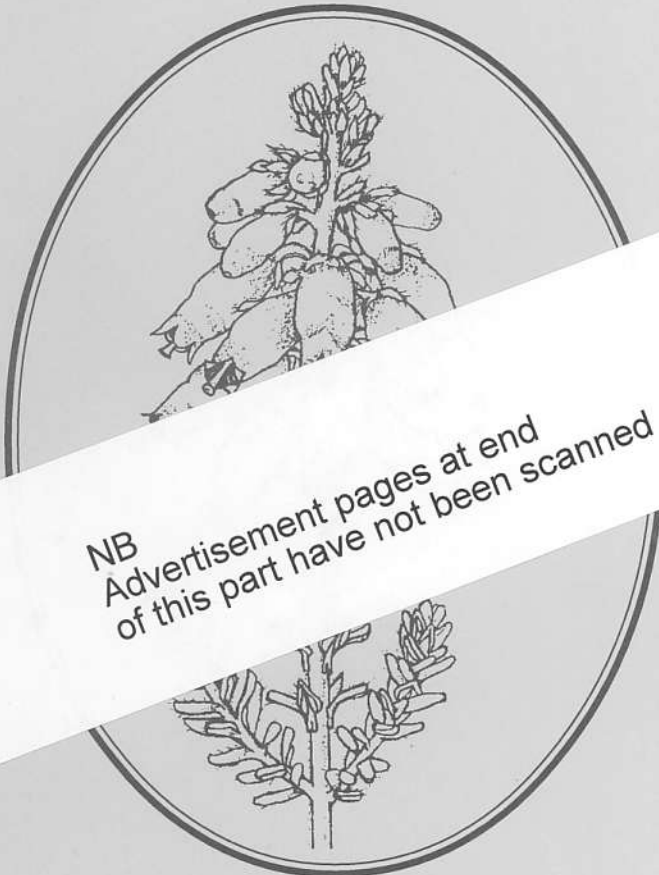


# Bulletin of The Heather Society



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*Vol. 5 No. 11*

*Summer 1997*

## DIARY OF EVENTS 1997

6-7 July	South West Group	Balloon & Flower Festival
16 July	North East Group	Car Outing to Bill Crow's Nursery
19 July	South West Group	Two-garden visit
20 July	Southern Group	Bodiam Nursery
16 August	East Midlands Group	Inaugural Meeting
16 August	Southern Group	Thursley Common
5-8 September	ANNUAL CONFERENCE	
13 September	Yorkshire Group	Talk on Cape Heaths
13 September	North East Group	Annual Show - Ponteland
15 September	Closing date for <i>The Bulletin</i>	
20 September	Southern Group	RHS Wisley
31 October	North East Group	A.G.M.



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Cover illustration *Erica ciliaris* by Brita Johansson

*I am sure that we all wish Allen Hall and the new East Midlands Group (see Group News) much success. Before moving to the Midlands Allen put a great deal of time and effort into the organisation of the very successful Southern Group, so if anyone can get a new one up and running he can. However he can't do it without the help of our loyal members. So come on all of you, give Allen your support - he has set the ball rolling with a talk from our Chairman that is not to be missed.*

## **27th Annual Conference 5 - 8th September 1997 Newton Rigg College, Penrith. Cumbria**

There are still a few places available at this Conference but Newton Rigg require us to finalise the list of delegates a good deal earlier than usual, so it is important that you book as soon as you receive this *Bulletin* or you may be too late. The Programme was announced in the Spring *Bulletin* but may still be subject to some minor adjustment. It would be useful if, when booking or paying their final amount Members could indicate their preference for the Sunday - either a trip to Don and Toni Richards' garden, or the Workshops, bearing in mind that there will be a restriction on the size of the coach going to Eskdale and numbers may have to be limited. Don and Toni's garden will be open around the conference and details can be supplied. The timing of the group photograph will be announced at the Conference. We are now able to outline the Workshop Programme as follows:

Conference Workshop on Propagation - 9.30 am to 6 pm.

The purpose of the Workshop is to have a thoroughly enjoyable day and yet hopefully learn something in the process! Peter Vickers will take a light-hearted look at propagation, particularly aimed at those who have never tried it or have never had much success. David Small will provide a more advanced study of propagation which, he hopes, beginners and experienced propagators alike will find interesting. Every delegate will get the opportunity to have some practical experience of taking cuttings of some unusual species and cultivars. How about smoking seed with Barry Sellers? He will explain two ways of using

smoke to enhance germination.

To give everyone the chance to have maximum time for the practical, delegates will be divided into two parties which come together for lunch and the first session in the afternoon. A booklet will be provided to all delegates detailing the various propagation methods demonstrated throughout the day. Coffee will be served in the morning and tea in the afternoon.

The Programme will consist of:

Propagation by Layering - talk and demonstration - Peter Vickers

Propagation from seed of European and South African species - talk and examples - Barry Sellers

Propagation by cuttings (close polythene method) - Peter Vickers

Picnic lunch and a walk around the gardens

How heathers root - talk and slides - David Small

Mist propagation - talk and slides followed by a 'hands on' workshop. The cuttings taken will be placed under mist propagation at Denbeigh Heathers and returned to the delegate when rooted.

Members will note that there has been a departure from the normal timing for the AGM. The AGM has been arranged for the Saturday evening to allow for a possible overrun of business.

Cost of the Conference

Residents for the whole weekend £130.00

Non-residents, per day £ 33.00

Friday evening (includes dinner) £ 11.00

All accommodation will be en-suite single rooms. The day visitor rate includes coffee, lunch, dinner, speaker fees and coach costs where applicable. A quotation can be provided for other options, e.g. leaving on Sunday evening.

