VIREYA VINE

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R.S.F. PO BOX 3798, FEDERAL WAY, WA. 98063
E. White Smith, Editor

From John Bodenham, Plymouth, Devon, England.
Dear Vireya Vine, January 2001

It is a very wet and miserable New Year's Eve just now. What better time to sit at the computer and mull over vireya thoughts?

Growing vireyas, as we do, in given sets of conditions, it seems to me to be optimistic to expect success with all species. After all, if all vireyas would accept all conditions, then, for example, Mount Kinabalu would be covered with all its species and natural hybrids at all altitudes. But this is reputedly not the case. I personally have never been there so I have to look to the publication *'Rhododendrons of Sabah'* to provide me with intelligent, scientific, on-site observations in order to suggest to me the reasons why. Two predominant factors, it seems to me, govern the success of any species. They are, (a) can the flower be fertilised?, and, (b) can the germinated seedling live in its environment? The book lists the following species/varieties at their corresponding altitudes & with pollinator types (where known) in Sabah:

NAME	ALTITUDE	POLLINATOR
abietifolium	2900-3400m	birds?
acuminatum	2800-3400m	bird (Mountain Blackeye?)
baconii	2000-2500m	?
bagobonum	1200-1900m	?
borneense ssp. borneense	c 1800m	?
borneense ssp. villosum	1200-1800m	birds?
burttii	1500-1600m	small birds?
buxifolium	3100-3900m	bird, Mountain Blackeye
chamaepitys	300-450m	?
coriifolium	3000+m	?
crassifolium	1200-2200m	?
cuneifolium var. cuneifolium	1500-2800	bird, Mountain Blackeye
cuneifolium var. microcarpum	?	?
durionifolium ssp. durionifolium	1400-1800	?
durionifolium ssp. sabahense	?	?
exuberans	1300-2000m	?
fallacinum	1200-2500m	butterfly (bfly) & sunbirds
fuchsii	3350-3360m	?
himantodes	1300-2000m	insects?
javanicum ssp javanicum	near 0 - 2000m	?
javanicum ssp. brookeanum	300-1800m	insects? bfly Troides
javanicum ssp. brookeanum var. brookeanum	up to c1000m	?
javanicum ssp. brookeanum var. kinabaluense	1000-1800m	?
javanicum ssp. cockburnii	975m	?
javanicum ssp. gracile	near 0-1500m	?
javanicum ssp. moultonii	?	?
keditii	1900m	?
lanceolatum	1000-1500m	?
x liewianum	1900-2500m	?

longiflorum var. longiflorum	near 0-1500m (rarely)	?
longiflorum var. subcordatum	near 0-1500m	?
longiflorum var. longipetalum	760-1060m	?
lowii	2700-3650m	? large insects?
malayanum	near 0-500m	?
maxwellii	2300-2900m	?
meijeri	2400-2500m	?
micromalayanum	800-2000m	birds?
nervulosum	2500-3000m	?
nieuwenhuisii	near 0- 800m	? large insects. bees?
orbiculatum	800-1800m	? large moths?
planecostatum	1830-2135m	Scarlet Sunbird?
pneumonanthum	1700-2400m	? Moths?
polyanthemum	1300-2300m	?
praetervisum	1100-1800m	Bird. Whitehead's Spiderhunter.
retivenium	2000-2700m	Bee. (Bombus Apiformis).
rugosum var. rugosum	2000-3500m	birds.
rugosum var. laeve	?	?
sheilae	3240-3670m	Scarlet Sunbird
x silvicolum	2800-3200m	?
stapfianum	900-1550m	?
stenophyllum ssp. stenophyllum	2700-2800m	?
stenophyllum var. angustifolium	2200-2400m	? Large insects?
suaveolens forma suaveolens	1200-1700m	Moth?
suaveolens forma roseum	?	?
variolosum	2150-2700m	?
yongii	1500-2100m	Birds?

In seeking suitable conditions, then, the windblown seed in the intermittent environment of rain, thunderstorm thermals, sunshine, deep shade, and a suitable site to germinate, comes to rest. What is it about that site which makes that seed successful? Alternatively, what is it about that site which makes it a weakling and ultimately a failure? Why, then, do we think that in just one garden or greenhouse we can have success with anything and everything?

Firstly, considering the above chart, we are able to determine (from the sorts of plants we have which do well, and which do not) which sort of conditions we each one of us has created, inadvertently, or by design, or we just happen to live in. Is there a pattern?

