



Bermuda Botanical Society

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MAY NEWSLETTER 2012

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

If you have not visited our website lately, check it out now at www.bermudabotanicalsociety.org and bookmark it for future use. Executive Committee member, Nigel Turini has done a wonderful job for us in getting the site reorganised and updated.

Some useful features are the Calendar of forthcoming events, the Membership renewal form for downloading and an archive of all quarterly Newsletters dating back to 2008.

Going forward, those members who have opted to receive their newsletters by email, will get an email notification that the latest edition is now posted on the website. It can then be read and/or downloaded and printed out, if so desired.

The advantages of receiving your newsletter this way are many. Firstly, you get the photos in glorious colour. Secondly you receive the newsletter promptly, wherever you are in the world, so long as you have internet access. Thirdly, by not emailing the newsletter itself, it avoids the problems associated with file size and getting the "mail box is full" messages. And lastly it saves the Society the cost and labour of mailing out the printed version.

The Society enjoyed a most enjoyable visit on 14 April to the garden of Michael and Elaine Darling. This was

interesting on several levels. A good deal of planning had gone into redesigning the garden after the Darlings took it over, with particular emphasis on provision of windbreaks using both plantings and dry stone walls. Overlooking Granaway Deep, the property was particularly exposed to winter gales from the north. Michael is an avid and thoughtful gardener, who loves to propagate unusual plants, so that his garden is both well laid out and full of surprises. *See photos.*

Members will be interested in news of the career path of one of our 2010 scholarship recipients, Lucy Hollis. Lucy obtained her postgraduate degree in Landscape Architecture, with Distinction, in the UK last year. She is currently gaining valuable practical experience as assistant Landscape Architect with a company in Suffolk, England, which experience should stand Lucy in good stead when she eventually returns home.

We were deeply saddened to note the passing in March of our member, Diana Barker. Diana was one of the regular contributors of plants for our annual Plant Sale. Each October I would receive the call to collect the plants from her home in Somerset, as she had no car. An octogenarian, Diana travelled to work each day, in Hamilton, by moped.

Nigel Chudleigh

ENDEMIC FERN – GOVERNOR LAFFAN'S FERN (*DIPLAZIUM LAFFANIANUM*)

BY PETER LEE

The Governor Laffan's Fern is one of four endemic ferns in Bermuda and because of major changes in landscapes over the past 20 - 25 years it has been almost destroyed (Whitney, 1955). Phillips-Watlington, (1996) agrees, stating that it has been virtually extinct in the wild since 1905 and only a few specimens can be found throughout the island. Cultivated specimens can still be found in the Bermuda Botanical Gardens.



Governor Laffan's Fern, (Google, 2006).



Governor Laffan's Fern (undated)

The fern is named after Governor Sir Robert Laffan, who sent a living plant to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in 1880, from which this species was first described. Governor Laffan's fern is relatively large with bright green leaves reaching up to 30 cm (12 inches). According to Britton's 1918 book *Flora of Bermuda*, this fern was found in cave mouths and rock crevices between Harrington Sound and Paynters Vale up until 1905.

Britton describes seeing this very rare fern in the wild in the autumn of 1905, but in 1913 when he returned to a location known to have the fern it could not be found. At one time the fern had been relatively common in the Walsingham area, and two plants were taken to a private greenhouse in Hamilton. Britton notes that he studied these plants in 1914, but was unable to successfully raise young ferns from the spores.



Juvenile Governor Laffan's Fern

Today Governor Laffan's Fern remains critically endangered. It is considered extinct in the wild, as it has not been found growing in Bermuda since Britton's 1905 observation more than 100 years ago. In 2002 spores from this species were sent to the United States for propagation at the Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha. A few ferns were returned to Bermuda in 2006 and are housed at the government plant nursery at Tulo Valley and the Botanical Gardens. Without this conservation action it is likely that this fern would have become extinct. (Department of Conservation Services, 2009-2011)

It is interesting to note that of the estimated 12,000 known fern species in the world, 19 are native to Bermuda. (Royal Gazette, 2004).

THE TREE THAT DRINKS CLOUDS

BY LISA GREENE

How does a tree survive on a rocky island with no rain?

The dragon's blood tree (*Dracaena cinnabari*) is found only in the arid, vulture-frequented mountains and canyons of Socotra, an island in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Yemen. It is named for its scarlet sap, which is cherished by local people, who use the red resin in make-up and also to decorate traditional pottery.

But the tree's real claim to fame is slightly more subtle – it has an extraordinary strategy for surviving the summer here, when there is almost no rain and certainly no surface water. Resembling a huge toadstool, the tree's canopy actually acts as a funnel. When regular morning mists envelope [*sic*] the mountains, the water condenses on the tree's leaves and is channelled down the twigs and limbs direct to the base of the trunk, where it is drawn in by the roots. Furthermore, the dense foliage acts as a parasol in the extreme heat of the day, protecting the roots from being fatally baked.

