



Newsletter

North American Rock Garden Society
Berkshire Chapter *May 2011*

Next Meeting:

Saturday, June 4, @ 10:30 AM

Berkshire Botanical Garden Exhibit Hall
BBG is located 2 miles west of Stockbridge,
MA at the junction of Routes 102 & 183

AM: Anne Spiegel:

*Alpine Plants Growing in their Homes
and Yours*



Lunch – BYO

We welcome dessert contributions. Lunch
will be followed by Show & Tell, a plant
sale and an auction

**PM: Robin Magowan and Juliet
Mattila:**

*A Photographic Reprise of The Salida
Conference*



RAINY DAY RAMBLINGS

Despite rain over half the days since I returned from my vacation in New Mexico, so far all of the dozen plants I brought home are still alive, even the few that have since been planted directly in the ground. Hopefully *Penstemon pachyphyllus* will even make it through the wet weather in the winter time. It is planted in well drained soil and mulched with a thin layer of stones. I am keeping my fingers crossed.

I also came home with a few hardy cactus, several varieties of hardy *Delosperma*, another small, blue flowering *Penstemon* without a name tag, and even a Cota tea plant (*Theლოსperma megapotamicum*), which is a yellow flowering plant in the aster family, native to New Mexico, that makes a tasty herb tea.

I have been looking forward to attending the annual plant swap at Wild Things Rescue Nursery in Valley Falls, NY this weekend. Last year I ended up going home with a Korean lilac bush that is getting ready to bloom now. While the event was not rain free, the heavy rain held off till just after I got in my car to go home. The weather even held up well enough to walk through the display gardens, which had a huge



variety of plants in flower, plus some interesting trees and shrubs such as the cork screw willow and double petaled white lilac. Between

the swap itself and a few side trades with Dawn, the owner of the plant nursery, I went home with some cool stuff. I decided the *Tiarella sp.* and *Dicentra spectabilis* were best suited for the yard of a friend. The *Gentiana cruciata*, *Coreopsis rosea*, a small hosta and a few others are now calling my place home.

One good thing about all the rain this year is that transplants seem to be establishing themselves well. I figure since I can't change the weather, I might as well learn to use it to my advantage.

Erica Schumacher

MOUNTAIN PLANTS OF THE NORTHEAST - PART 3

TEXT BY TOM CLARK

Houstonia, we have a problem! To be more accurate, *Houstonia caerulea* var. *faxonorum*, we have a problem. Well, it isn't so much a problem as it is a question. Where do you get the moxie to restrict yourself to a handful of high northeastern peaks and on two French colonial island outposts off the south coast of Newfoundland...and nowhere else?! I mean *really*, what are you a snob of the plant world with a place in the mountains and a place at the shore? Been there for millennia, you say? Since the last ice age, well I beg your pardon!

Yes, it is true that the alpine bluet exists nowhere else on earth other than moist areas in the subalpine and alpine zones of northern New Hampshire and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. This certainly adds to the allure (at least for me) of this charming close relative of our widespread (and widely known?) bluets. The alpine bluet, however, is white with a subtle



Houstonia caerulea – image by Mark McDonough

dot of yellow at its center and bears a larger flower, but has the same clumping and sheet-forming tendencies as its lowland cousin.

Another with a unique “Can-Am” connection is mountain avens (*Geum peckii*) that is known from populations in the White Mountains and then not again until one travels northeast to Briar Island, Nova Scotia. Ahh, the wonderful world of plant geography! My first encounter with this yellow flowered species was along the upper reaches of the Six Husbands Trail in the Franconia Range on a rather foreboding, dreary day. As I scrambled over open ledge approaching treeline I came across a uniquely linear colony of this plant happily growing in a long, narrow peat-filled cleft across the face of the outcrop over which a constant supply of icy water flowed. This mid-Summer bloomer is more typically found inhabiting moist alpine meadows.

