A Registered Charity No. 261407

Editor: Daphne Everett, The Bannut, Bringsty, Herefordshire, WR6 5TA.
Telephone/Fax: 01885 482206 e-mail: everettbannut@zetnet.co.uk

Cover illustration *Calluna vulgaris* by Brita Johannson

What a wonderful summer it has been - no need to go to the Bahamas for the sunshine. When we visited Kew gardens recently it was looking rather like a desert, with an occasional oasis of green grass around an irrigated flower bed and Wisley must be suffering in the same way. So far, on our heavy Herefordshire soil, the heathers are coping, although the flowers are going over much earlier than usual. How about you? Have you any stories to tell?

International Conference & AGM 2004

20 – 23rd August, at the Hilton Hotel, Coylumbridge, near Aviemore, Scotland.

The draft programme is as follows:

Friday, 20th August – Registration from 4 pm.

A talk about the local area, by David Lambie of Speyside Heather Centre.

Saturday, 21st August

A visit to the Scottish National Heather Collection at Cherrybank Gardens, Perth and Scottish Plant Collectors garden.

Sunday 22nd August

A visit to Speyside Heather Heritage and Garden Centre, with an afternoon moorland- walk with David Lambie, also, a visit to Loch Garten to view ospreys.

Monday 23rd August

A visit to Jack Drake's Nursey near Aviemore and a guided tour around a whisky distillery.

In addition, a 5 day tour of Skye, to include a day trip to Harris is in the planning stage.

Report on the 33rd Annual Conference

At the start of the AGM the Chairman, Arnold Stowe, asked for a few moments silence to remember Joan Rope and Des Oliver, two long-time members of the Society, who had recently passed away.

The Hon. Secretary, Jean Julian, reported on most of the major happenings in the Society over the last year. Her report is reprinted verbatim below:

My main concern in 2002 was P.R. I hoped that the new R.H.S. director would be keen on heathers. Well actually he is a vegetable man but we must be thankful that the R.H.S. have a close working relationship with the B.B.C. for in their "Gardening with Experts" series heathers came up in two or three programmes. The R.H.S. bicentenary is in 2004 and in association with the B.B.C. seven "Gardens through Time" are being prepared at Harlow Carr so filming is taking place on a monthly basis – maybe we shall see the heathers at the entrance on this programme also when it is shown on television next spring.

The Council has met on its usual 3 occasions, November, February and yesterday, September. Our two new Councillors have contributed well. Susie Kay is even helping with this conference and forming a sub-committee to organise a conference for 2005. Bryon Roberts has helped more behind the scenes. He has only attended one meeting but I have had several written reports from him and he has already been informed of the dates of Council meetings in 2004 so that he can arrange his busy schedule around them.

I have recorded membership in 2002 as 562. I believe at present it is 554 with the majority of new members joining via the website. Work in the second volume of the International Register moves apace, with a draft version of letter A ready. Considerable difficulties have occurred with names and sources and help has been sought from various parts of the world. Editing will continue throughout the autumn and it is still hoped that the Register will be published in 2004. Grateful thanks go to our editors Charles Nelson and David Small for their work on this project.

The local groups continue with a meeting coming up for each of them.

Progress with the booklet series remains slow but hopefully we shall see a new one in 2004.

The *Yearbook* and *Bulletin* continue to have problems with shortage of copy, particularly the Bulletin, which was thin in the summer and may only have 16 pages in the autumn. Charles is also doubtful whether he will complete the usual 80 pages.

The National Collections at Cherrybank and Wisley continue to flourish, although Wisley has suffered from the heat and dry conditions this summer. The heathers at Harlow Carr have fared better in their heavy clay soil. The new National Collection there is still in the planning stage so do not expect to see any planting before 2005.

The Plant Franchise scheme had problems in the spring with the quality of plants, which gave Anne and David quite a headache.

In addition to the Cape Heaths taken to the Eden Project, a further planting has been delivered in April to the new Winter Garden in Sheffield and

the Smalls have purchased a large new greenhouse for use in the production of Cape Heaths. This has been another headache!