Most of the dragon's blood trees on Socotra are at least 200 years old, and the team were surprised not to find any baby specimens. It may be that the domestic goat population is eating the saplings. It seems that a herbivore's teeth can be more perilous than a savage climate.

Excerpted from BBC Wildlife, Nov. 2009.

Note from L. Greene: We have Dragon's blood trees here in Bermuda but the species grown here is *Dracaena draco*. There are at least 2 in Bermuda. One is in the Botanical Gardens just to the west of the Exotic House and the other is at the Crawl Post office. I have photographs that show the Crawl specimen bearing flower buds and mature fruit in December. The photo here is of sap coming out of a wound in the bark.



EXCERPT FROM SMITHSONIAN: MARCH 2011

“Decline and Fall – A new analysis of tree rings from more than 9,000 European pines, larches and oaks provides a climate record going back 2,500 years. Scientists in Switzerland and elsewhere inked the data to history. For instance, the Roman Empire thrived during a period of above average rainfall and steady temperatures, which ended around A.D. 250, followed by 300 years of extreme variability – and the fall of the empire.”

SPRING FOLIAGE

BY GEORGE PETERICH, A.B.

“Fresh green leaves” is what comes to mind first, when thinking about spring foliage. We do not get too much of that here, spoiled as we are with evergreens. Indeed, one of the freshest greens that we can see this time of the year is that of the Southern Hackberry, a native that is deciduous. But we have one evergreen, the endemic Olivewood Bark, that now shows off lots of delightful fresh green leaves, that contrast beautifully with the dark older leaves. This beauty is only one of the reasons why this tree has recently become more and more appreciated. (The other one being the way it comes through the fiercest hurricanes. What helps here is that the young leaves turn dark and leathery before the storm season.)



Bermuda Olivewood Bark

Moving around Bermuda one cannot miss the orange leaves of the Fiddlewood everywhere. They came early this year, probably because of the persistent drought. The orange leaves will fall off and will soon be replaced by green ones – no barren branches here.

The lightest green to be seen on any tree now is a green shade of yellow. It is one the Avocado trees. What we see is not the leaves, but the flowers and their stalks. On close inspection the beginning of

some fruits are visible – they have a pinkish colour, as the leaves will have when they reappear.

Shiny pink and ruddy brown, both in lighter and darker shades can now be seen everywhere on the Surinam Cherries. One could almost say that these are the real colours of the Bermuda spring. In some places, however, the young leaves of the Surinam Cherry are green. I have found that mainly in spots where the bushes are not in the direct sunlight. I have no explanation for that.



Surinam Cherry

The Pride of India now displays new leaves, together with the flowers. If you have a chance to reach a branch and smell the flowers, the fragrance of lilac comes to mind!



There is much to be observed. A few trees, like the Poincianas, are still barren. Only a few leaves can be seen developing here and there. It is as if they are waiting for the rain to come. Later in the season the flowers will follow. One of the marvels of the Botanical Gardens, the Shaving Brush tree, will soon start blooming – here the leaves come later. This tree is from Mexico; it is typically drought deciduous.

Some of the Kapok trees on the Island are now getting their spring leaves. They can be pink or brownish. Trees of the same species are different, also in the timing. One wonders why this is, but I advise you not to ask too many questions. Spring colours are here to be enjoyed, and after all I am just an amateur botanist. (A.B.)

Southern Hackberry – *Celtis laevigata*

Olivewood Bark – *Cassine laneana*

Fiddlewood – *Citharexylum spinosum*

Avocado – *Persea americana*

Surinam Cherry – *Eugenia uniflora*

Pride of India – *Melia azedarach*

Shaving brush tree - *Ceiba petandra*

Kapok Tree *Pseudobombax ellipticum*

The Bermuda Botanical Society recently enjoyed a wonderful tour of Michael Darling's exquisite garden





IN FEBRUARY PETER LEE HELD
A VERY SUCCESSFUL
PROPAGATION WORKSHOP AT
THE BOTANICAL GARDENS,
MUCH ENJOYED BY THE
PARTICIPANTS.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Saturday, May 19** **Quiz Night. 8 pm.** Woodlands, 9 Middle Road, Paget PG 01.
For reservations call 236-4578, or email Peterich@northrock.bm
Members: \$5.00, non-members \$10.00.
Cash bar.
- Saturday, June 23** **Walkabout in the Botanical Gardens, 7 pm.** Bring your own
Picnic. Assembly point in front of the Visitors' Centre.
- Saturday, October 27** **Plant sale, Botanical Gardens.** Members only: 8:30 am.
General public: 9:00 am – 12 noon.