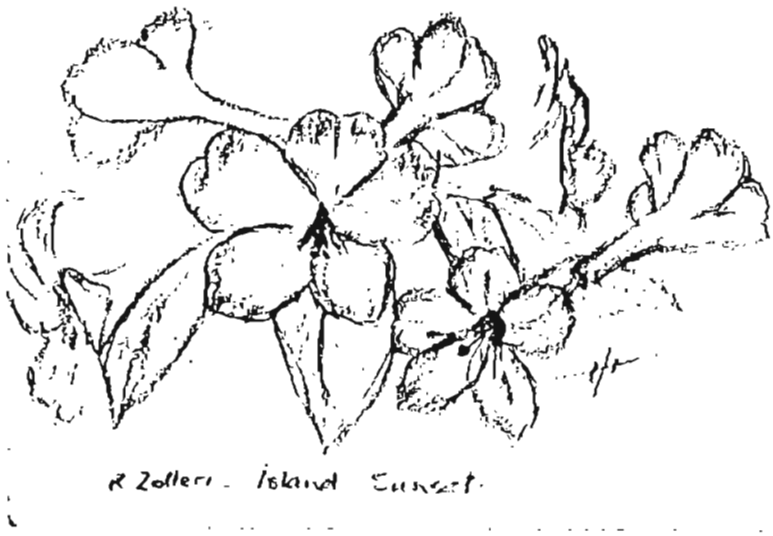

THE VIREYA VENTURE No.10 JANUARY 1993

Our thanks to Miss Hazel Holmwood for a new illustration. Her drawing is of R.zoelleri, regrettably black and white cannot do justice to this, the most brilliant of the Vireyas, but it is well written up by Brian Clancy later in this newsletter.

While some parts of Australia have had far too much rain at the wrong time, N.S.W. coastal regions have not done badly with mid October seeing the start of some good falls, resulting in our backyard scoring 1907mm (75") for the year, despite a dry winter and spring. Sring flowers continued until Christmas in local gardens, even camellias and azaleas persevering.

We had good news from Canon Cruttwell this Christmas. Although he had another pulmonary embolism in June he is now well settled in at the College of St.Barnabas, Lingfield, Surrey, RH7 6NJ, where he has many friends and is occupied in recording his botanical work in P.N.G. for Kew.

If you are visiting Melbourne this year, try to arrive at the time of the A.R.S. Vireya Field Day and Display. This will be held on Sat. and Sun. March 20th and 21st from 10am to 5pm at the Nunawading Horticultural Centre, 82 Jolimont Road, Forest Hill.

Renewals of subscriptions for 1993 have been coming in steadily, thank you, and this newsletter will continue if we continue to receive your letters, comments. criticisms, or questions - which Vireya does do best in your garden ? and which ones refuse to flower?.

So write now to The Editor,
P.O.Box 8
Keiraville, N.S.W. 2500.

PROPAGATION of VIREYAS

The present practice is either from seed or from cuttings and procedures are well known and well proven commercially. However there are variations on these themes that have been recorded over the years and these may be of interest and use in some circumstances,even commercially.

In the first case seedlings can be frustratingly slow to grow from germination to even 50mm in height. However John Patrick of Richmond California wrote an article that was published in the American Rhododendron Society Bulletin of Jan.1969 which detailed a method of hastening the process. Details of this were written up by Brian Clancy in the Australian Rhododendron Society Journal in Sept.1971.

Patrick's practice was to take cuttings from seedlings when they showed their second set of true leaves - using cuticle scissors and tweezers to handle these small stems - then dipping them in weak 'Rootone' and inserting them in damp sphagnum moss, loosely packed, about 12mm deep in plastic pots. These were then placed in plastic bags, sealed and put under lights. Such cuttings showed roots in 10 to 14 days and were best transplanted as soon as there was just enough supporting root system - usually about 30 days. Brian Clancy used this practice himself and confirmed the success of it in the article.

While this is certainly the earliest stage at which cuttings may be taken, it is not the latest and cuttings taken from larger seedlings do seem to flower much earlier than their parent plants would.

Gibberellic Acid has also been used with care on larger seedlings and can give considerably increased growth, also from Brian's experience.

In the second case the propagation from cuttings needs no further comment on conventional practice but there are two procedures that may also be used in some specific cases. The first is not to take a cutting until it has rooted, which was the original method of propagating rhododendrons by layering, resulting in the production of established plants at flowering age. Lou Searle advised that "I have layered some Vireyas and it happens naturally also - I noticed it mainly in plants growing in sphagnum bogs, in P.N.G. on Mt. Wilhem I remember R.culminicolum and R.maius. At present I have layered 'Pacific Shower', 'Saint Valentine' and R.laetum x R.aurigeranum. This latter I have just buried and put a rock on top, did not even put a cut in it. The two former ones I cracked the stem first."

