



# Bermuda Botanical Society

P. O. Box HM 834, Hamilton HM CX, Bermuda  
Tel: (441) 236-5291 • Fax (441) 236-8970 • Email: bdabotanical@logic.bm

## SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER 2010

### THE SOCIETY ANNOUNCES ITS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



The Bermuda Botanical Society is very proud to announce that three students have been presented with scholarships to enable them to continue in their horticultural studies. Ryan Branco and Lucy Hollis are both studying at the University of Gloucestershire, England, and Sonia Bremer, of the Botanical Gardens, is taking a Michigan Design Certification Course at Midwest Permaculture.

Pictured above are Neville Richardson, Curator of the Botanical Gardens, Sonia Bremer, Ryan Branco, Nigel Chudleigh, head of BBS's scholarship committee, and Lucy Hollis.

Congratulations to the three winners. We look forward to their input to our Society when they have finished their studies.

# DNA-BASE PLANT NAMES (GARDEN DESIGN JULY/AUG 2010)

The buzz about genetics, once limited to hard-core scientists, has lately entered man-on-the-street dialogue, what with the all the crime show chatter about DNA. One valuable outcome has been connecting family members. Now something similar is happening to the plant world.

Ordering the Earth's flora based on DNA rather than physical appearance alone, the revolutionary system APG III (Angiosperm Phylogeny Group) is the result of a 10-year collaborative effort by taxonomists from around the globe.

As a former botany student and on-going plant nut, I cringe every time a plant changes its name.

But most genera have remained unmoved, though there have been a few mind-bending relocations. The huge sci-fi-looking *Rafflesia* is now kin to the poinsettia.

Peter Steven, curator at the Missouri Botanical Garden and a professor at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, has been involved with the project from its inception. His (comforting) take on APG III: "The botanical community already knows where the problems are and changes are not made lightly. The good news is, not many areas are uncertain."

## UN YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY

In this year of 2010, the United Nations is celebrating the world's biodiversity.

After reading an article recently on the state of the world's biodiversity in 2010, in which the news was not good, a few "themes" captured my attention:

- 1) The more diverse nature is, the more productive/healthy it is.
- 2) "When fiddling with something complicated [biodiversity] and not entirely understood, it's not smart to throw away parts – especially when those systems keep humanity alive on the planet." – Smithsonian Institute entomologist Scott Miller.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) If a species dies out, it's genetic variety also dies. It will no longer be able contribute it's genes to help and/or solve the problems created by lack of genetic diversity.

4) Habitats with more genetic variety (diversity) recuperate from problems more quickly than habitats with less genetic variety.

And of particular interest to me because we *can* do this in Bermuda (and *some* people *are*) -

5) Private landowners can improve the biodiversity of their land and, in doing so, make a significant positive difference. Surveys show that remnants of nature in built up areas can boast impressive populations of some species. Local areas of high biodiversity can add up.

<sup>1</sup> Losing Life's Variety, Science News, March 13, 2010.

Readers who have access to the internet might want to have a look at the United Nations webpage: <http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/>

***Lisa Greene***

*Lisa's note cards featuring her photos of local flora are on sale in our Gift Shop.*

## NONSUCH ISLAND TRIP MAY 30



This is Bermudiana, the second cahow born on Nonsuch In the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Jeremy weighs Spitfire, while Marijke notes the measurements



Jeremy measures Bermudiana's wing-span

David leads the tour

## **NONSUCH TRIP cont'd:**

The Botanical Society's second annual Nonsuch Island visit took place on May 30. The weather was glorious and BZS's *Endurance* provided a smooth sail round St David's head to enchanting Nonsuch Island, where both Dr David Wingate and Conservation Officer Jeremy Madeiros ferried the passengers ashore, so that, in the end, no one needed to swim (rather to the disappointment of some!)

David led the tour, telling the story of his life on the island and the work he put into it over 40 years. He also revealed some information that most of us have not been privy to so far: the DNA of endemic Bermuda plants is being analysed in the UK, to establish whether they truly are endemic (i.e. separate species found only in Bermuda) rather than native (arrived here by natural means but found elsewhere as the same species). And it turns out that maybe most of the Bermuda cedars found on the island are actually not *Juniperus bermudiana*, but a hybrid of Bermuda cedar and Virginia cedar, caused by cross-pollination. There is also a possibility that the Bermudiana, *Sisyrinchium bermudiana* – Bermuda's national flower – is not endemic to Bermuda! Keep tuned ...

