



Bermuda Botanical Society

SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER 2012

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The last day of August marks the end of the Society's financial year. Please renew your membership now, using the membership renewal form attached.

This has been a transitional year for the Society since, during the year, we ceased our operation of the cafe and shop at the Botanical Gardens Visitors' Centre. As you know, this had become a financially draining operation, which we could no longer sustain. We will be showing a loss for the year just ended since we were still running the shop and cafe for the first four months of the Society year.

Incidentally, we are pleased to note that the cafe has now reopened as **Petals Cafe** under new private proprietorship. The kitchen area has been upgraded so that hot foods, including home made soup, can be sold. This facility should be of great benefit for visitors, the Botanical Gardens staff and the general public. I understand that the cafe's summer hours are from 10.00 am to 7.00 pm on week days and also on week-end afternoons. Please give Petals a try and pass the word around.

We urge members to become involved with BBS activities. Here are a few areas we need your help:

Do you, or anyone you know, have a particular interest related to Botany to share, such as in a workshop or slide presentation? Do you have a garden you would be willing to open? How about writing an article for the Newsletter - our editor, Helle Patterson, always welcomes new contributors.

Would you like to join the Executive Committee and assist with our activities and organization? Do you have ideas for fundraising or expanding the membership?

Can you help with our Plant Sale by providing plants and/or helping with setting up and stewarding? (See below.)

Do you have accounting expertise? We are looking for someone to take over from current treasurer, Samantha Bromfield, who has to step down during the next year. Samantha assures me that, now we no longer operate the Visitors' Centre, this is a much simplified job.

If you can help in any way, please contact me or another Executive Committee member.

The **Plant Sale**, our main fundraiser, is set for **Saturday 27 October**, just eight weeks away. Please have a look around to see what plants you may be able to donate to the sale. The more variety we have, the better. Often it's just a case of digging up and potting on plants that have self-propagated in the garden. Other plants lend themselves to dividing or the taking of cuttings. Or maybe you have raised plants from seeds and have more than you can use? Act now - it's no good waiting until a few days before the sale!

My own stock of empty plant pots is just about exhausted. If you have any **unwanted pots and containers** of any shape or size, please call me at **293-0128** or email me at nchudlei@ibl.bm and I will arrange to collect. Spare those pots from incineration!

Nigel Chudleigh



FLORAL BRITAIN

Unexpectedly, I had to spend a good portion of this year in England. The upside was it provided the opportunity to take in such notable events as the Chelsea Flower Show, the Royal Jubilee and the Olympic Games. We also visited some very interesting public and private open gardens.

Quite by luck, I stumbled across the Punchbowl in

Azaleas at Punchbowl, Windsor Gt. Park

Windsor Great Park just at the peak of the azalea season. Azaleas, as you can see, are quite spectacular when in their full glory.

Azaleas are members of the Rhododendron family and need acidic soil to prosper. For this reason they can really only be grown in containers in Bermuda. Azaleas are shade tolerant and prefer to grow close to, or under, trees.

At the Olympic Stadium park in London, the plantings were also very impressive. The meadows of annual flowers were especially eye-catching.



Flower meadow at Olympic Stadium Park, London

Nigel Chudleigh

TREES IN THE CITY

Some time ago Lisa Greene told me about Hamilton's Catalpa Trees, that she somehow had never identified. I went to take a look and indeed, what I had thought to be White Cedars turned out to be something different. At least some of them turned out to be the Catalpas that she had described. The differences are obvious: the leaves of the Catalpa are pointed and those of the White Cedars are rather elliptical (below:)



But the real difference lies in the flowers and the seedpods. The flowers of both are about the same colour, but those of the Catalpa are much smaller than those of the West Indian Cedar. The most striking difference, however, is that the Catalpa has very long seed pods, hence the name Pencil Tree. The seedpods of the White Cedar are shorter and wider.

Observing these things I came to think what great variety of trees there really is in the streets of Hamilton, and I am not talking about what's in parks and gardens, like Victoria and Par-la-Ville Park and around the Government buildings. One can see many different trees just on the sidewalks of our streets.

Let's just take a short walk into the City from Spurling Hill into Reid Street. What do we see?

In the very first section there are three Queen Palms, and two Mahogany trees. It is really after King Street that the fun begins.

The first tree on the left is a Catalpa! Then a West Indian Almond. To the right a small row of Mahogany trees and left again a White Cedar. One does not have to look up: you can tell by the flowers which are on the sidewalk, and if not by the flowers, then by the myriad feather-light two-winged seeds at your feet.

In front of the old Canadian Hotel there are both White Cedars and Catalpas. Here you can see the difference in the seedpods: those of the Catalpa are very long indeed! Just before Court Street there are Mahogany and Black Ebony trees. If you take the time you may also learn the different aspects of the bark of several of these trees, so the next time you drive by you may identify what you see without looking up.

So far we have seen 6 different trees and I am not counting an Indian Laurel that sprouts from the base of one of them. Talking about Indian Laurels... have you ever noticed the one that grew from the top floor of the Canadian Hotel, where there is a large sculpture of a lion? Well, it has been killed, but its root is still supplying the lion with a tail.

Between Court and Parliament Street there is a nice row of Cordias. At this time of the year you can see both the orange flowers and the white fruit.

After Parliament Street there is some wonderful shade in the summer, supplied by Black Ebony trees. The Corporation of Hamilton knew what to do in the past and has recently planted a few young ones in open spots.

