

RHS Bursaries funding given for plant hunting trips



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BURSARIES

Newsletter



Rambling for *Rubus* - a botanical study trip to China

In June 2007 Barry Clarke, a Propagator and Nursery Manager at Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Hampshire, undertook a study trip to Guangxi and Hunan in China to search for new *Rubus* species and to research the main ethnobotanical uses for some of the fruits, their uses as an edible crop and as a form of herbal medicine. He was awarded a *Blaxall Valentine* bursary award in May 2007 for this study trip. This was a follow up trip to one undertaken in 2005, when he had been invited to take part in a field trip to several locations in southern China accompanying a professor from the Southern Chinese Institute of Botany in Guilin.

Two hours into their journey, during a break at a small village not far from the Guangxi/Hunan border, the team found the very common *Rubus hunanensis* growing in many locations around the village. Although the fruits were not eaten by these villagers (who regarded the fruits as tasteless) the plants can form huge thickets and many are used to create natural fences between properties. The team was fortunate enough to have had permission to visit the Mangshang reserve – an area of deep valleys filled with lush rain forest, tall sandstone cliffs and a wide diversity of plants. A bright orange fruit growing out of a crevice in the sandstone turned out to be that of *Rubus paucidentatus*.



Rubus paucidentatus

Barry Clarke

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The fruit had an excellent flavour and the guide advised that this species was often picked and made into tarts and fruit breads by the local people who inhabit the reserve. As with brambles the world over, the fruits and foliage are consumed by many creatures such as birds and Phasmids (stick insects), but predation has little effect on the *Rubus* population.



Unidentified *Rubus*

Whereas in Europe native *Rubus* usually fruit mid to late summer, in southern China plants can fruit at almost any time of the year. Twelve species were found growing within a one and a half mile radius, such as *R.reflexus*, *R.paucidentatus*, *R.alceifolius* and a variety of *R.lambertianus* and the slopes of Mount Tengkehia were covered in a huge colony of *R.crassifolius*, a species with round, felty leaves that lie on top of one another.

Several as yet unknown species were found and some plants appeared to be hybrids of several localised species.

After leaving the reserve, the next destination was the city of Nanyue, in the middle of which an area of ancient forest had been preserved as a nature reserve, partly due to the presence of a network of Buddhist temples and other sites of religious importance. Many plants of *R.corchorifolius* were found, some of which were in fruit and others just beginning to flower. This species is used in local herbal medicine and it is possible that the monks had brought it to the area for that reason. Large colonies of *R.sumatranus* and *R.mesogaeus* were seen on the descent of Nanyue Mountain and, in the foothills surrounding the city of Guilin, two further species were found. (One was later identified as a variety of *R.reflexus*, which the local guide knew had orange fruits that were collected and eaten by locals, but the other was unidentified, having long racemes of plump black fruits which were unpalatable when eaten).

The genus is widespread in China and Barry has recognised that there is much confusion in the taxonomy. An example of this is the species *R.setchuenensis*, of which there are many different examples held in both Chinese and European herbaria. His trips to China have inspired him and he hopes to return to find and describe more species and learn more about their importance in herbal medicine and in the Chinese way of life.

Funding to attend conferences

Amongst applications submitted to the RHS Bursaries Committee, those relevant to horticultural and botanical conferences are looked on favourably as deserving of financial support. For an application to be considered, it is necessary to provide a copy of the conference programme in addition to any travel and accommodation costs. As with all bursary awards, a bursary report is mandatory. It is recommended that for attending a conference, a 2-3 page account is appropriate with a personal critique of the programme content and visiting speakers, along with a summary of any relevant information that the applicant considers would be of benefit in the workplace.

Over recent years, funding has been given to many *Professional Gardeners Guild* members to attend the PGG conferences held in association with the *Historic Houses Association*; such as 'Sustainability and the Professional Working Gardener' held at RHS Rosemoor in 2005 and 'Career Challenges for the Professional Working Gardener' held at Pershore College in 2007. These PGG conferences provide a good opportunity to increase personal horticultural knowledge and to share best practice with other working gardeners.



Support is also given to attend specialist conferences such as the 7th International symposium on *Thysanoptera* and *Tospoviruses* in 2005, the Sarawak *Nepenthes* Summit in 2007 and the International Rock Garden Conference held in the Czech Republic in 2007.

