ventnorensis

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society Journal

'If you've got a botanic garden there's something missing if there isn't an artist at work somewhere'

– Alex Williams

VENTNOR BOTANIC GARDEN • FRIENDS' SOCIETY •

VOLUME 23 NO. 1 SPRING 2016

Spring/Summer opening times and events

10am till dusk daily

For opening times, and for information about special events for adults or children in the Visitor Centre, *edulis* Restaurant and Plantation Room Café, and for Plant Sales and Greenhouse, please call the Garden on 855387 or check website, www.botanic.co.uk.

exhibitions/events

FEBRUARY

Each Mon, 9.30 – 11.30am Yoga Nidra with Sue Bolton

28th, 2pm – 4pm Friends' Seed Swap Sunday

MARCH

2nd, 7pm Café Botanique Lecture. Dr Richard Smout from County Record Office on 'Climate, Landscape and the English Madeira and Factors influencing the Undercliff'

2nd and each Wed, 10 – 11am Mum and Baby Yoga with Yonat Bitner

2nd and each Wed, 11.15 – 12.15pm Pregnancy Yoga with Yonat Bitner

3rd and each Thurs, 10 – 11.30am Singing for Wellbeing. Informal singing for fun with Valerie Ford

4th, 7 – 9pm Lecture, Nutrition for Balancing Hormones

5th Charity Auction

6th Mother's Day at VBG

12th Charity Auction

13th, 11am – 4pm Wedding Fayre. Plan your perfect day

19th, 10am – 4pm Printmaking in the Garden. Inspiration from the Garden to try monoprint, frottage and collograph, with Minette Dogllewski

20th, 8.30am – 5pm IW Car Club Rally Donation Day. Cars in the Garden

APRIL

2nd, 10am – 4pm Playing with Nature's Colours Workshop. Create a range of coloured yarns and threads for knitting, crochet, weaving, stitching and quilting. With Nicola Orpen.

9th Royal Society Art Tour

14th, 7pm VBG Friends' Society AGM

MAY

4th Botany Club to Knighton East Wood, with Colin Pope

20th Down the Coast Exhibition

29th, 6.30pm The Great Summer Garden Party

JUNE

5th Book Fair

8th, 2pm Botany Club to Val Gwynn's Wild Life Farm, Shalfleet

18th Masquerade Ball Charity Evening

TBC Botany Club talk by Andy Butler, Glanville Fritillary Butterflies

29th Paranormal Research Evening

JULY

1st – 3rd YogaVibe Festival. Great teachers, diverse classes, treatments and healing foods

AUGUST

27th Yacht Club Dinner

27th – 29th Healing Festival

SEPTEMBER

11th Book Fair

25th Hops Festival. A celebration of the hand-picked hops grown at VBG

OCTOBER

5th Capability Brown 300th Anniversary

All dates and booking correct at time of going to press

Front cover: 'From the Car Park' by Alex Williams, Artist in Residence

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Curator's Notes

Etching knowledge into the Garden

One of the underpinning disciplines that make a botanic garden different from a park, garden or public space is the knowledge of the plant collection held therein. From this knowledge stem many of the more overt characteristics the visitor can see, whether this be plant labels, interpretive displays, published works, research . . . the list goes on. The knowledge is held on a living plant database (we store records of all the dead plants too) that is updated on a pretty relentless basis. What populates the database comes from the knowledge and observation of our gardeners and volunteers, so the calibre of this is directly linked to the calibre of knowledge that goes into it. I mentioned in the last *Ventnorensis* how Dr Colin Pope is volunteering with us now, and the observational information he is putting into the database is making a huge difference to managing the plant collection.

Lots in a name: labels convey essential info

Through Colin we have begun benefitting from the help of his good friend Eric Clement. Eric is co-author of *The Vegetative Key to the British Flora,* a landmark publication that for lesser mortals than Eric would have adequately proven to be the sum of a lifetime's work. Fortunately for our Garden, Eric has taken on the task of identifying the plants in the collection that have so far defied everyone to name. Not as easy as you might think. Eric has travelled over the Solent several times already and with Colin has named several of our alien species; he has also supplied seeds from an interesting Acacia, which hopefully are now germinating in the nursery. Once ready, these will join the collection with their provenance recorded and an engraved label for everyone to see.

We've engraved our labels, the black and white ones on (most) of the Garden's plants using our own machine since 2000. That was the year Simon Goodenough and I blew more than the entire budget for the Garden on a state of the art engraving machine that would link to the newly acquired Living Collections Database (acquired by anonymous donation from a Friend). Previously the engraved labels were done by hand using a pantograph, a fiendish device that utilised rubber bands and sellotape. When working, it would engrave one label a month. It would cut your fingers often. When it wasn't electrocuting you.

Supporting the Garden has always been The Friends' main objective, and in 2016 you are once again helping us in many ways, pertinently, with our engraving machine. The software it operates on is twenty years old, and it failed in December. At the Friends' Christmas lunch I appealed for assistance to upgrade to the latest software package, and am pleased to say that already you have paid for the new upgrade, so by the time you read this we will be labelling plants again.

Chris Kidd, Curator

Committee Update

With the AGM on 14th April, it is time to think about the formation of a new Committee to take VBGFS into the next year of activity.

Our Chairman, Dr Chris Kershaw, has decided to stand down at the AGM having served three years; he has steered the Committee through the initial years of working with the CIC and must be thanked for encouraging links with academic scientific communities. We look forward to his continuing support.

Our Treasurer, Kay Grist, is delighted that we have been able to find a replacement for her – Kay has also served for three years and we have been most grateful for her dedication and attention. Tim Woodcock has kindly accepted our co-option as Treasurer as of 18th January and will be standing for election.

Vice-Chairman, David Grist, is also standing down from his post but is happy to remain on the Committee.

Committee Officers and members seeking your endorsement at the AGM are:

Honorary Secretary	Rosemary Stewart
Treasurer	Tim Woodcock (co-opted)
Membership Secretary	Caroline Peel
Editor Ventnorensis	Roz Whistance

Committee: Jan Wyers, Sally Peake, David Grist, Di Sichel (co-opted), Barry and Megan Cook (co-opted). Ex officio: Chris Kidd (Curator)

Nominations for election to the Executive Committee must be made by members of the Society in writing and must be in the hands of the Secretary at least fourteen days before the AGM. Should nominations exceed vacancies, election shall be by ballot.

For your information, the Committee intend to nominate Sally Peake as Chairman and Jan Wyers as Vice Chairman.

Annual General Meeting 2016

The AGM will be held on 14th April 2016 at 7pm in the Visitor Centre, followed by the presentation of the Harold Hillier Award.

John Curtis will speak about where we are with the Garden.

Gardening Volunteers

Help is always required in the Garden and we warmly welcome new recruits to work with the Garden staff and dedicated volunteers, either in a friendly group on a Wednesday morning or at other times to be arranged. No qualifications or previous experience is required and apart from sensible clothing and a flask of refreshments, bring your own hand tools.

For further information for Garden volunteers please ring Bridgette Sibbick - 867739

Chairman's message

Of surgeon naturalists, the Spanish Armada and the future

Surgeon Captain Chris Kershaw: more plant hunting opportunities in retirement

What a transformation VBG has undergone in the last three years! The Tropical House cladding looks superb. There have been numerous renovations including galleries, a museum, a laboratory, offices, a smart café and restaurant with new stage and terrace, an artist studio, an exhibition area and a cosy potting shed. Now we might also be said to be reaching to the stars . . .

