VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK & ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

The Oldest Rock and Alpine Gardening club in North America

103rd Year, Newsletter, Number 5

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Next VIRAGS Meeting Tuesday, June 11 6:00 PM

Talk at 7:30

Janice Currie

Botanizing Patagonia

Potluck dinner, open garden Bring a dish to share, chair, plate, cutlery, and cup.

VIRAGS is a club for plant lovers with special interest in alpine, bog and woodland plants.

VIRAGS in-person/Teams meetings are at 7:30 on the second Tuesday of the month from March to November at Lambrick Park Church, 1780 Feltham

Notes from the Executive

Our June meeting will be a **Pot-Luck dinner** in Janice's garden (840 Sayward Rd.). Come after **6 pm** to see a **stunning alpine garden**, share an ***al fresco* pot-luck dinner**, and hear about **Janice's trip to South America**. All you need is an appetizer, a main, or a dessert. Bring a chair, plate, cutlery, and cup.

The Propagation Group will be **potting up seedlings** at Robert and Elizabeth's 19 June-7pm (2926 Tudor). We could always use extra hands!

Field trip to the Olympic Mountains. This event was very popular last year. We are working on dates in July for a **ride share, one day trip to Obstruction Point**. Details will be promulgated by email in June.

The **open gardens** this year were well attended. VIRAGS thanks **Brian Rowe/Glenna Duguid, Leda Bower, Louise Potvin, Carol Dancer, and Paul Spriggs** for welcoming members into their gardens. We will have open gardens again next year, some in April to catch early spring plants!

GARDEN IN THE PARK

SPRING CLEAN-UP AND PLANTING

JUNE 8TH 10 -12 AM

Come and help get the garden in top shape for the coming season. Shrubs need trimming, damaged plants need some attention, debris from the winter winds and weeds must be removed. Bring your secateurs, your trowel and your garden gloves! There will be new plants for the crevice garden that need placement.

There is parking by the Petting Zoo and at the Cricket grounds. It is only a short walk from these lots to the GITP which is located on the north side of Goodacre Lake where it meets Arbutus Way.

VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK AND ALPINE
GARDEN SOCIETY PRESENTS

BOTANIZING PATAGONIA

WITH JANICE CURRIE

Janice Currie, avid alpine garden enthusiast and long time club member, has spent years cultivating her passion for alpines and plants alike. Through her journey, she has been drawn to the unparalleled beauty and rich biodiversity of Patagonia. Join Janice for her captivating talk on the flora of the region at this year's VIRAGS potluck party, held at Janice's home. Please dress for the weather.

7:30 JUNE 11
@ THE HOME OF JANICE CURRIE
840 SAYWARD RD
VICTORIA BC
ZOOM LINK VIA EMAIL

Open Garden and Potluck at 6:00 PM - Talk at 7:30 PM

For info visit www.virags.com
Facebook- @vancouver island rock and alpine garden society
Instagram- @virags_pics

VIRAGS, 3930 St. Peter's Road, Victoria, BC V8P 2J8

@VIRAGS – President's Blog

Although the spring show was generally considered a success, some attending the show were disappointed with the range of plants available for sale. In particular, they noted that there were relatively few true alpine plants. For some, this was their principal reason to attend the show.

Alpine and rock garden plants are difficult to obtain and even the best stocked garden centers have a meagre selection of these plants. One of the objectives of VIRAGS is to try to make available plants for people interested in alpine and rock gardening Each year the Propagation Group has a seeding event in which we plant scores of different species and then pot-on the seedlings to produce plants for the Spring Show and Sale. This past year we had unusually cold weather in January and of the nearly 1000 seedlings we had only about 1/3 survived. To enhance the availability of plants for the annual sale, the Propagation Group propose to scale up our cuttings efforts with the aim of producing a large number of rooted cuttings that we can grow on. We would also like to hold back some of the seedlings and cuttings to produce more substantial plants, which seems to be what people want.

We encourage all members to propagate, with seeds and cuttings and make extra plants available for others. One very good way to do this is through the Spring Show and sale, or the members sale in September. It is not trivial for amateur gardeners to produce large numbers of sale-worthy plants without the advantage of commercial facilities and adequate greenhouses. However, making alpine and rock garden plants available to the public is one of means by which we encourage rock and alpine gardening.

