

# LILY GROUP Newsletter



AUTUMN 2020



## The Lily Group goes digital

- Join our virtual AGM on 17 October
- LG Bulb Auction, this year by email SEE PAGES 4/5

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The RHS Lily Trial update SEE BACK PAGE

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# Chairman's letter

Jamie Compton

How can one begin to convey the enormity of the global events of the Spring and Summer of the year 2020?

The coronavirus has had and will continue to have a huge impact on us all but as some small recompense for the mental and physical hardships that all of us have had to endure, we all share our deep passion for lilies. I am fortunate, we live in the country in a beautiful part of England where lilies grow if they are tended well. Lockdown therefore has enabled my wife and me to concentrate in an unprecedented way on all matters lily and on the garden as a whole.

Covid-19 and its knock-on effects have not been the only setback this year has heralded. A blisteringly cold spell with damaging night frosts in May was of course followed in June by Saharan temperatures for days on end. The lilies in general have survived all of this quite well with a ready waterer constantly on hand to tend to them.

The RHS Lily Group has also survived reasonably well throughout all this chaos. Under tutelage from my daughter and incentive ably provided by Lily Group Vice-Chair Alisdair Aird and computer whizz-kid George Battle we have had several good working meetings via Zoom. It is via this to me entirely new method of communication that we have been able to conduct business and to arrange our forthcoming bulb auction and AGM. I

hope very much that as many as read this will feel confident to join the auction and place their bids (see pages 4/5). We will keep everyone updated on our possible future visits both at home and abroad as soon as it is deemed safe to do so.

Please do send Pat Huff your spare seeds. As some societies have cancelled their lists this year, ours is even more vital than usual. See <https://rhslilygroup.org/seed-list/>



This summer Jamie flowered two young *Lilium speciosum* var. *gloriosoides*, from a pot of seedlings given to him last year by Mel Herbert. Photograph © Tania Compton



Springtime at Exbury

# Plans for events in 2021

Duncan Coombs

The Covid-19 pandemic sadly meant we had to cancel the April 2020 visits to the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Mottisfont Abbey, and the July guided tour of the Wisley Lily Trial.

**It is too soon to be certain whether organised visits or meetings will be able to take place in 2021. We are working optimistically on the assumption that by the time we publish our next Newsletter, in March 2021, we will be able to provide firm details of spring and summer visits.**

One likely possibility being explored is an April tour of the extensive and beautiful spring gardens of Exbury in Hampshire, perhaps coupled with either the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens or a member's private garden.

For next summer, we have some possibilities in mind already, but would be very glad of your own suggestions for a visit ideally to two gardens—public or better still private—within a 20-minute or so drive of each other, at least one of them with interesting lilies. If you can recommend such a visit, so that we can explore the idea further please

contact me as soon as you can by email please to: [dcoombs@warwickshire.ac.uk](mailto:dcoombs@warwickshire.ac.uk).

Further in the future, we are working on a tour of the wild lilies of the West Coast of the United States, probably focused on a fairly small area of the beautiful wooded country around the border between California and Oregon. We will not press ahead with this until the future of international travel becomes clearer. I'd always be glad too of other ideas for lily trips abroad.

Next autumn we plan to have our AGM face to face, and have already tentatively arranged to hold it at the newly restored Dorothy Clive Garden near Market Drayton, not far from the beautiful Peak District. Although we hope this will be a regular AGM, we plan to build on this year's Zoom experience, so that many more members can 'attend' virtually in addition to those that can come in person.

# Lily Group AGM 2020

Online via Zoom | Saturday 17 October | 11am

This year, because of Covid-19, the Lily Group's AGM is going 'digital' via a virtual meeting, using Zoom (<https://zoom.us/>).

Up to 100 members can attend, so we hope to see many more than usually come in person - wherever in the world you live!

If you would like to attend you will need to **register in advance** by sending your name and email address to: [alisdaira@gmail.com](mailto:alisdaira@gmail.com).

If you are reading the digital version of this Newsletter, **click HERE to register**. We will send you an email a few days before the meeting with details of how to attend, and the password that you will need.

## REGISTER BY 10 OCTOBER

The AGM is limited to 100 members. To secure your place email Alisdair Aird:

[alisdaira@gmail.com](mailto:alisdaira@gmail.com)

<https://www.rhslilygroup.org/2020/09/24/AGM-2020/>

are in different countries, we hope that in October this will give us the chance of 'meeting' many more of you than usual.

## LG Bulb Auction for UK members, this year via email

The Bulb Auction is usually the highlight of our AGMs. This year, because of the continuing risk of Covid-19, that can't happen. So we are holding the 2020 Bulb Auction via email. Always, there are bargains to be had, as well as often surprising rarities. In normal years, as these are snapped up by those attending the AGM in person, we wish that many more members were able to take advantage of the splendid opportunities, and the generosity of the donors. So this year we are delighted that the email version will let far more members join in. The auction, which includes a number of books/journals, is open to all fully paid up UK members. Do take part!

### AGM AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the 2019 meeting
4. Chairman's report
5. Financial report
6. Website and Facebook
7. Lyttel Lily Cup award
8. Any other business

If you haven't yet used Zoom, it's very easy. Before the meeting, download the Zoom software, either by **clicking HERE** (digital readers) or from Apple's App store or the Google Play Store. You can get the hang of how Zoom meetings work by joining Zoom test meetings, using this link: <https://zoom.us/test>.