Thanks to Chad Powell's wonderfully clear photographs, on show in the Gallery and in the shop, we can obtain a perspective of recent advances in our knowledge of the universe. He will indicate on these the approximate position of Sagittarius A at the centre of our Milky Way Galaxy. In the last three years, in this region, a super massive black hole 4.1 million times the mass of our sun, 82 light seconds across and 26,000 light years away, has been confirmed. Chad will also point out to you the larger Andromeda Galaxy accelerating towards us at a rate of knots. Well before it connects there are many new and exciting garden gallery projects to be undertaken. The Friends' library looks like it may never be finally completed – perhaps it will simply continue to evolve . . . but be assured we are working on this!

As many of you may know, my predecessor as Chairman, Phil Le May, was a distinguished Royal Marine pilot. (Fly Navy – Sea Sense!) He is/was exceptional. The majority of (Royal) Naval plant gatherers have been of the "fish-head" (surface fleet) variety. The role was popularised in the film adaptation of Patrick O'Brian's book *Surgeon's Mate* by doctor naturalist Stephen Maturin in *Master and Commander*.

In reality, the tradition of the surgeon naturalist goes back to the buccaneering barber surgeons of the 17th century. "Sea chyrurgeons'' such as Alexander Brown (fl 1680) contributed to the famous Sloane Herborium at the Natural History Museum.

Whilst Sir Joseph Banks was persuading the Admiralty to regularly include a naturalist on its expeditions (think Darwin and The Beagle), it was Sir John Richardson at the Royal Hospital, Haslar, who 'salte' the great scientific bond between Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Joseph Hooker – perhaps the most famous surgeon's mate of all. Richardson's Arctic exploration and plant collections in the British Museum and Kew Herbarium are renowned, and he established a natural history museum at Haslar that inspired many.

Much of this was going on in Nelson's time. I have a feeling he would have been rather amused at our recent 'friendly invasion' of Spanish botanists with their Armada of bright yellow (invasive) Mimulus guttatus and robertsii monkey flowers. (See Sally Peake's report on the Mimulus collaboration in previous issue.) His

"touch" – an unorthodox two-pronged approach (think Trafalgar!) applied by the CIC and the Friends – seems to have succeeded and international botanical friendships cemented!

Those of you who accompanied me on one of the visits to view the historic museum and collection at the Institute of Naval Medicine at Alverstoke will see the connection, for this was what remained locally of Richardson's museum when it transferred from Haslar. During my Naval career, over three decades based at the Royal Naval Hospital, there were, sadly, fewer opportunities to hunt plants! This didn't stop me admiring the Spathodea *campanulata* (African Tulip or flame tree), Araucaria and Arecaceae on my overseas postings, but it has only been in retirement and thanks largely to the Friends, John Curtis and Chris Kidd that I have been able to pursue the most absorbing interest of my predecessors. The latest generation of Royal Naval Surgeon Officers includes Rory Goodenough (son of our previous Curator). How lucky for him to have two such wonderful tutors as Simon and Debs, so watch this space!

During this same three years our friend and supporter, Professor Scott Armbruster, has been writing up his life's work on plant evolution and pollination science. We are delighted that he has contributed a synopsis and introduction to these complex but fascinating subjects. [See Page 20]

It has been a great privilege for me to serve on the Executive, but after three years a sea change is due. It is time to make way for a new Chairman and "The Friends' Foundation". I wish them well and a good following breeze. There will be announcements at the AGM on 14 April, which David Grist will chair. Who will be the next deserving recipient of the 2016 Harold Hillier Award, can anyone guess? My thanks to David and to you all for being good shipmates.

Surgeon Captain Chris Kershaw RN

Hoppy talk

Darren Norbury of beertoday.co.uk reviews VBG's newest beer. [See Hops, Page 18]

Plenty of breweries produce green hop beers, at the end of the summer, using fresh hops which have not been dried or stored. On the Island, Goddards, in this case, was lucky enough to get some of the Sovereign hops grown by VBG to use in an American-style pale ale, along with some dried Admiral and Cascade hops.

Botanic Pale Ale is one of the nicest green hop beers I've had. The Sovereign hops give a nice hedgerow note to the golden/amber brew while there are orange tones, too, presumably from the Admiral, and some resinous hints from the Cascade. The malt is quite sweet, but the hops are so robust that there's a decent balance. It's very drinkable, especially for its 7.5% ABV, and I'm a bit disappointed I only had one bottle!

Callistemon

The bottlebrushes, members of the genus Callistemon, are exclusively Australian, mostly from the eastern flank of the land and Tasmania.

Unlike its close Myrtaceae relatives in the subcontinent, it has comparatively few species, arguably twenty-five, though debate rages. Interbreeding and intermediation between the species combined with high variability makes the task of their taxonomy arduous, and more than one botanist has called for a complete revision of the genus.

C. citrinus "Splendens": for the gardener with no patience and the visitor with no taste
Photo by Julian Winslow

The late Graham Hutchins of County Park Nursery noted that many species of the related genus Melaleuca could in fact be included in Callistemon; the observed difference between the two genera being arrangement of stamens as clusters in Callistemon. Appetising as this may be, few joined in his enthusiasm, though no one seems to have a better diagnostic to tease them apart. The Ventnor collection, like so many of our plants, are named as acquired, that is they are labelled and listed in the database with the names they were supplied with. Clearly, some are unnamed, and some have a little provenance data. Some have names that have never been published, or are the names from the fevered imaginations of nurserymen. We have many plants from the National Collection holder as well as plants raised by seed, accessions from botanic gardens in Australia with good data, other donations from another era. Other than Cistus, I would be hard pressed to think of a genus we grow so many of so well, and know so little about at VBG.

Callistemon grow well at VBG, with exception of some pernickety cultivars and the very tender species. Usually the larger and fluffier the leaf, the less likely it is to thrive in our Garden. When we planted out the Australian Terraces in 2005 I remember well Roy Cummins planting Callistemon with a pick axe to make a planting hole. They very much enjoy a hard, dry and rocky position, so the proposition we had created was perfect. Amongst the earliest plantings were *C. citrinus* "Splendens" (see picture) which had been acquired commercially. These very quickly form large shrubs with excessively large red clusters of flower, ideal for the gardener with no patience and visitor with no taste, so perfect for quick results next to path edges after a winter of mud. The more sublime cultivars and species take time. Our early plantings also included some rather

ugly-looking stools of Callistemon that we moved from the original Australian Terraces. To our surprise they survived this harsh transplant.

More interesting flowerings followed, such as *C.* aff *linearlis,* a mysterious plant collected from Wakehurst on 29th January 2009 from their surplus plant list. This was originally raised by architectural plants from seed collected from a specimen at London University Botanic Gardens, an apparently hardy form which produces viable seed regularly. This specimen was (at Kew) previously known as *C. subulatus.* Nic Lughadha from Kew noted "Not *C. subulatus* which should have green style and no visible gland dots on leaves. This material is a good match for several herbarium specimens variously determined as *C. pallidus* x *linearis, C. linearis,* and *C.* near *rigidus*." His notes continue: "Genus needs revision."

We used money from VBG Friends to purchase many cultivars: *C. citrinus* "White Anjac", (not really white), the pastellic *C. pachyphyllus* "Apricot Blush" (not really apricot) and portentic C. "Little John", very small indeed

A large influx of material came from the National Collection Holders when based at The Old Walled Garden at Oxenhoath, and we used money from VBG Friends to purchase many cultivars. These included *C. citrinus* "White Anjac", probably the best white flowered Bottle brush (not really white), the pastellic *C. pachyphyllus* "Apricot Blush" (nor really apricot) and portentic *C.* "Little John", very small indeed, it lingers next to Signal Point.

We have a number of species that have been raised from seed, and these can take many years to come into flower. *C. pinifolius* was a hard species to find, only available from seed purchased from the internet, where all manner of unlikely offerings are made. The germinated seedlings looked quite correct for the species diagnosis, but it was five years until we saw the flowers. Ironically, by this time the plant was in cultivation once again, or at least offered in the trade, as we purchased material from an old cohort, Graham Blunt at Plantbase, which flowered the same year, corroborating both accessions.