Spring Ephemerals in North Saanich

- *Colin Tamboline*

This year, over the three or four weeks from late March to mid-April, in my neck of the woods (North Saanich) we were treated to a magnificent display of the harbingers of spring. *Primula (Dodecatheon) hendersonii* – the round leaved shooting star, and *Erythronium oregonum* – dog-tooth violet or Easter lily, are always the start of spring for me, and this year they were particularly exuberant. Perhaps the moisture levels were just right at just the right time, or perhaps the cold snap in January stimulated them, but whatever the cause, the effect was magnificent. I am very fortunate to have both of these delightful plants growing wild on my one-acre property, and also in the woodland all around us. Over the years of tramping these hills I have discovered many rich groupings of these plants, and as I watch them emerge at home. I start my rounds of walks through the woods to see how all the other patches (populations?) are faring. I have never seen so many double and triple flowers on *E. oregonum* as I did this year.

I like to play Johnny Appleseed with seeds from these two plants, and I find they are quite happy to grow in the right conditions in nature, and very happy in the tended garden. While they are adapted to dry summer conditions, if they have open, quickly draining soil I find they will tolerate summer watering.

Whenever I am digging rock out to plant a tree on my property, I inevitably find *E. oregonum* bulbs deep in the cracks between sandstone blocks, in a black organic soil that has sifted down there over the decades. They will transplant to the garden easily, preferring a shady position, planted quite deep in the soil, plus or minus rocks. When planting seed, I just broadcast it on the soil in early fall.

Primula hendersonii is almost the opposite in some ways, as the octopus-like root can be quite shallow, often only a centimeter or two below the surface. They also like richer organic soils, but for *P. hendersonii* it has to be well drained. Frequently I find this plant growing through a layer of moss which also helps prevent desiccation in the summer. I have had good luck transplanting them, ideally in fall or winter, using the seed stalks as a marker for where to dig to lift them. They will take (and may prefer) more sun than the erythroniums but do fine in partial or light shade. When planting seed, I just broadcast it over the soil patch where I want them, in early fall.

This year's bloom of my favourite spring ephemerals, *Primula hendersonii* and *Erythronium oregonum*, produced an abundance of multi-flower stems.

Miscellaneous News and Announcements

- A member of VIRAGS suggested this story about rosy saxifrage in Wales would be of interest https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjkkm4re518o

