



Bermuda Botanical Society

P.O. Box HM 2116, Hamilton, HM JX, Bermuda

bermudabotanical.org

bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2020

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Successful visit by Writtle University College Senior Lecturers, Jan 9 – 17, 2020

2020 got off to a great start for the BBS with the visit by Senior Lecturers from Writtle University College, UK, Mick Lavelle and Sandra Nicholson. Writtle University has been attended by a number of Bermudians, who are now working locally, in various branches of horticulture. A reception on the Saturday evening enabled the alumni to reconnect with Mick and Sandra.

The BBS linked forces with 3 other local organizations, The Garden Club of Bermuda, Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo, and the Bermuda National Trust. We appreciate the support and collaboration of those groups. Along with these 3 presentations – ‘Climate Change and Landscape Plants’, ‘Plants & People’, ‘The Development of the Mediaeval Garden at Crossing Temple’, visits were made to the Bermuda College, Cedarbridge Academy and Warwick Academy where careers in horticulture were discussed with students. The latter was followed by an informative tour of the organic garden and tree planting projects, amazing! Congratulations to the teachers, students and parents involved.



Students, Warwick Academy



Lecturing at Bermuda College

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Following the presentation at the Bermuda College, one of the students offered to show us their hydroponic experiment. Eric has done an amazing job, using recycled products (including solar panel!) to create a self-sustaining, productive unit.

Well worth a visit.



Hydroponics and fish pond, Bermuda College

The discussion at Cedarbridge Academy revolved around climate change and plants, as well as careers (see later item).

Monday morning and a visit with Keival “The Captain” Burgess, of the Bermuda Broadcasting Company gave useful coverage of the events to come and the BBS.

A visit to the restored gardens of Dr and Mrs Chudleigh was one of the highlights for Mick and Sandra. After an extensive, interesting and informative tour we were kindly invited to a delicious lunch on the patio overlooking the beautiful Harrington Sound.

Other visits included the Arboretum, the Bermuda Botanical Gardens, Southlands, Somerset Long Bay and Pitman’s Pond (more on these to be found in another item in this newsletter). Mick and Sandra

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were honoured to meet with Dr David Wingate – whom Mick dubbed the Bermuda equivalent to the UK's David Attenborough.

Many thanks to Society member Astrid Robinson, who so kindly hosted Mick and Sandra. Very much appreciated.

Do hope you managed to attend at least one of the presentation, all in all, an extremely busy and successful event.

Jennifer Flood

CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

Will you be the one to report a first flowering?

Bermudiana, Loquat, Bay Grape, Surinam Cherry, Allspice

At the recent visit to Cedarbridge Academy by Sandra Nicholson and Mick Lavelle, a student asked if the early flowering of loquat trees could be a sign of climate change. It was thought this would make an interesting project – seeing when iconic plants came into flower and if this changed over the coming years, the student is keen to work on this. The list of plants we had Bermudiana (*Sisyrinchium bermudiana*), Loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*), Bay Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), and Dr Wingate suggested we add Surinam Cherry (*Eugenia uniflora*), and Allspice (*Pimenta dioica*).

So, please, as you enjoy your garden, your walks or are generally out and about, keep your eyes open for the first flowering of these plants and let the Society know – date, time, location - at bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

Look forward to hearing from you.

Jennifer Flood

DO YOU HAVE A COUPLE OF HOURS ONCE A MONTH?

Two of the Bermuda Botanical Gardens Tour Guides are presently out of action for health reasons and we really could use some temporary help – would you be willing to take tours – once a month would be most helpful. Contact Jennifer at bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

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THE FOUR O'CLOCK FLOWER – text & photos by George Peterich

The things that I observe while walking with my dog are not all visual. I have developed a knowledge of quite a few different scents, mainly of flowering trees. I know that they are there by just smelling them. Examples are: fiddlewood, Loquat and the infamous Sicklethorn. Sometime, it was late November all of a sudden, an unknown scent hit my nose. I was a bit late with my afternoon walk and it was almost dark. What could it be? Looking ahead I saw a cluster of two-foot-high plants that showed a number of white flowers, and sure enough that was where the scent came from. That scent is not really nice, being quite similar to the aroma of Winter Green, something that I do not appreciate as it reminds me of the small tins of “Snuff”, that is finely ground tobacco seasoned, that some American men use as chewing tobacco, and that come with that wintergreen aroma. I went and smelled the flowers and found it remarkable that I had not smelled them before, although in the mornings had seen the flowers before. They are really lovely: the pink stamens contrasting with the white of the petals.