It had been hoped that the Society could set up an Erica Trust in conjunction with the R.H.S., Kew or a university to protect Erica species throughout the world. This is proving difficult to organise, not only the sponsorship required, but due to a change in law worldwide to prevent species of plants entering a country.

The Council is also in discussion about a *Heather Society* Award for the Best New cultivar. This project is still in the early stages so more will be said in 2004.

Thanks must be given to members of the Council, our President and Chairman noting particularly Phil Joyner, our Conference organizer, Anne Small, our administrator, who works away quietly in the background and also to Daphne Everett, Chairman of the Technical Committee, who ran a trial of peat free compost through 2002/2003.

The recommendations of that trial are that members in the North of England use either: -

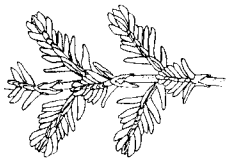
Moorland Gold + Osmocote
or West Riding Organics Ericaceous Compost
whilst members in the South should use
B & Q Peat Free Compost + Osmocote
or Tunstall's John Innes type, Ericaceous Compost + Osmocote

The Hon. Treasurer, Tony Princep presented the accounts unaudited, as ill health had prevented him from getting them completed in time. He said that investments were down due to the prevailing economic circumstances and an Investment sub-committee was presently looking for a stable, satisfactory investment system for the Society.

The Society said a sincere 'thank you' to Tony, who had valiantly stepped into the breach three years ago when no one in the Society could be found to take on the position. He has handed on the reins to Phil Joyner, who has organised our Conferences so well for many years. A Committee consisting of Susie Kay, Barry Sellers, David Small and Richard Canovan will take over the organisation of future Conferences.

Erica scoparia: help! (again)

On page 8 of the Spring *Bulletin*, our Registrar asked for information on *Erica scoparia* for an inventory, which is being compiled by Allen Hall and himself. Unfortunately, gremlins managed to delete both Allen & Charles's e-mail addresses, so, if you can help, please e-mail Charles at: **registrar@zetnet.co.uk** or Allen at: **allen.hall@care4free.net**



2003 Annual Conference

Ken Hulme talking to members at Ness Gardens

Conference group at Ness Gardens

Ornamental pool, Arley Hall Gardens

Heather beds at Okell's Nurseries

Who's that heather named after?

E. Charles Nelson (Registrar)

1. ***Erica ciliaris* 'Mawiana'.**

Yes, 'Mawiana' is correct, with an i, not an e, please! It's hard to correct long-standing mistakes, but this heather's name has been misspelled since it was first published in the 1880's. However, that is not an excuse for perpetuating the mistake and it should be corrected for several reasons. The simplest one is courtesy to the person commemorated.

If we accept the suggestion – and no one has ever disputed it – that the plant was found in Portugal in 1872 by George Maw (who had no e at the end of his surname), then the name must be spelled 'Mawiana'.

The epithet is Latin, and is permitted because it was published before 1959. There are various ways of commemorating individuals by devising epithets from their names. In this instance, the epithet is adjectival, formed by appending the Latin adjectival suffix -anus-a-um, signifying an association, and inserting the connecting vowel i, because the stem ends in a consonant (not a vowel). Thus Maw + i + -ana = mawiana (-ana because *Erica* is feminine and the gender of adjectival epithet has to correspond with the gender of the generis name).

George Maw (1832–1912), a native of London, was a tile manufacturer. According to Brian Mathew, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust published a booklet noting that George 'was a remarkable man whose achievements are less well known than his tiles'. He and his brother established a company to manufacture decorative tiles in Worcester in 1850, and they soon transferred the business to Benthall in Shropshire. It was extraordinarily successful – many public building, churches, railway stations and ordinary houses throughout Britain and the British Empire were paved or tiled with Maw & Company's tiles.

George was very keen on natural history, at least the branches of botany and geology. He was a member of the Botanical Society of London – there are specimens he collected when he was just 14 years old in my local museum. His geological notebooks contain observations, and his papers on different types of clay and their use in tile manufacturing are of note. Returning to botany, Maw is remembered nowadays principally for his monograph on *Crocus*, illustrated with his own water-colours which John Ruskin ventured to describe as 'most exquisite... and quite beyond criticism'.