Bookings can still be made by sending £2 (per mailing) to Phil Joyner, 84 Kinross Road, Rushington Manor, Totton. Southampton SO40 9BN. Cheques should be made payable to *The Heather Society*. The booking fee is non returnable and is not a deposit on the cost of the Conference. Full payment should be made by 31st July 1997 at the latest. Members are reminded that payment can be made by VISA or MASTERCARD credit cards.

## **The Harrogate Spring Flower Show 1997**

*The following three reports provide a vivid picture of the amount of organisation and sheer hard work that go into putting on a display at one of the big Flower shows.*

It was a first for them, in that it was the first time in 67 years that the Spring Flower Show had not been held in the famous Valley Gardens but instead at the Great Yorkshire Showground, and a first for *The Heather Society* to show at Harrogate.

This Show is the Chelsea of the North; we were in with the 'big boys' and determined to do our best. Everyone worked with a will and when the stand was finished we felt quietly pleased with our efforts. No one expected any rewards but when we arrived next morning to find we had won a bronze certificate, our jubilation was tremendous.

Don't let anyone kid you that 'doing a show' is an easy task. It is four days of darned hard work, from 9.30 am to 6 pm, keeping a constant supply of heathers going, answering queries and both giving and selling literature to the public. But the atmosphere was great, which went a long way to help our aching backs and sore feet! 65,000 people attended on the first day alone.

However, none of this success could have been achieved without the nucleus of 'permanent staff' and additional help which came in each day from different members of the North East and Yorkshire Groups. But special mention must go to Peter Vickers, who organised the whole project with such efficiency, and to Jean Julian who saw to the administration with the show organisers. Everyone worked as a team and it was this great team spirit that made the whole effort such a success. Thank you and WELL DONE everyone.

Dorothy M Warner

Our efforts to produce plants for the Harrogate Spring Flower Show were successful in making it possible to give an attractive display of heather cultivars which gained a bronze medal. Members from as far afield as Newcastle, Pickering and Rotherham gave their services in setting up, manning and clearing the stand.

The plants of winter and summer flowering cultivars were planted in threes in each of forty bowls placed in four tiers on the stand. They were outstanding for quality, in particular those with coloured foliage. They were accompanied by eye-catching specimen plants of *Erica australis* 'Riverslea', *E. erigena* 'Brightness' and 'W.T. Rackliff' in full flower. The project was organised, ostensibly, to promote heathers and publicise *The Heather Society* and to gain members for the Northern Horticultural and Heather Societies, but to cover costs, plants of recommended cultivars were placed on sale and proved to be a major attraction.

Jean Julian

It was going to be a publicity only stand when it was discussed at Council level two or three years ago but no funds were available to finance a four-day show. So I said "Let's sell some plants - all I need are volunteers" and the volunteers came, from all over the North-East, from Sheffield to Newcastle (where I was the Southerner). Walter Wornick came over from the USA and shared a bed and breakfast room with me for the period of the show. He didn't complain about my early morning tea making, or my nightly Archers instalment, or our fish and chip suppers and he even gave a jovial hand on the show-stand. Thank you Walter!

The Show Plants were heathers in bulb-bowls and there were plenty of well-grown colourful plants to sell - and how those volunteers worked!

I had mapped out a plan. They set up swiftly and cleanly, without

argument. They turned up daily, sold plants and satisfied customers - it was wonderful. Some things went wrong - we put them right. We sold £1120 of plants, gave out piles of leaflets, answered myriads of questions - Oh Aye - and we got a Bronze.

The regulations said no dismantling before 4 p.m. on Sunday. 'The Team' moved in on time and by 5.15 pm I was driving away, with everything which had been left over on board. It was fantastic, absolutely fantastic - well done Yorkshire and the North East.

*Peter Vickers*

## **Help!**

Andy Collins, who looks after the National Heather Collection at Wisley, would be over the moon if anyone could spare a few hours a week (or even a month) to help him keep it looking its superb best. This Collection is seen and admired by a great many visitors, so you will be helping to spread the gospel, as well as making Andy a very happy man. Telephone Wisley Gardens on 01483 224234.

Also, the number of entries in the Heather Competition at the August Westminster Show have been declining in recent years. In fact, you may remember that last year Mary Bowerman found when she arrived that she was the only entrant and, rather than let the side down, she and Sid Brown between them entered every single class (11 in all). They filled 39 vases with heathers, as well as doing two basket arrangements.

You don't have to be a wonderful flower arranger to enter the competitions and you certainly won't get rich on the prize money, but its a very enjoyable way of helping the Society and keeping heathers in people's minds. All it entails is a phone call to the RHS who will send you a Show Schedule with all the details. Then, just make sure you get to the Show in time to arrange the blooms before 10.15 am - its a good way to get to see the show before the crowds arrive (or you can go the day before) - and fill up those vases with heathers!

## **Heathermania**

Dee Daneri, 11 Pinecrest Drive, Fortuna, California 95540, USA

My first symptoms of Heathermania began showing early in this decade. Our City wanted to try something new in the landscape. The team of experts were asked "what about heather?". We all looked a bit baffled, knowing that the garden centres carried heather, both "Med Pink", and "Med White", they bloomed in the winter, and became very leggy in time. So, what about heather? Rumour was that there was a new one that bloomed in the summer. I was chosen to investigate.

Much to my amazement there were no books about heather in our library or garden centre. Further investigation brought me to references which were unavailable and out of print.



Our local agricultural extension office suggested a grower in Fort Bragg, California who grew heather. I made an appointment to visit Bob Body at Descanso Nursery. Without written educational material available, my first introduction to heaths and heathers followed the ancient custom of passing down knowledge by the spoken word.