Secondly, there must be, through the phenomenon of 'hybrid vigour', a considerably better chance of success with hybrids as being the most adaptable and indeed floriferous, virtually regardless of most shortcomings in individual growing conditions. At least they should have inherited the generic altitude ranges of the both (or multiple) parents. (If that is the overall predominant characteristic which gives them 'vigour'). If, therefore, a particular species will grow at 2700 metres, but not at 2705 metres, not enough can be known about the subtle difference(s) involved. Is it thicker undergrowth? Is it an increase in light intensity? Is it the presence or absence of moss or perhaps mitochondria? Is it the pH? Is it just that subtle difference in temperature? Is there no suitable pollinator present? Is it some other unknown factor? Soil? (Surely the wandering seed cannot pick and choose the soil type just by landing on it, knowing it will be an ideal composition?). Within our Group, does Member 'A' not knowingly enjoy that subtle difference not enjoyed by Member 'B'? Will science ever be able to determine this or these differences so that we can all adapt to suit the plants? Is any such adaption commercially or economically viable? Will genetic engineering provide the means to grow bananas at the north pole? (Or at least provide vireya species with modifications enabling them to grow anywhere?) Is genetic engineering on such a scale desireable, considering the fact that modified species might become impossible to control geographically? I think not.

There must therefore be a compelling case to distribute around our entire membership the whole gamut of species so that at least someone, somewhere, has some chance of success. Endangered species might thus be saved from extinction.

We, as enthusiastic amateurs, are the very people who already demonstrate sufficient interest to search for knowledge such as this. We are world-wide in our various geographical positions, and this opportunity for the advancement of botanical understanding does not deserve to be neglected.

If this sort of philosophy is to be promoted, I think it is high time that the world-wide transfer of cutting material on a small scale be permitted internationally. It already happens in clandestine manner, as we are all aware. Such permission would be miniscule by comparison with the already existing world trade in vegetables and flowers. Orchids from Singapore.... bananas from the tropics.... and in 1999 a Middle Eastern Potentate even imported full-size living palm trees for his exhibition at Chelsea, and you cannot convince me that they arrived bare-root and insect-free.

Do we all need to be somehow registered as responsible recipients of cutting material? Can such transfers ever be officially recognised as being of insignificant danger? (After all, in this climate, the destination environment has to be a greenhouse, i.e. enclosed, so there is very little chance of the escape of anything detrimental. Back in the days of early plant hunters, no such petty regulations existed, so most incoming 'nasties' would already be in our countries, if they had been able to exist at all).

Could we, therefore, each one of us, become an officially designated "botanical learning sub-centre" so that material could be transferred legitimately in the search for knowledge? There must be an acceptable system, because the official one that exists now is so detrimental to the material itself as to make it ridiculous. Cuttings are by far the best method of material transfer, and how different is a vireya cutting from a cut flower orchid? Orchids arrive by the plane-load, and it would be impossible to inspect every one.

How about other views along these lines? Which species fail for you? Which succeed? Where do you grow them and in what conditions? Perhaps our Mentor, E. White Smith, might wish to set up a species growing here and species that have failed here enquiry form to send out with a 'Vine', and the results might just be useful.

John Bodenham
Hunters Lodge, Wembury Rd
Wembury, Plymouth, Devon
England. PL9 0DL

(Note. Most data taken from *'Rhododendrons of Sabah'*, plus a little from Sleumer's 1966 work).
John_Bodenham@compuserve.com

Some words about the color photos on the next two pages.