Maw lived much of his adult life at Benthall Hall, a sixteenth-century stone house, which is now owned by The National Trust. There is an 'intimate and carefully restored plantsman's garden' there today, and in the springtime

crocuses which perhaps arose from Maw's introduction can be seen in this 'monument to botanical history'.

The other great *Crocus* expert, E. A. Bowles, described Maw as 'a brilliant, many-sided man, distinguished as chemist, geologist and traveller as well as botanist and gardener.' As a traveller he ranged through much of southern Europe eastwards to Greece and Turkey in search of bulbs which were his passion. He went in 1871 with Dr. Joseph Hooker and John Ball on a famous plant-hunting expedition described by his companions in *Journal of tour in Morocco and Great Atlas* (1878).

George Maw is commemorated in *Chrysanthemum mawii*, *Draba mawii* and *Saxifraga mawiana*, as well as *Erica mawiana*, now *Erica ciliaris* 'Mawiana'

Why Not In Water?

Donald Mackay

With acknowledgments to '*Heather News*' the Newsletter of the North American Heather Society, Winter 2001

Many times I've thrown out bunches of flowers and found the occasional piece of florist's greenery that has grown roots. Pussy willow stems, of course, frequently root, -as will Forsythia and other flowering branches brought into the house for forcing.

I think about the carrot tops in the saucer that always root to please the children, and the many branches of heathers I've seen in vases that never root. Give cut heather to a friend and it usually ends up in water, even when you tell the friend the flowers may last better if they are kept dry. Yet when I see how easily pieces of mint will root in a glass of water, the nagging thought occurs to me - why not heathers? If heathers root in wet soil, why not in wet water?

What in fact is the essential difference between rooting in soil and rooting in water? Roots formed in water are different because they have to cope with sub-optimum processes for exchange of essential gases like carbon dioxide and oxygen. The mechanical effect of the sharp edges of sand - resulting in hormonal responses in the "irritated" tissue - has also been invoked to explain rooting in sand, but that's unlikely to be the whole story, else recumbent stems would never root in wet grass or the boggy peat of the moor. Can we be sure there will never be a hydroponics industry for heathers?

Light is also likely to be a factor, but which way? Light is needed for the carbohydrates that create new root tissues, arid later for creating the sugars that induce certain fungi to invade and form mycorrhizal roots. This may also involve a hormonal response in the plant as it sets up the conditions for an exchange mechanism with the fungus to provide a successfully balanced symbiosis, but this is a later development.

Forgotten cuttings left in a plastic bag have later been found to have rooted. Has this happened to you? Is this rooting in air? I've often got stems of ericaceous bog plants to root by wrapping them in sphagnum, then burying the lot (except the leaves) in the soil, but that's just copying nature.

Allied to the question of the ease or difficulty of rooting heather in water, or a solid medium like sand, or sphagnum moss or wet paper (the latter two certainly don't have sharp edges) is the question why the *Ericaceae* show such a wide range of rooting propensities. Cranberry is on the end of the scale down towards sedum and Virginia dayflower (where dropping a piece on the ground is enough to assure a new plant); and Mountain Laurel is on the top end being inordinately difficult to root by the ordinary means available to gardeners.

A piece of cranberry will nearly always root if you poke it into the ground with your finger. Do it enough times, by the way, and you can get yourself a nice bushy, very hardy evergreen plant that blends well with the heathers - or you can let it run between, over or through them. On the other hand, I can keep *Kalmia* cuttings green for months, but I never see roots no matter what age wood I start with. Heathers also show a wide range of rooting difficulty. *Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis* can almost get by with the poke-in-the-ground-with-the-finger treatment that works for cranberry, as can *tetralix* and x *williamsii* at times, but *Calluna* (which shows marked cultivar effects) and especially *cinerea* are in my mind the hardest to get rooted. Also while *Calluna* in the lawn spreads by copious self-rooting among the grass, I don't see *cinerea* doing this under the same conditions. It may send out long horizontal branches, but I don't find them rooting in the grass. If it did I'd have a lot more bell heathers in the garden.