At Descanso in the very late fall, the tiny pots bore few or no flowers. Bob concentrated on a limited number of varieties, mostly winter *Ericas*, and the hoop houses were full of basic green. He told me about plants with brighter foliage colour, but had found the market to be limited. As I blindly envisioned a use for them in the landscape, Bob could see that I needed to visit a real heather garden.

I still recall my first sight of the Thompson Garden. One glimpse and anyone who ever loved a plant would be totally cast under the spell of Heathermania. I was disoriented, as my brain and eyes tried to communicate the scene. The eyes saw mountains of colour but the brain saw a painting. A psychedelic sea of paint pots lay before me, as Jim apologized that we were too late this year - only the foliage was left.

After a tour of two acres of these explosions of confetti, I was delirious, bursting with questions and frustration. Why were these plants unknown? Why was there no information about them? Where did they come from? The Thompson's were generous with time and information about the plants. They had developed their own list of top plants, and guests to the garden were offered information on growing the plants. I was dumbfounded that such a thing of beauty could exist, oblivious to all but a privileged few.

Colonel Thompson had spent years collecting plants. He found his first plants at a Rhododendron Show in Portland, and learned about a mail order company in Washington. That good information led him to Alice Knight and the *North American Heather Society*. He shared this information with me.

The next day I was on the phone to Alice Knight seeking information about NAHS and asking how to get plants. Alice had nearly 200 cultivars in her mail order catalogue, but she cautioned that these new plants of unusual foliage colour were in great demand. My first precious cargo from Alice consisted of 56 plants. There were just enough of the unique coloured-foliage plants to make the tiny box of plants dance with colour.

By Spring I was convinced that I must see more. I continued my search, but was always disappointed. I was off on a 600 mile drive to Washington to see more of Alice's plants, and by this time the City was expressing an interest too.

Alice suggested several hardy plants for our City planting. Many winter blooming varieties were chosen and I came home with boxes packed with hundreds of plants. But it was a book I spotted at Alice's that really put me over the edge. She was selling *Handy Guide to Heathers*. Alice knew that I would be frustrated to learn that few of these plants were available in North America. But why?

During the next year I made more trips to Washington and the collection grew to over 100 varieties. High demand by the Rock Garden Society and others kept many choices out of my reach.

Again, with my very patient husband, I saw the Thompson Garden and visited the beautiful Mendocino Coast Botanical Garden. The Fort Bragg area offered some summer-blooming plants for sale, and every new addition brought new fascination to this new world of heaths and heathers.

That May I had planned a trip to the Chelsea Flower Show. I called Alice to ask if she could suggest heather gardens to visit in Great Britain. She referred me to David and Anne Small who would ultimately open the door to the heather world. With meticulous thought, the Smalls suggested several fine gardens, and even private gardens which would welcome me by appointment.

My first stop on the suggested itinerary was Lambie's Speyside Garden Centre in Scotland. I stood salivating over the tables of tiny plants of pink, yellow, orange, and red foliage. This was the largest variety of foliage plants I'd seen. The Lambie's were starting to ship to America, and I ordered a dozen cuttings which would come rooted in perlite. (This method proved fatal when the plants arrived several months later, long dead from their travels.)

The next stop was lovely Cherrybank in Perth. Norrie Robertson, the gardener at that time, apologized for the time of year and not much to see. My excitement was now over the moon as I gazed out at the largest collection of heather plants in Scotland. The rain was merciless, but I stayed for hours. Norrie cheerfully held my handbag and umbrella while I frantically tried to keep the water away from the camera lens. True, only a few *Erica erigena* were blooming, but who cared. The kaleidoscope of colour was there, with foliage plants as bright as autumn in New England or the Grand Canyon, dancing from garden to garden. It was magnificent.

At Harlow Carr I was able to observe a true demonstration garden, developed by Albert Julian in cooperation with *The Heather Society*. I thought how ironic that here in England the group was trying to sort out which ones were worthy, and back home I was just trying to get the plants - any plants!

Kingfisher Nursery was the next stop, and a treasured visit with Peter Bingham. This afternoon course on the cultivation of heather is still with me. Peter shared the brochure of the heather growers, and I marvelled again at the development of the heather industry in Great Britain - maybe we needed an infusion of heather propaganda back home.

Foggy Bottom, the creation of Adrian Bloom, is now the classic design, using the great companions of conifers and grasses in the heather garden. So many of these exotic conifers are native to my part of America. This, together with the Thompson Garden provided the essential elements of designing with heather.

Finally it was time to drop in at Creeting St. Mary and say thank you for opening the door to so many gardens, education and dedicated heather growers. I shared my frustration at finding so few plants available at home. David and Anne Small have been trying to get plants to many growers in America, but soil is a problem, and rooted cuttings are often rejected, even when grown in inert medium. It was the custom to bring back rooted cuttings without declaring them, in an attempt to get the collection into America. I joined with others who forgot to declare the little rooted cuttings, getting them



to Alice Knight, who would grow them on and propagate them, enabling us to have at least one source of these precious plants in America. The demand was simply always beyond the supply.

I was able to visit the newly planted heather gardens in Howard's Field at Wisley, and I made a note that I must come here again in a few years.

This first trip ended with a visit to Chelsea, and it was my good fortune to spend the afternoon with David McClintock, enjoying all of those "other" plants - the ones they still write books about.

It was never my intention to go into the nursery business, but there was no way to introduce the plants to the garden centres in my area without a commercial outlet. Surprisingly, mostly to myself, I was suddenly taking cuttings from the plants I'd purchased in Washington, and a little heather business was born.