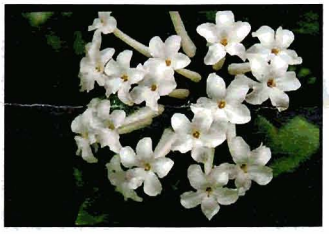
The picture of R. anagalliflorum is meant to show a very small growing plant with very small flowers. Bill Moyles' display garden in Oakland California (Lakeside Garden Center Park) is a place anyone in the area should visit -- - great job, Bill, and thanks for the financial help from the California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The photo of R. durionifolium is a plant collected in the wild of Northern Borneo by Keith Adams, NZ. It is still quite rare in collections. Hellwigii is a great plant but you need to know that it can get big and is a bit slow to bloom. Konori & leucogigas – what great things, but leucogigas is always in short supply and is s-l-o-w growing. A great lochiae photo of a much better form than the ones we have grown for years (big flowers and a fast, easy grower). The R. perakense is a small collector's species that we have not seen bloom yet. There are many forms of phaeochitum, some good and some not as good, but it can be a spectacular plant in leaf and bloom. R. praetervisum is very different. The flower in the photo should be a bit bluer. R. rarum is from a cutting I got from Frank Doleshy when he gave a Vireya talk to the Tacoma Study Club, probably 25 years ago. I took a small 6 inch branch and rooted 5 cuttings from it. Makes a great hanging plant and blooms almost continuously. I am sure you like the picture of retivenium, but don't ask for it, it's very rare. Go to Pukeiti and see it 7 or 8 feet tall, great big yellow flowers and fragrant. Our rubineiflorum grown from Pukeiti cuttings. This species is stoloniferous, sending branches under ground and also creeping. I have a photo of the big (for a very dwarf species) plant at Pukeiti showing it climbing up a fern log. The rubin x gracil is a more upright growing plant. These are our first bloomings of R. rushforthii and santapaui. Rushforthii has very blue/green leaves and is very different from other Vireyas. Our new house at Bovees (2001). Wow, superbum in PNG. Wish we had one like that. R. tuba taken in Keith's garden in New Plymouth NZ. First blooming of R. x sheilae, and it also has a blue tinge to the flowers. Great small upright grower, but it has been a little slow to bloom. We have seen 5 different color forms of R. celebicum, from pink to red. Great species and easy. We have not seen yongii bloom yet but it sure look interesting, another Keith Adams collection.

anagalliflorum Pukeiti NZ

Bill Moyles display garden

durionifolium Keith Adams NZ

hellwigii 1000



jasminiflorum Pukeiti NZ

konori West Irian form - Pukeiti

leucogigas Pukeiti NZ

lochiae VG form Bovees

perakense Keith Adams 7909 Pukeiti

phaeochitum Bovees

praetervisum

rarum Bovees

retivenium Pukeiti NZ

rubineiflorum Bovees

rubineiflorum x gracilentum Bovees

rushforthii Bovees

santapaui Bovees

Smith House at Bovees

superbum PNG 2700'

tuba Keith Adams - Mark Jury NZ

x sheilae Bovees

celebicum red form RSF

goodenoughii Mark Jury NZ

yongii Keith Adams Pukeiti NZ

From Brentel Hansjorg Austria, Europe
Dear Vireya Vine, June 28, 2001

Treading the paths of Dr. Sleumer in the Arfak mountains, Vogelkop Penninsula, New Guinea

When Mr. Moser of the German Rhododendron Society sent me an excerpt from the Yearbook 1963 of the society, I was immediately fascinated by Dr. Sleumer's reports of the rhododendron in the area around the Aggi lakes in the Arfak mountains.

I decided there and then to visit the area at some point in time. So when I found a trekking guide of tours in New Guinea which included the aforementioned tour, we scheduled the journey for August 2000. On August 15, we flew via Singapur-Makassar to Biak, a small island in the northwest of the New Guineas. Biak can be accessed by large aircraft from Garuda and Merpati.

In Biak the weather was unfriendly, so we reached Manokwari at the foot of the Arfak mountains one day later than expected. More bad news was waiting for us: there had been continuous rainfalls for the past four weeks. None of the rivers could be crossed and the rare flights to the Anggi Lakes had been canceled. Having been utterly disappointed, we flew to North Sumatra, where we collected a few rhododendrons on the volcanoes surrounding Brastagi and Lake Toba.

The original trip stuck to our minds, however, and so we try again in January 2001. This time we arrived in Biak via Bali. Again we are greeted by rain. The flight to Manokwari has to be postponed. On the next day, the small 14-seat Twin-Otter can not start due to a technical problems. The engine is examined and after the second try we are airborne for some five minutes before we have to come down again. We can't help thinking that the Arfak mountains are reluctant to receive us.