This discussion is likely to seem laughable to a commercial grower, but what I seek is the guidance necessary to someone on his (or her) knees in the gathering darkness of gathering rain clouds. This is not an appeal for divine revelation (though that would help) so much as the recognition that the best time for rooting is not always that when tools and trays are laid out with surgical precision in the greenhouse with cuttings and sterilized soil all ready to go. Instead it is usually that moment when clumsy fingers or over-enthusiastic weeding or inattentive, haphazard or inadvertent pruning has produced a piece of foliage needing **immediate** attention.

What then are the rules of thumb for the best hope of its survival? Light, shade, edge of plant, under plant, edge of bed, in lawn? How long can you keep it in water? Like it or not you may be involving mycorrhizal fungi and messenger chemicals in the plants' rooting, pro- and anti-factors in leaf litter, and light/dark generated plant hormones.

On top of that the microclimates in and under stones, weeds and grass that determine moisture retention, dew condensation, and the stable humidity needed to give your unexpected cutting a reasonable chance at an afterlife, have also to be considered.

Maybe you just throw these adventitious clippings away, but I nearly always feel compelled to give them a chance at adventitious rooting. Whether or not I need the plants, I feel I need the learning experience. When I really do want a plant that a stone on a bottom branch is supposed to guarantee, why is it sometimes the branch roots, but as often dies. It's not my fault; is it the Stone's?

Note: Many *Ericaceae,* under natural circumstances, do root in water. Bog Laurel, Rhodora, Leather Leaf, Andromeda, Labrador Tea can all be found

with recumbent stems lying on the surface of the bog with new roots sunk into the underlying water-sodden sphagnum. And real heathers on waterlogged moors will often spread by rooting their lower branches. The question is whether this kind of rooting (in tissue that is being fully supported by active photosynthesis and well-established root functioning) is really comparable to the rooting that must be summoned immediately by the exigencies of the sudden loss of support systems.

Letters

Those Dear, Deer...

I read with interest the concern of a member about problems with deer eating heather and the response indicating that "deer are a much bigger problem in the USA" Lest members be dissuaded from growing heather, on either side of the Atlantic, because of this, let me say that I have been growing several hundred heathers, in rural New Hampshire, USA for some 19 years and have never had a problem with deer. They neither eat heather nor tread through it. Because of the cold climate (zone -4-5) I grow mostly *Calluna vulgaris, Erica carnea, E. tetralix, E. darleyensis* and *Bruckenthalia [now E. spiculiflora].*

There are many deer in the area and they do eat my *Rhododendrons*, Japanese Maples, *Hollies, Hostas*, most roses, except for small leaved types like 'Dunwich' and climbers. This past winter was the worst ever for deer damage, as there was so much snow. For the first time they ate conifers, such as upright Junipers, but not the prostrate types, *Chamaecyparis* and even a Korean Pine. The branches of some choice crab apples were also eaten, but my heathers were not touched.

Yes, I have good snow coverage, so that protects some plants, but there are always some thaws and they could get to some of the heathers but only dig down to get at more of the plants they love. Now in summer, everything is exposed and they take a leaf here and there, but not from the heather, blooming or not in bloom. I have an ultrasonic device, made by Coleman, in the back garden and it usually works well. It takes four batteries, but I was unable to get out there to change them do to the heavy snow last winter and also failed to do so when I was away and that invited the deer. It emits a high frequency sound, which only a few, female visitors to the garden can hear. I set it just beyond the setting for armadillos, but it would be even more effective if I mounted it lower to the ground. I also have groundhogs and small, brown rabbits, from time to time, but they don't eat heather either.

I have little deer damage in other parts of the garden and only have this one device in the rear, where most deer go through. Several will pass by as I am working in the garden and seem as interested in looking at me as I at them. Perhaps they can discern my love for heather so don't munch on it and tell their relatives and offspring?

Walter Wornick

A Contemplative Question from County Durham

On the evening of our return from the Conference, Rita interrupted my unpacking to suggest I look at the heathers. While they normally glow beautifully at dusk, on this occasion they were truly wonderful, aided I think, by an overhead cloud which reflected light from the setting sun. This is a question I have been meaning to ask at Conference and again overlooked it because of the interesting and diverting discussions: 'Why do heathers, and it particular *cinereas*, glow so beautifully in the gloaming?'

