



Bermuda Botanical Society

P.O. Box HM 2116, Hamilton, HM JX, Bermuda
bdabotanicalsociety@gmail.com

MAY NEWSLETTER 2013

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

An **Exhibition of Botanical Paintings by Charlotte Anna Lefroy** is to take place in the ACE Ltd. art gallery, from 14 May 2013. (*See Calendar of Events.*)



Red Plumbago, *Plumbago indica*

An album containing more than eighty such paintings by Charlotte Anna Lefroy is owned by the Bermuda National Trust and is under the care of the Bermuda Archives. The pictures were painted in Bermuda during the tenure of her husband, General John Henry Lefroy, as Governor from 1871 to 1877.

The exhibition will comprise some 23 of the paintings selected and exhibited by David Mitchell, curator of the Ace Ltd. collection of artwork.

The pictures are watercolour over pencil on tinted paper. Most are titled, but the modern botanical identity is often unclear. My wife, Diana, along with Lisa Greene, George Ogden and others, has been attempting to correctly identify the plants depicted.

Governor Lefroy was a soldier and scientist and a keen botanist. While he is best known locally for his historical *Memorials of Bermuda*, he also produced a *Botany of Bermuda*. He was an avid plant collector and no doubt his imports provided the subjects for his wife's artwork. None of the pictures in the collection portray Bermuda's native plants.



Cleome

In his *Botany of Bermuda*, Governor Lefroy relates that soon after his arrival here he brought in two gardeners

from Kew in England to cultivate the garden at the Lefroys' residence at Mount Langton. (The present Government House was not yet built.) Between November 1871 and the end of 1876 "few months passed without the introduction and trial of new plants". The Governor also had a friendly rivalry with successive naval commanders-in-chief stationed at Clarence House (now Admiralty House with garden at present-day Tulo Valley), who imported plant material from the West Indies. One such naval commander-in-chief followed the Governor's example in erecting a conservatory.

Exhibition visitors may notice a few plants portrayed that they haven't seen growing in Bermuda. No doubt this is because some of the imported plants painted by Charlotte Anna Lefroy proved to be unsuited to Bermuda's conditions. If anyone knows of Red plumbago, *Plumbago indica*, currently growing in Bermuda, I would be interested to know.

Nigel Chudleigh
nchudlei@ibl.bm

VISCID SPIDER-FLOWER

By Lisa Greene

In the process of helping to verify scientific names for an exhibit of some of Charlotte Anna Lefroy's botanical paintings, I was referring to Governor Lefroy's *Botany of Bermuda* and Britton's *Flora of Bermuda* to see what plants of the same genus they listed as growing. I was then looking at internet images of some of these plants.

One of the painted plants I was trying to find the scientific name for was a pink Cleome. Britton listed several cleome including *Cleome viscosa*. I found an image of it on the internet but since the flowers were yellow, not pink, I nearly discounted it - and then I did a double-take. This plant with the yellow flowers looked like something I'd collected at Morgan's Point in late Oct. 2012!

I hurriedly retrieved the images I'd taken in October and compared them to the internet images of *Cleome viscosa*. Lo and behold, they are one and the same plant! How about that for a lucky find!

When I collected the plant in October for the Museum's herbarium, I'd never seen it before it and assumed it was a legume. Obviously I didn't look closely enough. The plant is in Cleomaceae and is the viscid spider-flower, *Arivela viscosa* (although in Britton it is listed under an old scientific name: *Cleome viscosa*).



Britton described it as "common in waste and cultivated grounds. Naturalized...."

David Wingate commented that he used to see it as a weed in arable fields and that perhaps it is not so common now because of the use of herbicides.



FICUS

By George Peterich

If you want to gather knowledge about plants in Bermuda, and are starting with a blank page, it is a good plan to first consult Christine Watlington's book *Bermuda's Botanical Wonderland*. I looked in the book recently, when I finally resolved to write something about the genus *Ficus*. The book mentions 7 species of *Ficus* or figs, 5 of which can be found in the Botanical Gardens. So let's begin with what we find in the Botanical Gardens' *Ficus* collection.

The *Ficus* Collection is in the Western part of the Gardens and the most impressive tree there is the large Banyan Tree, *Ficus benghalensis*. On the guided tours that I sometimes do, this spectacular tree is always on my programme. If there are fruits on the tree, I take the opportunity to tell about the wonderful relationship that exists between these trees and certain tiny wasps. The fruit, when cut open, turns out not to be a fruit at all, but a composite flower, with the special characteristic that the flowers are on the inside of the flesh. Therefore botanists have named these *pseudofruit*. The wasps enter a flower through a small opening, to lay one or more eggs, and by visiting several flowers they pollinate them. The wasp larvae will feed on what now is becoming a fruit, carrying multiple seeds.



The extensive *Ficus benghalensis* at the entrance to Southlands

There are all sorts of wasps, as many, or perhaps almost as many, as there are species of *Ficus*. In the case of *Ficus benghalensis*, the wasp that belongs to it is not present in Bermuda. Until some time in the 1980s there were no such wasps at all in Bermuda. But then one species of wasp came in somehow, and started doing its thing on the *Ficus retusa* (also known as *Ficus microcarpa*), the Indian Laurel. The results of that can be seen widely, and this can rightly be called a disaster. The birds disperse the seeds with their droppings and Indian Laurels will grow anywhere, including on walls, roofs, and other trees.