When we returned from the western cliff-top, where David explained the workings of the cahows' artificial burrow, Jeremy was ready to introduce us to the living birds, first giving us an update on the cahows' progress over the years.

There were at the time two cahow chicks on Nonsuch. Bermudiana was born to the first Nonsuch-fledged cahows to breed (they produced last year's Somers), while Spitfire had to be rescued from one of the cahow islands where he had been abandoned by his parents, and was very underweight and in serious distress. Despite this, however, he was a feisty and aggressive chick, and earned his name after lacerating Jeremy's flesh wherever he could reach it. After Jeremy had

The

fed him in our presence, Spitfire's weight was almost up to norm.

Bermudiana fledged about a week after our visit, and Spitfire took off a few days later.

Because of the hour we spent with the cahows, there was unfortunately no time left to see the rest of the island – an error we shall remedy by adding an hour to our next Nonsuch trip, already booked for May 29, 2011.



This longtail chick in its burrow greeted us on our arrival (the nest is placed above the steps leading up from the dock).



***Helle Patterson***  
***Newsletter Editor***

## “PLANTS THAT BITE BACK”

I recently visited the magnificent Royal Horticultural Society Gardens at Wisley, Surrey in England.

A current feature is entitled as above and certain plants throughout the Gardens have informative labelling highlighting their varying abilities to “bite back”.

One such plant label that caught my attention was for our common Oleander, *Nerium oleander*. See photo.

I have always regarded Oleander as one of our best and most picturesque hedging plants, though regrettably its prevalence has declined in recent years, no doubt due to increasing urbanisation.

Residents will be well aware that Oleander is a highly poisonous plant, but the information that it is one of the world’s *most* poisonous plants and that one drop of nectar might kill was startling to me. The label awards the plant a “Scariness Score” of 9 out of 10! When visiting South Africa a couple of years ago, I was told that plant nurseries there are prohibited from selling Oleander plants because of its toxicity, though it is commonly grown between carriageways on the main highways in that country.

If the nectar is so deadly, do bees know to eschew it? It apparently doesn’t find its way into our delicious local honey. (A prime component of which, incidentally, is the nectar of the invasive Brazil (or Mexican) Pepper, *Schinus terebinthifolius*.)

An interesting personal observation regarding Oleander is that, up to a few years ago, one rarely saw seed pods on this plant in Bermuda. Now fruiting of the plant is commonplace and branches even bend under the weight of the fruit and the windblown seeds accumulate in small drifts. And seedlings are popping up everywhere. Could



it be, as with the Indian Laurel, *Ficus microcarpa*, that there is now present an immigrant insect which facilitates pollination? Or could there be a climatic or other explanation?

Another “Bite Backer” identified at RHS Wisley is Swiss cheese plant, *Monstera deliciosa*, also a common plant in Bermuda. The fruit, which, as the name suggests, is delicious when ripe, is nevertheless apparently extremely poisonous when unripe. However, this plant rates a “Scariness Score” of only 4 out of 10.

***Nigel Chudleigh***

## TREASURER'S REPORT

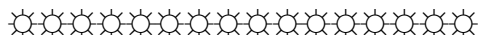
It's almost that time of year again.... the financial year end (Aug 31<sup>st</sup>) and the "new year" is just around the corner. We will be stocktaking from 12pm on 31<sup>st</sup>, and so the Visitor's Centre will close early that day. We also have our final sale of the year on, as a run up to the stocktake.

From a preliminary review of the financials, it looks like we have had a good year, which means we will be able to put some money back into the Society for future projects and to be able to offer our scholarship program again next year.

I look forward to sharing the final financial results with you over the coming months and to working with the Society during the next year.

We are still looking out for new volunteers and to recruit a new part time employee in the Visitors' Centre so please get in touch with one of the exec committee if you are interested in either position.

*Samantha Bromfield*



## FROM THE GIFT SHOP

We were saddened to learn of the deaths of Natalie de Moura and Jane Carpenter this summer. Both volunteered together on Monday mornings for several years. Our sympathies to the families. We also send our condolences to Doreen Woolridge, a long time volunteer for us, on the death of her husband.

The Visitors' Centre will be getting some new merchandise after our 31 August stock taking. Please keep in touch and support us by purchasing from our gift shop and cafe. The coffee is great, parking is easy and the environment is relaxing.