These are but two of dozens of plants highlighted in a 1982 book by Garrett Crow, *New England's Rare, Threatened and Endangered Plants*. As you might guess, many of the plants discussed are specialists adapted to a particular and rare habitat in New England – among others, sandplain grasslands, serpentine outcrops, limestone cliffs, bogs or, in the case of the plants we're considering, alpine areas. Undoubtedly, the poster child from the latter habitat is the federally endangered Robbin's cinquefoil (*Potentilla robbinsiana*) that occurs on Monroe Flats in the Presidentials and the Franconia Range where it grows in lean, stony



Geum peckii – image by Dan Sperduto

ground. Much attention has been lavished on this tiny alpine and not all of it welcome. Early botanists collected hundreds of herbarium specimens. Although perhaps unaware of its rarity their activities unquestionably helped establish it as one of New England's rarest plants. In many cases unaware of its existence, let alone its rarity, were the thousands of hikers who hiked a length of the Appalachian Trail that bisected the main population. The intrusion of the trail and the many feet that often strayed from it took their toll on the plants and the unique habitat. The majority of attention, however, has been positive and in the form of research that has very effectively informed collaborative efforts to protect and secure existing populations and bolster numbers through a reintroduction program headed up by the New England Wildflower Society. The various efforts have been successful to the point that the federal status of this half-dollar sized plant has been proposed to be downgraded.

Seemingly relishing disturbance, mountain sandwort (*Minuartia glabra* syn. *Arenaria groenlandica*) is a short-lived, tufted perennial that colonizes the bare, disturbed mineral soil especially common along trails. Producing its small white flowers from mid-Summer on, it has, perhaps, the longest bloom season of any northeastern alpine. I can by no means say that I have truly been successful with this species in the garden, but I did manage to grow and flower it when at Mount Holyoke College. A smattering of flowers, an abrupt decline and prompt death sums up my experience with it. I didn't really want it in the garden anyway!

Another high elevation specialist, albeit more widespread, is Boott's rattlesnake-root (*Nabalus boottii* syn. *Prenanthes boottii*). I have found it growing in moist alpine areas along the Alpine Garden Trail above Tuckerman and Huntington Ravines. The less than pure white flowers appear atop 4-12" tall stems in mid to late summer. Not a true beauty in my estimation it is nonetheless a thrill to encounter a plant that calls so few places home. This and the next two plants are members of the aster clan.

How many places in the northeast can you go and not encounter a goldenrod? Very few, but how many places can you go and encounter a charming dwarf goldenrod? Even fewer, but alpine goldenrod (*Solidago leiocarpa*) is there above treeline to greet the mid-late Summer explorer as it did some 200 years ago when the man for whom it was named, Rev. Manasseh Cutler, explored the Mt. Washington area. Topping out at a mere six inches, its golden yellow flowers are more button-like than wand-like as in several lowland species. A few other goldenrods occur above treeline, but this is the dwarfiest. Another yellow composite (and there are thankfully few allowing us to sidestep the need to refer to the lot of them as DYC's!) is *Arnica lanceolata* ssp. *lanceolata*. Too see a broad range of our native alpine in bloom requires at least a couple trips to the mountains, but why limit yourself?! *Arnica* is one of the later season attractions putting on a fine display of small yellow daisies in July and August, especially prominent on the headwalls of Tuckerman and Huntington Ravines.

A frequent companion of arnica is pale painted cup (*Castilleja septentrionalis*). Also flowering in mid to late summer it is less showy than the arnica and far less showy than the myriad



Castilleja septentrionalis – image by Mike Jones

species of *Castilleja* that populate the western states, and confound many of us who've tried to identify some of them! No such problems here in the east, though – if it's a *Castilleja* and you're in the mountains, this is it! Its cream-colored flowers occur in short terminal heads atop 8-15" stems. Although I've seen this high on the headwall of Tuckerman Ravine my thoughts return to western Newfoundland where robust clumps of this plant were common.

Many other plants await the intrepid botanist or plant explorer in not only the White Mountains, but throughout the northeast, and so many are relatively accessible. In Vermont, Mt. Mansfield, Camel's Hump, Smuggler's Notch, Hazen's Notch, the cliffs above Lake Willoughby, serpentine outcrops near Mt.

Belvidere; Mt. Marcy and the other highest Adirondack peaks; and the rugged and remote Mt. Katahdin in Maine all beckon. Perhaps our paths will cross in one of these special places where grows a bounty of plants that comprise a cherished part of our unique natural mountain heritage.

Tom is a long-time member of the Berkshire Chapter of NARGS, and is currently the Collection and Grounds Manager of The Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard, MA.

The electronic version is **still** less costly than paper. To change from print to electronic, please contact Pam Johnson. Thank you!