Another way to speed the process is to make cuttings from multiple stemmed wood as first detailed for azaleas in 'The Azalean',Dec. 1987. This is only practical with the small leafed, short stemmed varieties but it is well worth tryiny, using older wood with 2 to 4 stems that are reasonably mature. The cuttings root in the usual time and you have a shapely plant straight away.

Editor.

Dr.Geoff Atherton, Lot 1 Mt.Glorious Road, Mt. Glorious, Queensland 4520, has some interesting news:-
"Recently I spent 5 weeks in Irian Jaya working for an Indonesian Company. I was fortunate enough to visit plant communities ranging from mangroves to coastal low land rainforest to high mountain cloud forests to alpine meadows, from where we had the opportunity to walk up to the tropical glaciers at 16,000 feet elevation.

The rhododendrons were in abundance! We did see large scrambling plants of R.zoelleri growing about 10 metres up in large coastal rainforest trees as epiphytes. Their brilliant trusses were very large. In this setting they were growing in the sphagnum moss on the tree trunks.

We saw R.konori in abundance, together with R.zoelleri growing on roadside cuttings. Here they appeared as the primary regrowth and were always growing in a thick layer of moss - usually about 10 to 15 cms thick. Even though they had full sun for the morning, the onset of cloud cover in the late morning or afternoon cut down their exposure to light and the flowers were not bleached.

At the 8,000 feet elevation, we saw road cuttings up to 300 feet high completely covered with rhododendrons, including R.macgregoriae and R.tuba and many which, unfortunately, I could not identify. Again they were growing, fully exposed, in a thick soggy mat of sphagnum moss, lichens and liverworts.

The cloud forest at these elevations was characterized by daily rain and mist for at least 12 - 16 hours a day. The trees have a large epiphyte cover and all branches have a thick mat of mosses. I saw many epiphytic rhododendrons. Above the alpine meadows we walked through rhododendrons growing in a thick forest up to 3 metres high and here the sphagnum moss in which they grew was up to 2 metres deep.

In the area below the glacier, I was surprised to see some ground living rhododendrons growing in limestone dust with no obvious organic matter at an elevation of 15,000 feet."

A few days later a further note was received:-
" I am off to Irian Jaya again soon to work. This time I am a little better prepared and will hopefully get another chance to see Vireyas from sea level to the glacial elevations of Mt.Jaya. I will write if there are any reportable sightings!"

xxxxx

Very little has been written about the Vireyas of Irian Jaya, where some 98 species are listed as growing there. Of these 73 are endemic to the region and so far have not been found elsewhere. Of that total 20 are in cultivation in Australia. Dr.H.Sleumer gave a talk to the Portland, Oregon, Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society on Malesian Rhododendrons (including Irian Jaya) in 1976 and this is the only account of this region that I have seen. Editor.

A letter from Brian Clancy, 31 Renown Street, Bentleigh, Vic. 3204 says:-

"In reference to the note on R.zoelleri in issue No.8, page 6, without any doubt the best form of R.zoelleri is the cultivar selected by Michael Black from some 500 plants in full bloom on a bank near Aregenan. This opinion is based on my knowledge of nearly 50 collections from the wild, including that from Irian Jaya (the weakest grower) which resulted in variety 'Golden Gate" and also variety 'Island Sunset' from Goodenough Island.

The Australian Rhododendron Society received cuttings of the selected best two from Aregenang. Selection No.1 was housed in the Society's glasshouse at Olinda. Selection No.2 was given to the late Arthur Headlam and he gave cuttings to others, but, on his demise, the original plant has been lost.

The very best No.1 cultivar was covered in 33 flower buds when it was pruned by an apprentice gardener and the prunings were dumped on a bonfire. After pruning no leaves were left on stems and the plant soon died. Fortunately I rescued three cuttings from the bonfire and I have flowered and hybridized this outstanding variety.

It should be noted by all growers that Vireyas are amenable to pruning and grafting, but to ensure success some leaves must be left on the plant."

xxxxx

In case you do not know of him, the late Dr.Michael Black was a specialist Veterinary surgeon, who collected in Papua New Guinea in 1965 and 1968, on one occasion in the company of Paddy Woods of Edinburgh Gardens. He was well known in Australia, visiting Wollongong in 1965 to meet Don Stanton, and Melbourne in 1968 where he gave the inaugural Baron von Mueller Memorial Lecture to the Australian Rhododendron Society in July on his way to New Guinea.