David Plumridge

Somewhere in the Atlantic

Dee Danari

Reprinted from *Heather News*, the Newsletter of the North American Heather Society, Summer 2003.

The blue and white *azulejos*, telling the story of history and Catholicism, identified homes, shops, and even bus stops throughout the village. The bubbling cauldrons of the *femerols* were tended by the village families. Soon the local yams, *chorizo*, chicken, veal, and pork - the *cozida*, would create the holiday meal prepared on God's very own cook top, the geysers.

The people were strange. They spoke softly, and moved slowly but with dignity. There was no graffiti to be seen. The widows were in black, and seldom seen without a daughter at their side. Some people left their doors open, welcoming strangers to visit and share holiday sweets. This was the holiday of the Holy Ghost, but if you missed it there would be another holiday in a few days.

The cleanliness of the place was striking. Even the dreaded underground public restrooms were as pleasant and as well maintained as the same facility in an upscale private club.

The *cao de fila*, or milk dog, guarded the cows and the on-site milking stations while young boys carried the heavy milk cans on horseback to the nearby creamery.

Hydrangeas and azaleas lined the roads of this small paradise hundreds of miles away from the nearest deer. New vineyards grew from lava vaults, which were created by a volcanic eruption only 250 years ago. Even breathing became a new experience, as the pure clean air circulated through this land of few pollutants, and very few automobiles.

The reason for travelling 8,000 miles was to see *Erica scoparia* ssp. *azorica* and *Daboecia azorica*, and indeed we did. The plant hunting didn't require much hunting, but the precious time spent with friends from the heather world, as we experienced this unspoiled land together, was time that reminds us all to cherish the moment.

This was the Azores in 2003.

Just a taste of what those who joined Charles Nelson's trip to the Azores in the Spring were able to enjoy, for the benefit of those of us who were unable to go. Ed.

Queries through our website – (www.heathersociety.org) Answered by David Small

Q Would you, please, kindly advise me on the time of the heather blooming in particular regions of Britain.

A The best times to visit Britain to see heathers in bloom is the middle two weeks of August. The further north you go add a week earlier. So in the north of Scotland, the first two weeks of August, whilst in the south of England, the last two weeks of August.

Q Could you tell me what kind of heather(s) can be found on the Dartmoor national park - and what time of year do they flower?

A There three species of heathers that can be seen. They are: *Calluna vulgaris* which is the dominant species flowering in August and September which usually mauve flowers. *Erica cinerea* which flowers July to September and usually has purple bell-like flowers. *Erica tetralix* which flowers about the same time with usually pale pink flowers. This species is usually found in the damper areas. There is a fourth species which is extremely rare and therefore carefully protected. This is *Erica ciliaris* flowering August to October with pink/mauve flowers.

Q What I want to know is, at what point do heathers decide that they are going to flower? The reason I am asking is that I have an *Erica cinerea* 'Pink Ice' which doesn't flower - which I am pretty sure (because I have not hacked it to death) is because it does not have enough light. I was thinking of moving it to a pot in sunlight later in the year as it's fairly compact - but I am worried that it may already have decided whether or not it will flower next year and no amount of putting it in sunlight will make any difference. I have similar fears about my *Erica carnea* 'Barry Sellers' - who seems to be growing away happily at the moment and gets a fair bit of light now – but think he will get a lot less in winter because of where the sun is (I did trim him at the right time so that shouldn't stop him flowering).

A There are a number of things, light levels being important. Day/night length is another triggering feature. If the plants are dry when they set bud, that too could cause poor flowering. In the case of *Erica carnea*, this will be June and July. As regards *Erica cinerea*, moving the plant this autumn will not affect flowering next year, as it sets bud on the new spring growth.

Q I was reading about doing cuttings of heathers in one of my heather books and it all seems fairly clear except the bits about what soil stuff you put them in, in the little tray. Is it the same ericaceous compost that I bought for the pot, or something else? The second bit that bemuses me is where, you put the tray in a plastic bag, blow the bag up and seal it. Presumably you have to keep blowing it up every so often or the heathers will suffocate?? But how do you know when? (By the way I have read about plant breeders rights and so will leave my *Callunas* alone!).