I spoke about the Indian Laurel and the *Ficus* collection with Curator Neville Richardson, as he was directing some work in the Kitchen Garden. He said: "We have a special collection of figs here," and pointed at the many little ones that were growing out of the wall behind the garden. The little trees grow so fast that you must kill them when they are still young, and there are only a few ways to do the job. Even if you cut them back drastically, they will most often sprout again.



Ficus retusa growing on Cedar

Quite a few species of *Ficus* go under the name "Strangler Fig". This refers to the fact that a small fig tree, growing somewhere on another tree, will let its roots encircle the host tree and will finally kill it. In the case that it grows on a tree that has soft wood, the host tree eventually rots away. The remaining fig tree looks as if it were a chimney. I have not seen this in Bermuda, but there are many cases, where the rich foliage and branches of an Indian Laurel sit on top of a dead Bermuda Cedar. Very often the roots that dangle from a tree are the first signs that it is under attack. The roots of *Ficus microcarpa* can be identified by their light-coloured horizontal specks. If you see them, the plant higher up will already have some size to it.

Now I have written only about two species of *Ficus*. The other four that can be found in the Botanical Gardens are:

- Ficus religiosa*, the sacred fig.
- Ficus lyrata*, the fiddle leaf fig
- Ficus elastica*, the Indian Rubber Tree, and
- Ficus pumila*, the creeping fig.

In another issue of our "Botanical Illustrated News" there will be more about these.

APPEAL FROM THE EXECUTIVE

With regret we received word that Samantha Bromfield, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, is leaving Bermuda in June of this year.

We are very sorry indeed to see Samantha go as she has done such a great job reorganising our finances and managing our membership records and contacts. We wish her all the best for her future endeavours.

We URGENTLY need someone to take over these duties.

Samantha assures us that since we ceased operating the Visitors' Centre, her workload as Treasurer has reduced to a mere couple of hours a month.

We feel sure there must be someone among our membership, with some knowledge of, or aptitude for, accounting or bookkeeping, who can give the Society 2 to 4 hours a month and attend the occasional meeting. Our finances are set up using QuickBooks software.

Please contact Nigel Chudleigh at 293-1028 or nchudlei@ibl.bm if you can help, or if you know anyone you may be so willing.

Trivium 1

This time of the year the Pride of India (*Melia azedarach*) trees are in full bloom. Before the leaves develop, which happens very soon after the flowers appear, the trees make a greyish impression from a distance, but if you look closer you'll see that there is really much more colour. The little flowers, that have the shape of a trumpet daffodil, have little mauve trumpets, while the petals are white with a purple hue on the inside and a light colour of purple on the outside.

The more you look, the more you see!



The winner of the puzzle set in the November newsletter was Sarah Vallis. The answer: Petrea volubilis:



Trivium 2

This time of the year, the Shaving Brush Tree, *Pseudobombax ellipticum* shows its shaving brushes and it is a joy to behold how the buds at the tips of the twigs swell, grow longer and then burst open, displaying so many stamens that the flowers look like shaving brushes

The question is how many stamens that can be. It is possible, but unlikely, that you come up with the right number, without actually counting. I did, and the number is --- ?

Send an email with your guess (*to the editor or me*, gpeterich@northrock.bm)

Hint: it may be a number in the series of Leonardo Fibonacci



MEA CULPA By George Peterich

I have heard that there was a lecture by a visiting scientist about citrus leafminers.

When I discovered leafminers on our citrus, now quite a few years ago, I called the Government Entomologist, who said to me that I was the second person to report this. All my citrus trees died, or got so sick that I had to cut them. (There was also a virus that attacked them at the same time.)

So no more oranges and grapefruit from my garden.

I was curious though about this leafminer and I looked it up on the Internet. What I found was quite a shock to me. Leafminer worms do not only live in leaves – they may also live in the peel of citrus. I then remembered having seen their “tracks” in Orange peel, from imported oranges. And I had started not too long before to put these peels on the compost heap . . .



Conclusion: my loss was self inflicted. *Mea culpa* is the term that comes to mind





Calendar of Upcoming Events

May 14 – September 12

Charlotte Anna Lefroy Botanical Paintings Exhibition, ACE Ltd gallery, ACE Building, Hamilton Opening hours: 11:00 am to 1:00 pm every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Friday May 17

Bermuda's Backyard Battles. Good bugs versus bad.

Presentation by international guest speaker Suzanne Wainwright, owner of Buglady Consulting. 6:00 pm in the Tradewinds auditorium, BUEI. Tickets \$45 from **Aberfeldy Nurseries**, the sponsor of the Buglady's visit. Purchase tickets by Monday, 13 May. Gold sponsorship is also available for the visit at \$500.00. This includes two tickets to the Friday presentation, plus two tickets to a Staff Development Forum to be run by Ms Wainwright at Aberfeldy on Thursday, 16 May, from 8:00 am to 10:30 am. This should particularly appeal to professionals. **For info contact Julie at Aberfeldy:** 300-1170, or Julie@aberfeldy.bm. Useful website: www.bugladyconsulting.com.

Sunday June 9

Blackburn Nature Reserve field trip with Peter Lee and Lisa Greene. Meet on the east wedding lawn at Coral Beach Club at 4:00 pm. Refreshments provided after walk. \$5 members, \$10 guests.