Of all the 96 accessions we have grown since 2000, if pressed to name a favourite it would be tough to select one. A contender would have to be *C. pallidus,* sometimes called the Lemon Bottlebrush. It can be found planted at the exit from the Treefern Glade, but these days is best viewed from the path downward from the South African Terraces. When they arrived we noted that they were sickly, grey leaved plants in 2-litre pots, bought from a commercial source near Colchester. The true wonder of these plants took time to reveal, and the best plant is now 2m tall. When in flower the air hums to the sound of countless bees – and the scent is of very good quality pilau rice.

Chris Kidd

JOHN CURTIS'S SPRING UPDATE

Blasts of creativity

There are new facilities, new people and new possibilities in the Garden as spring gets underway

We are gearing up for our fourth season without Council subsidy. As I have written before we have made good progress, but have not nearly finished the journey to establish a vibrant, internationally acclaimed, botanic garden in Ventnor with a firm financial footing.

By Easter we will have rebuilt the atrium of the Tropical House, opening 'The Hub at VBG' – a place where Garden visitors can learn about the Garden, its microclimate, our research projects and our unique greenhouse which explores the tension between nature and extractive industries. The Kids' Colouring Wall in The Hub will be wiped clean each evening for a new blast of creativity the following day.

You will encounter many new faces at VBG on your next visit: two apprentices, one in the Garden, Josh, and one in Marketing, Rosie, a new Product Sales executive, Chloe, a new Front of House Manager, Fabian, a new Wellbeing Experience Facilitator, Freya, and new Volunteers. Transformation efforts always herald new faces – please introduce yourself and help us welcome them aboard.

Many ask 'What is the Wellbeing Experience?' It is a combination of classes, lectures, lessons and treatments with the tranquillity of the Garden and healing foods from our *edulis* Restaurant. The Wellbeing Experience aims to attract a new, wider audience to the Garden on a regular basis. As Sue Bolton, one of the Yoga teachers, told me: "There is a wonderful history of healing at the Garden

Live the history: take part in The Wellbeing Experience

stretching back to 1869." So we are standing on the shoulders of the past again – not so much introducing something as reintroducing it.

Adjustments continue to the physical plant. The old Shop is the new Gallery. The old Gallery is the new Shop. The Shop as was had reached its potential. We needed more space without sacrificing the opportunity to display art at VBG. So out went the shelving, the Council carpet and 1970's fluorescent lighting and in went new oak flooring, LED lights, and with one tap of the magic wand a set of doors disappeared and voila – a new purpose-built Gallery to be used for art exhibitions, receptions, private dinners, and yoga classes. The LED lights are only 12 watts and at 4600 Kelvin, a daylight temperature, they really show art well. We will soon see the first works of our new Artist in Residence, Alex Williams, hanging proudly in there (see Page 16).

We have been fortunate to have had a dedicated group of Volunteers seed cleaning and providing information, smiles, and directions in the new Shop all winter. The winter has also been characterised by the arrival of our second hop based beer, Botanic Pale Ale, a hearty strong craft ale coming to a store near you soon (see Review, Page 5). Drink beer, support the Garden . . . From mushrooms to beer to Dr Hill Hassell's Eucalyptus Cordial, VBG Products are an important part of the answer to the question 'How do you fund a modern botanic garden?'

As Sue Bolton, one of the Yoga teachers, told me: 'There is a wonderful history of healing at the Garden stretching back to 1869' So we are standing on the past's shoulders

It is an excellent time to be involved in a botanic garden. Society is becoming increasingly aware of climate change, of extinction rates, of the problems associated with industrial agriculture, and of the need for plant conservation. Ventnor Botanic Garden and our synthetic ecosystems created using the Ventnor Method℠ – which selects plants that fit our microclimate and presents them in association with each other as they would be in the wild – is right on the pace.

Please see how you can help us support the Garden – I believe our efforts together will be part of an enduring legacy.

DISCOUNTS for members

The following suppliers have kindly agreed to give discounts to Friends' Society members. Please be aware that discounts and other benefits of VBGFS membership are subject to change. **Remember to take your membership card with you – a discount will only be given if you show it.**

Eddington House Nursery	Eddington Road, Nettlestone/Seaview: 10% discount
Deacons Nursery	Moor View, Godshill: 10% discount.

Aliens in the Garden

We love our lizards but what else can you find in the foliage, asks **Dr Colin Pope**

Watching Wall Lizards is part of the experience of a visit to the Botanic Garden. They are far more approachable than our native Common Lizards and can be spotted basking at almost any time of year in favourable weather. Unlike our natives, they do not fully hibernate during winter but emerge on mild sunny days. We perhaps don't fully appreciating that they have not always been here.

Wall lizard among South African Ruschia waiting to catch insects

Wall Lizards have been established in Ventnor for a very long time. Some people would wishfully claim that they are native here, but all the evidence suggests they have been introduced. Anecdotal reports confirm there have been Wall Lizards in Ventnor since the early 1920s, possibly since Victorian times. Several owners of large houses in the Undercliff were keen to introduce European reptiles and amphibians into their gardens, and accounts exist of Green Lizards and European Tree Frogs being released into the grounds of Belvedere at St Lawrence and of European Terrapins into the pond at Old Park.

It is generally recognised that the Ventnor colony is the largest and oldest introduced colony in Britain. However, their overall morphology is not consistent with the north-western European populations and it is likely that ours arrived from an introduction from northern Italy. Their arrival at the Botanic Garden was much more recent, but clearly they like the place.

Interestingly, a study carried out by Dr Tobias Uller at Oxford University found that the eggs laid by Ventnor Wall Lizards develop faster than those laid by Wall Lizards in France and Italy. As a result, they hatch approximately two weeks earlier and this is considered to be an adaptation to our cooler climate. Remarkably, this adaptation is believed to have occurred over just a few decades. There are now Wall Lizard colonies in several seaside towns on the south coast of England but fears they may out-compete our native lizards because of their agility and high breeding rates have not been proven.

There are other non-native creatures thriving in the Garden. Amongst damp leaf litter you are likely to come across some very lively jumping creatures up to 1cm in length. Remarkably similar to the sand shrimps on the beach, these are terrestrial shrimps. Shiny and dark brown in colour (orange when dead) they jump vertically several centimetres. They are landhoppers, *Arcitalitrus dorrieni*, or lawn shrimps, and they are a native of eastern Australia in New South Wales and Southern Queensland. Landhoppers were first discovered in the Abbey Gardens on Tresco, Isles of Scilly, in 1924, believed accidentally brought in on tree fern trunks.

Landhoppers are common throughout the Garden, and likely to be established elsewhere on the Island. Look for them under stones, dead wood and leaf litter in gardens and damp scrub – and please let me know if you find any.

In September Tony Barber, a national expert on centipedes and millipedes, visited the Garden hoping to find some interesting species, introduced into gardens with horticultural material. From warmer climes and often on the borderline of hardiness in this country, they survive mostly in greenhouses and outdoors only the mildest parts of south-western Britain. Tony was successful in his search, finding three millipedes which are greenhouse or botanic garden specialists.

The Greenhouse Millipede *(Oxidus gracilis),* originally a native of East Africa, spread throughout the tropics and has become well established in nurseries in Britain, although it appears unable to survive out of doors. Tony found two amongst old building material in the compost yard, so it is just possible that they may be surviving outside here in sheltered spots.

