

# MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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A Publication of the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American  
Rhododendron Society

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## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

May 12-15, 2006	Joint Convention of ARS & ASA Rockville, MD (District 9 is sponsor.)
Nov 3-5, 2006	Ramada Inn, Virginia Beach, VA

### Rhododendron Web Site Addresses:

American Rhododendron Society <http://www.rhododendron.org/>  
MAC Website <http://www.macars.org/>  
U VA Science & Engineering Libraries <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/science/guides/s-rhodo.htm>  
U VA Special Collections <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/>  
Henry Skinner Website (\*NEW\*) <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/collections/projects/rhodo/skinner/>

### MAC MEETING - MAY 12-15, 2006 ARS/ASA CONVENTION IN ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

**MAC will not be having a separate Spring Meeting this year, but will be participating in the big Joint Convention!** Don Hyatt has been busy for many months organizing this meeting. George McLellan and Jim Brant have been attending the organizational meetings on behalf of MAC. **Volunteers are still needed to help with the meeting, especially for moving plants for the plant sale into the building and the photo contest.** Please contact Jim Brant to volunteer to help.

The Convention Insert is in the winter issue of the *Journal* which you should have received by now. Registration deadline is April 1, 2006. Don Hyatt has information about the convention online at: <http://arspvc.org/2006/index.html>.

All the talks look interesting, but one that should be of special interest to MAC members is

Dr. Hartwig Schepker's Saturday evening talk. He went up Gregory Bald with the MAC Species Study Group and his film crew making a movie for the Rhododendronpark in Bremen, Germany. See you in Rockville!

### IS THERE A GARDEN AFTER ISABEL? by Debby Sauer

The arrival of September will mark the two year anniversary of Hurricane Isabel that brought so many changes to many of our gardens in central and coastal Virginia. Pre-Isabel, the acronym "MAC" meant Middle Atlantic Chapter, but soon after "she" blew through our place, it changed to mean "Maculloch", and the name "Big MAC" refers to the one with the 24 inch blade. The chain saw assumed a new role in our daily life. We couldn't count the number of trees down simply because they fell in groups, stacked on each other and we were unable to scramble through them to get to all the areas of the garden for an accurate

count. A rough estimate would be about 150 or more just in the planted areas, on the road and around the house - two of them ON the roof. Fortunately, the damage was to the overhang and not a direct hit on the main roof. After the loggers left, the rest of the clean-up fell to Steve and me, Steve being our neighbor and friend who wields the Big MAC. After a conservative estimate of a year and a half, we finally removed all of the wood, sticks, branches and dead plant material that remained. There have been changes in our garden and the way we maintain it. A few noteworthy observations:



*Sun + Rain = WEEDS*<sup>2</sup>. For gardeners,  $E = mc^2$  is *not* the most familiar equation. This is obvious to those of you with sunny, perennial gardens, but we had a shady, woodland garden with a canopy of pine and oak. We now have several areas that are virtually treeless and it was a quite a shock to return from California last summer and find the place shoulder-high and higher with milkweed and pokeberry. The first change was to backfill the deep ruts from the skidders and then mulch the walking paths with hardwood chips. We use *Roundup* before the weedy devils get too tall in the early summer. (Lesson 1.)



*The Comeback Kids*. It was truly amazing to see 20 - 30 year old rhodies and azaleas return to life after being cut to the ground. *Rhododendron* "Caroline" was reduced from 12-15 feet down to 6 inches after an oak hit it dead on.. *Rhododendron* 'Van Ness Sensation', about 14', was literally cut in half by a falling pine or two. When spring arrived, we noticed that new leaves were forming on the hard wood near the base of the plant. R. 'Lem's Monarch' has doubled its width due to extensive ground layering activity. The plant measures about 4' by 15' instead of the other way around. When plants have a large, 20+ year root base, they can take some hard pruning by Mother Nature and still survive, sometimes showing more vigorous and lush growth. Unfortunately, the Satsuki beds were heavily damaged when the loggers rolled over the plants to get the fallen trees. This area was one of the few that was not badly damaged by the storm and suffered mainly from the clean-up crews. We have duplicates of most of the plants and since the plants are about 30+ years old, we think the plants will form new growth and we do not expect many losses.

