

Bulletin of The Heather Society



Volume 7, number 18.

Spring 2013

Contents

Bannut forewords	1
Chairman's piece	2
Society news & events	2
Allen Hall	4
Tippitiwitchet log 17	4
Heather news	5
Philomath frolickings	7
Website questions & answers	10

Bulletin of The Heather Society

volume 7 number 18

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DIARY 2013

9 March	Yorkshire Group: RHS Garden, Harlow Carr (see p. 3)
20 April	Plant Society Open Day, RHS Garden Wisley
15 May	Closing date for Summer 2013 Bulletin
25 May	Yorkshire Group: RHS Garden, Harlow Carr (see p. 3)
13 June	Council meeting, London
9–14 July	RHS Hampton Court Flower Show (see p. 2)
6–9 September	Annual Gathering 2013, Thirsk, Yorkshire (see p. 2)
15 September	Closing date for Autumn 2013 Bulletin
30 September	Closing date for contributions to 2013 CD
31 October	Closing date for <i>Heathers</i> 11 (2014)

For contact details of the Society's Officers, Editors, Group Organizers, and Administrator, see inside back cover.

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Bannut forewords

Well – this is a different Bulletin isn't it? A new-look Bulletin to coincide with the Society's 50th anniversary! Sadly, as with most societies, The Heather Society is suffering from falling membership and rising prices, so ways of saving money have had to be found. However, I hope the Bulletin will continue to keep members up to date with what is happening in the Society and to provide a medium for communication. Letters, items of interest and short articles will still be more than welcome PLEASE.

We have a domestic rabbit living free in our garden. He arrived last July, after he and his brother tunneled their way out of a pen in a neighbour's field. The neighbours train gun-dogs and apparently use the rabbits for obedience training, so no wonder they were keen to leave.

We don't know what happened to his brother but Snoopy (as we have named

him) sought asylum in our garden and has stayed. He likes grass, corn, wallflowers, sedums and, especially, *Clianthus*, but, luckily for us (and for him), he is not tempted by heathers.

I think he is a rather confused rabbit. He joins the pheasants that arrive every morning for their breakfast of corn, and contentedly munches his supper in the evening in the company of a couple of stray cats that come to be feed – they all seem to co-exist quite happily.

Why do we put up with him you ask? Well, the damage he does (so far) is not great and our garden visitors are quite charmed by him. He has taken over as number one attraction from our late, lamented cat, Sid, who got to know the approved route around the garden and would take our visitors on guided tours.

We just have to warn those who bring their dogs!

Daphne Everett



Chairman's piece

As we enter another year and await the forthcoming change from Winter to Spring, the make up of The Heather Society Council has also undergone a change, with the resignation of Richard Bowater, our Hon. Secretary, due to ill health. On behalf of the members of Council we extend our grateful thanks for his valued input and wish him well in the months and years ahead.

Our ex-Hon. Treasurer and Council member, Phil Joyner, has kindly agreed to take over the reins of this post, and again the Society is indebted to him for undertaking this position. He will be Acting Hon. Secretary until the AGM in September. The Society relies heavily on willing volunteers to ensure the smooth running of its operation, its publications, activities and finances.

Following on from the 2011 Award Winning garden at the Hampton Court Show, The Heather Society has been granted a position in the Floral Marquee at the RHS Hampton Court Flower Show, on 9–14 July this year. This will involve setting up an eye-catching display of plants to attract the wider public's interest in our subject plant, and hopefully, the opportunity to increase our membership. The display will also celebrate our golden jubilee.

David Edge

Society news & events

Annual Gathering 6–9 September 2013

For our Golden Anniversary, our venue is to be The Golden Fleece in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. Our programme for this special occasion is now finalised and hopefully will provide an interesting and entertaining weekend.

Professor Mark Seaward will speak to us on the Friday night. Our visits for Saturday will be to Brimham Rocks, where we should manage to see some heather in the wild. Our next stop will be Newby Hall to tour both house and garden.

Saturday night is to have a different look as "Open Forum" moves here with our Administrator, Dr Charles Nelson, giving us a history lesson on past affairs of The Heather Society.

