plants are difficult to propagate and need to be grafted, it was time to bite the bullet and see if we could develop our own skills in this specialised area. Plenty to think about as we moved on to a report by Lucy Pitman from head office about the challenges and successes of the past year and the outlook for the coming one.

With the thought of lunch filling people's minds we heard a short summary of the Plant Nannies project for the year and handed out some plants in need of new Nannies. I hope you are all having some success with them!

Once restored to full vigour by lunch we tried our hands at some practical grafting using a professional tool that gives a uniform cut to the scion and the stock so that a union can form. The fiddly process of wrapping the joint with a plastic strip is one of those things that can only be learnt with practise. Hopefully people have a selection of Beech cultivars and old apples growing away following the session. I am sure there have been failures but the tool we used seemed very efficient and it will be interesting to hear how people got on.

As the afternoon came to a close we heard about the history of Heligan and the decline of the garden after the First World War. The National Collection at Heligan is seeking to preserve and restore the *Rhododendron* and *Camellia* grown in the garden during its heyday. This was followed by a tour around the gardens and a chance to see the collection and hear something of the issues faced in conserving them with a historical context.



Hands on grafting experience.



The challenges of conserving old plants.



***Camellia* 'Gloire de Nantes'.**

In March we were able to visit the Woodland Garden at Antony House. The garden sweeps down to the edge of the Lynher Estuary and the grounds were initially landscaped by Humphrey Repton in the 18th century. The National Collection of *Camellia japonica* cultivars grows in a valley behind the house and a spectacularly beautiful day in March turned out to be the ideal time to see them at their best. In a seemingly perfect environment the plants grow rapidly and so create a problem that besets most camellia collections in the county. The only solution is regular pruning to rejuvenate the plants and maintain the landscape effect. Retaining labels under these circumstances can be difficult, but plants in the collection were well marked and well recorded and showed the genus at its best.



Antony House.



Beside the Lynher Estuary.



***Camellia* 'Citation'.**

In May our attention switches to the Cornwall Hardy Plant Society Plant Sale in Truro. This is our big fund-raiser of the year and the operation of our local group depends on the income we raise here. Thanks are due to all the members who bring us plants they have propagated to sell and especially to those who help to run the stand through the morning. Volunteers and plants are always very welcome, rain or shine (and we hope sincerely for shine). As well as raising the money the group relies on to operate it gives us a chance to meet the members and catch up with the local news and gossip.

This year we had a perfect May day for the sale. Enough sunshine to be warm and a gentle breeze for comfort (and a little bit of drizzle at the end of the morning - it helped to keep the dust down). As ever there was a wonderful range of plants for sale, some of the best (in my opinion) offered by Plant Heritage. Thank you all for bringing them, please spare us a few moments to produce a few more during the winter for next year!



CHPS Plant Sale in May.



In June we visited Neil Armstrong's remarkable sculpture garden at Tremeneheere. The gardens are planted with a remarkable assortment of tender and exotic plants well suited to the mild conditions in the garden, set just a few hundred yards from the coast of Mounts Bay on the edge of Penzance. At the bottom of the garden the palms take centre stage with many large specimens of unusual species planted on the slope near to the entrance. Rare palms continue in the lower parts of the streamside path with a number of the more tender species taking advantage of the shelter provided by the mature woodland. Further along the path the palms are replaced by mature tree ferns in a number of species. *Dicksonia antarctica* provides a reliable backbone for plantings of *Cyathea* species, *Lophosoria quadripinnata* and *Todea barbara*. Near the top of the raised walkway a magnificent specimen of *Cyathea medullaris* is a remarkable reflection of the mild and moist conditions that the garden provides.

At the top of the slope the garden opens up and the sunnier conditions and good drainage make a perfect environment for a wide range of *Protea*, and a selection of succulents. There are some magnificent

mature *Agave* growing through plantings of South African and Australian natives. The highlight of the day for me was a flowering specimen of *Magnolia fordiana*, a species from southern China and Myanmar. I have seen young plants before but it was good to see as more mature specimen in such good condition.



Tremenheere.



The outlook to St Michaels Mount.



Palms in the garden.

I had hoped that we would be able to visit the collection of *Hemerocallis* at Antony House this year but I didn't manage to organise it in time (my fault entirely) and rather than visit when the collection was going over we have postponed the trip until next year.

