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Newsletter September 2025

Dear Member

Welcome to the RCMG newsletter. Write to us [here](#) with your news for the next edition, October. We start this month by celebrating Rhododendron Subgenus Vireya with two plants coming from the Pukeiti Rhododendron Garden, Taranaki, New Zealand

Plant of the month - Rhododendron himantodes & tuba



Rhododendron himantodes is a wonderfully unique vireya rhododendron native to the mountains of Borneo. It forms a dense bush with narrow, needle-like foliage and produces dozens of delicate white flowers with deep-red stamens. The buds, flowers and stems are covered in tiny golden-brown scales - in its natural habitat this acts like a sunscreen, protecting the plant from harsh sun, but it also adds to the overall striking impression of the flowers and foliage. This plant was wild-collected in Borneo and thrives in the Vireya Walk at Pukeiti.

Rhododendron tuba is in full bloom at Pukeiti now (16/09/2025). This vireya rhododendron grows naturally in mountainous areas of Papua New Guinea and produces masses of pink and white trumpet-shaped flowers with a sweet scent. A

Only species with strong, upright growth and attractive elliptic foliage, this plant is lovely at any time of year, but it is breathtaking when flowering. The covered Vireya

Walk provides the perfect spot to view this spectacular display at eye-level from the ground, or to get a bird's eye view from the raised walkway.

The Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust was founded in 1951, originally purchasing a block of land on a saddle between Taranaki Maunga and the Kaitake Ranges to establish a garden of international importance and grow a world-class collection of rhododendrons in New Zealand's unique temperate rainforest. Thank you Kate Chibnall of the Pukeiti Rhododendron Trust for the images and descriptions. If you would like to view more of the collection at Pukeiti find it [here](#)

Rhododendron williamsianum

a new population discovered on Wawushan, Sichuan

Seamus O'Brien





Rhododendron williamsianum is an enigmatic species first found by E. H. Wilson (*W.* 1350) forming thickets on a cliff on Washan, western Sichuan, in June 1908. When the species was described by Wilson and Alfred Rehder five years later, they dedicated it to John Charles (J. C.) Williams (1861-1939) of Caerhays Castle, in Cornwall, the first 'amateur' to appreciate the horticultural value of the rhododendrons of western China, a fair appreciation of one of the greatest plantsmen of the early 20th century.

In his original description Wilson stated it was rare; it was later found as a small population on nearby Emei Shan (Mount Omei) by Chinese botanists and is also recorded in western Guixhou and the borders of south-east Tibet and north-west Yunnan. The species is currently red listed by the IUCN as Vulnerable, meaning that it faces a high risk of extinction in the wild unless the circumstances threatening its survival and reproduction are improved.

Last June, I led a group (including several RCMG members) to western Sichuan. We had just climbed Emei Shan, where, from the summit, we spotted the flat-topped Washan, where Wilson had made his discovery in 1908. Also on the horizon lay its sister mountain, Wawushan, another flat-topped massif that was to be our next port of call.

On our approach, Wawushan resembled a scene from a science fiction movie with mile-high waterfalls falling sheer from the summit. Wilson also visited this mountain in 1908, but found it heavily deforested, the same forests were allowed to regenerate since then and we botanised through an immensely rich flora.

On the summit we were thrilled to stumble upon a statue of E. H. Wilson, applauding his pioneering work in China and it was good to see that he is appreciated there. *Rhododendron* species abounded, many were in bloom. We had trekked for 15 minutes past Wilson's statue when we reached a viewpoint on the edge of a cliff and stupendous waterfall, where I looked down and spotted a flash of rose-pink on the cliff face immediately beside the waterfall.

Two of my travelling companions, Mark Bobin from Minterne Gardens in Dorset and Ned Lomax from Bodnant in Wales, were able to zoom in on the plant with their camera lenses and it was impossible to disguise our excitement when we realised that we were looking at *Rhododendron williamsianum*, in full glorious bloom; a new population of this threatened species.

Like Wilson we found it rare, and in just two colour forms, rose-pink and rose-purple, forming incredibly tight, compact shrubs clinging to the cliff walls and within the spray of a mile-high waterfall, one of those never-to-be-forgotten sights and we later voted it 'plant of the trip'; it was certainly the most exciting of over sixty rhododendron species sighted during our travels.



Thank you to Roy and Lorraine for sharing highlights of their fantastic garden, showcasing many rhododendron, camellia and magnolia in Australia. Read more about their garden [here](#) on edition 129



NEW EVENT FOR 2026

Dunge Valley Gardens invites the RCMG

Dunge Valley Gardens Kettleshulme High Peak SK23 7RF

Wednesday 22nd April 2026 (limited to 15 people) **Cost £15**

The cost includes tea and cake on arrival, guided tour, plant sales (including many rare rhododendrons not widely available) and rhododendron propagation demonstration.

To book, contact either David Ketley direct and pay on line david@dungevalley.co.uk

Or for more information kevinpratt.gardentalks@gmail.com

Please note: You need to book and pay in advance, limited to 15 places.

2025

27 September

South West Branch

Autumn Meeting and AGM

Speaker is John Lanyon former NT Gardens Advisor

Dr. John Marston

southwest@rhodogroup-rhs.org

4 October

North West & North Wales Branch

Talk at Ness Gardens. The Rhododendron Species at Hergest

Croft by Rowan Griffiths

Nick Lightfoot

northwest@rhodogroup-rhs.org

8 October

South East Branch

Visit to Architectural Plants

Philip Eastell

philipeastell@hotmail.co.uk

15 October

New Forest Branch

Talk on Exbury Gardens by Tom Clarke

Emma Page

emma.page@lepe.org.uk

📍 Join us for the New Forest branch of the RHS

Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group Annual Lecture

EXBURY - THE FIRST 100 YEARS

🌳 The challenges of managing a historic woodland garden in an ever changing climate by Exbury Head Gardener, Tom

Clarke

The Hazel Room

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Jermyns Lane, Romsey SO51 0QA

Emma Page

emma.page@lepe.org.uk

27/28 November

Wessex Branch

Sian Thomas

Autumn Meeting at Ramster Hall Gardens on Japanese plants and walk around a garden wessex@rhodogroup-rhs.org

Our 2025 and 2026 Yearbook and Bulletins

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this newsletter. It is a team effort.

Our editorial team for the Yearbook and Bulletin will send the summer bulletin out soon. The 2025 Yearbook is near completion and will also be sent out soon.

We are now commissioning articles for our 2026 Yearbook and we are asking for contributions. Even if you have been asked before, or have previously mentioned it, please contact us [here](#).



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