The E A Bowles Memorial Award

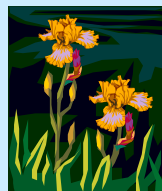
Edward Augustus Bowles, VMH ("Gussie" to his friends) was one of the 20th century's great gardeners. He was born at Myddelton House in Enfield and as a child was a very keen natural historian and gardener. He was an accomplished artist, entomologist, botanist, and an entertaining and knowledgeable writer who travelled widely with many eminent plant hunters of the day. First and foremost his interest was in plants and he leaves many cultivars as his legacy. Crocuses were one of his many passions. Despite the loss of sight from his right eye, countless detailed paintings now held at the RHS Lindley Library are a testimony to his talent as an artist.



E A Bowles (1865-1954)

The *E A Bowles of Myddelton House Society* (EAB Society) is a charitable society set up to further interest in Bowles' life and work and also the conservation of his garden at Myddelton House, which is now owned by the *Lee Valley Regional Park Authority*. The *EAB Society* works closely with the Authority to support the garden, with members sitting on the Garden Advisory Group and supporting the garden through financial donations and by giving practical support as garden volunteers.

In 2004, on the 50th anniversary of the death of E A Bowles, the *EAB Society* launched a fundraising scheme to establish a biennial award to commemorate Bowles' lifelong interest and contribution to education. The aims of the award are to aid a project concentrating on the work of E A Bowles, one of his particular horticultural interests such as bulbs or alpine, his garden at Myddelton House or other relevant related topics such as garden history and design. The award is open to horticultural students and trainees and there are no age restrictions. The award is administered by the RHS and, to date, two awards have been made - one in 2004 to research new collections of Argentinean *Lathyrus* (sweet peas) and one in 2006 to provide part-funding for a study trip to Eastern Turkey to research bulbous plants such as *Fritillaria*, *Crocus*, *Iris* and *Tulipa*.



The next award is due to be made in 2008, pending receipt of suitably themed applications.

For more information about the *E A Bowles of Myddelton House Society*, please see their website:

www.eabowlessociety.org.uk.

Reasons for decline of bursary applications

- Projects that are primarily conservational, botanical or ecological, as opposed to horticultural in nature;
- Projects already underway, or already completed at the date of the Bursaries Committee meeting;
- Projects outside the British Isles submitted by applicants who are *not resident* in the British Isles;
- Applications submitted on incomplete, incorrect or out of date forms;
- Applications relating to salary costs;
- Applications relating to the underwriting or support of commercial enterprises e.g. a book publication.



Chelsea Physic Garden staff attend the 3rd Global Botanic Gardens Congress

In April 2007, two representatives from The Chelsea Physic garden, Christel Lagier and Sarah Hodges, attended the annual Global Botanic Gardens Congress in Wuhan, China. Both received funding from the *RHS Coke Trust Bursary Awards*. As well as attending the congress itself, both Christel and Sarah had the opportunity to visit other botanical gardens in mainland China and Hong Kong.

The themes of the Congress centred upon conservation, sustainability, plant diversity and promoting education and awareness. Both Christel's and Sarah's objectives were to learn about the methods and programmes used by other botanic gardens around the world and to convey this to colleagues at the Chelsea Physic Garden, as well as pursue their own specific horticultural interests - Christel to learn more about hosting carnivorous and succulent plant collections and Sarah to study the range of medicinal plants in other Chinese botanic gardens and how they are displayed and interpreted. The main purpose of this was to improve the current collection of traditional Chinese plants at the Chelsea Physic Garden.



Rumex crispus
(Polygonaceae) from north east China - the roots are used in cancer treatment.

Sarah Hodges



Rhodotypos scandens
(Rosaceae) at the Beijing Botanical Garden - the small black fruit of this plant are said to be beneficial for the general well-being of the kidneys

Sarah Hodges

The Congress offered an excellent opportunity for networking with staff from other botanic gardens and gave both Christel and Sarah an insight into the extent of threats to plant diversity and to the urgency of the conservation work needed. They found it inspiring and motivating to learn of all the successful conservation projects that have been conducted and the efforts that people are making to resolve these issues.

RECENT BURSARY AWARDS

20 applications were received for the November 2007 Bursaries Meeting, for which 16 awards were made totalling **£23,200**.

31 applications were received for the February 2008 Bursaries Meeting, for which 21 awards were made totalling **£19,750**.

Bursary applications: Closing dates 2008/2009

A bursary application should be submitted before one of the following closing dates, to ensure it is eligible for consideration by the RHS Bursaries Committee:

30 June 2008
30 September 2008
15 December 2008
31 March 2009

The completed form should be submitted to:

Secretary of the RHS Bursaries Committee

RHS Garden Wisley

Woking, Surrey, GU23 6QB

Or by e-mail to: bursaries@rhs.org.uk

"The best place to seek God is in a garden. You can dig for him there."

George Bernard Shaw