In that year my husband Dick joined me and we attended *The Heather Society* conference at York. We saw lovely gardens, and met many of the dedicated people who have made heather gardening possible in Great Britain. Brita Johansson had painted lovely tee-shirts and brought them from Sweden. The Schroeders were there from Germany, the Albrondas from Holland, and Eileen Pettersen from Norway. I met Walter Wornick and Judy Wiksten, fellow NAHS members. It was really an exciting international affair.

The dedication of the group never stopped leaving an impression. Des Oliver was retiring after 17 years of service as Treasurer of THS. Jeane Sharpe (Julian) and Beryl and David Mayne provided a lovely meeting and arranged the tours, and I enjoyed Peter Vickers plant sale.

This time I bought plants and took cuttings to bring back to America. It was fun to have a plant of *E. carnea* 'Barry Sellers', and one of Don Richard's *Daboecia*, having just met these gentlemen. The cuttings all struck very well. The plants? They were left in the ladies room at Heathrow with a note "Please give us a good home".

The same autumn we visited Vancouver Island, and the NAHS conference was staged by the Cowichan Chapter. It was a beautiful backdrop, with introductions to more heather people. David Wilson is a very large grower in British Columbia, and his giant plant sale was glorious. I bought many varieties that have been developed by David, and his father Ken Wilson, the founder of our society in North America. I was introduced to Kate Herrick's beautiful catalogue - Kate doesn't ship to California, but offers a good selection to the rest of the U.S.

A highlight in my life was the visit to Ireland in 1995, accompanied by many of the world's foremost experts on heaths and heathers. To visit seven species in their native habitat all within one day was to finally discover much of the origin of all the beauty that I had seen in that first exotic heather garden in California.

Kurt Kramer, our celebrated German hybridizer was there, and the tour was led by Charles Nelson. Bert and Diane Jones were gathering and categorizing information, working the entire time. Allen and Joan Hall were there, and the Everetts were gathering information for *The Bulletin* and taking slides which would be shared with more heather enthusiasts back home in

England. In Dublin I was once again reminded of the dedication of Dr. Ted Oliver, whom I'd met at Chelsea, representing the South African exhibit.

Last year I read the accounts of botanizing in Cornwall, written by Major-General Pat Turpin. With the help of *The Heather Society*, I was able to follow a few of those early footsteps and ponder how I can possibly give back all that I have received from *The Heather Society* and the NAHS.

Three years ago, about halfway through this adventure, I decided it was time to start a study group. I sent letters to garden club members, gardeners, growers, and anyone I could think of who ever grew a plant, to invite them to a garden party with the hopes of establishing enough interest to form a heather group. That day ended with twelve founding members.

Today, the *Heather Enthusiasts of the Redwood Empire* has 161 members, and in cooperation with *The Heather Society*, is looking forward to planting a national collection at Humboldt Botanical Garden. The collection will provide a control reference and just as Albert Julian taught us at Harlow Carr, we will be able to add to the research that will ultimately create a list of the most outstanding cultivars for North American gardens.

The Department of Agriculture is most cooperative when we bring in cuttings, if we only cooperate by providing proper phytosanitary certificates and a permit. Today close to 600 cultivars are available in Northern California and other growers across the continent have brought cuttings from Holland and England. The success rate of their rooting is outstanding.

Last year the NAHS conference was held in Eureka, California, and the HERE chapter was pleased to have the opportunity to welcome and host a few of the people who have provided the knowledge, plants and basic tools to create this cultural enrichment in this area.

I've sold the business that I never intended to start, and there are now two heather businesses in this area. I can't imagine missing an annual pilgrimage to my new heather family in Great Britain. Now, with the cooperation of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, I bring back cuttings for anyone who wants to expand or start growing plants, and a group of dedicated newcomers to Heathermania are making them available to all heather gardeners and growers across North America. Is this competing with the commercial trade? The growers with whom I've spoken tell me that the creation of more display gardens across North America will greatly strengthen the industry. The public demand will force greater supplies.

I will spend the next two years as President of NAHS, with the fondest wish that heather awareness will continue to expand across North America. Our mission is to advance knowledge, disseminate information, and promote fellowship.

With websites, fax machines, E-mail and other instant communication systems rapidly plummeting before us, heather awareness in America should quickly accelerate into the 21st century. A well-structured fleet will be at the base of our success, and I personally hope it will be *The Heather Society* guiding the fleet into those uncharted international waters of the 21st century.

P.S. "The Surgeon General warns that exposure to heaths and heathers

may result in various degrees of Heathermania. Incoherence, divorce, bankruptcy, and complete mental collapse have been reported in acute cases".

## Soil Testing - a service to members

In general the summer-flowering heathers require a degree of soil acidity for healthy growth, or even to survive and gardening articles on heather culture generally advise testing the soil for its acidity, by checking the pH value, before planting. The pH scale ranges from extreme acidity, pH 1.0, through neutral pH 7.0, to maximum alkalinity, pH 14.0. The pH values of garden soils usually lie between 4.5 (very acid) and 8.0 (strongly alkaline). *Calluna vulgaris* and most of the summer-flowering ericas need soil with values that are not higher than pH 6.5, for satisfactory results.

Soil testing kits for amateurs are available in garden centres but the Consumer Association's publication "Gardening Which" has shown that they are not reliable. The alternatives are to purchase a pH meter or to have the soil checked professionally, both incurring appreciable expense. *The Heather Society* has limited access to professional pH measuring equipment and is prepared to test soil samples for members free of charge. Members taking advantage of this facility should send not more than two samples weighing around 30 gm each, taken from two separate locations in the area in question. They should be sent to:- Mrs. J. Julian, 3 Selby Road, Fulford, York YO1 4RD, enclosing an S.A.E. for the reply.