But miracles do happen, and so we change aircraft and arrive in Manokwari only a few hours late. Matthias, our guide, is expecting us with the unpleasant news that there is not going to be a flight to the Anggi lakes that week. He convinces us that it is now possible to reach Anggi-Gita (the male lake) with a jeep on the newly-built road via Ransiki and the 7,200 feet high Trikora. Arriving at the first river, the Maruni, we discover why we could not beat the rain here. The riverbed is 1,700 feet wide with several arms, and the bridges are destroyed. Fortunately it carries little water at that time of the year, so we cross the Masabui River at Ransiki and go up to the mountains. The road runs along the river, then through untouched lowland rainforest, where a breach of 23-25 feet has been cut to build a road. How long will there be such a forest with such mighty trees? At the first steep part, the road is entirely washed out. The jeep gets stuck in a hole and is about to capsize. We filled up the largest holes with stones and manage the ascent after trying three times. We reached the Mati River and continue our way to the mountains. The road is in pretty good condition and climbs up through dense virgin rainforests. At approximately 5,250 feet a.s.l. the substance of the ground changes. The fine-grain quartz sands that make up the mountains here seem to pose a massive problem for road builders. On both sides of the road, deep holes of 7-20 feet have been eroded, holes big enough to swallow our jeep. The road surface is so marked by grooves up to three feet in depth that we barely reached the highest point, the 7,200 feet high Trikora. Here we spot the first rhododendron, the R. phaeochristum which is related to the beyerinckianum. Through the mist we see the first lake, the Anggi-Gita. We continued downhill until we reached Yrikora, the first little village by the lake. The swamp is full of R. laetum with yellow/orange blossoms also the small blossomed R. inconspicuum can be found. We are warmly welcomed, the whole village running to meet us. Very soon we have to go back, the next rain fall could make the road impassable.

I find out that the name of the village is North Pole. In his report, Dr. Sleumer mentions the North Pole bivouac where he landed with a helicopter, coming from Mawokwari in 1962. The children bring us a whole bunch of R. laetum The night is very cold, the thermometer shows 54 degrees Fahrenheit and our Papua carriers, coming from the lowlands, are freezing.

The next morning, we crossed the lake in a dug-out. By the lakeside and on the surrounding hills we see vast colonies of R. konori. We also see the first blossoms that are white and some 4 inches in diameter and fragrant. The mountain scenery is impressive, the climate mild. On the other side we begin the ascent of the Koebre - the mountain ridge separating the two lakes. On the scorched slopes, rhododendron are the most frequent form of vegetation. We found R. arfakianum with its red blossoms, R. lindaueanum (a small-leafed bush) with red blossoms reminding us of R. gracilentum. Further uphill we discover R. asperum, with yellow blossoms (hybrids) instead of the usual pink and white. Near the peak we find the first "Giant Konori", with blossoms 7 inches long and ten centimeters wide. The impressive blossoms are white and a dark hue of pink. R. phaeochristum can also be found here. From the peak we can see the second lake, the Anggi-Giggi (the female lake). The carriers light a

smoking fire to hire a boat from Surerey, which lies on the other side of the Anggi-Giggi. But there is no reply and Matthias states dryly that: "The Johnson is broken", meaning all outboard boats on the lake.

The crisis of the Indonesian economy has reached the Anggi lakes and so the large boats are rotting away in the mud by the lakeside. Having no other options, we begin our long way around the lake. When we reached a swamp by the lakeside, heavy rain set in and we are soaked through. But tempests do not last very long here and we continue through tall ferns and R. konori to Surerey, which we reach after three hours. Surerey is a relatively large village with a mission station. A German missionary lived there a few years ago and translated the Bible into the local Soubg language. The Soubg that form the local population subsist mainly on sweet potatoes, but also grow corn and vegetables. They have been christianized long ago. This is one of the nicest Villages, with small houses and gardens with flowers and very friendly people.

Dr. Sleumer climbed the Gwamongga-mot (mountain) and the Sensenemes, both abundant in Ericaceae. So we set out the next morning to hike along the ridge of the Gwamongga-mot to Surey-mot and Sensenemes. The ascent to Gwamongga-mot leads through misty forests, where we keep finding R. lindaueanum, culminicolum var. angiense, konori, inconspicuum, arfakianum, erosipetalum and asperum. In his report, Dr. Sleumer describes a new rhododendron that he found near the peak, R. proliferum. So we decide to look for it. The "Giant Konori" grows everywhere and in the shade of a thicket of trees that are 6-9 feet high. We found a different species with hard, oval-shaped leaves with scales, three feet high, no blossoms and we found seeds, perhaps this is R. proliferum?