Plant Explorations

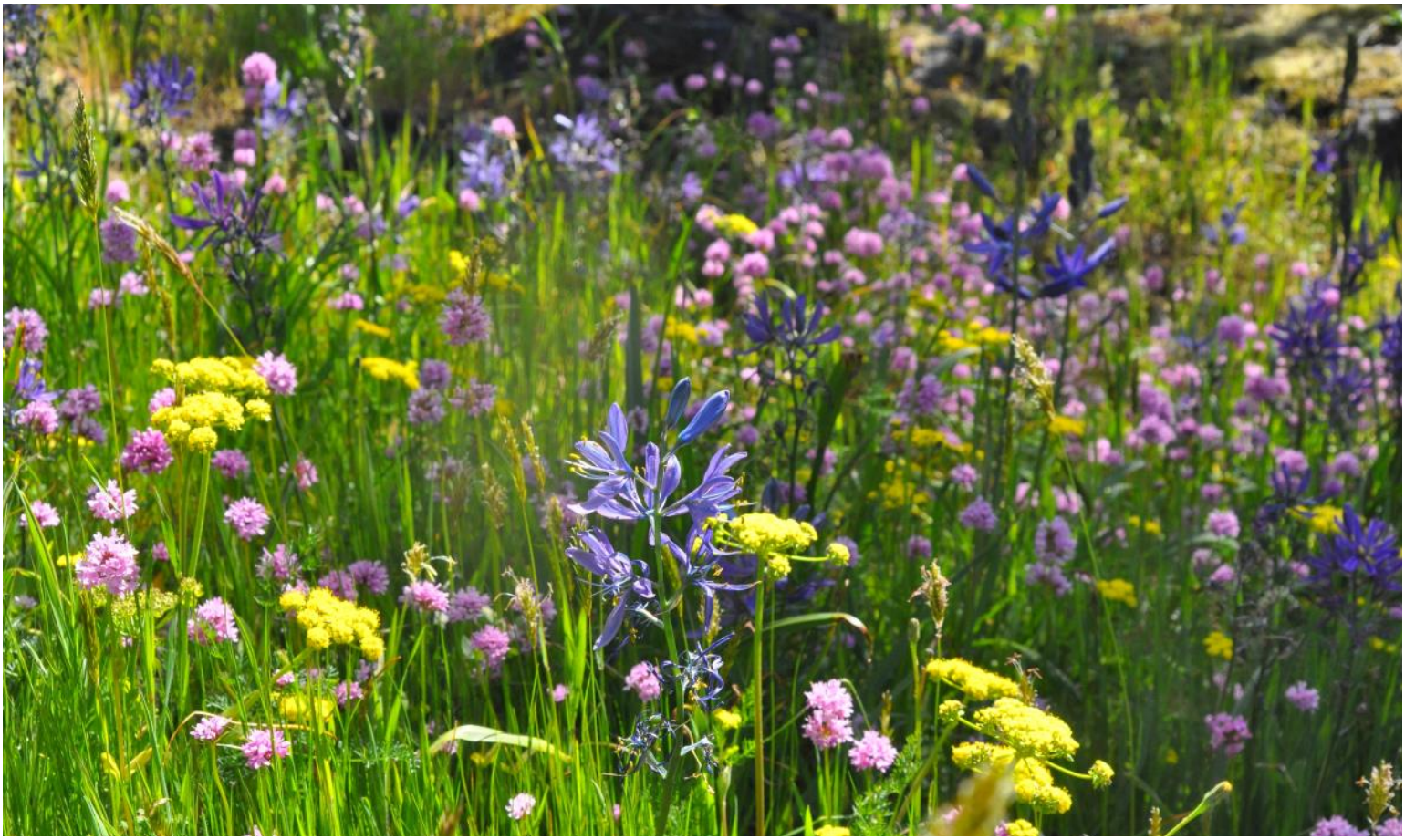
- *Robert Burke and Elizabeth Grant*

The famous plant hunters in the 1800's and early 1900's were motivated by the potential to make money from plants new to Europeans. Rubber trees (*Nevea brasiliensis*) or tea (*Camellia sinensis*) are examples of plants that created industries and great wealth, but often plants brought into cultivation as garden plants also paid dividends. Plant hunters risked their lives and endured prolonged deprivations to find and propagate potential new garden plants. There are others who seek plants growing in wild places for the sole reason of seeing them – these are plant explorers. Many of our monthly speakers are plant explorers who travel to find plants and many members of VIRAGS have similar inclinations. Finding a new, or rare plant, thriving in the wild seems to provide the thrill that motivates plant explorers.

Vancouver Island is a wonderful place for plant explorers, and we are fortunate to have easy access to stunning displays of wildflowers. Spring is a special time for seeing wildflowers here, so we hike as often as possible. We usually go looking for a specific plant. *Calypso bulbosa* is a well-known plant that can be found in moist, mossy areas usually under Douglas fir, on the East coast of Vancouver Island. This year we came across it while looking for the Sooke form of *Primula* (*Dodecatheon*). There is a narrow strip of trees between Gordon's beach and the West Coast Road, where Otter Point Road intersects. We could not find the *Primula*, but *Calypso* was there to make our stop worthwhile. When we went to Stoney Hill, near Maple Bay to see the drifts of *Primula hendersonii* that we know to be there, we were delighted to find abundant *Calypso* on the north side of the hill. We have also found healthy populations on the north sides of Mount Manual Quimper, Mt. Finlayson, and Horth Hill.

The Lewis J. Clark trail in Thetis Lake park is a gem that never fails to provide us with a surprise. In late April we set out hoping to catch the last of their early spring blooms. We were not disappointed as *Primula hendersonii* and *Olsynium douglasii* were just finishing blooming, within 100 meters of the parking lot. The trail is not difficult and clearly marked as it climbs past an old reservoir and up to a more open Garry oak meadow. The *Primula* were constant companions on the walk, but we were happy to find lots of *Valeriana congesta* (Sea Blush), *Lomatium utriculatum* (Spring gold, *below left*), some early blooms of *Camassia quamash* (Camas), and a couple of *Fritillaria affinis* on display right beside the path. A couple of less abundant plants provided the excitement for the trip. A *Lupinus bicolor*, the miniature lupine, grew happily in the meadow. In a couple of places, we spotted a leafless single stem with a two-lipped, tubular, purple flower with a yellow throat in a large patch of *Sedum*. *Orobanche uniflora*, is a leafless, parasitic annual that taps nutrients from several species including *Sedum*. The tiny blossom seems impossible, given its complex natural history and all that must happen for it to persist (*below right*).

Our short trips into close by wild areas on Vancouver Island are not in the same league as the trips taken by many plant explorers. However, seeing plants, even plants you have in your own garden, in natural settings is rewarding.



Vancouver Island is a wonderful place for plant explorers, and we are fortunate to have easy access to stunning displays of wildflowers. Often mixtures of colours and types appear to have been planted.