A You can use ericaceous compost but you will get better results if you use a fine grade of sphagnum moss peat. Ideally mix 3 parts peat and one part of perlite or extra fine composted bark. When you put the plastic bag on, place the bag against a north facing wall or somewhere where the sun cannot shine on the bag. The bag should fog up and remain so. If it does not that is the time to take it off water the cuttings and put the bag on again. If you take cuttings in July or August, they should be rooted by the end of September. Over winter them in their tray until next spring, when you can pot them on.

Q I have two patches of heather, one white and one rose. They were planted approximately 20 years ago, but all of a sudden, both have started to turn brown and die. We have had a dry summer, but the heather was watered occasionally, so I don't think lack of water is the problem. Is there a disease that is common to old heather? Thank you for any help you can provide.

A There is no disease that attacks old heather, on the contrary, diseases tend to attack young plants. I suspect it is the unusually dry weather that is the problem. Give them a long soak late in the evening after the sun has gone down.

Q I hope you can help me I brought 12 heathers last year in small pots. I have planted them around my garden but they have never grown any bigger and they are looking dull and lifeless. So many people have told me different things but I don't know what I am doing wrong. Do they need to be replanted in special soil how often should I water them etc.? Please could you advise me on how to look after them?

A The fact that they have not grown this year and are looking dull and lifeless suggests that your heathers are already dead or dying. Lightly tap the plants to see if you get any leaf drop. Any significant amount would suggest that the plant is dead. Some heathers require an acid soil but even if your soil is alkaline, it would not kill your plants in one year. The main reason is almost certainly that they have not been watered sufficiently. Heathers need plenty of water in the first year of planting between April and October. This is best done by giving a really good soak twice a week in dry weather. By a really good soak, I mean the soil needs to be damp several inches into the soil. This is best done after the sun has gone down or at least is not shining on the heathers.

There are a number of pages on our website which will give you more information. Follow the links found on choosing.html.

Q I am looking for a book on heather and have been unable to locate a title on the internet. I have acid soil, good drainage but only a small spot to plant them. Do they mix with other perennials? Do they spread etc.? Can you recommend a book that "Recommends heathers" details heights and spreads and also suggests heathers for limited areas.

A A good starting point is a book published by *The Heather Society* called "Everyone can grow Heathers" and then possibly followed by another book called "Recommended heathers". Details can be found on our website at www.heathersociety.org.uk/pubs.html.

Group Meetings

North East

We had a most enjoyable Car Outing to Kane's Nursery at Wooler on June 12th Eleven members met at The Roseden Tea Rooms where we had an excellent home-made lunch (all good Northumbrian Fare, produced on their own farm) before going on to the nursery. We were met by Chris and he kindly gave us a tour of all the greenhouses showing us the life-cycle of a heather from the cutting to packaging and distribution - a most informative and interesting afternoon.

September 13th, was the Annual Ponteland Flower Show and, as reported in the last *Bulletin*, we merged the Heather Society Classes with those of the PFS for the first time making this an Open Competition. As we all know, we have had a fantastic summer this year, but this has inevitably brought its problems and we found that most things were about 3/4 weeks ahead of their normal flowering period. However, we managed to put on a good show bench in spite of the difficulties, and most competitors were prize-winners. Thank you to all who took part.

Our A.G.M. is on **Friday, November 7th, 2003**, at 7.30 p.m. in St. Matthew's Church Hall, Ponteland, with our usual format of business, faith supper and slide show. We look forward to seeing you there.

Dorothy M. Warner.

Yorkshire

We have had an excellent programme of meetings this summer. They opened on Saturday, 7th June with a short talk by Andrew Hart, the Curator of Harlow Carr about the future of the gardens. This was then followed by a guided tour of the garden explaining what is planned for each area and giving the relative timing for each project taking place. The meeting was completed with tea and biscuits as usual in the Field Classroom.