His collection of R.zoelleri near Aregenang is described in an article 'Expedition to Malesia, 1968' in the Royal Horticultural Society's 'The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book - 1970'. He states: "... the situation of the colony in grassland and thin bush alongside a track was interesting as all these plants were growing in a 3 inch to 2 foot layer of humus overlying limestone. Thousands of seedlings sprung from mossy tufts in half shade".

His only other reference to R.zoelleri was to having seen an isolated population above a road cutting in the hot grassland of the great Waghi Gorge.

xxxxx

Barry Paget of 'ORCHIDWORLD NURSERY' 1422 New Cleveland Road, Capalaba West, Q 4257, has written to say:-

"This has been a very interesting year, rhododendron wise. It has been another year of new experiments and following through on my previous work.

I spent almost three months building a new shade house some 32 metres by 16 metres as my original shade house of the same dimensions was becoming too cramped, with stock far too crowded. This exercise was carried out during winter when there is less activity in general areas of potting etc.... I had no choice but to place out in full winter sun a significant range of plants. All plants responded brilliantly to the cool weather and full sunlight. In fact, many showed very interesting leaf pigmentation, adding a new dimension to the beauty of such plants.

As planned, I had the new building roofed with white knitted shade cloth by the end of August as here in southern Queensland the progression from winter to summer may be rather abrupt. The new shed is almost filled with large flowering plants and I have enjoyed over two hundred plants blooming each week.

The results of my previous exercises are appearing in some plants, with their resultant increased bushiness, carrying sixty or more heads of flower at one time. 'Simbu Sunset' carried over sixty showy heads of flowers and many of my basket plants have been showy. R.lochae x R.brookeanum var.'gracile', which I am naming provisionally as 'Show Stopper' carried over one hundred blooms on some baskets and on my original stock plant. I exhibited some of these at the Warana Garden Fest at Brisbane Botanic Garden in late September this year. This year I am placing more plants into baskets to ascertain their worth in this medium.

I am about to landscape an area around a dam installed near th new shade house as a rhododendron display garden. I guess it will take several months to carry out this exercise.

xxxxx

From Joan Moodie, Jindalee Nursery and Florist, 52 Looranah Street, Jindalee, Queensland 4074.

"I thought it may be of interest to some members to hear of our success growing Vireyas in trees:- I nail a wire basket to the fork of trees such as Jacarandas, Poincianas and Melaleuca, then put in a good quality basket liner, fill with Camellia and Azalea potting soil, plant a Vireya, any variety seems to do, then cover with sphagnum moss. They just love it! Next I am going to try some hollow logs in varying heights.

For the retail trade some varieties look very much alike and I wonder if too many similar ones are being propagated ?

Anthracnose is a real menace on R.javanicum - apart from copper spray has anyone got a better cure ?

xxxxx

There is another way to grow Vireyas in trees which Lou Searle favours, although not all of us have the means. Lou puts them behind established staghorns or elkhorns with a little nourishment and some watering. Since staghorns at least can grow to a very large size the little extra weight of a Vireya will mean nothing more than some good company.

xxxxx

The curent issue of the Australian Garden Journal has a 'Profile' on Graham and Wendy Snell which it is pleasing to see gives them due credit for their work and interest in establishing a major collection of Vireyas. They have also pioneered the commercial production of Vireyas and have raised many new hybrids in their nursery, now at Maleny, Qeensland.
The next issue (March/April) of the Journal will feature an article on Vireyas written by Graham that will be of major interest to us.

xxxxx

LACEBUG and LACEWING

There have been some occasions when these two names seem to have been confused by people - and even by one gardening book - but they are two very different insects indeed.

Lacebug are the small lacy winged insects, less than 5mm.long that are notorious for feeding on azaleas, causing extensive damage. They also attack Vireyas and Asiatic rhododendrons and once seen underleaf, preferably before the leaf shows the yellow dots that indicate their presence, should have immediate attention, they breed fast and soon make your plants very unsightly. Strangely, two other species of lacebug were brought into Australia in the 1930's and again in the 70's to control the wild lantana but were not sucessful and have become a pest on garden varieties of lantana in warmer climates.

Lacewing are a larger insect with two pairs of nearly equal gauzy, membraneous wings with many veins, a prominent head and large eyes. They are mainly active at night when they eat soft bodied insects. Their larvae prey actively on aphids and other small insects, hence they are to be welcomed. There are more details in a book on insects in Australia by Hadlington and Johnston.

xxxxx

While on the subject of pests, one that is seldom mentioned is the larva of the Christmas beetle, a white curl grub with a brown head which lives under ground where it is only seen when the soil is being dug. They live on grass and tree roots and do not appear to do very much damage. But - beware of them if they get into a pot. A dozen or so killed a Vireya very effectively and were not seen until the pot was emptied to examine the roots.

xxxxx