John Veillette and **Pat Gordon** received a thank you card and a gift certificate from VIRAGS for their years of volunteer work. Pat continues to help with memberships, and they both understand how doing little things, like making coffee for meetings, picking up a roll of raffle tickets from a thrift store or securing coffee mugs for a new meeting venue are what keeps our community strong.

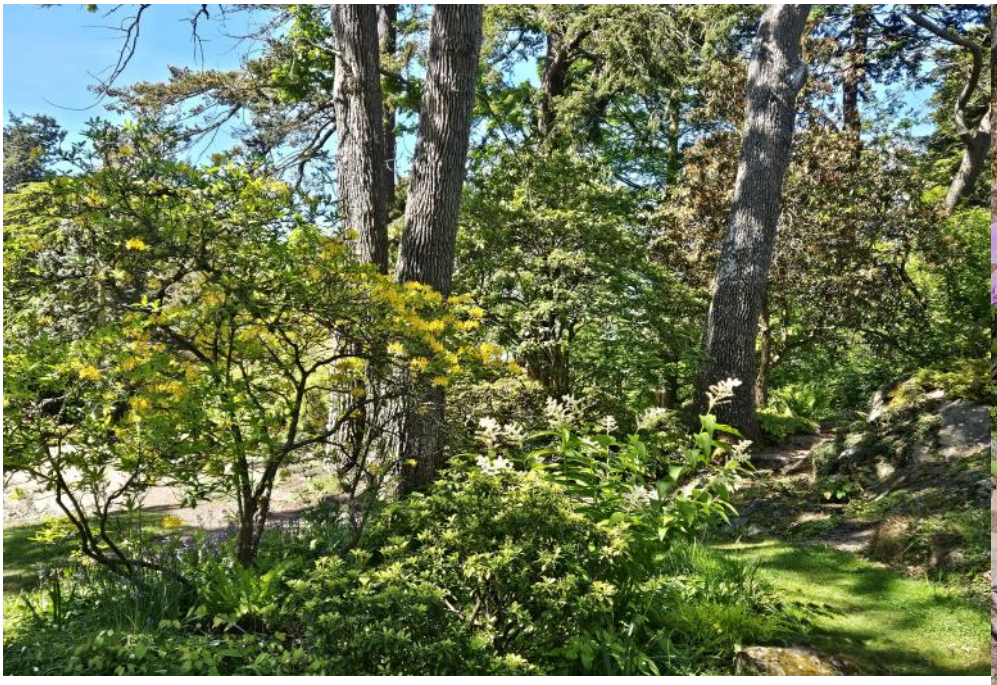
Parlour Show Awards

Paul Spriggs was awarded the VIRAGS Parlour Show Awards at our May monthly meeting. The "**Vern Ahier**" award is won by the member with the year's highest aggregate score and the "**Albert de Mezey**" award is given for the year's highest average score. The Parlour Show is a venue to show interesting and unusual plants-look for something to bring to a monthly meeting!.

Garden in the Park—update:

The hot, dry weather in early May was unprecedented, so the latest rains have been welcomed. Cuttings and divisions from plants removed from the old crevice garden are getting established and some have bloomed. Paul Spriggs came by earlier this month and brought some *Armeria* – thanks Paul! They will bloom next year. Louise and I scattered seeds of Paul's Easy 10 and there are tiny plants starting to appear so again, we are happy to see the rain. The crevice garden needs more plants so if you have a sun-loving, crevice-growing seedling or plant, please consider donating it to the Garden In The Park. You can call Louise or me to arrange delivery.

With only 2 regular volunteers and another every two weeks, it is difficult to get ahead during the spring and fall seasons. This little Gem In The Park is visited frequently throughout the year and regularly hear thanks and appreciation from locals and tourists. On **Saturday, June 8th** we are asking for your help to trim the heathers and shrubs, remove grass, weeds and winter debris, and plant the crevice garden. It would bring the garden into good shape for the summer and make such a difference to our ongoing ability to maintain the garden. More information is available in this newsletter. Please help us out by volunteering just 2 hours of your day!



Spring at the Garden in the Park. The *Oxalis* was planted in the fall and looks good already. The transition area from the new crevice garden to the exposed bedrock has recently been re-planted.

June

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
26	27	28	29	30	31	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 **GITP-Work Party**
9	10	11 Pot-luck Meeting See Poster!	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19 Propagation Group 6 PM 2926 Tudor Ave	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1 • Canada Day	2	3	4	5	6