Italian Millipede, Cylindroiulus apenninorum: new to this country. Photo by Paul Richards

Millipede at VBG, Haplopodoiulus spathifer. Photograph by Keith Lugg

Terrestrial shrimp Alcitalitrus dorrieni, from Australia

He also came across the Kew Spine-tail Millipede *(Haplopodoiulus spathifer)*, so named because it was first found at Kew Gardens, in 1976. It was subsequently discovered at Bedgebury Pinetum, Wakehurst Place, the Wildlife Garden at the Natural History Museum in London and Trelissick Garden in Cornwall. In all these gardens, and now also at Ventnor, it is likely to have been spread by the movement of plants, originally from Kew.

A third and most exciting discovery was a species which is common in Italy but never previously found in this country. Tony found that *Cylindroiulus appeninorum* was common in leaf litter in the Palm Garden. Again, it is likely to have been accidentally brought in on plant material. None of these introduced species are known to be a threat to our native fauna.

Do keep an eye out for unusual creatures in the Garden. One that may be surviving here but is easily overlooked is the Stick Insect. There are three species now recorded living in sheltered gardens in Devon and Cornwall, some having been known for over one hundred years. All came originally from New Zealand and have been spread with the movement of plants. The best time to find them is in early autumn when they have grown to their maximum size (up to 10cm) and may come out to bask on sunny walls. They spend the winter as eggs in the soil, which is probably how they are spread.

Weather in the Garden

(September 2015 – January 2016) **by Chris Watts**

Autumn passed by without too much trouble from the weather. Neither September or October sprang any surprises, although October was a bit on the dry side. This was made up by a November which was a bit on the wet side, and it was quite windy at times; by the end of November, we were awaiting Desmond, the fourth storm to be given a name, and he turned up during the first week of December. All the while the weather had kept exceptionally mild for the time of year, but that said, December proceeded to give us temperatures that were truly astonishing.

The mean temperature for December, 11.9°C, was up by 5.4°C over the 1921-50 average for the Hospital, due to the dominance of air originating in the tropics. Since observations began in 1839 at Ventnor, the record for the highest mean temperature for a December has stood for 163 years when in 1852 10.2°C was measured. So this has now been exceeded by 1.7°C. Night time temperatures were particularly noteworthy, keeping in double figures Celsius at 10.7°C; not only was this 6.4°C above the norm, it was also 2.0°C above the normal daytime temperatures! No wonder then when Curator Chris counted the number of plants in flower on New Years Day there were 287, against the usual 130.* The absolute lowest temperature of the month was 5.9°C as midnight approached on New Years Eve.

January maintained the mild theme, although not quite to the same extent as December. The averages were somewhat dented by a cold snap mid month, and we just avoided two potential air frosts; the thermometer dropped on the 15th and 19th to plus 0.9°C and plus 0.8°C respectively. However, rainfall was the noteworthy issue this time; it was the second wettest January (171.5mm, twice the average) since records began in 1839, after 2014 when 176.8mm fell. This same amount was reported from a gauge sited at Ventnor Cemetery in 1988, but because of the height difference it cannot really be counted.

So to sum up the past five months: it was basically very mild, and it rained often, but without any great daily amounts, for the wettest day recorded 19.9mm (October 5th) which in old money is less than an inch. It followed that it was altogether a very cloudy period, and amounts of sun were poor.

*See Dear Members, Facing Page

		Mean Temp C	Rain mm	Wet Days	Soil Temp (1+ mm) 1ft depth
2015	*September*	*15.0*	*65.5*	*8*	*16.5*
	October	*13.1*	*53.2—-*	*7*	*13.7*
	November	*11.8++*	*101.9++*	*22*	*12.1*
	December	*11.9++*	*77.9–*	*16*	*11.2*
	Year	*12.0++*	*862.6+*	*131*	*12.8*
2016	*January*	*8.0++*	*171.5++*	*18*	*7.8*

Note: Cols 2, 4, 5 No sign: about average
++/—- : significantly above/below average +/– : modestly above/below average

Dear members . . .

When I was in Cornwall recently I was surprised to hear that the first day of spring had "officially" been declared to be 10th February. This is only in Cornwall. The rest of us, as far as I know, have to wait for the official "official" day, 21st March.

Has spring sprung? Magnolias, heralding the season

The way the Cornish date is arrived at is quite simple. Six nominated Magnolia *campbellii* are monitored in six different great gardens, to record the date they come into full bloom. The moment all six of the trees have flowered – with a count of at least 50 blooms on each – then Cornwall declares spring has arrived in England.

You might think – though I couldn't possibly comment – that this is a rather clever publicity generator on the part of the six gardens in question. Certainly it's the sort of thing the local media will love to latch onto, with guaranteed pretty pictures and the great and the good in celebratory mood. But, thinking of our own headline grabbing story of record numbers of plants in flower at VBG on New Year's Day, (see Page 28) I couldn't help thinking that there must have been weeks of nail chewing down in Cornwall. After all, the way things were going they might have had to declare spring in mid-January!

Fortunately for all, and as explained by our weather expert Christopher Watts opposite, the brief cold snap slowed things down and our spring, which started early, is taking its time to disappear.

There are plenty of other fascinating things to learn in the pages of this Issue. Prof Scott Armbruster introduces us to Pollination (Page 20), while Dr Colin Pope suggests we look for aliens (see Page 10). Jane Cooper entices us to volunteer (Inside Back Page), while Sally Peake celebrates winning some grant money and tells us how it will be spent (Page 18).

Finally, some thanks. To our Chairman, Dr Chris Kershaw who is standing down after three years of relentless work raising the profile of our education programme. To our outgoing Treasurer, Kay Grist, who has kept us on the financial straight and narrow for three relentless years, and indeed to Tim Woodcock who is standing as her replacement at the AGM on 14th April. And to Rosemary Stewart for her tireless and cheerful help with photos and information for Ventnorensis

Roz Whistance, Editor

Please send ideas and contributions for the Autumn edition by 30th September 2016

Save the Date – Sunday 29th May 2016

This will be the Third Summer Garden Party at Ventnor Botanic Garden and we do hope that you will put this date in your diary to come and enjoy an evening in the Garden, with music, food, drink, an auction and your friends.

For the past two years we have been building up our Education Fund in order to sponsor apprentices in the Garden. Our first apprentice, Conrad Williams, is finishing his first year at Sparsholt as a result of his work in the Garden and it is amazing to see the change in this young man. This year's crop is maturing nicely and doing really well!

However, none of this would have happened without your support so, please, continue to do so and we look forward to seeing you on the 29th. The evening will start off with a tour of the Garden, drink in hand, around 6.30 pm.

Contact Jane Bland on 01983 874592
or jane@blandz.co.uk

The Apprentice

The Friends contribute to the funding of an apprentice for VBG. **Roz Whistance** meets Josh Edwards, drummer with Eight 28, three months into the job, but first Josh introduces himself – and confesses that the gardening life has taken him by surprise

Won over: Joshua Edwards. Photo by Rosemary Stewart

"Alright ladies and gentlemen, my name is Joshua Edwards and from December of 2015 I joined the diligent and dynamic gardening work force of Ventnor Botanic Garden as a first year horticultural apprentice.

To be completely honest I took this position because I couldn't find a full time job on the island. It never entered my mind that I would be taken in as I have by the beauty and majesty of this incredible microcosm, its staff, the volunteers, and the friends who reside in her.

So far, writing this segment about me for the Friends is most uncomfortable thing I've had to do here, which is testament to just how well I have been received and how confident I have been made to feel going about daily tasks and challenges in the Garden which are completely new to me."

The day-to-day work of an apprentice is never routine, says Josh. Everyone on the gardening team is put on the rota and he is shown specific skills he needs for work and to complete his course. Asked what his favourite part of the job is he simply says: "All of it! I love being outdoors."

The apprenticeship can run for two years and Josh is hoping to take all that time to maximise the experience. He is also keenly aware that gardening doesn't have to exclude his music. He is thrilled that his band, Eight 28, is to support The Fratellis this summer in London – for which he will take a week off work.