*Lyn Vaughan.*

### Plant Sale Saturday 30 October 2010

#### PLANTS NEEDED!

Now that the hot, dry summer is ending, the autumn growing season is just around the corner. It's a good time to get those special plants potted up, or re-potted, to have them in good condition for the annual Plant Sale, now only two months away! Have a look around your garden for anything that may have self-propagated and which may be of interest to fellow gardeners.

In the last newsletter I extolled the virtues of Malabar Spinach as a rare summer-growing green vegetable. I have had gratifying feed-back from a few members who tried it out. The vines really took off after the summer rainy spells. For anyone who missed out, there are still packets of seeds available from the Visitors' Center.

*Nigel Chudleigh*

## GARDEN WALKS

During June the Society organised two Garden Walks. The first, at the Middle Road, Paget, home of George and Marijke Peterich, also included a walk through the spectacular neighbouring

property of Elfrida Chappell. The twenty participants were delighted with the experience, which was followed by wine and cheese at the Peterichs.



Later in the month a dozen members gathered at the Shelly Bay home of Nigel and Diana Chudleigh. The Chudleighs have devoted much time and toil to removing introduced and invasive plant species from their property, and to replanting with natives and endemics, with awe-inspiring success. The

afternoon was rounded off on the patio by the serving of refreshments which included a mouth-wateringly delicious cheese home-made by the Botanical Gardens' Superintendent, Myles Darrell. If you are after freshly-made speciality cheeses, call Myles!



# VOLUNTEERS

Lyn Vaughan has been blessed with several new volunteers at the Visitors' Centre this summer. Various persons have photographed the newcomers, but only one picture has reached me. Many thanks to all the volunteers, old and new, without whom the Centre could not keep running!



New volunteer Alexis Richens and Lyn Vaughan



## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- October 30**      **Plant Sale. 8:30 am members, 9:00 am general public.**  
Botanical Gardens.
- November 1**      **Deadline for submissions to next newsletter.** Please email  
articles/news/questions to [helle@northrock.bm](mailto:helle@northrock.bm)
- June 29, 2011**      **Nonsuch cruise and tour. Members only. 1:00 – 6:00 pm.**  
Cost is likely to be \$50, but will not be confirmed until nearer the  
time, when BZS has established its prices for 2011. For  
reservations, please email [helle@northrock.bm](mailto:helle@northrock.bm)





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## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Our Goals: To encourage & support the botanical sciences within the community & promote further development of the Botanical Gardens and Arboretum.

Your membership contribution is important to us. It helps the Society to further our goals. We support the following programmes:

- **BOTANY CAMP** A summer camp where children learn about growing plants and how important they are in our lives.
- **SCHOLARSHIP FUND** To assist Bermuda's horticultural students.
- **LECTURES, WORKSHOPS & TOURS** A winter/spring programme on botanical themes to educate and inform our members and guests.

As a member of the Society, you will receive the following benefits:

- **QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER** with news of the Society and advance notice of events.
- **DISCOUNT** on lectures and tours.
- **10% DISCOUNT** on merchandise from the Visitors' Centre Gift Shop (membership card required).
- **MEMBERS' DISCOUNT** at Brighton Nursery (membership card required).

**PLEASE SHOW YOUR SUPPORT & RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP BY COMPLETING THE FORM BELOW. THANK YOU!**

### 1) PERSONAL DETAILS

New Member: \_\_\_ Renewal: \_\_\_

Name: Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: (required only for new members or change of address) \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to receive your newsletter by e-mail? YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

Overseas Members receive newsletter by email *ONLY*.

### 2) FEES & DONATIONS (Please tick relevant boxes)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$5 SENIOR                 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 LIFE MEMBERSHIP              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$5 JUNIOR                 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000 CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10 INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP | <input type="checkbox"/> PERSONAL DONATION AMOUNT: \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 FAMILY MEMBERSHIP     | TOTAL AMOUNT PAID: \$ _____                                 |

### 3) PAYMENT METHOD (Please tick one box & complete payment details if paying by card)

- CASH ENCLOSED
- CHEQUE ENCLOSED (Please make payable to the Bermuda Botanical Society)
- CREDIT/DEBIT CARD (Visa/MasterCard only)

NAME ON CARD: \_\_\_\_\_ CARD NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

EXPIRY DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

Questions? Please call 236-5291.

FOR OUR RECORDS:

Payment Rec'd: \_\_\_\_\_ (register button #7) Date card issued \_\_\_\_\_ Entered in D/B \_\_\_\_\_

For Credit/Debit payment print receipt & send to member with membership card.