That took us to September and the Plant Nannies event held at the Tremenheere Plant Fair. It was great to meet up with some old friends. Huge thanks to the Plant Nannies who brought plants back for us, it was wonderful to see some of these plants prospering and being distributed.

A sunny day in early September within sight of the sea at Penzance, things could hardly have been better. We met up with a number of our Plant Nannies, and signed up a record number of new ones. Thank you all, you are amazing.



Tremenheere Plant Fair.



Setting up in the morning.



A good crowd and a busy day.

Devon Group AGM.

In November I was able to spend a day at the Devon Group's AGM. The business of the meeting was rapidly and efficiently dealt with and the morning continued with a talk from Carlos Magdalena about his work at Kew and around the world. He steps in to help conserve some of the world's most threatened species, developing ways to propagate and increase their numbers. His work with *Nymphaea thermarum*, the world's smallest water lily, has been well recorded. The plant was discovered in 1987 growing at the site of a single thermal spring in Rwanda. The population was declining and it was proving difficult to cultivate outside its unusual natural conditions. The species became extinct in its natural habitat and Carlos was down to his last 20 seeds before he discovered that they needed to germinate in mud at the surface rather than underwater like the rest of the genus. Since then Carlos has been involved in the conservation of a number of other critically endangered species.

Lunch gave us all a chance to chat, meet new friends and catch up with old ones. There is a plant sale that always produces some interesting plants and I took up a few plants in need of conservation. We signed up six new Plant Nannies. They may be north of the Tamar but they have good hearts.

And there was cake. The Devon Group was celebrating its 40th anniversary with a magnificent cake. I managed to get a picture of about half of it. They don't waste any time. The Devon members may have good hearts but those people are gannets!

In the afternoon we had a very interesting talk from Neil Lucas of the Knoll Garden in Hampshire. Neil is well known for his promotion of grasses in the garden and he showed us a wonderful selection of the best of them. His talk was also brutally honest about those grass species that seemed to show promise but that didn't actually perform in a garden setting. The nomenclature of grasses seems to be in a state of constant change but I came away feeling less ignorant and perplexed than I was at the start. I also have a list of proven performers that I will be trying in my own garden.



The Devon group assembling.



Half of a 40th anniversary cake.



The last remains of a good plant sale.

Plant Nannies.

The Plant Nannies have had a very good year. We numbered thirty at the start of the year. At our annual meeting in January another six people joined us, looking after things as diverse as a variegated auricula and a dwarf, white flowered winter *Iris*. It is wonderful that people are able to help us with plant conservation in such a simple and practical manner.

The Plant Nannies event at the Tremeneere Plant Fair introduced another seventeen people to the program and we ended the year with fifty three Plant Nannies helping to conserve plants in cultivation. There were 76,000 different plants recorded as being commercially available in the RHS Plant Finder for 2017. Estimates vary, but there are probably an equal number that are grown but not commercially available. It is almost inevitable that a large number of plants are drifting unnoticed towards extinction. As a national organisation, Plant Heritage is working to identify the highest priorities and taking steps to conserve them through the Threatened Plants Project, the Plant Exchange, Plant Guardianship and other initiatives.

In the Cornish group we don't have the resources to identify the plants grown locally that are at greatest risk, so the Plant Nannies Project takes a broader view. We start with plants that we believe are declining in cultivation locally or poorly established. When we have managed to propagate a specimen we hand it on to a Plant Nanny to grow in their own garden and take care of. All we ask is that once the plant is flourishing and secure, they bring us back a piece to pass on to another Plant Nanny. In this way we are able to slowly improve the plants position in cultivation and hopefully keep it from slipping onto the "critical" list.

New Plant Nannies are always welcome, we are hoping to increase the number of events that we hold next year. Volunteers are always needed to help with the stall and explain what we are doing to the public. Details of coming events will be circulated through this newsletter, but until then: Thank you all!



The Cornwall group and Plant Nannies at Heligan in January.



Primula auricula 'Forest Bordeaux', now being looked after by a Plant Nanny.



Plant Nannies stand at Tremeneere Plant Fair.

Annual Meeting 2020.

Our Annual Meeting will once again be held at Heligan. Tuesday 28th January 2020. Meet in the cafe at the entrance to the gardens at 10.30. We will move on from there to the meeting room to start the meeting at 11.00.