For while he admits that music will always take precedence over gardening, Josh Edwards has clearly found a new love that could work as a tandem career. "Gardening is worldwide, it breaks the language barrier," he says, and readily takes to the suggestion that gardening venues and music venues can be one and the same.

Josh and Eight 28 are planning an event in the Old Coal Cellars. Look out for details.

Competing with the flowers

Alex Williams, this spring's Artist in Residence talks to **Roz Whistance** about colour, perspective and just being there

"My job is very clear," says Alex Williams. "It's 'See what happens.'"

He is urgently applying bright pink, some white and a bit of blue to a large painting where, thanks to a perspective that is pleasingly twisted, a magnolia draws the attention seemingly of the whole garden. He works deftly with quite a chunky brush, and is only slightly distracted when talking about his role as the current Artist in Residence at VBG.

"If you're an artist in residence you can't come along with a preconceived notion of what you're going to paint and say: 'Well I'm going to carry on with what I usually do."

You sense there isn't actually such a thing as 'what he usually does': he has certainly had a long and varied career. He trained at St Martin's School of Art, took his degree in Wales and taught for many years before setting up a design and print studio in Hay-on-Wye. Eventually he and his wife Celia settled in the Welsh borders, and he gained a following for his quirky paintings of people's houses. The Welsh landscape and the farming life is the subject of his art but there is nothing pastel or gently rolling about his work. In vibrant, living colour the hyper real and sometimes humorous paintings portray an emotional connection between the people, their land, their animals and their often tumbledown dwellings,

"My painting has been a lot of raw umbers, farmyard mud, and blue," he says as he adds extra depth of colour to the canvas. "I felt coming here, the breakthrough was in finding a colour I could make work. Because the problem with painting gardens is that they are green."

If unadulterated green was a problem it is clearly one he has got over. "The thing about this Garden is the wonderful spurts of colour, and so I can't be an artist in residence without trying to use colour – competing with the flowers, as it were."

He chose to use acrylics, partly for the range of colour but also to avoid the toxicity of oils – at least until it is warm enough to work with the door open.

"It's very nice to arrive here in the morning, with something in my sketchbook ready to paint. I'm looking forward to going out and sitting and drawing directly, but at the moment I'm reconstructing these flowers, they're almost semi-abstract." He adds: "I've been doing a lot of figurative painting. It's good to have the flower as the main character."

He marked his arrival at the studio in the Tropical House at VBG with a lush jungle scene featuring a familiar waterfall, with Amazonian women fetching water from an oasis packed with coloured fish which seem to multiply as you gaze. "As soon as I arrived I wanted to paint that. It was such a strong idea, and it about my trying to get into the place."

Inspire

ed by VBG: Amazon comes to the Tropical House

Hibiscus: In Britain's Hottest Garden

Winter flowering: 'My breakthrough was finding colours that aren't green'

'It's good to have the flower as the main character'

Having got that scene out of his head and onto canvas he was able to focus on smaller subjects, albeit still on a large scale. "I want to build up a body of work that reflects my time here. I think that's important when you're an artist in residence."

Propped against a wall is something that a lesser artist might find intimidating – a very large, blank canvas. "That's my donation canvas, that I will give to the Garden. I want to do a big painting of the whole of the Garden, to have the pond with the koi, the café, the trees, maybe even Steep Hill Cove and the entrance up here. I want to do the whole garden with a phoney perspective, then fill it with specimens."

He wants to include a resident crow that has become a bit of a friend. "I think if he were looking down onto these palms and echiums, that would make a fantastic view." Alex clearly relishes every day that he is here.

Alex is not a stranger to residencies. Almost as soon as he moved to the Island, just three years ago, he was offered the chance of a residency at the Griffiths Arts Centre in Connecticut, USA. Now, taking up his brush here, he says a botanic garden needs an artist. "Here we're a bit like a zoo, the studio is an attraction and if you've got a botanic garden there's something missing if there isn't an artist at work somewhere."

So how does he feel about being Exhibit A? "If a painting is going well you don't want to be interrupted and if it's going badly you're in a bad mood!" he jokes. "There's always something to wash up when you stop, and it's always good to stop and look. An artist has a restless eye – how can I improve that?"

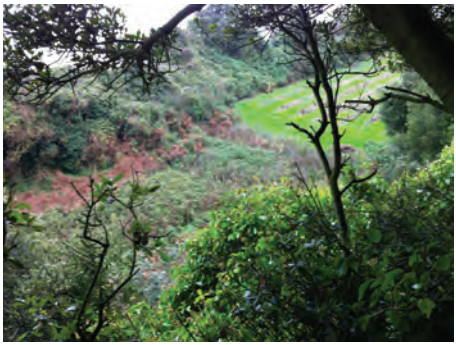
So don't hesitate to visit Alex in his studio, he is happy to stop, chat – and cast that restless eye on his work so when you're gone he knows exactly how he can make it better.

Alex Williams is in the Garden from Monday to Wednesday until June 2016. Look out for notices about exhibitions.

Bags of Help from Tesco

Ventnor Botanic Garden Friends' Society (VBGFS) is celebrating being short-listed for funding by the Tesco's Bags of Help scheme. The 5p charge for each bag is being channelled back into local communities to help with projects of benefit to people living near Tesco stores. Find out more at www.tesco.com/bagsofhelp

Hoping for more hops: Hand picking by VBG Friends



Potential: rough ground where a pathway could extend through to the coastal viewpoint

Many Islanders will have enjoyed participating with the re-introduction of hop-growing at Ventnor Botanic Garden and this fund will allow for much needed improvement to the Hop Yard and allow for better access for volunteers and visitors.

Shortlisting guarantees the Friends £8000 but there is even more money available through a public vote available to all Tesco customers. Between 27th February and 6th March all customers were able to vote for the Hop Yard project – your support might have added another £4000 to the pot and allowed even more improvements to the area adjacent to the Coastal Path that is already enjoyed by so many locals and visiting walkers.

Plans include a new trail down to a clifftop viewing point and information boards explaining the history and wildlife of the area. The extra money would also provide for much-needed support for volunteers, the life-blood of the Garden, who all need tools and training to get the most out of their experience.

Keep an eye on news via Rosemary's emails and in the County Press to see if we mustered enough votes to get the extra £4,000.

Not only by also . . .

The Friends were delighted to receive a grant of £500 from The Roger Vere Foundation, "to be used as you think best".

Event

Art in the Garden 2015–2016

Exotic blooms: 3D flowers in felt

By Carol Ann Eades

A new series of Art workshops was launched in March 2015 using the Garden as a resource, with professional artists working with members, visitors and the public. A wide variety of Art and Craft subjects have been experienced and enjoyed by beginners as well as those with more experience throughout the year, as the programme has grown in popularity.

The programme was launched in March 2015 with Nicola Orpen, a renowned textile artist, who demonstrated how to eco dye on cloth and wool from materials sourced from the Garden in the spring.

Over the past twelve months the programme has gradually grown both in numbers and artistic diversity to include Painting in the Garden and Drawing from the Garden, both with local artist Diana Parsons. After watching demonstrations, participants were inspired by the unusual flowers of the Garden in summer to create original artworks.

Another local craftsperson and an experienced feltmaker and illustrator, Gillian Chapman, has presented a number of very successful feltmaking workshops in both two and three dimensions. Students developed ideas taken from the Gardens to produce 3D flowers in felt, and in an autumn session created three-dimensional bowls sourced from the seeds and pods in the Garden.

The final workshop of the year was in December with Coastal Gardener Gerry Price. Skills were learnt and techniques incorporated using both natural materials from the Garden and the seashore to create seasonal wreaths and decorations.

The program for this year was launched in February with Gillian Chapman showing how to 'Paint with Fibres' using inspiration from the Garden in winter to create, for example, pictures, cushion covers and small bags.