## *Erica australis* in Burton

On a rainy day in April Joan and I visited Conifers Nursery, Outwoods, Burton on Trent, where we were hospitably received by the proprietors, Mrs. Warren and Mrs. Wyers. As the name implies, the nursery specialises in conifers, but also offers a good selection of heathers.

There is an attractive grove of conifers and heather at the nursery and in a sheltered corner of it we saw a most lovely example of *Erica australis* 'Riverslea'. It was full of flower and was obviously undamaged by frost in the recent winter; there were some attractive unnamed clones there as well. *E. australis* is one of my favourite heathers and I am encouraged by what I saw in Burton to think that I might be able to grow some outdoors in nearby Loughborough. Besides *E. australis* there were some fine specimens of *E. arborea* 'Alpina', an *E. lusitanica*, and the largest cultivar of *E. erigena* 'Brightness' I have ever seen. Mrs. Wyers told me that it is 25 years old - and I can confirm that it is still in splendid condition.

Allen Hall - Zone 6

## **Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) The Deadly Silent Invader**

T A Julian, 3 Selby Road, Fulford, York, North Yorkshire, YO1 4RD

The general concern of conservation authorities for the widespread bracken invasion of heaths and moorlands first came to my notice in 1985 when my grandson, an undergraduate studying remote sensing, undertook a practical project in the Peak National Park of assessing the increased amount that the bracken had spread during the previous ten years. "Landset" satellite images and aerial photographs of the period were used and the result proved to be a disturbing 10%. Several years later, indeed during visits to Exmoor and Dartmoor preceding the 1996 Annual Conference at Dillington Hall, I became aware of massive areas of bracken stretching away in all directions smothering the heather in its wake. One high point on Dartmoor was completely covered with the exception of a wide swathe of yellowing grass which indicated that there had been some successful experimental bracken clearance activity. The trip to the Quantocks during the conference also gave ample evidence of the magnitude of the problem.

It has been stated that bracken, which flourishes in four continents (excluding Antarctica), now covers seven per cent of the U.K. land mass and is increasing significantly, up to 3% per year in some areas. It is well appreciated by moorland managers that heather and its habitats are severely affected and it is generally agreed that prompt steps must be taken to protect and preserve it. In former years bracken has been kept in check by more intensive use of marginal lands, for example, by cattle grazing, bracken cutting for animal bedding and peat cutting and not least, by constant trampling by farmers on new growth in the normal course of their work. However more recent factors have contributed to an increase in the speed of growth and spread. Until two years ago farmers would receive grants covering half the cost of clearing bracken. That was reduced to 30% and then abandoned except for parts of Wales. The European Union "set aside" policy of discouraging agricultural use of marginal land, the slight but significant increase in global warming and changes in soil chemistry have played their part. Airborne gaseous ammonia resulting from intensive livestock farming, prevalent in the South of England, and nitrogen oxides, the products of power stations and vehicle exhausts, have increased soil nitrogen in most European countries in the last two decades, in some places by more than tenfold. Heather avoids competition from other plants by its ability to grow in a low nutrient environment but added nitrogen encourages bracken and other plants to compete. There is a traditional saying of Welsh hill farmers "Gold under bracken, silver under gorse and famine under heather", which illustrates the differing nutrient requirements of these moorland plants.

The roots and foliage of bracken are slightly toxic thus reducing competition by discouraging the growth of nearby plants and preventing seed germination in the near vicinity. The foliage contains toxic chemicals, including carcinogens and a hormone which renders insect larvae and caterpillars sterile after

eating the fronds. Thus bracken is unique in that no predators nor competitors have evolved through the ages.

The vast number of spores which are produced by plants in early Autumn have been shown to be carcinogenic. Feeding bracken spores to laboratory animals quickly result in digestive tract and other cancers so there is little doubt that they can have the same effect on humans. Japan, where young bracken fronds are eaten as a delicacy, has the world's highest incidence of stomach and oesophagus cancers. The health of moorland sheep can be seriously affected. Carcinomas, cancer of the jaws, and "bright blindness" of sheep can result from the occasional accidental sampling of the fresh fronds of the carcinogenic bracken. According to a study commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1989, the cost of bracken to the livestock sector in terms of animals lost and vets' bills was about £8 million per year. More importantly it plays host to the infamous sheep tick (*Nodes ricinus*) a spider-like creature which feeds on animal blood. Ticks, clinging to the bracken fronds, attach themselves to the fleece of passing sheep. In many instances the debilitating disease louping-ill results from the bites. The 30 per cent death rate of lambs on the North York Moors is mainly attributable to ticks. Sheep dips, with all the health problems to farmers operating them, are necessary to kill the ticks. Grouse are victims also, and are susceptible to the louping-ill disease. 20,000 grouse are shot on the North York Moors annually but an enormous quantity of 13,000, are lost to disease. Tick's tastes are not confined to the blood of sheep and grouse, their hosts include small mammals, dogs and humans. In the early nymph stages of their development ticks may become affected by bacteria (*spirochaete borrelia burgdorferi*) and in the third year nymph and the adult stages it is passed on to their hosts when taking their blood meals. In humans this can be the cause of Lyme Disease, an infection which manifests itself as a reddish rash in the area of the bite followed by symptoms which resemble those of influenza. If left untreated the disease may develop into meningitis or arthritis like symptoms over the following months or years. In the United States in 1975 there were 250 reported cases of Lyme Disease; last year there were 12,000. It is second to H.I.V. as the most widely reported disease caused by persistent bacterial or viral infection. 250 cases are being confirmed annually in the U.K.

Research by Dr. Roy Brown of Bishop Burton College, Beverley has shown that there has been a dramatic increase in the tick population during the last decade. The method adopted for checking the density of ticks at a given location is to drag a one square metre blanket, suitably weighted, through 30 metres of bracken, the ticks reacting by fastening on to it. Ten years ago one or two would have been caught in February, a period of low activity. Today in the same month and in the same place there are counts of 50 or 60.