*Chez Sauer's Café in the Woods*. Here come the deer, rabbits, turkeys, foxes, raccoons and possums to get whatever seeds and green things they could find. We rarely saw even a single deer during a calendar year before Isabel. Now with less vegetation in the woods, when the drought arrives so do the animals. It is not unusual to part the curtains in the early AM and see a deer rump at the upper pond, not 5 feet away! The hostas, daylilies, ginger, astilbes, and some of the azaleas have been chewed to the ground. Give us a break!

We haven't figured out how to close the cafeteria doors yet. Perhaps a sign "We reserve the right to refuse service" should be stapled to the plants.....

Mother (Nature) Knows Best. Shortly after Isabel, David mentioned to me (in low, discreet



tones) that the garden would be much more beautiful with heavier blooms because of the increase in the light level. The phrase "a more flexible" garden was also introduced into the conversation at a later date. And, in fact, that has come to pass. One star of the garden this year was Dexter's "Pink Satin" which was literally dripping blooms, the result of more light and plentiful rain. The water lilies now form buds that actually OPEN. We can see the golden tips on the Chamaecyparis "Lemon Threads" in response to the light level and the Rosea 'Betty Pryor' no longer leans to get light. Down by the lower pond, I noticed a gigantic clump of columbine - must have planted it last year - but it didn't thrive until this year. The lovely, cool moss no longer grows at the edge of the lower pond, since it now receives full sun most of the day. I don't work in the blazing sun areas when the heat index is 102° - I seek the shade or work indoors. Things are finally returning to a routine and I can have some fun with the pruning and shaping of the plants. Would I ever prune the plants to the hard wood? Or take them down to the trunk? NEVER. But sometimes, when Mom Nature steps in with a heavy hand, she may know a little more about gardening than we do.

## FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC by Jane McKay



I've long been striving for an attractive winter garden and feel I'm pretty close. We love our rhododendrons and they are wonderful in the winter garden except when the temperature

drops below freezing. Evergreen azalea foliage can also be attractive according to variety. The white, light pink and coral flowered plants usually have yellowish green foliage whereas the darker flowered azaleas have leaves that approach burgundy. Evergreen hollies are great and the heavily berried deciduous hollies are outstanding. In our garden we have native *Ilex verticillata*, I. 'Winter Red' 'Winter Gold' and 'Sparkleberry'. Aucubas add some 'pop' to the



landscape, or 'bling' to use the latest decorators term. Boxwood, conifers and viburnums all add some variation in color and texture. As for flowers pansies and the little violas are wonderful. In late winter up pop snowdrops (I'm already seeing foliage), early crocus and hellebores. *Hamamelis* 'Arnold Promise' blooms here in late February or early March; 'Pallida' blooms a bit earlier. My all time favorite plants are *Pieris*. *P.* 'Little Heath' is variegated and appears grayish in the distance. *P.* 'Dorothy

Wycoff' has pink variegation in the foliage and the flower buds are deeper pink. The best *Pieris*, in my opinion (but this could change) is *P. 'Valley Fire'*. The flower buds now (January) are long racemes of pinkish orange, the colors will slightly change until they bloom white in the Spring.

I'm sure I've forgotten a few other plants, and I'm sure you have some favorites, lets here about them. If I can write an article so can you.

### **JIM BRANT'S SPECIES STUDY GROUP AERIAL PHOTO PRESENTATION TO PARK SERVICE** by Jim Brant

After three years of climbing Gregory Bald in the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, in search of a clear day when the azaleas were in their peak bloom, we finally on June 25, 2005 took "the picture". It was a great day when we got the call that between 11:05 and 11:14 a.m. that the shot was taken. Relief went through the MAC species group that it was done.

We now have our negatives from which to choose our picture. I rushed back down to Alcoa, Tennessee to the offices of Continental Aerial Surveys and with their help was able to pick out the outstanding negative. The next step was to get a 40" x 30" picture made and we were also able to get two CDs made, one of the entire bald and one with the bald broken down into eight sections. This made it possible to zoom into a section and see all the individual plants.

Without the help of the Smoky Mountain National Park Service personnel this picture would not have been possible. Therefore on November 29, 2005, the MAC species group sent me to present a 40" x 30" framed picture to the Superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountain's National Park Service, Mr. Dale Ditmanson. They propose hanging this picture in the Visitors Center at Sugarlands. This location is right outside Gatlinburg, Tennessee, at park headquarters.