Further sessions have been organised each month to include Printmaking with Minette Dogilewski and a follow up workshop demonstrating how to create a book with images from the Garden are planned for March and April. Another Eco Colour on Cloth will take place in April. In May there will be Painting in the Garden and in June the local Botanical Art society will be presenting a beginners Introduction to Botanical Art to coincide with their exhibition.

Later in the summer an Indigo demonstration and installation is planned for July during the Yoga weekend and in September there will be Hop Making Activities

Further activities are being organised - for more information or to book please contact Carol Ann Eades caeades@btinternet.com who will be pleased to help you and hopefully see and welcome you in this year of creativity in the Garden.

Attract to survive

Professor Scott Armbruster considers the effects of pollination mechanisms on survival, evolution and extinction

Darwin (1859-1877) was probably the first to recognize that specialised plant-pollinator interactions could influence both the evolution and the diversification of plants and interacting animals. Most subsequent researchers have focused primarily on the influence of floral specialisation on rates of evolution of new species (speciation). However, the diversity of related species or 'clade species richness', is the difference between speciation and extinction rates over time since origin. It is important, therefore, to consider also the effects of pollination mechanisms on extinction as well as speciation.

It has been found that clades of plants that are pollinated by animals are more diverse than their abiotically pollinated relatives (i.e. those with wind or water pollination). For example, plants bearing specialised flowers with nectar spurs (tubular structures containing nectar or other pollinator rewards) are more diverse than relatives with flowers not having nectar spurs (e.g. in *Aquilegia*). Floral specialisation has been interpreted as promoting the effectiveness of reproductive isolation* and speciation, but it may also be a factor in extinction. Clearly multiple factors affect plant diversification.

Ethological Isolation*

Some plants have flowers that attract only very specific pollinators (e.g. one species), and this specificity may generate 'ethological' isolation (i.e. based on pollinator behaviour) from related species of plants. The Madagascar star orchid (*Angraecum sesquipedale*) has approximately 30cm nectar spurs that restrict access to nectar to one species of sphinx moth with similarly long proboscides. Orchids pollinated by male-euglossine bees (Apidae: Euglossini) in South and Central America attract one or a few species of pollinators by having unusual compounds or complex mixtures of compounds in their fragrance attractants. Extremely similar, closely related orchid species may be virtually identical in all features but fragrance chemistry, and yet remain reproductively isolated. Their speciation may have involved only small shifts in the chemistry of their floral fragrances (which are, importantly, rewards as well as advertisements). That speciation can occur with little phenotypic or genetic change suggests isolation, and thus diversification, can evolve rapidly. Outside of orchids and nursery-reward plants (like figs), however, extreme specialisation and specificity of plant-pollinator relationships is generally thought to be rare, at least in most geographic regions.

Mechanical Isolation

Floral 'mechanical isolation' operates through differential pollen placement on pollinators. Some of the strongest cases for this mechanism are seen in orchids that have pollen united into packets ('pollinia'). For example, sympatric* orchids pollinated by male euglossine bees in the tropical Americas usually differ in the location of pollinarium attachment on pollinators. These packets can be placed precisely on pollinator and stay put until removed by other conspecific flowers. This is in contrast to most plants, which have granular pollen; granular pollen rarely lands and stays in a small enough space on the pollinator to preclude interspecific pollination. This may be critical in the maintenance

of reproductive isolation in many orchids, but again, among most plant species it seems unlikely that mechanical isolation is common. However, this does not mean that selection on sympatric species against sharing pollinators and against placing pollen in the same location is uncommon. Indeed, adaptations promoting both features seem to be quite common, even in plants with granular pollen. These adaptations promote fitness of individuals, but should not be interpreted as "good for the species", a common, group-selection-based misconception.

Restricting nectar access: Madagascar star orchid Angraecum sp

Effects of Floral Traits on Extinction Rates

Another route to the increased species diversity in a clade is the reduction of the extinction rate. Lowered extinction rates may occur in plant lineages that have particularly effective combinations of floral traits that lead to effective attraction of, and/or mechanical fit with, pollinators [Armbruster 2014]. Along an axis of ecological differentiation, limiting similarity in pollination may reduce the number of pollination generalists that can coexist in a community, relative to pollination specialists. Thus, as species become more specialised in their pollination, more species can coexist in the same community. This reduces the extinction rates and raises species richness, but also contributes to more diverse floral displays "for our enjoyment!"

Effects of Diversity on the Evolution of Specialised Flowers

A third route to the association between specialised flowers and clade species richness has been pointed out only recently: members of species-rich clades may regularly experience sympatry with one or more relatives, and this selects for floral specialisation [Armbruster 2014]. When related species share pollinators, there will be strong selection for them to diverge in pollinator use (character displacement), such that one or both of them may become more specialised in their pollination. This is a largely untested idea, but it is consistent with the fairly common observation of floral character displacement occurring in flowering plants.

Conclusions

Although there is little doubt but that plant-pollinator interactions and plant diversification rates are interrelated, the actual mechanisms involved, and their relative importance, remain to be fully elucidated. In some groups, such as orchids, specialised relationships with pollinators may increase the likelihood of reproductive isolation between similar plant taxa and thus increase speciation rates. More commonly, however, effective flower-pollinator relationships may contribute to plant diversification rates by enhancing the effectiveness of pollination and seed production, increasing population viability, and hence reducing rates of extinction. Finally, in some plant lineages, the association between specialised pollination and species diversity may reflect specialisation in response to selection generated by pollinator sharing with closely related, sympatric species.

See Page 27 for Definitions and References

Photographic Competition

The photographic competition "A Year in Ventnor Botanic Garden" announced in the last *Ventnorensis* is starting NOW

Photographs for the competition must be taken in Ventnor Botanic Garden and should be submitted under the following five categories:

Plant portrait
Landscape
Abstract
Wildlife
Young photographer

Each entry will cost £10, £5 for Friends, and an entry form will be available for download from the Friends' website – www.botanicfriends.org.uk

Competition judges will be Julian Winslow and his photographic partner, Steve Blamire, both successful Island photographers, together with Dr Rachel Flynn who is Exhibition and Collections Coordinator at Dimbola Museum and Galleries, the photography museum and house of the pioneer Victorian photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron.

The winner and two runners-up in each category will have their images professionally printed, mounted and hung in an exhibition at The Gallery in the Garden: any additional prizes are still being finalised. The Exhibition will be publicised on both in the Garden and Friends websites, as well as The Isle of Wight County Press. The images will also, naturally, be featured in *Ventnorensis.*

In addition the Friends intend to use a selection of the images in a calendar which will be available for sale at The Garden Shop.

Full terms and conditions will be available on the entry form.

Details of prizes will be published on the Friends website as and when they are finalised.

Judge Julian

Julian Winslow couldn't be better qualified to judge the inaugural VBGFS Photography Competition. He has been a full-time professional photographer for over a decade, but before that he was a gardener at VBG. Not any old gardener: he was instrumental in setting up the Garden in its new guise after the 2008 storms that flattened it.

"I was deeply involved when Chris Kidd rebuilt the greenhouse, the Mediterranean Garden, the Japanese Terraces and the Australian Garden. Our long term vision for the Australian Garden was based on a walk I did when I was in the Blue Mountains. You start in the Bush, and it's very dry and as you walk down into the gorge it becomes more and more humid and lush, until it becomes temperate rain forest.

"So our plan for the Australian Garden was to start on the hill where it is quite dry, with eucalyptus, and as you go down it would get more and more tree ferny."