We also took cuttings from the other rhododendrons. We continued along the ridge of to Surey-mot, where *we* found another R. proliferum. It is wonderful to walk through the clear mountain air, with a beautiful view of the lake and the surrounding mountains. On the Surey-mot, there is a little lake with dark brown water. It is not allowed to take photographs here. Matthias explains that lightening will strike from the sky if photographs are taken. The Soubg are very superstitious. In Iray we observed that women would rather lift an electric cable and slip through underneath it than step over it. We returned to Surerey and rowed our dug-out to Iray, where we are hoping to catch a flight to Manokwari. From Iray, we walked into the surrounding mountains. Near a hill whose vegetation has recently been destroyed by fire, hundreds of R. laetum were sprouting. Also the Konori has grown from seedling to bushes.

Dr. Sleumer had found a new rhododendron here, R. bullifolium with large leaves, color unknown, maybe red. So we searched the area, always at an altitude of 6,700 feet - as indicated by Dr. Sleumer. R. konori is everywhere, but after a while we found a different species in the shade of surviving trees: yellow and red blossoms, with five petals, 3 inches long, 2 inches wide, yellow calyx, the petals are red on the outside. Maybe this is R bullifolium or a hybrid konori-laetum. Finally we find two more, always in the shade of trees, while konori-laetum grows in full sunlight. It is time to return home now and we make our way back to Iray.

The next day is our scheduled flying day. There are heavy rainfalls during the night but the weather is bright on the next day. We are waiting for the Merpati plane to arrive. After two hours of anxious waiting, we are informed that the flight has been canceled.

We dread the long way back to Ransiki where there is another flight scheduled two days later. The Merpati is very unreliable, however, and there is a high risk of cancellation due to bad weather. As the local passengers all decide to walk, we have no other choice. From Iray we take a seven-hour walk via Kobrey to Trikora by the Anggi-Gita lake, where we spend the night. In Trikora, I am struck by the size of the araucaria and some sizeable specimens of the palm trees Kentia-Gibbsiana, that was used for building rafts and is now almost extinct. The next day brings us an eleven hour walk to Ransiki. At the steep part, where we had problems with the jeep, seven meters of road have disappeared in the ditch. Thus, the road cannot be used. After three hours drive and completely worn out, we arrive at our Hotel in Manokwari. Instead of a flight of 25 minutes, we have done 18 hours of walking!

On the next day we bathe in the warm sea on Mansinam Island where two German missionaries (Otto and Geissler) brought the christian religion to New Guinea. On the following day we fly back to Biak, back to civilization. From here, we take the Garruda Air back to Makassar and Bali, where we relax for a few days and continue via Bangkok and Vienna to our home in the Tyrol

This was a journey into mountains of breathtaking beauty, certainly an unforgettable experience to remember in years to come!

Brentel Hansjorg
Schloglstrabe 30
A-6060 Hall in Tirol
Austria, Europe

Some interesting Internet sites www.vireya.supanet.com (Chris Callards new site) www.groups.yahoo.com/group/vireya & www.tropicalgardner.com

VIREYA NURSERIES

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Australia

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Australia E-mail puddy@bigpond.com

Rhododendron Species Foundation
PO Box 3798 www.rhodygarden.org
Federal Way, WA 98063 USA
(253)838-4646 Mail Order E-mail rsf@rhodygarden.org

Christopher Fairweather
The Garden Centre, High Street
Beaulieu, Hampshire www.website.lineone/fairweather.com
England SO42 7YR E-mail plantdoc@martex.co.uk
web Site www.glendoick.com

Te Puna Cottage Gardens (John Kenyon)
Te Puna Road, RD6 E-mail kenyon@vireya.co.nz
Tauranga, New Zealand web site at www.vireya.co.nz
Mail Order NZ only Phone (07)552-5756

Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust
Carrington Rd. RD4
New Plymouth E-mail pukeiti@pukeiti.org.nz
New Zealand web site at www.pukeiti.org.nz

The Vireya Venue
2 Clifford Street
Maleny, Queensland 4552
Australia

Pacific Island Nursery (Sherla Bertelmann & Richard Marques)
HCR-1 Box 4641 E-mail tropical@greensand.net
Keaau, HI 96749 (808)966-9225
www.pacificislandnursery.com
They also handle the Vireya seed exchange. WorldWide.

VIREYA VINE
RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION
P . O . BOX 3798
FEDERAL WAY, WASHINGTON 98063
U .S .A.