28th January 2020	Programme for the day.
11.00 - 12.00	Annual meeting.
12.00 - 1.00	Importing <i>Lapageria</i> for the National Collection. National Plant Heritage report. Plant Nannies report and event.
1.00 - 2.00	Lunch.
2.00 - 3.00	Practical session on hardwood cuttings. Results of last years grafting.
3.00 - 4.00	The National Collection at Heligan.

There is no charge for the day but you will have to get your own lunch and other refreshments (sorry, we have no budget). The cafe at Heligan is excellent.

We would be delighted to see you on the day, but if it is possible could you let me know that you are planning to come. It helps us to organise enough chairs and other innately stupid but essential things!
cornwallplantheritage@gmail.com

Meetings for 2020.

Details are still being confirmed for some of the events planned for 2020, you will receive further details via this newsletter or on the website as things are finalised.

28th January 2020	Annual meeting at Heligan.
22nd March	Plant Nannies event at Tavistock Plant Fair.
2nd May	Plant Heritage stall at Hardy Plant Society Plant Sale, Truro.
July	Hemerocallis National Collection open day at Antony house. Date to be confirmed.
1st September	Visit to the National Collection of <i>Lapageria</i> in the flowering season and to see the new plants.
13th (?) September	Plant Nannies event the the Tremenheere Plant Fair.

www.cornwallplantheritage.co.uk

Plant Nannies are very welcome at all of our meetings.

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Cornwall Plant Heritage Website.

Many of you will have noticed that we now have a new website, accessible through a link on the national website or directly at :

www.cornwallplantheritage.co.uk

I would like to ensure that there are records of significant plants and plant collections in Cornwall that are freely and easily available. If collection holders would like to add more than the links in their entries any submissions are very welcome. Let me know about any errors and I will correct them.

General Data Protection Regulation.

New Data Protection Regulations came into force in 2019. If the Cornwall Group of Plant Heritage hold your address, e-mail address or other data we use it to communicate matters relating to Plant Heritage or the Cornwall Group of Plant Heritage. We will only use it for this purpose and will not provide it to other organisations.

If you wish your data to be deleted from Cornwall Plant Heritage Group records now or at any time in the future, please let the us know.

This notice is issued in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Administrative bits and bobs.

We don't currently have a group secretary in Cornwall. If there is anybody prepared to offer some assistance on that front then it would be very much appreciated. The duties aren't particularly onerous but spreading some of the load around would make us more effective. Some extra opinions would help us to innovate and improve our democratic representation. On the same tack, a general Committee Member would be very welcome.

We always need plants to sell at the HPS plant sale in May. Please remember us, propagate things now and bring them along in May. They provide our only significant source of income and although our running costs are very low, we do need some money to function.

The Plant Nannies project depends on our members identifying plants that are declining in the County, propagating them and bringing them to a Plant Nannies event to start the ball rolling. The more help we get with this at the beginning, the more difference we can make.

And some stuff about *Hypericum*.

A RHS trial of shrubby *Hypericum* has recently come to an end. This is probably the most complete collection of shrubby species that has ever been assembled and it would be nice if they could be kept together.

So, if anybody feels they could house a large number of shrubby *Hypericum* as the foundation of a new National Collection, please get in touch with me and I will try to connect you with the relevant people. There were 136 accessions in the trial but it is thought that only about half of them are significantly distinct and in need of conservation.

Plant Nannies.

The Plant Nannies exist to encourage the cultivation, propagation and dissemination of uncommon, poorly known or endangered garden plants in Cornwall.

They are organised by the Cornwall group of Plant Heritage, a national charity that seeks to encourage the conservation of garden plants through cultivation.

Who can take part?

Anyone with an interest who would like to grow a plant and assist in the Cornish conservation effort.

What does it involve?

We have a few plants available that we think deserve some care to keep them in cultivation. We give them to the Plant Nannies to look after and enjoy in their own gardens. When the plant grows and they feel able to divide or propagate a small section then they return a young plant to us and keep the original. The young plants are either given out to a new Plant Nanny or we sell them to raise money for Plant Heritage.

What does it cost?

Nothing. We hope to raise money by selling surplus plants through regular Rare Plant sales in the region.

What do we ask?

We ask for an e-mail address so that we can send you Cornwall Plant Heritage Newsletters that will inform you of coming events and plant sales.

What do we get?

With your help we can keep plants in cultivation in gardens that are in danger of disappearing. Together we can raise the profile of plants that were once better known but are now endangered and we can raise some money to support the national charity.

Hope to see you soon.

John Sirkett.

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