May 14 Meeting Notes

It was announced that Chris Chadwell would give two talks: "The Beautiful Alpine of Kashmir" and "Growing Himalayan Rock Garden Plants". In fact, he gave one talk (with a short pause for lunch and the plant sale.) It was a fascinating talk, very informal in its structure, without a dull moment. It ended too soon. Just as in a conversation with friends there were many asides and apparent detours and reminiscences but one shouldn't be mistaken: everything he said was relevant and never straying far from a well defined line and from the announced topics. He talked about his life and experiences collecting seeds in the Himalaya, the landscape, the travel conditions, the people, the (few) authoritative reference publications and their authors (he had the chance to meet a few of them) and of course plants.

What happens to these plants in cultivation? This is something of great interest to Chadwell the collector and he offered a few of his personal observations. He described the process of gathering, storing, and identifying seeds. He cautioned us that if some plants appear to be short lived, it is not necessarily our fault: so are they in their native habitat, but there they form large colonies and reproduce freely by seeds. The population is long lived, if not necessarily

individual plants. And about colonies, he also pointed out the impressive variations to be observed in forms, colors, compactness etc. He clearly illustrated that point with a picture of a field of *Geranium wallichianum*. Proper and accurate identification in the field is not always easy for many reasons. Quite often the collector will qualify a name with an 'aff'. Further precision may be gained later after germination. In any case one should expect that growing seeds collected from a population in the wild may produce results different from what is grown from a single source. It is recommended to use the reference # and collection # after the Latin name.



Androsace muscodea - image by Esther Wrightman

For a large part, Chadwell showed and talked about plants which are generally successfully grown or growable here: *Bergenia stracheyi*, *Bergenia ciliata*, *Arisaema flavum*, *Arisaema jacquemontii*, *Primula denticulata*, *P. rosea*, *P. munroi* (very adaptable), *P. macrophylla* (less so, short lived?), *Anemone rupicola*, *Delphinium brunonianum*, *Androsace mucronifolia*, *Paraquilegia anemonoides*, *Androsace muscoides*, *Arisaema costatum*, *Anemone tetrasepala*, *Codonopsis ovata*, and many more. Since he was talking about Kashmir and the Himalaya there were also various *Meconopsis*, *Corydalis*, *Cremanthodium*, etc., which are plants that frequently we only dream of. Yet, some of them are truly difficult: *Gentiana depressa* (C.C.: "I killed them all"), *Primula reptans* (practically intractable). About the latter, we cannot resist quoting John Richards: "extremely shallow rooted...unless continuously humid conditions are provided when in growth it

rapidly dies...a less than perfectly drained compost causes it to rot...must be kept on the dry side in winter...warm spells during the winter tend to bring it into growth with disastrous effects...).



Paraquilegia anemonoides – image by Esther Wrightman

Just following the lunch break we had the plant sale. During the short "Show and Tell" we had seen a yellowish form of *Trillium grandiflorum*, an impressive clump of *Epimedium*, a nice set of clear yellow *Primulas* (a cross between *Pr. veris* and *Pr. elatior* most likely). These were auctioned off, as well as more yellow and double snowdrops donated by Nancy Chute. The main plant sale had a wide variety of choice offerings. We particularly noticed several beautiful *Primulas* (*auricula*, *sieboldii*) in bloom and a very nice clump of the rarely offered *Podophyllum pleianthum*. It may be unfair not to mention more: but the sale went very fast, we had no time to make notes. Besides, the lucky ones know what they bought, and the other ones probably wouldn't be glad to be reminded of the treasures that they missed.

Random Thoughts

By Dean Evans

The other day I stopped in a local charity store that receives donations from compulsive de-clutterers. One never knows what he might find there. Over time I have been able to upgrade my racing pigeon breeders' nest bowls from ordinary clay pottery to Corningware and Pyrex casserole dishes. This time there was a small collection of records. I picked out 6 Perry Comos, an Eddy Arnold and

3 classicals – one being a Leonard Bernstein recording of Scheherazade. I have always liked this piece since I heard it on his television program in the late 1950's through which he encouraged children to like classical music. I cleaned the Bernstein one with care and I am sitting here listening to it—great entertainment for a dime.