After our AGM on Sunday morning a coach will take us to Harlow Carr for a special lunch and a presentation by Dr John Grimshaw, followed by a tour of the gardens and afternoon tea. On Sunday evening, we shall have a relaxing dinner

The cost for the whole weekend is £285 per person. This includes dinner, bed & breakfast for 3 nights, garden entrances, lunches and tips.

There are only a couple of rooms left, so if you are still wavering on a decision, then you must decide to call Charles immediately. Of course we can

provide for unlimited day visitors places and the rate for this can be obtained by phoning me (00353 9543575) or emailing susiek@gofree.indigo.ie. For those people who have already booked, *please note that the amount of £285 per person is payable by 30 June*. Remember – I do not send out individual invoices and the responsibility of paying by the due date is up to each person.

We shall be having our usual plant, book and memorabilia auction so for those attending it is time to start those cuttings of rare and unusual heathers. This is increasingly important as the number of cultivars available commercially is becoming fewer and fewer.

Do come and enjoy some golden moments and golden memories for the golden anniversary of The Heather Society.

Susie Kay

Group News: Yorkshire

This small group last met on a beautiful sunny day on Saturday, 6 October 2012. We had an informal discussion on heathers led by Bryon Roberts. It gave particular regard to the prevailing weather conditions as 2012 was such a wet year. Normally Bryon has to water his *Erica cinerea*, which in the past have suffered a lot from drought but the summer and autumn of 2012 were the wettest remembered over a 40 year period. Our vegetable allot-

ment was a lake, not a garden, for more than four months of the year.

I have booked a room at the Brammall Learning Centre at RHS Harlow Carr for two Saturday afternoons in 2013. These are Saturday 9 March and Saturday 25 May.

The meetings start at 2.30pm and last for a couple of hours, tea and cakes are included; these will both be informal meetings when the major topic will be heather growing.

We usually go on a visit to a garden in July or August, no plans have been made as yet, if we are lucky it may be to visit our President's new garden, which he has been working on for the past two years.

As the 2013 Annual Gathering is in North Yorkshire and we shall have a formal visit to RHS Harlow Carr on Sunday 8 September I have not made any arrangements for a Yorkshire Group meeting this coming autumn.

Jean Preston

Proposed trip to northern Spain

This field trip (which was mentioned in the 2012 Autumn *Bulletin*, p. 6) has had to be postponed as Ana and Jaimé Fagundez are expecting a baby at the beginning of July when the trip was planned.

Jaimé, who is to be the trip leader, has prepared a programme with hotels, coaches and visits already contacted. It has been suggested to Jaimé that he uses this programme for July 2014. This postponement will give him

more time to refine the visits and when it is known how many people would like to attend, final preparations can be made.

I hope to publish this programme in the 2013 Summer *Bulletin* and will gladly receive expressions of interest, now or after June 2013. The estimated cost is €600 (£500) **excluding flights**. People would be responsible for their own airfares and travel arrangements to Santiago de Compostela.

In the mean time, we send Ana and Jaimé our congratulations and best wishes on their impending arrival.

Susie Kay

✧

Allen Hall

The many members who knew Allen Hall will be saddened to read his obituary in the 2013 yearbook. Allen had been in hospital for six weeks and was expecting to be home for Christmas, but sadly, it wasn't to be. We send our sincere condolences to his wife Joan and family. The Society was represented at the funeral by Jean Preston and Anne Small.

Tippitiwitchet Log 17 Charles Nelson

2013 subscriptions

Thank you to all members who have renewed subscriptions for 2013. If your subscription is not up-to-date there will be a reminder-cum-payment form in this *Bulletin*. Prompt payment would be greatly appreciated.

2013 yearbook, *Heather 10*

The Golden Jubilee yearbook, with a special section of reminiscences and another about our affiliated societies, is enclosed for everyone whose subscriptions are up-to-date. I am most grateful to everyone who contributed articles for the issue which I hope you will enjoy.

Website visitors & "Heather of the Month"

The number of people who have visited the Society's website since it was relaunched in 2011 now exceed 23,000 and we frequently get queries from non-members about heather-related matters. Some of the questions, and the answers, are printed in *Bulletins* when space allows.