He says it was Chris Kidd's vision to allow the Eucalyptus to grow to hide the Cricket Club: "so from the other side of the garden you can look across and all you can see is Australia." The same is true of the Mediterranean Garden, and this, Julian says, is going to aid entrants to the Photography Competition:

"It gives you an opportunity within the UK to take photos without going anywhere. The Garden has a much wider range of flowering plants than most gardens because of the microclimate, which gives the opportunity to shoot cacti – even flowering cacti – against a blue sky rather than against a greenhouse. There are a lot of plants you won't find outside in the rest of the UK, and rarities too, you wouldn't find elsewhere. A lot of the plants are grouped as you'd find them in nature – which makes it very interesting."

He adds that the fact the Garden is situated on one of the most beautiful bits of coastline on the Isle of Wight means it's a great day's exploration, which changes each time you come back. [continued on Page 29]

VBG Annual Pass Benefits

A reminder of the benefits of holding an Annual Pass with VBG

- Unlimited access to the Garden including: daily tours of the garden, the tunnel tour and visiting the mushroom experience.
- Free car parking.
- Regular newsletters - Be the first to hear about upcoming events at the Garden.
- Up to 20% off VBG-run events.
- 10% off in our Plantation Room Café when you spend £10 or more.
- 10% off in our edulis restaurant when you spend £20 or more.
- 10% off in our gift shop when you spend £20 or more.
- Watch the garden evolve through the seasons - including the fabulous, floral, firework display from our echiums and the intoxicating Amazonian Water Lily

TO GET YOUR PASS

and further details go to http://www.botanic.co.uk/news?id=82
You will need a passport-size photo

Capability Brown on the Isle of Wight

The 'Capability' Brown Festival 2016, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is a nationwide celebration of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown (1716 - 1783). A number of events are being organised by the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust, with funding from the HLF via the East Wight Landscape Partnership 'Down to the Coast', and with support from Ventnor Botanic Garden.

Sweeping lawns, undulating lakes and artfully placed clumps of trees typify the 18th Century English landscape park; all are part of the landscape formula devised by Capability Brown. Between 1751 and 1783 his consultancy handled over 170 commissions. Ambitious and hard working, Brown rose from being an apprentice under-gardener at Kirkharle Hall, a modest Northumbrian estate, to be Master Gardener to George III.

Walking and talking: Guided talks at Appuldurcombe

The nationwide Festival will offer access to sites Brown created or advised on that are not usually seen by the public, and host exhibitions, publications and a range of events.

In 1779 Capability Brown was commissioned by Sir Richard Worsley to devise a plan for additional work to the landscaped grounds of Appuldurcombe House, in order to complete work already carried out. The design included parkland planting, serpentine drives and eyecatchers, which exploited the dramatic topography of the downland setting. As part of the Festival, English Heritage, which manages the inner park, has installed a new interpretative panel at Appuldurcombe, and a new interpretative leaflet is being produced. Download from the English Heritage website: www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Also the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust is organising some special events at Appuldurcombe about Brown. Guided walks are being organised as part of the Isle of Wight Walking Festival (website: www.isleofwightwalkingfestival.co.uk) – a short walk around the inner park led by Lorna McRobie, on 3rd May at 2.00 pm and 21st October at 1.00 pm, and a longer walk around the outer park led by Vicky Basford, on 12th May at 10.30 am and 23rd October at 2.00 pm. To book phone Mike Dawson on 07794 173865. Walks are free, but places are limited.

On 5th October, 7.00 pm at Ventnor Botanic Garden, Brown expert Steffie Shields will give a lecture: 'Paints as he Plants' on Brown's colourful palette. Then on 6th October, 10.00 am, a study day at Appuldurcombe will include Kate Harwood on Brown's life and work, Steffie Shields: 'Moving Heaven and Earth' on Brown's use of ground modelling and water, Vicky Basford on the history and development of Appuldurcombe Park and consultant Philip Masters on the conservation and management of Brown's landscapes. A guided walk around the estate will follow the lectures.

Further details from Mike Dawson: tel. 07794 173865, email: mike.dawson@mcrobie.org.uk or visit www.capabilitybrown.org

Thirty Friends enjoyed a delicious lunch at the Garden prior to Christmas, with an excellent raffle and a good update from Chris Kidd. This was the first of its kind and hopefully there will be another one this year with more guests

THE MET

WINE - TAPAS - COFFEE

Follow us...

The Met brings a little of the Mediterranean to the beach front at Ventnor. Whether you are planning a big night out or just popping in with friends, The Met is your perfect venue. Open from 9.30am daily.

Quality tapas, fine wine and Italian coffee

Esplanade | Ventnor | PO38 1JP | 01983 855441 metwinebar.co.uk

Growing the Garden . . .

Launching the **Friends' Foundation Fund**

Most of the long-established Botanic Gardens are able to lean on historic links and legacies to help fund their ambitions; creating a fund that allows our supporters and benefactors a way of donating both small and large sums of money in a very simple way has challenged your Committee for some time.

Interest rates are historically low at present but, with every penny counting, the Committee has decided to start a new Foundation Fund with £15K from our reserves. The ambition is that this fund capital will grow steadily with the interest being spent on projects that enhance the long-term future of the Garden.

So, how to grow the Fund? Our President, Brian Kidd, has long supported the Friends with a monthly Standing Order and it is the simplicity of his giving that we hope you will all feel able to support. By filling in a Standing Order (enclosed), you choose how much you can afford to support the future; even £1 a month would double the value of a single subscription with Gift Aid. For those considering larger donations, Standing Orders provide a simple means of giving that can be easily managed.

And the effect? Should just half of our current membership choose to donate £2 each month, the fund would grow, including Gift Aid claimed, by about £7500 each year. Just £5 a month would add nearly £20K every single year.

Our Curator often talks of the long view, particularly when planting the Champion Trees of the future; your Committee hope that the Friends' Foundation Fund will support the Garden towards a future when his seedlings are reaching for the sky.

A Standing Order form is enclosed; please fill it in today . . . for tomorrow!

Attract to survive: Pollination Science [from Pages 20/21]

Definitions:

Reproductive isolation: Barriers to gene flow between related species, such as by hybrid sterility or use of different pollinators.

Sympatry: Living together. Sympatric speciation is the process through which new species evolve from a single ancestral species while inhabiting the same geographic region.

Ethological: Ethology is concerned with the evolutionary significance of an animal's behaviour in its natural environment.

Conspecific: Of the same species

References:

Armbruster, W. S. (2014). Floral specialization and angiosperm diversity: Phenotypic divergence, fitness trade-offs and realized pollination accuracy. AoB Plants 6, plu003.

Darwin, C. (1859). On The Origin of Species. London: John Murray.

Darwin, C. (1877). The various contrivances by which orchids are fertilised by insects. Republished 1984, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Here where it's Hot

If it were need, confirmation that we were living through an exceptionally mild winter came on New Year's Day when **Chris Kidd's** annual head count of blooms in the garden was an unprecedented 287! Photos by Rosemary Stewart

Here are a few examples of plants that show what they can do in Britain's Hottest Garden!

Passiflora – "Lavender Lady" One of the tougher culivars of Passion Flower, but still only really for the mildest locations

Aloe arborescens – The Octopus Plant. One of the best and toughest winter flowering Aloes, from South Africa

Arbutus xalapensis – Very rare in cultivation, this is a seedling from a plant collected by Sir Harold Hillier on his honeymoon in Mexico

Sparmannia Africana – African Hemp, this has lived for three years without frost now and is many meters high, its flowers open to the touch

[from Page 23]

Julian speaks with particular fondness for the Garden because in the 15 years since he left his gardening role to become a professional photographer some of his assignments have allowed him less opportunity to see his surroundings than he might have hoped.

"I've been to Tokyo, Brazil, New York, Omaha, Bangalore, Iran, Naples – Watford! – doing portraits of people in their offices. Some of it was very 'land in Tokyo, 12 hours later take off again.'"

