

The Urban Rock Gardener



Volume 34, Issue 2

March/April 2021



MARCH VIRTUAL MEETING

Monday, March 15 at 6 p.m. via Zoom

A Zoom link will be sent to members prior to this event

BOTANIZING IN THE HIMALAYA – YUNNAN, SHANGRI-LA AND THE BORDERLANDS OF TIBET

Speaker:

Matt Mattus

Horticulturist, Plantsman, Gardener and Author



Enjoy some Himalayan escapism via Matt Mattus's stunning photos from a recent NARGS expedition. Western China has always attracted some of the greatest botanists, such as Farrer, Ward and Wilson in the 19th century and Forrest in the 20th. While many plants from this region are commonly found in North American gardens, many more remain rare, as they only thrive in their native (and at-risk) high-elevation habitat.

This talk focuses on western Yunnan and the borderlands along the Chinese Tibetan Autonomous Region. This area remains of immense interest to botanists and alpine gardeners, as it is home to most of the species of primula, rhododendron and meconopsis (the famed blue poppy). What makes this talk extra unique is that Matt and the NARGS team visited not in autumn during seed collection season, but during the spectacular, yet brief bloom period at the end of June and beginning of July.



MATT MATTUS is vice president and trustee of the Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston, Massachusetts, and is a past president of NARGS. He is a contributing regional reporter for *Fine Gardening* magazine, and contributes to many other publications.

Matt has authored two books: *Mastering the Art of Vegetable Gardening* (2019) and *Mastering the Art of Flower Gardening* (2020). While most people know him for his popular blog, *Growing with Plants*, his garden and greenhouse, featured in articles published in *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Martha Stewart Living*, have provided both inspiration and aspiration for gardeners of all levels.

For nearly thirty years, Matt was worldwide creative director for toy giant Hasbro, Inc. He is the third generation of his family to cultivate the land on which he lives and gardens. He has a strong practical and aesthetic sense which he brings to bear on his lifelong love of plants and gardening. Today Matt spends most of his time as a freelance designer, writer and garden photographer. He lives in Worcester, Massachusetts with his partner Joe and their three Irish terriers.



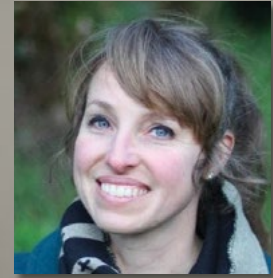
PLEASE NOTE: The Annual Meeting of the Manhattan Chapter of NARGS will be held at 6 p.m. prior to the talk. See page 4 for complete information.

APRIL VIRTUAL MEETING

Monday, April 19 at 6 p.m. via Zoom

A Zoom link will be sent to members prior to this event

POLLINATOR ECOLOGY



Speaker:

Rebecca McMackin

**Director of Horticulture
Brooklyn Bridge Park**



The vast majority of plants rely on pollinators to reproduce. From bees to butterflies, to birds and bats, these pollinator partners shaped the evolution of flowers, giving us so much of the beauty we appreciate today. However, these exciting dynamics, in which a flower's pollen is carried to a stigma, are fraught with trickery, bribery, thievery, and, of course, salacious plant sex. Learn the basics of pollination ecology. Why do plants have flowers? How did they evolve? And specifically, what are flowers doing? Why are they so pretty and smell so good to non-pollinating primates such as ourselves? Certainly flowers are beautiful, but they are also complex communication appendages – sending scents out for insects to locate, directing flight patterns with well-marked landing strips, deceiving gullible males to mate with them – all for the sake of pollination, and thus, reproduction.

Many lectures teach audiences who our pollinators are and how to encourage them. But this talk will focus on flowers, their functionality and modes of communication. By the end of the presentation, you will be able to “read” flowers and come to know the true desires of the organisms you cultivate.



REBECCA McMACKIN is an ecologically obsessed horticulturist and garden designer. By day, she is the Director of Horticulture for Brooklyn Bridge Park, where she manages eighty-five acres of diverse parkland organically and with an eye toward habitat creation for birds, butterflies and soil microorganisms. In her imaginary free time, Rebecca writes about landscape management and pollination ecology, and designs the occasional garden. She serves on the boards of Metro Hort Group and the Ecological Landscape Alliance, and is a NOFA Certified Landcare Professional as well as an ISA Certified Arborist.

ANOTHER HOOSIER IN MANHATTAN

by Brendan Kenney, Chair



REFLECTING UPON SIX YEARS as Chair of the Manhattan Chapter, the deep roots of NARGS entwined with the New York Botanical Garden have special meaning. In March 1934, the first meeting of the American Rock Garden Society (now NARGS) was held at the Commodore Hotel in Manhattan. The previous November, six people had met at the same location to plan the meeting, including T. H. Everett. As is well-known, he was the creator of NYBG's Rock Garden, designing and supervising its construction and initial planting of 2,000 specimens.

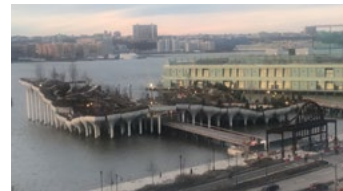
In 1980 the Commodore Hotel's renovation and name change to the Grand Hyatt New York was the first project in Manhattan by "the former guy."

Now slated for demolition, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill has designed Project Commodore, a 1,600-foot super tall mixed-use skyscraper that will become the tallest building in the Western Hemisphere by roof height. Oddly addressed as 175 Park Avenue, the 83-story project is planned to rise on the site of the 26-story Grand Hyatt New York, flanking Central Terminal. Completion is slated for 2030. With the inevitable construction delays, hopefully it will open in time to celebrate the centennial anniversary of NARGS.