On hand for the unveiling of this picture was Krystal Johnson and her crew. These people

since 1989 have been trying to restore Gregory Bald to its original size. There were also a large number of Park Service Rangers there. I was also happy to see Herb Raser and his wife at the ceremony. This couple throughout the project would give us vital information concerning the weather and peak bloom time. Also in attendance were civilians like our MAC group who were interested in the preservation of Gregory Bald and the rest of the Great Smoky Mountains.

After presenting the picture I gave a Power Point show on the trek up the mountain showing beautiful mountain scenery and a large number of azaleas. These azaleas were put in different categories to show the diversity of colors on the Bald. This presentation was prepared by Don Hyatt. It became readily apparent to me during this presentation because of all the "Oohs" and "Aahs" that everyone was enjoying the show! The comment that I heard most often was..."I didn't know that there was such a large variety of colors on Gregory Bald".

The Park Service then thanked MAC for such a



useful educational and scientific tool. They are sure many people will benefit from seeing this picture and realizing what a treasure we have in Gregory Bald.



Jim Brant giving presentation about Gregory Bald aerial photo to National Park Service personnel at Sugarland's headquarters.



National Park Service personnel and guests from other interested organizations watch Jim Brant's presentation about Gregory Bald aerial photo from MAC.

## **LAST NORFOLK BOTANICAL GARDEN PLANTER IN ORIGINAL WORK FORCE DIES**

In the late 1930s and early 1940s under the WPA program during the Great Depression, 200 African American women and 20 African American men were hired to clear and plant 30 acres around Mirror Lake in Norfolk to create an azalea garden. Some of the azaleas they planted in the cleared area are still alive today. Edna Joyce was the last survivor of the group of workers. She passed away January 6, 2006. The Norfolk Botanical Garden will be 70 years old in 2008. (Information from January 14, 2006 *Daily Press*.)

## **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

Phyllis Rittman, Fairfax, VA

Marcus Simpson, Advance, NC

Judi Tonti, Free Union, VA

## **DIGITAL ATLAS OF VIRGINIA FLORA**

Virginia Tech has the Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora online. Then web site is:

[http://www.biol.vt.edu/digital\\_atlas/](http://www.biol.vt.edu/digital_atlas/)

You can put in a search term such as Rhododendron and a list of the species found in Virginia will appear. Of course the web site is not limited to Rhododendron and you can find most of the plants found endemic to Virginia there.

## **MAC BOARD MEETING**

The MAC board met at the Gordon Library in Charlottesville on January 28<sup>th</sup>. Many items of routine business were discussed as well as the new items outlined below.

Theresa Brents was seeking input for book titles from Timber Press to order for the May 12-15, 2006 convention. She is in charge of book sales for the convention.

Doug Jolley will be in charge of the photo contest for the May 12-15 convention.

Web master Dave Banks has been upgrading our MACARS.org web site and was seeking more material for it. The web site itself is now searchable with a Google search button on it.

Billy Constable is the new Plants for Members Chairman and is being assisted with propagation by Dr. Jay Gillenwater. They have started with a group of 500 rhododendron cuttings from the garden of Paul James.

Sharon Horn discussed her plans for the MAC booth at the Maymont garden show.

Jim Brant told about our application for a grant from the ARS Endowment Fund to purchase a brush cutting machine for the National Park Service to help with maintenance of Gregory Bald.

Our Fall Meeting November 3-5, 2006 will be in Virginia Beach where we will have really good room rates since it is off season. This should make a very nice get-away meeting.

Don Hyatt gave an extensive report about the May 12-15 Annual Convention in Rockville, Maryland. Don still needs volunteers.



MAC board members. Photo by S. McDonald.



Sharon Horn and Billy & Bill Constable.  
Photo by S. McDonald.



Doug Jolley, Sybil Przystek, and Jim Brant.  
Photo by S. McDonald.

**GARDENS OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS** - New members are encouraged to visit members' gardens in their area. The officers and board members have agreed to show new members through their gardens if the member will call ahead and arrange a convenient time. Telephone numbers and towns are listed below.

Annual membership dues are \$35 per year.

Miscellaneous inquiries may be sent to the editor (address below) for forwarding to proper individual.

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