But you only have to Google some of work for his more creative clients and you see a distinctive Julian Winslow trait. He has photographed a lot of work for the New Covent Garden Market:

"I've always maintained an interest in photographing plants. I try to treat them much as I would the subject of a portrait. I will photograph what draws my eye to a particular part of the plant, such as just where a petiole comes off the leaf where it joins the stem."

Having an awareness of the end use of a photograph – where text might be overlaid in a magazine – has made him aware of the negative space as much as the positive as he is shooting. Attention to detail, too, is reflected in his larger work. For London-based florist Zita Elles he has covered wedding fairs at The Dorchester Hotel. "I made one of the rooms into a forest! Luckily she likes to play quite a lot."

'Playing' is important to Julian and creative collaboration with friends is something he is doing increasingly. A highly successful project with fellow competition judge Steve Blamire in 2015 saw prominent Islanders photographed in such a way that their job or hobby was a tangible part of the person's portrait. His latest collaboration is with a poet friend:

"We asked each other probing questions about our childhood, which led to a project of exploring the river [Medina] where I used to play as a child. As I get older I value time more than ever."

Time to reflect: Julian Winslow

Botany Club and Café Botanique

Botany Club is now linked to the winter lecture series, now known as Café Botanique. As part of the makeover, there is no longer a membership fee. So anyone can go along to one, many or all of the varied events in the programme that is unfolding, paying for each event at it happens. (£5 for a Friend, £10 for a non-member.)

Already this year we have had a fascinating talk by Jonyth Hill about the Old Hospital from patients' perspective; then Morgan Curtis brought the issue of Fracking to our doorstep; and Richard Smout told us about the climate and landscape in the English Riviera.

A woody walk with Dr Colin Pope is planned for 4th May, and on 25th May there will be a conducted walk with Andy Butler, Warden of the National Trust, taking in Glanville Fritillary Butterflies, Wheelers Bay and Bonchurch.

We greatly look forward to a visit to Val Gwynn's 'Wildlife Farm' in Shalfleet on 8th June, and to Louise Ness's wild flower meadow, which she has established over the last two years. Both these trips will be in June.

Capability Brown

In October there will be a talk on Capability Brown from the IW Gardens Trust – get your ticket early for this landmark event.

Look out for details of an amphibian talk by Mark Earp on 9th November and for a quiz night, as well as talks by Prof Scott Armbruster, ecologist Heather White and our own Rosemary Stewart on her St Helena adventure.

There is more in the pipeline as we go to press so watch this space (and your email). It's all about botanizing so come along and enjoy!

Seed Swap

Our gardening volunteers, Bridgette and Linda, have asked to me tell you about their new idea – a Seed Swap Event.

While *Ventnorensis* may not have reached you in time for the first one, keep an eye out for future seed swaps so you can collect and prepare your own seeds.

We do hope we shall be able to make a successful event and make it a day to plan some planting in your garden next year.

Why not join us on a Wednesday morning in the Nammet Room to help clean seeds for VBG? The Nammet Room is beside the toilets in the Car Park - we meet there at 10am. Bring a hot drink for coffee time!

Eddington House Nursery

24th April 2016

Isle of Wight Rare Plant Fair

Featuring guest speaker Bob Brown and Chris Chadwell

* Guest speakers (including Bob Brown of Cotswold Garden Flowers)
* Guest specialist local island growers
* Wide selection of locally grown rare plants including Perennials, Alpines & Shrubs
* Explore the stunning display gardens and speak with expert local plant specialists
* Homemade cakes, snacks and light refreshments available
* Fair Open 9am - 5pm

How to find us

www.eddingtonhousenursery.co.uk

Eddington Road, Seaview, Isle of Wight PO34 5EF

New members

A very WARM WELCOME to these friends who have recently joined the Society.

Mr Barry & Mrs Megan Cook, Yaverland
Mr Graham Drucker, Ventnor.
Mr Guy & Mrs Carol Ann Eades. Sandown
Mrs Jacqueline Nash, Ventnor
The Earl & Countess of Sandwich, (John and Caroline), Beaminster, Dorset
Mr Michael & Mrs. Josephine Smith, Seaview
Mrs S Dickens Yates, Shorwell

Honorary members

Alan Titchmarsh
Simon Goodenough
Brian Kidd

Patrons

Gilly Drummond OBE
Penelope Hobhouse

News from Wales

Simon Goodenough gave us a wonderful introduction to the history of the National Botanic Garden of Wales, highlighting its beginnings as a Welsh landscape garden with wonderful wooded hillsides and lakes formed in the valleys. The Garden was granted Millennium Lottery funding which provided the iconic Great Glasshouse that has given Simon so much pleasure providing protected space for his beloved South African flora. His work there has included continuing the programme of restoration of the historic landscape. Shortly after his talk, Simon announced his retirement - we wish him a long and happy one.

Rosemary Stewart, Secretary

Old friends: Simon and Debs Goodenough, Jonyth and John Hill

Design by Simone Dickens Yates, Coco Design Co. Tel: 07530 867318 / 01983 551527 simone.dickens@gmail.com

Very Important Place: Visitors seek help from volunteers at the Kiosk

VOLUNTEERING AT VBG

Is it a hut? Is it a shed? No, it's an **Information Kiosk**

Jane Cooper describes the thrills and spills of giving help to visitors now there is a new, improved info point

It was formally known as the VIP (Volunteer Information Point) Lounge, but nothing could be less like a VIP Lounge usually associated with the term.

Towards the end of 2014 some volunteers were getting frustrated with their role as 'meeters and greeters'. We were based by the top entrance and when the weather was poor, especially with no shelter, and footfall was slow, it was not the most fulfilling of roles. Jonyth and a couple of others had started to operate in a limited way in a single wooden chalet (the VIP lounge) inside the Garden, and some of us thought there could be a more useful role for more of us if we could improve this facility.

So in the spring of 2015 John Curtis agreed for us to have the use of a double hut that was placed down in the area by the pond and restaurant. We set up the inside with a mixture of information about The Garden and The Old Hospital. We have tried to keep up to date with posters for various events and have a board for Plants of the Month, which has proved to be very successful.

We have a rota and throughout the main season have tried to keep the facility open for at least a few hours on most days. We communicate with each other by using a comments book (to be read just amongst ourselves) where we all put down any thoughts, queries and questions that we hope one of us may be able to answer – or commiserate with. I always look forward to reading what has been written since I was last there. Anything from: "Yet another cold, grey, windy day" (this unfortunately tended to be the Friday volunteers!) "and now torrential rain!!" Then: "Sun hat, no fleece! Hurrah!" To: "I've had some lovely comments about the Garden." And: "There's a terrapin in the pond." "There are two terrapins." "Any more?"' Plus lots of comments about things that need attention, queries as to how we deal with a particular problem, etc.

Visitors like to come and chat, asking questions from the mundane – "Where is the exit?" . . . to "Do you know if the deck chairs are available for rent today down at Steephill Cove?"' They bring pictures on their phones of plants they've seen – or they'll say: "There's a plant we saw in the long border, it's blue, do you know what it is?" Visitors on the whole are very positive and like to tell us about how they have enjoyed certain aspects of their visit to the Garden.

During the winter we moved to a spot inside the new Gift Shop but we intend moving back outside once the season is up and running and, hopefully, the weather warms up.

We do, however, need more volunteers to join us, as we are thin on the ground as we man the Kiosk as well as give garden tours. There is also the possibility of us diversifying to continue meeting and greeting in the shop, but only if we can attract more people to help us.

If you would like to spend some time meeting, greeting and helping visitors to really enjoy their visit to VBG, contact Jane Cooper at 01983 861459 (or kjanecooper@yahoo.co.uk) or Jonyth Hill on jonyth.hill@mypostoffice.co.uk

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