One page on the website is entitled "Heather of the Month" and ideally should change every month (URL <http://www.heathersociety.org/heather-of-the-month/>). But, we need fresh digital pictures for it so it can be changed monthly to reflect the chang-

Heather news

Heather Watcher

ing seasons; using older photographs does not make that point. Once again can I appeal for good quality, fairly close-up images of the best heather in your garden that could be selected for use on this page. Even if we don't use the image on the website, we can accumulate images for the annual CD.

Identification aid

Those who attended the Falmouth Gathering will have seen Ted Oliver demonstrating the latest version of the Erica Identification 'key' which has been issued by the Bolus Herbarium. This is Version 3 of the program and much altered from the earlier ones. There are many more photos (when available) per species and a lot of replacements of the old photos. Ted Oliver and Nigel Forshaw collaborated on this version and decided to change the title to "Genus Erica, An Identification Aid" since it is *not* a definitive key. Nigel updated the computer aspects to make it compatible with Windows XP and Windows 7 on 32 bit and/or 64 bit computers. It's important to remember that the Aid is being refined and added to all the time – a never-ending process. The copy on Ted's computer is already more up-to-date than that on the CD. Alas it is of no use to Mac users – my Mac simply "spits" out the CD. It will only function with Windows. For more details, contact Dr Ted Oliver: email eoliver@sun.ac.za.

You have probably heard of 'Weather Watchers' – those mad individuals who drive around chasing bad weather? Well, now the Society has a 'Heather Watcher', in the person of David Plumridge (he who writes 'Rose Cottage Ramblings' for the *Bulletin*), who seeks out any mention of heathers in the gardening press. This past year he found quite a few, leading him to speculate that heathers may gain popularity at last.

In October, David spotted an item in *Garden answers* entitled 'Heavenly Heathers'. It featured *Calluna*, including bud-bloomers, and suggested the tender South African heather, *Erica gracilis*, as a good plant for autumn containers. There was also a section on how to create a heather bed.

December's *Gardeners' world* had a well illustrated article, with some good photographs, of summer- and winter-flowering heathers. They slipped a bit in the popularity stakes though, by implying that all heathers need an acid soil.

David's sharp eyes also noticed a couple of heathery mentions in the February 2013 *Garden* magazine. On page 22 is a photograph of *Picea pungens* 'Globosa' planted in a bed of an un-named *Erica vagans*, the red flowers of the heather nicely complementing the blue foliage of the conifer. On page

87, there is an enthusiastic item about the expanded winter heather beds at Harlow Carr, where around 15,000 young *Erica* plants, representing over 20 cultivars, have been planted in a naturalistic style, to echo the Yorkshire moors. Garden Manager, Alison Golden said: "They demonstrate the huge range of heathers available and will hopefully help inspire people to grow them". She also pointed out that winter heathers provide a food source for pollinating insects.

Even Monty Don is thawing. He recommended *Erica carnea* as his 'Plant of the Week'! It must have been the shock that caused me to forget to make a note of the publication and of who sent it to me.

In the November 2012 *Gardening Which*, there was an article on 'How to get the most from short-lived shrubs', one of which was heathers. There were a couple of colourful pictures, but the article was a bit confusing, as it gave its readers the blanket advice to 'clip in March to remove old flower heads', without differentiating between the treatment of winter and summer heathers. I did write to point this out and also to say that the winter flowering heathers are anything but short-lived – but didn't get a reply.

So, if any of you should read anything about heathers in the press and could send it in, it would be nice to have a regular section in the *Bulletin*, and, if you are quick, you might even get in before David!

Chris Brickell

There is a splendid appreciation of Chris in the Autumn 2012 issue of *Hortus* (no. 103) noting that he is a distinguished honorary member of this Society. *Hortus* is a "gardening journal", "a treat for yourself and your gardening friends". Well worth a subscription!

Reference book of the year 2012

Hardy heathers from the northern hemisphere written by our Administrator and *Yearbook* editor Dr Charles Nelson, has been awarded the prestigious accolade of "Reference book of the year" for 2012 by the Garden Media Guild (formerly the Garden Writers Guild).

From the GMG website: "Given the vast library of horticultural reference works, it is an almighty challenge to produce one that adds something new while remaining accessible and yet attractive to handle and read. The winner stood out as indisputably important in covering a group of plants that are much loved by gardeners, whilst being an authoritative work of reference that will maintain its relevance for years to come."