The scent seemed a bit of a mystery, but the explanation was of course: the plant is a night bloomer. It spreads its scent in the first dark hour of the evenings in the late Fall and early winter days. This is confirmed by the local name of the plant: The Four O'clock Flower! I found that the scientific name in the literature is both *Jalapa mirabilis* and *Mirabilis jalapa*. I'll vote for the former, because mirabilis is a Latin adjective and as such more appropriate as an epithet. The origin of the plant is a place called Jalapa in Mexico. There are several cultivars and they are very easy to grow from seed. Here in Bermuda I have also seen a pink one.

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TRIVIUM no.25— text by George Peterich

SOME BASIC LATIN

Linnaeus and the founding fathers of the Binomial System did not start from scratch when they made up the scientific names of plants. Many plants were already known to them by the names that the Romans used., and also they were very familiar with them, because in those days Latin was still the language written between scientists.

Here follow a few names of trees that have that pedigree and are nice to know:

Quercus	Fagus,
Ilex	Salix
Pinus,	Abies
Ficus	Morus

Each one of these is used for a genus. See if you can match the following English names to the above. Oak, beach, willow, pine, holly, mulberry, fir, fig

Example: *Quercus robur* is the English oak. But in Bermuda you may only find *Quercus Virginiana*. (in the Botanical Garden)

Here in Bermuda you can find: *Ilex cornuta*, *Pinus halepensis*, *Ficus retusa*, *Morus nigra*. I think I have seen a weeping *Salix* here.

Ed. note: the last time I looked, there was a weeping willow in Southampton, Middle Road, near Evan's Pond

THE GREY NICKERS & THE LEAF CUTTER BEE

- text and photos by Allison Copeland

A few weeks ago I was on Nonsuch Island visiting the 'snail wall' where a population of *Poecilozonites bermudensis* land snails have been established. On the way into this site, one has to pass some of my least favourite native plants – the nicker bean or grey nickers plant *Guilandina bonduc*. To be fair, it does have pretty yellow flowers. Also, it has one of the most attractive seeds you can find; a grape-sized sphere that looks like Italian marble, housed in a spiny pod. Apparently, it is the greyish white colour of the seed that gives grey nickers its common name. (Wikipedia tells us that 'knikker' is Dutch for a clay marble – so nothing to do with under garments.)

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Grey nicker seed pods with sea oxeye leaves at Blue Hole Park



Grey nickers at Somerset Long Bay

Grey nickers is a coastal plant that grows like a sprawling vine, scrambling over anything nearby. The reason I hate it so much is the stem is covered in pairs of incredibly sharp, curved thorns. The moment you go too close it grabs a hold of you and the curve in its spines makes it impossible to free yourself without ripping skin or clothing. It would be ideal for anyone looking for a native plant for a security planting.

On a visit to the snail wall last August, I was interested to notice that this patch of grey nickers had been thoroughly cut up by leaf-cutter bees. There is evidence of leaf cutting activity all over Nonsuch each summer. The bees like to target Jamaica dogwood and wax myrtle, and are very fond of the peach tree in front of the house. This is the first time I had seen cuts on the grey nickers. The cuts made by the bees are very distinctive; they look like elongated 'C' shapes along the margins of the

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leaves. It made me happy to think that one of our native insects was making good use of this unpleasant plant.



Leaf cutter bee marks on grey knickers

Do you have this plant in your garden or know anyone who does?