A selective herbicide, Asulox, has been developed to deal with bracken. Hilly moorland sites, unsuited to land vehicles, are sprayed by helicopter but four-wheel all terrain vehicles are used where access is easier. They carry the herbicide under pressure, sufficient for up to three operators spraying simultaneously. Non-chemical methods of eradication sometimes adopted are rolling or mowing but according to a report of 1986 by The Institute of



Terrestrial Ecology on repeatedly cutting bracken on each of several sites, over a period of six years, it did not result in its complete eradication. Their conclusion was that a combination of cutting plus the application of herbicide is necessary. A 1996 English Heritage award-winning bracken clearance and heather growing project on Beacon Hill in Leicestershire, as yet uncompleted, employed mowing, rolling and harrowing to clear 6,000 square metres of dense bracken. The less accessible areas were walked on and trampled by many enthusiastic volunteer walkers from Leicester. To help restore the heather on the upper reaches of the hill, pupils from a nearby school in Woodhouse Eaves are taking wild heather cuttings and growing them in tubes for ultimate planting there.

For several years small grants and inducements to farmers and land owners have been made by the government and conservation organisations for improving moorland management methods and for research into the causes and cures of declining moorland habitats with emphasis on the bracken problem. One research project of particular interest to heather lovers is the subject of the publication "Heather in England and Wales" published by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, a branch of the government's research organisation The Natural Environment Council. It was reviewed in the 1991 issue of the Year Book.

The European Union has now become actively involved in the improvement of moorland habitats with its Europlan "Objective 5b" which finances projects for enrichment of rural life in Europe. Objective 5b money, matched by the British Government, is being made available for a U.K. six year moorland regeneration programme which was launched on 3rd November 1996 by Tim Boswell, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture. It involves farmers, landowners, National Parks, English Nature and the R.S.P.B. An Objective 5b scheme designed for the northern moorlands will pay 70 per cent of the costs of bracken control, heather burning and other improvement activities and is expected to clear 9,000 acres of bracken, improve 24,000 acres of heather, restore a further 1,600 acres to heather and 500 acres of grass on previous bracken infested sites. With all this activity surely this "deadly silent invader" will be halted and ultimately defeated.

#### ADDENDUM

The following is typical of advice given by authorities to walkers where there is widespread dense bracken.

##### Bracken: The Spore Laws - DO

- Wear a face mask near bracken beds from late August to early October.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers, preferably brightly coloured ones so that any ticks that jump on you are visible.
- Tuck your trousers into boots or socks.
- Spray dogs with insect-repellent powder before letting them walk through bracken. Check for ticks on your body after walking through bracken, removing them with a pair of sharp-pointed tweezers in a twisting action. If the mouth breaks off under the skin, consult your doctor immediately.



- DON'T
- Burst blood engorged ticks or squash them between your fingers.
- Wear shorts, skirts or rolled up sleeves.
- Walk in, or downwind of, bracken beds from late August to early October unless you are wearing a face mask.

## Questions and Answers

Dear Editor,

I am making increasing use of water butts to collect rainwater for use with heather in pots and in the ground since I have a positive approach to conservation, besides which we are now on a water meter.

I sprinkle a pinch of potassium permanganate into each butt from time to time to help keep the water free from algae. Additionally, I clean the butts out every autumn and when they run dry in the summer

This has not always prevented insects breeding in the water in high summer. Moreover, I am told that harmful fungi can breed in rain water butts. Apparently the chlorine in tap water makes it safe.

Can you advise please what the risk is of pathogens infecting stored rainwater and of any safeguards I should apply in addition to the above?

Yours sincerely

Allen Hall, Zone 6.

*A very helpful man from ADAS in Worcester replies:*

Potassium permanganate is ineffective in dealing with pathogens in rainwater. To be of any use at all the dosage would have to be so high as to kill the plants that the water was used on, however, the insects in the butts can be ignored as they cause no problems at all.

Pathogens, including phytophthora, can be a major problem in rainwater butts, especially when the water is collected from roofs and gutters. The roof surface can be covered with fungal spores which are then washed down into the butts and the gutters collect leaves which also harbour many different fungi.

The Man from the Ministry did not consider that there is any simple way of keeping water butts free from fungal problems when collected rainwater is used. His advice was never to use collected rain-water on tender plants or seedlings, or on young heathers in pots or trays, but he considered it quite safe to use on established plants (including heathers) in the garden.

*When I think back thirty five years to when I first started in horticulture, I wonder what answer my old boss would have given to Allen's problem. In those days all our rainwater was collected and stored in butts inside the greenhouses (to keep the water at a reasonable temperature) and in the spring a large dollop of fragrant horse manure was dropped into the bottom of the butts to provide liquid fertiliser for the plants. Strangely I don't ever remember having fungal problems of any sort on the nursery. Perhaps fungi hadn't been invented then, or maybe they couldn't cope with that manure! Ed.*

## Group News

### North East

Twenty six members and friends enjoyed an outing to Floors Castle in Roxburghshire on May 10th. The weather was extremely kind to us, considering what we had had the previous fortnight when we had been battling with snow, hail, rain and wind and, although it was cool the sun shone the whole time we were there. After a picnic, overlooking the Tweed, we dispersed to view either the Castle or the gardens. There were woodland walks and a nature trail, also a garden centre selling roses, shrubs, herbaceous plants and heathers, many of which were of the lesser known varieties. The Castle was enormous but homely, as the present Duke and Duchess of Roxburgh have three small children who live at the Castle most of the year. Tea at the restaurant concluded the day.