On Saturday, 19th July eighteen members enjoyed a meeting at which the speaker was Dr. Peter Newton, former lecturer in Botany at Manchester University. Peter advised Albert Julian when serious difficulties were encountered with the new *Calluna* collection in Queen's Meadow. He spoke as a scientific researcher explaining the pH required and the purpose of the various inorganic and organic chemicals required in soil for growth. He then translated this into practical features using tomatoes and vegetables before expanding into the requirements for heathers. Many questions were asked and a good discussion ensued.

On Saturday, 27th September twenty seven members and friends visited Kathleen Dyson's garden in Fixby, Huddersfield. It was a perfect day of beautiful sunshine and the garden was at its best. It is a mixed garden consisting mainly of heathers, *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis* with some *Daboecia* and *Erica x griffithsii* thrown it - these are surrounded by larger shrubs. All the plantings had coped well in the hot dry summer and were flowering superbly.

Our opening meeting of the 2004 season is on **Saturday, 6th March** at 2.30 pm. in the Study Centre, Harlow Carr. It is expected that this will be a talk and demonstration on "Pruning of Heathers" The following meetings will be held on **Saturday, 5th June** and **Saturday, 11th September** when we shall hear about "Dwarf Rhododendrons". Suggestions for speakers are always welcome.

Jean Julian

East Midlands

On a fine if breezy October day, 18 members met in Loughborough for a talk given by Dr Charles Nelson on the subject 'Heathers of the Atlantic Islands'.

Dr Nelson said that he was interpreting the subject liberally to include the British Isles because this brought more species into his scope. He had however much to say about the more exotic islands, particularly Madeira and the Azores. Some of his slides of *E. arborea* and *E. maderensis* were spectacular. He based his talk on species, taking them in alphabetic order, rather than on locations.

He chose to start with *Calluna vulgaris* growing on isolated pockets of peat in the limestone pavements of The Burren, in western Ireland. Rain falling on the limestone quickly seeps away underground and the only water available to the heather is that falling directly on it. *Calluna* can quickly establish an acid environment that other lime-hating plants can exploit for example *Erica cinerea* and *Arctoptaphylos uva-ursi* (bearberry)

Calluna grows prolifically in the Azores - up to the rim of the crater of Pico at around 2,350 metres (Portugal's highest mountain) - and Sao Miguel - growing within 20 cms of boiling-hot springs with steamy and sulphurous mists constantly blowing over it. During the recent *Heather Society* tour, several white flowered plants were seen on San Miguel.

Daboecia azorica was seen in plenty during the tour. It formed attractive groups on Pico, its bright red bells in sharp contrast to black basalt and pale grey lichen. On Faial, around the Caldeira, colour breaks were seen. Some plants had pure pink bells while others had deeper reds than the ones we are used to. Some flowers had more elongated bells than normal.

Erica arborea grows in the Canaries and Madeira achieving great heights and thick trunks. Some of Charles' slides showed spectacular specimens.

Erica erigena flourishes in Connemara and though bearing an Irish name is not a native of Ireland. Pollen records show that it first appeared in Ireland about 1,500AD. It colonises disturbed sites and thrives in boggy areas.

Erica mackaiana continues to interest botanists. Charles mentioned a study in which some thousands of flowers had been examined but only a few were found to contain seeds. Roots go down deep into the peat and when peat is worked for fuel, broken pieces of root can quickly sprout and form new plants. The species is more floriferous than *E. tetralix*; a species it resembles and with which it hybridises readily to form *E. x stuartii*. *E. mackaiana* is a true native with peat formed more than 5,000 years ago containing pollen.

E x stuartii has coloured spring foliage - a characteristic of hybrids and there are some good garden varieties. In Spain where *E. tetralix* and (fully fertile) *E. mackaiana* grow together, no *E. x stuartii* has yet been found; another mystery of the heather world.

As its name implies, *E. maderensis* is a native of Madeira and Charles' slides showed it growing on rocky mountain sides. He showed one woody plant hanging down fully 10 feet (3 metres). He mentioned that the valves of the seed-pods (fruits) are woody; the fruits persist a long time after the seed has been released, and the valves open and close according to humidity (like a pine cone).