A member of the BBS had this in her garden but it died out and she'd love to replace it. She gave seeds away but can't recall who she gave them to. If you can help, please send an email to bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com



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IN OUR GARDEN - Starburst, *Clerodendrum quadriloculare*

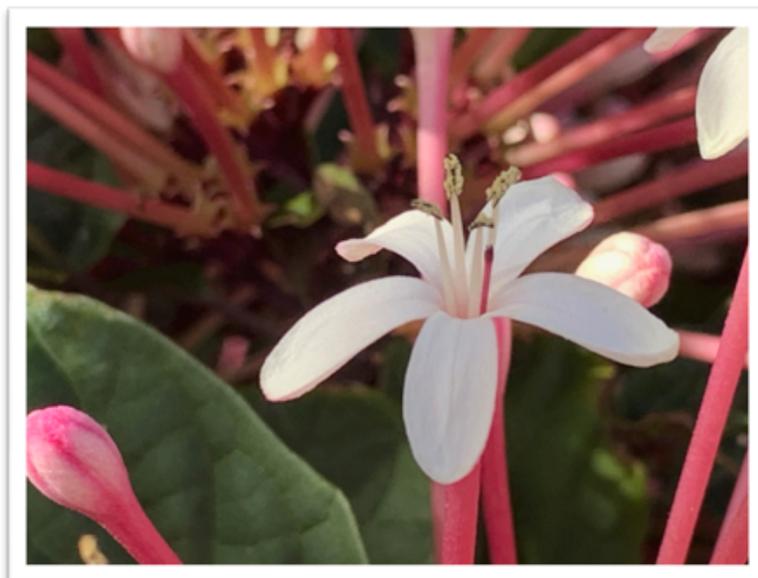
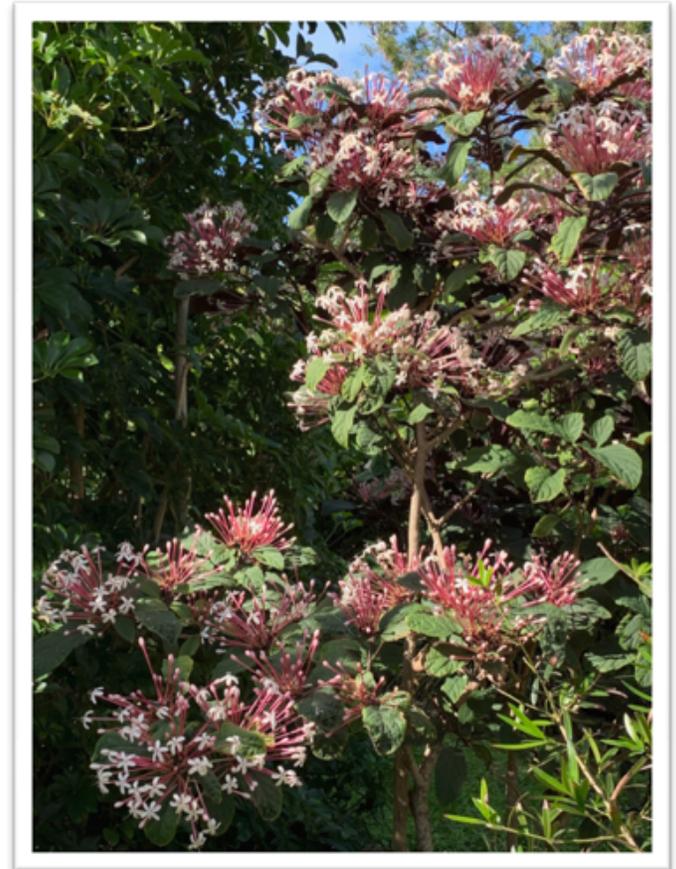
- text by Diana and photos by Nigel Chudleigh

Blooming spectacularly in our garden in late January and February is Starburst (*Clerodendrum quadriloculare*). It was burnt and shrivelled after Hurricane Humberto but it has come back once again in full glory.

We first noticed the unnamed plant at a Bermuda National Trust Plant Sale with its interesting leaves which are grey-green with deep purple undersides. Incidentally their Plant Sale this year is on February 15, but if you have missed the sale then you can propagate Starburst from hardwood cuttings.

Starburst or Shooting star is so named because its small flowers resemble delicate white stars shooting skywards with a pink tail trailing in their wake. It is a flowering shrub and is native to New Guinea and the Philippines. A specimen can be seen in the Shrub Border at the Botanical Gardens.

Clerodendrums are native to Africa and Asia and there are countless varieties. Popular in Bermuda are Bleeding heart vine (*Clerodendrum x speciosum*) and (Butterfly bush (*C. ugandense*)). One variety however has become invasive. This is known locally as Stinky Clerodendron. The Department of Conservation warns that it should be removed and never planted.