Just a reminder of the two car outings which have been fully described in the previous *Bulletin*. The first is to Howick Gardens on June 7th, meeting in the car park at 2.30 pm., and the second is to Bill Crow's nursery on July 16th at 7.30 pm.

Looking forward to seeing you all at these events.

Sadly we have lost another very good member of the Society when Doug Lister died recently. Doug and Joan were long-standing members and regular attenders of the annual Conferences, although latterly, through ill-health, he was unable to be there. Doug also served on the North East Group's Committee for many years and was a great help when we organised the Conference here at Durham in 1989 and also at the Gateshead Garden Festival. Because of his regular attendance at the Conferences he and Joan had made many friends throughout the Heather Society and he will be sadly missed. Our sympathy goes to Joan in her great loss.

Dorothy M Warner

### Yorkshire

The first meeting of the newly re-formed Yorkshire Heather Group was held in the Study Centre, Harlow Carr on Saturday, 15th March 1997.

Officers appointed were: Dr. John Griffiths, Chairman  
Mrs. Jean Julian, Secretary  
Malcolm Birkett, Treasurer

Dr. Griffiths gave an informative and interesting illustrated talk on "European Heathers and other dwarf ericaceae for the garden" and clearly displayed the salient features of plants of the *Erica* species and further described dwarf ericaceous plants with the aid of slides. Famous heather gardens in flower were shown also.

Jean Julian gave an account of the progress of the new *Calluna* National Collection, for which preparations are being made in Queen's Meadow and asked for volunteers for planting and subsequent regular maintenance.

Peter Vickers reported on the progress that has been made with the arrangements for the Heather Society's stand at the Harrogate Spring Flower Show when we shall be attempting to enrol new members for both the Northern Horticultural Society and the Heather Society. Members were asked to help man the stand. The proceedings terminated with a tour around the winter flowering heather collection and display beds in the gardens.

A visit to the "Gardening Which" trials and the Harry Ramsden Heather Garden in the Golden Acre Botanical Gardens, Leeds for June are in hand and

members will be advised when the arrangements have been finalised with Joe Maden, the "Which" trials supervisor.

### **The Group of the East Midlands (Gem)**

Following our move from Surrey to Loughborough, the Chairman asked me to organise some events for the East Midlands Group (Zone 6). For a first event, I have arranged an indoor meeting on Saturday August 16<sup>th</sup> 1997.

A room has been booked in the beautiful setting of the Sutton Bonington Campus of the University of Nottingham. I believe that this venue is reasonably central in the Zone - it is about 6 miles north of Loughborough - and it certainly affords excellent facilities. For this occasion, our Chairman, David Small, has consented to present a talk "In search of *Erica andevalensis*". There is no charge and the programme is as follows:

Meet at the main entrance of the Campus at 1.45 p.m. - proceed to Seminar Room 7 by 2 p.m.

- 2.05 p.m. Introduction
- **2.15 p.m. The Chairman "In Search of *Erica andevalensis*"**
- 3.00 p.m. Discussion
- 3.30 p.m. Tea
- 4.00 p.m. Open Forum led by the Chairman. Questions or points are welcome about the cultivation of heathers or the conduct of the Society.
- 5.00 p.m. Close

The Campus is two miles east of the Junction 24 (Kegworth) of the M1 motorway. From the Junction, take the A6 eastwards for a short distance and then follow road signs to Sutton Bonington. The Campus is well signposted in the vicinity of Sutton Bonington. A sketch map of the location can be obtained by sending me a stamped addressed envelope.

This will be an excellent opportunity to meet informally our Chairman who is acknowledged internationally as an expert on heathers - and all members are welcome to attend. A special invitation is extended to members residing in or near Zone 6. But please let me know if you propose to attend.

Allen Hall, East Midlands Group Organiser, 10 Upper Green,  
Loughborough LE11 3SG Tel: 01509 238 923

### **Southern**

On Sunday afternoon, 11th May, sixteen members of the Southern Group were guests of Joan and Peter Hancock at their delightful home and garden, Beauchamp, at Coombe Hill in Surrey, not far from Richmond Park.

First however Joan had laid on, as an additional feature, a visit to Cedar Court, a house with a history, next door. Now an English language school, the house had originally been built for a wool merchant in Colchester in the late 15th century. Threatened with demolition, the house was transferred to Surrey by a Mr. Thornton Smith in 1911. Moira, a member of the staff, gave us an interesting conducted tour, during which we admired the original linen-fold panelling and Tudor staircase amongst other features.

Joan and Peter have lived at Beauchamp for forty years and during that time they have created a magnificently varied and sculptured garden. That a number of our party had been there before was a testament to the Hancock's achievement. As first-timers, Audrey and I were particularly struck by the landscaping. Although the garden covered a relatively small area, the different ground levels, the pear-shaped and raised heather beds, the winding paths, gave the illusion

of a much larger garden and provided an ideal setting for a wide range of plants and trees. There were of course plenty of heathers, indeed I lost count of the number of cultivars, and the shrubs and trees were equally varied in shape and foliage. This was the first time Audrey and I had ever seen palm trees in flower in a private garden. Afterwards Joan and her sister Olive gave us a feast of a tea to round off a perfect day.

Our grateful thanks go to Joan, Peter and Olive for looking after us so well.

Saturday 20th July - Bodiam Nursery, East Sussex. An opportunity to visit a specialist heather nursery, courtesy of the proprietor Mr Richard Biggs: 2.15 pm for 2.30 pm. And perhaps to fit in a visit to Bodiam Castle as well.

Saturday 16th August - Thursley Common, near Godalming Surrey. We hope that the visit may be led by Dr. Rob McGibbon, project officer of the Heathland Project. 1. 45 pm for a 2.00 pm start.