Bee aware

The Crop Protection Association has joined in the concern about the declining number of pollinating bees, and has issued a leaflet to educate us about protecting our gardens without harming bees. Excellent advice, too, such as "Do not spray lawns when weeds are in flower; mow first to remove flowers heads". Yet to my mind the weeds should be allowed to blossom and provide sustenance for bees too. Flower-less lawns are like deserts: we need more dandelions and daisies with their blooming heads in the sun.

I notice among the helpful addresses www.adoptabeehive.co.uk

which is run by the British Bee Keepers Association (tel: 0845 6807038). It is a scheme whereby you



don't have to become a bee keeper, just adopt a hive and in return for an annual subscription of £30 you are promised, as well as seasonal newsletters,

- A jar of honey or honey mustard
- A pack of pollinator-friendly Habitat Aid wildflower seeds
- A pocket guide to the honey bee
- A lip balm from Burt's Bees.

Splendid idea – and as the website says it would make a lovely gift for a garden-lover.

Philomath frolickings Ella May T. Wulff

Philomath, Oregon, USA, 26 August, 2012

One of the best experiences I've had as a result of planting a heather garden came only tangentially from the garden. Before eating breakfast this morning, I went outside to turn on the sprinkler. Watering the garden during our long summer droughts is a never ending chore, best accomplished slowly so that the water soaks gradually into the soil instead of running off its dry surface. It would be good to get the watering started early in the day. I could eat while the sprinkler worked.

Normally, I rely upon soaker hoses as the most efficient water delivery system for the garden, with the least water wasted; but recently, it has become apparent to me that some parts of the garden are not getting enough water from that source. I've been supplementing the soaker hoses in those areas with overhead sprinkling.

This morning, I moved a circular sprinkler to an open spot where I've had trouble convincing heathers to live, mainly because I'd somehow managed to bury the soaker hose in this area so far down that heather roots never got to the water it distributed. (The proper place for a soaker hose is on the soil surface, covered with a thin layer of mulch to prevent both wasteful water evaporation and

hose degradation due to sun exposure.) After the first occupants of this area died and their replacements also died, I had decided to rework the soil there before planting anything else.

Needing to determine where the soaker hose was so that I'd avoid severing it while digging, I scraped away the surface layers of mulch and soil where, according to the sketchy map I had drawn, the hose should be – and couldn't find the hose! I kept removing soil very carefully with a trowel until I finally located a piece of hose, more than a foot down.

How the hose got this deep, I don't know. I do know that I had deliberately dug a shallow trench for the hose, but that had been no more than two inches deep, enough to ensure that the hose would remain buried even if the mulch above it were to be disturbed. For lack of any other candidate, I'll lay blame for the hose's ridiculous depth upon my husband's enthusiasm for covering any garden sin with bark mulch, the more the merrier. After several years' application of mulch, those first replacement heathers had obviously been planted so far above the hose that they could not possibly get their roots down that far before the dry season was upon them. What had been beautiful plants during their first winter and spring turned red, then brown, during the summer. Uh, oh. Not all the plants fed by this soaker hose were in trouble. Obviously some of them were getting

the water they needed. Removing the entire hose would have seriously damaged their root systems. Then I'd have an entirely dead bed.

I set about carefully following and uncovering the hose as far as I could before encountering heather roots. Then I lifted and repositioned the freed portion of hose as far as its still-buried ends allowed, pushing soil under it to keep it at a much higher level than it had been previously. After that, I planted new heathers close to the relocated soaker hose.

The latest replacement plant for one problem spot is an *Erica vagans* cultivar. *E. vagans* is reputed to be much more tolerant of adverse conditions (be they soil, water, or light problems) than most other heathers, so it has become my heather of choice for problem sites. Despite the species' reputation for tolerance, like every other newly planted heather, it needed extra watering during its first summer – at least.

So this morning, I set the sprinkler near the newly planted *Erica vagans*, to water a very small circle – about a yard in diameter – around the plant. The sprinkler threw water perhaps half that distance into the air before it fell onto the earth in large, discreet drops. I was back inside the house enjoying my breakfast when the show began.