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FOLLOW UP: - text and photo Lisa Greene

Two plants mentioned by Mick Lavelle in the People and Plants lecture caught my attention. The first was a cat's claw vine which, when the woody stem was cut, was a source of "water" to drink. The other was lime, the young leaves of which were edible. Both the cat's claw vine and lime are grown in Bermuda BUT the trees that the speaker referred to were, in fact, not the ones we know locally, but instead were European plants that happen to have the same common name.

His "lime tree" was *Tillia cordata* and not the lime we know - *Citrus aurantiifolia* and his "cat's claw vine" was *Uncaria tomentosa* not *Macfadyena unguis-cati*, the yellow-flowered vine that climbs over walls and up trees here in Bermuda.



Cat's claw vine, *Macfadyena unguis-cati*

This is a good example of how easy it is to confuse plants when only common names are used. When it comes to whether a plant is edible or not, it is always a very good idea to confirm the identity before eating any parts of a plant.

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SOUTHLANDS VISIT – text and photos Peter Lee

On Saturday January 11th 2020, the Senior Superintendent of Parks Stephen Furbert, along with our visiting Writtle College speakers Mick Lavelle and Sandra Nicholson toured the Southlands estate. Peter and Carol Lee accompanied them.

On arrival at the South Shore, Warwick estate, we entered the main gate where you immediately see an avenue of stunning Banyan trees (*Ficus benghalensis*). See photo.

We started walking up a slight incline and noticed some fragrant spice trees on the left, which the guests really enjoyed smelling. Sadly, there was evidence of many invasive species including the usual suspects of Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Chinese Fan Palm (*Livistona chinensis*) and Balloon vine (*Cardiospermum halicacabum*).



The main walking trails are generally kept clear because of the Mountain bike association and we saw quite a few riders who make very good use of the trails.

Steve told us that the original owners built the property in the design of a Botanical Gardens, having various sections for different collections, an old water feature and the right topography. We all agreed that the infrastructure is already in place for a possible future Botanical Garden.

On the western side of the property we saw the main house which is, unfortunately, in a state of disrepair. Large Casuarinas (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) are growing out of the building and the roof and walls are severely cracked. The second building also looked in a similar state and both will need major renovations or demolition in the near future.

Mike pointed out the poisonous Castor Oil (*Ricinus communis*) plant, the seeds of which are highly toxic.

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On the far west of the property, we were all very interested in an unusual tree which had fig like fruit on it. No one was able to identify the tree and Sandra sent a picture of it to her Kew Garden colleagues but it is still a mystery.



We walked across the road and down to the Southlands Beach which Mick and Sandra enjoyed and had a few photographs by the ocean.

It was a very pleasant afternoon and everyone enjoyed it.

James Lily – text & photos by George Peterich

These are called January Lilies. The flowers are some 5 inches across. I found they are a species of *Hippeastrum*, that means that they are related to the *Amaryllis*, that flowers in the spring and early summer. It is also called the James Lily, because it is said that it was raised by a Mr Harley James in the early 1900s in St. Georges, Bermuda



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Calendar of Activities – mark the dates in your calendar

Sunday March 1st 2020, 2 pm Guided Tour of Cooper's Island

This tour will begin at the pond boardwalk, continue along the Castle Harbor side and loop through the yellow wood grove. Further details to follow, but please reserve your spot by emailing bermudabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

March 14 or 21 BBS Plant Sale at Windybank Farm - please support this by growing some plants that can be sold at the event. Endemics, natives, easy to care for houseplants, herbs, vines, roses went particularly well.

April - early in the month - guided tour QEII Park - date to be confirmed

April - BBS display at the Agricultural Exhibition, April 23, 24 and 25. If you have examples of endemic/native plants - and some invasives you could loan please let us know at bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

May - having had 2 attempts to visit Somerset Long Bay area last year will try in May when weather should be more favorable! Date to be confirmed.

Questions, suggestions, comments - anything botanically related or about the activities of the Society are always welcome. bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com



Photo: Chhe at English Wikipedia

Do you have this plant in your garden, or know someone who does? If so, please email elgreenebda@icloud.com.

I'm hoping to get some material to propagate from, for a special garden for young people. I have not been able to get it in the nurseries.

It is lamb's ear, *Stachys byzantia*, in the mint family.

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