I end this small tour with an advice: you might get glimpses of this all from your vehicle, but if you want to take a really good look, you must take a walk.

George Peterich

BOTANICAL MUSINGS

BY LISA GREENE

Excerpted from the Millennium Seed Bank Blog: visit the site to see the photos - <http://www.kew.org/news/kew-blogs/millennium-seed-bank/blue-seeds-of-madagascar.htm>

If blue is such a rare colour among seeds, there must be a good reason why the Malagasy traveller's tree (*Ravenala madagascariensis*) seeds have evolved such an exotic colour. The reason behind it is a fascinating example of the tightly interwoven natural history of plants and animals.

The Malagasy traveller's tree [known in Bermuda as the traveller's palm] is a close relative of the bird-of-paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*) from South Africa and very similar to big palulu (*Phenakospermum guianense*) from South America [but not grown in Bermuda, to my knowledge].

All three species belong to the Strelitzaceae family and all three produce seeds with edible appendages to attract animals for their dispersal. However, whilst the edible appendage of the seeds of *Strelitzia* and *Phenakospermum* has the appearance of a bright orange-red 'wig', the seeds of *Ravenala* are wrapped in an intensely blue, soft, wax-paper-like appendage.

So, why are they blue? Clearly there must be a reason why *Ravenala*, geographically isolated in Madagascar, has evolved seeds with an intensely blue, rather than red, appendage. The answer is in the very special fauna of the island.

Prosimian ('half-apes') such as lemurs and lorises (a related group of 'half-apes' found in Asia), have dichromatic vision and can only differentiate shades of blue and green but not red – whereas birds have very similar colour-vision to humans. So the shaggy red 'wigs' of the seeds of the bird-of-paradise flower would be wasted on the lemurs of Madagascar.

Lisa's note:

There are a few Madagascar traveller's palms in Bermuda: one is in the garden of the Peace Lutheran Church in Paget opposite from the south entrance of the Botanical Gardens; another is on the south side near the junction of Devon Springs Lane and South Shore Road, and a third can be seen at the Aquarium. I have never seen seed on them, nor on the bird-of-paradise - but I've not looked for it either. I *have* seen fruit on the *giant* bird-of-paradise outside the offices of the (now) Dept. of Environmental Protection in the Botanical Gardens. Has anyone else seen fruit on any of these plants? If you have, send me an email at elgreene@ibl.bm.

SCHOLARSHIPS 2012



Nigel Chudleigh, Rachael Antonition, Kascia White and Peter Lee

Two Bermuda Botanical Society scholarships were awarded this year, to Rachael Antonition and Kascia White. Rachael is reading for a BA (Hons) Degree in Landscape Architecture at Kingston University, Surrey. UK, while Kascia is studying for a BSc in Biology with a minor in Psychology at St Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Each student received \$2,500.00 and a membership in the Society.



From Lisa Greene: This caterpillar is the *Agrius cingulatus* – the sweet potato hornworm. It eats plants in the convolvulus family, including the waxy-leaved seaside morning glory, and it will hatch into the pink-spotted sphinx moth



Lisa also sent us this picture of the glorious salmon-coloured royal Poinciana on the south side of the flamingo exhibit at the Aquarium

ENDEMIC PERENNIAL – BERMUDIANA
(Sisyrinchium bermudiana)

The Bermudiana is one of the few endemic species left in Bermuda and is part of the Iridaceae family. It is a small herbaceous perennial and is the unofficial national flower of Bermuda. The leaves grow from six to nine inches long and its flowers have six purple petals and are yellow at the base, which gives the plant a beautiful yellow glow. (Flora, 2005; Forbes 2005).

Also known as Bermuda iris (or blue-eyed grass), for many years before botanists knew of more continental species of sisyrinchium, the Bermuda variety was considered as a North American type. It was thought that our Bermudian species does not grow in the wild anywhere else in the world, as pointed

out by Hemsley in 1884 (Journ. Bot. 22: 108-110). It is interesting to note that plants which were taken to the New York Botanical Gardens grew easily and flowered well when grown under glass. (Flora of Bermuda, 1865).

Although this pretty little blue Iris is found growing in the wild in dry sunny places all over Bermuda, there is also a place for it in a cultivated home garden. It has typical Iris shaped leaves, and flowers throughout the month of April and sometimes even longer.



Bermudiana (Google, 2012)

Sisyrrinchium bermudiana will flourish in any open, sunny position and is propagated by seed. The seed is produced in the pods on top of the plant after the end of its flowering period. (Whitney, 1955). The seeds can be sown directly in the ground in early spring.

Peter Lee



REVISED CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Please note some changes to dates and / or venues.

Sun. 14 October 2012. 4:00 pm Presentation by Axel Bubenzer: “Some Rare and Unusual Plants – Their History, Propagation & Nurture.”
Venue : ***Visitors' Centre, Botanical Gardens. Not 6 October as previously advised.***

Sat. 27 October 2012 Annual Plant Sale, J. J. Outerbridge Building, Botanical Gardens. 8.30 am Members, 9.00 am General Public.

Wed. 7 November 2012 5.30 pm Annual General Meeting. ***Visitors' Centre, Botanical Gardens. Not 8 November as previously advised.***

Sat. 8 December 2012. 5.00 pm. Christmas Party. ***Visitors' Centre, Botanical Gardens.***