Spring has finally come here –after a fashion. Plants have started to show an inclination to bud. My blueberries have started to swell. I have given them a healthy dose of pigeon manure that will wash in with the rain. A fellow I know, who operates a commercial wood processor which produces the bundles of wood you see at gas convenience stores, gives me the sawdust. I clean up around and under the unit at the end of each day, collecting the sawdust and wood waste. I dump this around my rhododendrons, berry bushes and on flower beds in varying thicknesses. I pull the sawdust-filled large green bins (the type used by landscapers) on a kid's toboggan during the winter.

When you come to New York State, always stop at one of these convenience stores – look for the ones with a State lottery sign. Grab yourself a number of those Quick-Draw pencils. They have a softer lead than number 2. This helps in reading the slip as it passes under the Quick-Draw scanner. They are excellent for writing on plastic plant labels.

Gardeners accumulate huge numbers of pots and have trouble storing them. I have a source for plastic barrels. I wrap a small length of 1 inch



rubber hose against the lip on the end of the barrel which has the two threaded drain holes. Using a

grease pencil – the old fashioned ones that have a string embedded in the outer cover – I let the hose guide this pencil to mark the barrel. This results in an even mark one inch in from the lip of the barrel. Using a Sawsall or a keyhole saw, stick the blade in one of the holes and saw out to

the line and then around so you can remove the end. This opens the barrel for storage. By laying the barrel on its side you now have a container in which to store and confine all those pots. How often, after a windy night, has morning shown a mess of pots strewn around your property?

When you go into the Home Depot paint department you can get (for free) two large wooden paint sticks – you do have to ask for them. They generally have the small ones out. These sticks have many uses for you as a gardener, such as a tamper or temporary label. Always get your two. I generally have 50 or more around at any given time and I use them. I use my table saw to cut them into smaller widths and lengths if I need a small piece of wood for some purpose.



I go to Home Depot on Sunday morning. There are always a few items I need – I call it going to the “Orange Cathedral”. You should always enter the store via the “Exit” door. Just inside this door there is a crudely built plywood box in which they store extremely strong twine. It's some kind of polyfiber. It is provided for customers to assist them in tying purchased material to their vehicle. Pull out 20 or 30 feet of this twine, and scrub it on the hacksaw blade fastened to the box until it is cut. Lay one end on your palm and hold down with your thumb and wind the length around your hand, leaving about 10 inches unwound. Slide this roll off your hand and wrap that remainder around its center. On the last turn put the end underneath and cinch

tight. Put this in your pocket. And repeat the process when you leave the store. If this is done routinely, you will accumulate enough twine for all your tying needs.

Our June 4 Program

Our next program will have Anne Spiegel in the AM, presenting *Alpine Plants Growing in Their Homes and Yours*, which she describes as “showing plants in the garden and in the wild, sometimes the same plants.”



Petrocallis pyrenaica – image by Anne Spiegel

She'll discuss varying ways of growing them, from troughs to screes to crevice gardens and will include plants from alpine to sub-alpine locales, including the high desert. Those of you who know Anne and have visited her garden will know what to expect. But for those who haven't had the opportunity to travel with Anne through mountains and gardens via word and picture, this program will be an even more enjoyable experience.

The afternoon program will be presented by Juliet Mattila and Robin Magowan, although Robin insists that he's nothing more than her assistant for this talk. Juliet will present her photographic reprise of the 2010 NARGS National Meeting in Salida, CO, focusing on the plants rather than the people. Her photographs are always spectacular, and the peek I've had at the program is consistent with her other efforts.

That means, of course, that this meeting is one NOT to be missed.



Polemonium viscosum – image by Juliet Mattila

BNARGS 2011 Program

June 4 – **Anne Speigel** - *Alpine Plants Growing in their Homes and Yours*

Robin Magowan and Juliet Mattila - *Colorado*

July 2 - **Lori Chips** - *Planting and Growing in Troughs & Trough Planting Workshop*

August 13 - **Ron Rabideau** - *Alpine Plants of China*

Steve Whitesell - *Rock Garden Design*

September 3 - **Member's Potpourri**

October 8 - **Cliff Desch** - *Gardening in Conway, MA*

Joyce Hemingson - *Rock Garden Bulbs*

November 5 - **William Cullina** - *Woodland Gardening*



Positions of Responsibility

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Vice-Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
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Proofreader – Martin Aisenberg
Refreshments Chairperson – Joyce Hemingson
Speaker Housing – Anne Spiegel

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