A family of western wood peewees (*Contopus sordidulus*) came to enjoy the little shower, easily attracting my at-

tention because one swooped close to the window in typical flycatcher fashion. Barry and I had noticed a solitary peewee earlier in the summer, keeping watch over his territory and making insect catching forays from the top of a shovel handle, said shovel being left stuck in the ground when I'd been interrupted in digging and had never gotten around to putting it back into the tool shed. ("I'll work on it tomorrow, for sure.") Once we had identified the rather nondescript little bird (shades of dark grey with dusky breast and undertail coverts) as a wood peewee, there was no way that favored perch was being relegated to the tool shed.

We continued to see the little bird quite often, but as I got busier with NAHS conference planning and had less time to observe the goings on in the garden, I eventually forgot about the peewee. Last week, during general yard cleanup in preparation for having our house painted, I finally put the shovel away.

So this morning, when I saw our old friend back outside the window catching insects, I felt guilty for having removed his shovel perch. That is, until I realized that there was not just one flycatcher.

Suddenly, there seemed to be peewees everywhere, repeatedly swooping then perching (on twigs of the nearby ancient oak trees) but mainly enjoying the shower that I had unwittingly provided for them. They landed

on the ground under the sprinkler; they flitted through the airborne drops, then flew away to perch and shake off the water, only to return almost immediately to the sprinkler for another go. The nearby birdbath, cleaned and refilled only last night, was ignored. It was those moving drops of water that held the birds' attention.

Soon the peewees were joined by black-capped chickadees (*Poieile aticapilla*), American relatives of tits, which look much like blue tits but without that lovely blue. Then I spotted white-breasted nuthatches (*Sitta carolinensis*), year-round residents here like the chickadees but infrequently seen except by people who put out feeders filled with their favored treats, sunflower seeds. They, too, flew through the shower or even landed on the ground under it. (Nuthatches are usually easy to recognize from a distance because they most often are seen not on the ground but moving slowly headfirst down tree trunks as they look for insects in the bark.)

The show probably lasted only about five minutes. I don't know how many birds there were, because most were in constant motion, frequently interchanging positions. I did manage to count at least five peewees at once, though there may have been more. Then suddenly, all the birds were gone. The show was over.

The sprinkler is still running, but the birds have not returned. Not one. I

have now moved the sprinkler to a different problem spot to water some newly planted *Erica x darleyensis*, another kind of heather reputed to succeed under adverse conditions but also in need of extra watering during this, their first summer in the ground. With luck, the supplemental water will ensure that these new heathers thrive where their predecessors failed.

This morning, I happened to be in the right place at the right time. Had I not lingered over breakfast while reading the Sunday paper, I probably would have missed one of the most enchanting shows on earth. If I hadn't turned on that sprinkler during the early morning "bird time", well known to twitchers as the best time for bird watching, there would not have been a show. If the original heathers hadn't died, leaving space for new, experimental plantings, there would not have been a show. I mourned the loss of the heathers and the disruption their demise made to my original garden design, but I wouldn't have missed the frolicking of the birds this morning for anything. May all your dead heathers bring forth bird circuses.

Website Q & A

Q. We want to plant lime tolerant heaths on a slope. Do rabbits like heaths? We can do something about them digging up the roots (put wire mesh on the soil around them. Please advise.

Martha Vahl

A (ECN). Yes, rabbits eat heathers and seem especially fond of those that are lime-tolerant, *Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis*, as well as *E. vagans*. They have caused severe problems in heather gardens in various parts of England, for example at the RHS Garden Wisley and also at Harlow Carr, as well as at Windsor Great Park.

Preventing them from digging up the roots will not have any useful effect as they eat the foliage and shoots. There is useful information about rabbit-proof plants on the RHS website: <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/advice/search/profile.aspx?pid=209>

Many thanks, from Lincolnshire on the limestone ridge overlooking the Trent Valley (Brattleby), for your prompt reply. I will adjust my planting plans and plant the heaths on one of the banks but put them inside a rabbit proofed fence. I have got 10 acres to develop and it is still not an easy task to put a fence around the whole area. I already have some fences in place on parts of the banks and this is working

well. I also have a glass surrounded patio area where I have one bed with lime-hating heather, *Camellia* and *Rhododendron* (dug out all the soil quite deep and replaced it with ericaceous compost). Just love heathers. So I was really pleased to learn about the lime-tolerant varieties.

Editor's comment: Over the years I have had people complaining that: the rabbits only went for the winter-flowering ones, or, they only went for *Calluna*, or they only went for yellow foliated varieties. So – rabbits have their preferences it seems.