NEW YORKERS PARTICIPATING in the recent NARGS Crevice Study Day were perplexed by Queens Plaza (Dutch Kills) being the only mention of crevice gardening in New York City. While the reused concrete slabs in the medians there do help manage stormwater and create pedestrian safety, the planted *Yucca filamentosa* has mostly died, and only trash remains in the many crevices. Certainly the lovely crevice beds created in the Rock Garden at NYBG by Michael Hagen and his team a few years ago are worthy of our attention. Watch for the spring reopening in April. While at NYBG, you might notice that a portion of the Tulip



The LuEsther Mertz Library at NYBG and what remains of the tulip tree allée



Little Island at Pier 55

Tree Allée in front of the LuEsther Mertz Library is missing. Twenty-six ten-year-old *Liriodendron tulipifera* were planted in 1903. Take time to appreciate those that remain. Though tulip trees can live for hundreds of years, it is doubtful that the Indiana State Tree will survive so long in this allée. (Head to Alley Pond Park or Inwood Hill to see some very old specimens.)

LONGING FOR THE MOUNTAINS during the pandemic has recently led me to further exploration of the Watchung Mountains in New Jersey. On Preakness Mountain, High Mountain Park Preserve is one of the largest tracts of forested land in New Jersey's Piedmont region.

There are nine ecological communities represented, including traprock basalt glade. The preserve includes 380 plant species, eighteen of which are rare. Torrey's mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum torreyi*) and basil-leaved mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum clinopodioides*), along with narrow-leaved vervain (*Verbena simplex*), are classified as endangered by the state.

REAL MOUNTAINS AWAIT the arrival of rock gardeners in Durango, Colorado for the NARGS Annual Meeting, which has been rescheduled from June to the first week in August. It will be a joy to finally reconnect in person with other members in the Rocky Mountains. Details at www.nargs.org.

ANTICIPATED THIS SPRING is the opening of Little Island at Pier 55, a collaboration of the U.K.-based Heatherwick Studio and the New York-based landscape architecture firm MNLA, led by Signe Nielsen. The innovative tulip-shaped pods create slopes and are designed for rising ocean levels.

HOPE TO SEE YOU at our upcoming Zoom talks and perhaps in person in Durango the first week in August. Be safe until we can meet again at NYBG Midtown.

TULIP FESTIVAL RETURNS TO THE UPPER WEST SIDE



Photo by Robin B. Langsdorf

One of the most eagerly-awaited events of New York's community garden scene is the annual Tulip Festival hosted by the West Side Community Garden. In 2020 the tulips were there in their full glory, but alas, the public wasn't. This year, the Festival is back, the garden is open and everyone is invited. Covid protocols will be in place, of course, but social distancing and masks will not impede the sight of 13,000 tulips in full bloom. MCNARGS members may want to take special note of the central rock garden, featuring hundreds of minor species bulbs. The Festival dates are two weekends, April 17-18 and 24-25, but the garden is open on weekdays as well, which would be a great time to avoid the crowds.

For more information go to westsidecommunitygarden.org. The garden is located at 123 West 89th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues.



Top: The first meeting of the American Rock Garden Society, March 17, 1934. Below: The sorry state of the crevice garden at Queens Plaza (left) compared to the healthy state of the crevices at NYBG's Rock Garden (right). [Garden photos by Brendan Kenney]

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Michael Riley has agreed to serve as MCNARGS Treasurer, and was elected to this position by the board on Feb. 3, 2021.

THE MANHATTAN CHAPTER of the North American Rock Garden Society, founded in 1987, is a group of gardening enthusiasts who are dedicated to the propagation and promotion of an eclectic range of plants, with emphasis on alpine and rock gardening selections. Our Chapter programs, designed for a sophisticated mix of professionals and amateurs, cover a broad spectrum of special interests such as rock and alpine, woodland, bog, raised bed and planted walls, as well as trough and container gardening.

The Urban Rock Gardener is a newsletter published by the Manhattan Chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society.

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Our gratitude to Michael Riley for donating the printing and mailing of the *Urban Rock Gardener*.

UPCOMING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

**Monday, March 15 at 6:00 p.m.
prior to the scheduled talk**

MCNARGS members will elect the Board of Directors. Please contact us if you are interested in running, or want to nominate someone who would like to serve.

Up for election:

Nancy Crumley, Judi Dumont, Lola Lloyd Horwitz
Michael Riley, Susan Steinbrock

Monday, May 17 – via Zoom

The Highlands of Lesotho

MIKE BONE

Curator of Steppe Collection, Denver Botanic Gardens

Zoom links will be sent to the membership prior to the events

THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

JOIN TODAY. NARGS is for gardening enthusiasts interested in alpine, saxatile, and low-growing perennials and woody plants. Annual dues in the U.S. and Canada are \$40, payable in U.S. funds. VISA/Mastercard accepted.

Benefits of membership include: *Rock Garden Quarterly* with articles on alpinism and North American wildflowers; annual Seed Exchange with thousands of plant species; study weekends and annual meetings in either U.S. or Canada; and book service.

Join online at www.nargs.org. Or write: Bobby J. Ward, Executive Secretary NARGS, P.O. Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619-8604.

The NARGS *Quarterly* is now online and members have free access at www.nargs.org/rock-garden-quarterly.

WE HOPE TO "SEE" YOU AT ALL OUR UPCOMING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Submission deadline for May/June issue: April 20

MANHATTAN CHAPTER OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

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FIRST CLASS MAIL



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