It had been suggested in the past that *E. maderensis* is a subspecies of *E. cinerea* though it does not look much like it. (Prof. John Griffiths interjected to mention that he had several times crossed *E. cinerea* and *E. maderensis* (*E. maderensis* being the seed parent).

There are three subspecies of *E. scoparia* growing naturally in the Atlantic Islands - subsp. *platycodon* in the Canary Islands, subsp *maderincola* on Madeira, and subsp. *azorica* in the Azores. E. *scoparia* subsp. *platycodon* has

broader leaves and larger flowers than the other two and forms stiffer more upright bushes.

E. scoparia subsp *azorica* was of much interest to the party visiting the Azores in June 2003. It grows prolifically on all the islands. It was observed on Faial colonising new ground created by recent volcanic action. In sheltered places it grows tall - 20 to 30 feet (7-10 metres) but on the heights of Pico high winds keep it shorter. Its flowers resemble those of subsp *maderincola* and the mainland subsp *scoparia*. However a deal of variation in the shapes of stigmas was noted. Some of the flowers were of the familiar parchment-like, brown-white but others were bright brick red. Clearly there is a lot to learn about *E. scoparia*.

Members had a number of questions and comments after the talk.

Then came tea, lavishly laid on by Elaine. This provided a good time to talk among ourselves and swap plants.

By and by people climbed into their cars, in many cases for a long drive home.

Allen Hall

South West

The SW group has enjoyed three meetings this year, two have already been reported on and the third is described below. On one occasion we were a little unlucky with the weather but looking at the state of my garden at the moment some of the rain we had on that particular day would be very welcome now.

So, to the last meeting of this year. On Saturday, 20th September a party of 14 members visited Heale House Garden at Middle Woodford near Salisbury. The garden nestles in the valley of the River Avon where it winds it's way down off of the Salisbury Plain. Heale House is occupied by Guy and Frances Rasch and the garden is under the artistic eye of Frances and is described as constantly changing and improving. On a very pleasant and sunny day I was pleased to welcome our Chairman Arnold Stow and his wife Josey who had travelled some distance to come and support us. Although this tranquil garden has no heathers there was plenty to see and enjoy for those who have a general interest in plants. The garden consists of a number of smaller gardens from a walled garden with vegetables and fruit to a broad expanse of lawn with herbaceous borders surrounding Heale House and then a Japanese garden with water, bridges and a Japanese Tea House. I was particularly attracted to the carpets of *Cyclamen hederifolium* under the trees in the Japanese garden. Just beyond the walled garden was a large Mulberry tree, and fleece had been spread on the ground to catch the ripe fruit as it fell from the tree. The river Avon flows through the garden and within it's clear waters many fish were noticeable and watching those fish were rather realistic imitation Herons but I'm sure that the real ones weren't too far away. The garden has an adjacent Plant Centre with a craft and souvenir shop and a refreshment area so at the end of the afternoon we were able to sit and chat over a welcome cup of tea and wander amongst a large selection of plants that were for sale.

A date for your Diary

Saturday 27th March 2004 - This will be the annual indoor meeting at the Lytchett Matravers Village Hall in Dorset. Members should meet in the hall by 2.00 p.m. where we will have an illustrated talk on a heather related

topic. The speaker and the subject will be announced in the circular issued in February and also in the Spring Bulletin. At this meeting there will be a two class Table Show.

Class 1. A vase or bowl of heathers in bloom.

Class 2 A vase or bowl of heathers shown for foliage effect.

Prizes will be awarded and the Burfitt Bowl (currently held by Anne Pringle) will be awarded to the exhibitor with the most points overall. Lytchett Matravers is situated six miles from Poole and one mile west of the Poole-Blandford road. The Village Hall is on the west side of the High Street, just north of the Rose and Crown Inn. Ample parking is available close to the hall and a charge will be made to cover expenses. There will be refreshment supplied after the talk.

Further information on the meeting above and the rest of the meetings to be planned for 2004 can be obtained by sending me two SAEs by the end of January 2004. I finish this report by thanking you all for your support during this year and I hope for your continued support during 2004.

Phil Joyner