Saturday 20th September - RHS Wisley A garden visit in the morning and a meeting in the Lecture Room after lunch are planned. There will be the usual heather competition with prizes and the award of the Turpin Trophy for the best overall display. Would members who plan to participate in these visits please let me know. We can then give our hosts a rough idea as to numbers.

*David Sprague - Tel. 01306 886356*

## **South West**

On Saturday 5th April, South West Group members met with those from the Southern Group in a joint meeting at Lytchett Matravers Village Hall in Dorset, for a lecture and a Table Show Meeting. I was pleased to see many of our own regular members as well as several from the Southern Group, including Ron Wing and his wife Jean, representing its new Organising Committee.

The speaker for the afternoon was the Society's Assistant *Yearbook* Editor, Ron Cleevely. Ron gave an excellent illustrated talk on the history and culture of the South African Ericas. Ron spends many hours researching his subject matter and this was obvious from his slides of various illustrations from historical publications concerning Cape Heaths and also his descriptive discussion. After Ron's talk and several questions the members enjoyed the social part of the afternoon, taking refreshment and chatting on our favourite topic. The Table Show was then judged and the results were as follows:

Class 1 A vase or bowl of heathers in bloom

1st. Phyllis Kennedy, 2nd. Maureen Clark, 3rd. Anne Pringle

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

1st. Anne Pringle, 2nd. Jennifer Turrell, 3rd. Phyllis Kennedy

Phyllis Kennedy and Anne Pringle were joint winners of the Burfitt Bowl for the most points overall but prizes were presented to the members placed in the competition. My thanks go to my wife Lin, my mother and Val Davis, for their work in the kitchen. Thanks are also due to Ron Cleevely for his talk and to Lorna Farrow for judging the Table Show.

Meetings for the remainder of 1997

Saturday July 6th, Sunday July 7th - *The Heather Society* will have a display table at the Southampton Balloon and Flower Festival on the Southampton Common. Unlike previous years, the Society will not take part in competitive displays, but will concentrate on educating the public on heather culture and on the advantages of belonging to *The Heather Society*. If any member is interested in manning the stand then please contact me by letter or telephone.

Saturday July 19th - Two garden visit on the eastern side of the New Forest.

The first garden will be that of members Bill and Joan Vicary at 13 Foxhills, Ashurst, and the second will be my own at 84 Kinross road, Totton. Members should bring picnic lunches and folding chairs to the first garden from 12.00 midday onwards and at 2.30 pm we move on to the second garden, where tea will be provided. Last time we did this it rained, so better luck this time. The first garden will be found by leaving the A35 Southampton to Lyndhurst road at the right hand turning about a mile west of Totton (just over the brow which marks the end of the dual-carriageway at Ashurst. The right turning is Whartons Lane which leads into Foxhills at the bottom of the slope; the garden is on the left-hand side of Foxhills. The second garden is found by leaving Foxhills and very temporarily joining the A326 southbound and then the A35 eastbound. Travel about half a mile to the roundabout junction with the Fawley road, turning left immediately after the roundabout into Rushington Avenue, and immediately right into Kinross Road. The garden is on the right well along Kinross Road.

Saturday September 27th - This will be a return visit to Aurelia Gardens, near West Moors in Dorset to see how Robert and Magdalene Knight have developed the garden during the two years since we made our last visit. I am sure that the members who attended the previous visit will remember the enthusiastic welcome and the comprehensive tour we were given that afternoon. This is a garden of heathers and variegated shrubs and there is a small nursery attached. Robert has now added a pond and has a collection of rare breed fowl (Lin and I saw these in March and they were fascinating). We will assemble at the gardens from 1.45 pm. The garden is found by leaving the A31 Ringwood to Wimborne road along the Ferndown by-pass. The dual-carriageway is exited left, then turn right on to the B3072 Ferndown to West Moors road and travel to West Moors over the A31. Members should then travel through West Moors, then, after about a quarter of a mile, at a sharp right-hand bend, turn left into Newmans Lane. The garden is on the right -hand side of the lane.

Dates for your Diary:

Saturday March 28th 1998 - Annual indoor meeting at 2.00 pm at the Lytchett Matravers Village Hall. A talk will be arranged, more details in the Autumn Bulletin.

Further information on the meetings described above can be obtained by sending me 2 SAEs as soon as possible and, if you intend to come to a meeting, I should be grateful if you could let me know about 10 days beforehand (tel: 01703 864336). Once again I am grateful to those people who make the visits possible and I look forward to seeing you at one or more of the above meetings.

*Phil Joyner*

### **Welcome to M. Letellier!**

My apologies to Monsieur Letellier who joined the Society in November 1995 but I failed to include him in either the 1996 or the 1997 New Members List. His address is as follows:- LETELLIER MR J, 32 Rue de la Rhélie, 27310 Saint-Ouen-de-Thouberville, France. Administrator



## USEFUL ADDRESSES

- Chairman** *Policy matters, major events etc.*  
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- Treasurer** Mr. A. Hall, 10, Upper Green, Nanpantan, Loughborough, Leicestershire.  
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- Registrar** *Naming of heathers*  
 Mr. A.W. Jones, Otters' Court, Back Street, West Camel, Yeovil,  
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- Slide Librarian** *Hire of slides*  
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- Technical Committee** *Any queries regarding culture of heathers*  
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- Steering Committee** *Suggestions for improving the Society, publications, etc.*  
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- Group Organisers** *(Remember, you will be very welcome at any local meeting or visit!)*
- North East** Mrs. D. M. Warner, Littlcroft, Click-em-in, Ponteland, Newcastle-upon-  
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