★★★

A question that became an exchange!

Q. I recently found a plant label showing the variety as Eric Easton Bumby. Can you confirm if this is the same variety as Eric Easton ... ?



Eric Easton Bumby was my uncle and I inherited his property and very large heather garden. None of the varieties in the garden have any labels near them so I am unable to identify them at the moment and can't ask him as he has died.

If there is a variety of heather named after him I would love to be able to either identify it in his garden or purchase a plant.

I hope you are able to help me?

Fiona Hewitt

A. Thank you for your rather bewildering email. There is indeed a cultivar of heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) named 'Eric Easton', but we have no knowledge of any heather called "Eric Easton Bumby" as in your email. The *Calluna* called 'Eric Easton' is described as follows – *White flowers but few in number, VIII-IX; sage-green foliage composed of especially tiny leaves giving an unusual appearance; upright compact growth; height 26-30cm; spread 31-45cm.*

According to our information it was found by Mr Herbert Mitchell about 1972 – he was from Helmsley, Yorkshire.

There *may* be an explanation for your label, because the database records that Eric Easton was an employee of Herbert Mitchell, and it seems his "nickname" was "Mr Mumby".

You may well be able to correct this – but the name we have on record is MUMBY not Bumby.

Charles Nelson

Dear Dr Nelson

Thank you for your email, it has proved very helpful. Herbert Mitchell, or Uncle Herbert as I called him, was my uncle's first cousin but they were

raised as siblings in the farmhouse I currently live in 3 miles from Helmsley.

Uncle Easton did work for Uncle Herbert on the Nawton Tower Estate where they were both gardeners. Following the downsizing of staff they both worked at Helmsley garden centre, which closed in the 1970s. I think it specialized in heathers.

Kind regards
Fiona Hewitt

From what you have told me, the heather everyone calls 'Eric Easton' should in fact be "Eric Easton Bumby", but I do not think there is any way the name can be changed and I could not sanction a change as I have to abide by the international code.

It was first published in Geoffrey Yates's *Pocket guide to heather gardening*, in 1978 and is definitely simply composed of the two names Eric Easton. (By the way I noticed when looking for this that another white *Calluna* was called 'Herbert Mitchell' ... an upright one and evidently very vigorous.)

As I say, the name cannot be altered despite the label you have discovered – Bumby cannot be inserted into it. In a sense it is not wrong, merely partial, but that may in fact have been what was intended from the start.

Bumby is an unusual surname (at least to me) and I can see that it might have caused ribald jokes. No matter, I must correct our database and make

sure a correction is published to the nonsense about "Mr Mumby".

This is an interesting story – how much more could you tell us and do you have any photos of your uncles?
Charles Nelson

I'm rather glad my former surname isn't going to appear on any labels. Although the surname is rather common locally it is unusual elsewhere and has caused much amusement and teasing over the years.

I have many stories relating to my uncle; fewer for Uncle Herbert as he moved to Helmsley after his marriage, although he was a frequent visitor to the farm until his death in 1997.

Uncle Easton and his elder brother Reg never married and devoted their whole lives to gardening. They were very well known in the area for their stunning garden and several newspaper articles were written about it. However, I think having several relatives working as journalists may have helped! The broadcaster and presenter Selina Scott is a relative. Selina's mum Betty and Uncle Easton were first cousins.

I spent my childhood playing at the farm, living in a house adjoining the land. When I married and moved back to the village I spent many hours at the farm, listening to the stories told by the "Head Gardener" (as we affectionately called him).

Fiona Hewitt

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Front (clockwise, from top left): *Erica carnea* 'Wintersonne', 'Saskia' [¶], 'Pink Spangles'; Easter egg decorated with heathers [+]; Rose Cottage, Consett, January 2013 [#].

Back (clockwise, from top left) *Erica arborea* 'Albert's Gold' [¶]; *E. carnea* 'Lohses Rubin'; *E. x darleyensis* 'Tweety'; Snoopy; North bed in Allen Hall's garden Nanpantan [§].

Photographs by Daphne Everett unless acknowledged as follows: Susie Kay [+]; Allen Hall [§], David Plumridge [¶], Dr Charles Nelson [¶]

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