As Zoom makes it so easy for people to 'meet' without leaving home, even if they

The rare true pale yellow *Lilium leichtlinii*, one of two bulbs in our 2016 auction.



### How to contribute bulbs

To make a real success of this, we hope that as many members as possible will contribute bulbs. As well as lilies, other bulbs and corms are very welcome. Please send them to this address between 12 and 24 October:

George Battle, Oaklands, Gorst Hill, Rock, Kidderminster, DY14 9YR

### How to see what's for sale

We will post a full list of named and numbered lots in the Members' Area on the group's website at: [www.rhslilygroup.org](http://www.rhslilygroup.org). If you haven't already registered as a member on the website, it would be a good idea to register now – it's quick and easy. Late arrival bulbs will be added as 'Stop Press Additions'.

### How to make a bid

Bidding opens at 00:01 on Monday 26 October and closes at 18:00 on Saturday 31 October. To make or increase your bid, send an email clearly stating the book/books or bulb lot with its lot number and the amount of your bid to Mel Herbert ([lindmelve@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lindmelve@yahoo.co.uk)) with, importantly, 'Auction Bid' in the subject

line. You will also need to indicate which are 'primary' bids and which are 'secondary' bids – see 'Limits on bidding' below.

### Limits on bidding

To encourage as many bidders as possible, each member may bid on a maximum of five lots. These are your 'primary' bids. You may then submit up to five 'secondary' bids (labelled as 'Secondary bids' in your email) which will only be activated if there are no primary bids on a given lot. For the sake of fairness, please refrain from 'proxy' bidding on behalf of other members.

### BIDDING OPENS

00:01 MONDAY 26 OCTOBER 2020

### BIDDING CLOSES

18:00 SATURDAY 31 OCTOBER 2020

### Following the bidding

The auction web page will be regularly updated with the highest bid for each lot. We can't provide eBay-style 'live' bidding but will try to update the highest bids frequently. If on the website you see that your initial bid has been topped, you can submit a new bid. On the last day of the auction (31 October), if yours is one of the top three bids for any lot, you will be emailed to give you an opportunity to increase your bid before the auction closes at 18:00.

### Payment and shipping

Shortly after the close of bidding, successful bidders will receive an invoice which will include the costs for postage and packing. **Please pay as soon as you get your invoice.** Bulbs and books will be shipped after receipt of payment.



# Lyttel Lily Cup 2020

Melvyn Herbert and George Battle

Darm Crook's great success in meeting the challenge of lily growing in the north of Canada gains him this accolade.

The Lyttel Lily Cup, first presented in 1939 and not awarded every year, is the RHS's premier award for lily growers.

To be a gardener is, of necessity, to be an optimist. How essential this must be for Darm Crook, who is the Lily Group Committee's unanimous choice for the award this year. He gardens close to the Arctic Circle at around 61° North in Hay River, Canada. He has to cope with a climate which swings between winter extremes of -50 °C (-58 °F) and July temperatures of 33 °C (91 °F) and above. It's in this setting that Darm grows around 48 different lily species, as well as several subspecies and 50 varieties.

Darm's area receives anywhere from 61 cm (24 in) to 122 cm (4 ft) of snow each winter. The snow is light and fluffy and because of a lack of wind at ground level doesn't pack or form a surface crust. By the time real cold weather sets in there is an adequate supply of 'mother nature's white mulch' as Darm describes it. With 61 cm of snow at -40 °C (-40 °F) the soil's surface temperature only drops to about -2 °C (10 °F). Snow cover is almost always in place by the end of October and at that time the soil will usually have only

a crust of frost in its surface. The spring snow melt helps thaw the soil quickly, and gives the bulbs in a raised bed a quick drink to start their seasonal growth. Without raised beds the soil is totally saturated for at least two weeks, but with the lily bulbs in raised beds only the soil below the beds is saturated.

To cope with the short growing season Darm employs a range of strategies and techniques including a 'Baggie' method for germinating seed of species which have delayed germination, and what he has dubbed 'The Potato Nursery' for finishing late-ripening seed. The latter involves cutting the pods with a length of pedicel and inserting them into a potato so that the seeds draw nutrition from it and continue to develop. Using these methods and great growing skills Darm has built a large collection of lily species which not only includes plants renowned for their hardiness, such as around a dozen forms of *Lilium martagon*, but also more tender taxa like *L. sargentiae* and *L. sulphureum*.

A great supporter of the Lily Group, Darm is always willing to share his knowledge and experience, both on an individual basis and by contributing articles to *Lilies and Related*

Opposite page, left, Darm Crook's raised lily beds in Hay River, Canada. Opposite page, right, Darm Crook, with his hybrid *Lilium monadelphum* × *candidum* flowering this summer.

*Plants*. He has also been a contributor to our 'Lilium Species Profiles' and has provided several photographs of his plants for the photo galleries on our website. Many members will have plants in their gardens which have been grown from his regular and generous seed exchange contributions.

When the Lyttel Cup was first presented in 1939 'to someone who has done good work

for the cultivation of *Lilium*' a grower such as Darm would have been the ideal candidate. What he has demonstrated is how to grow lilies so that they thrive in the most extreme conditions. He has contributed significantly to the availability of rare species and forms in cultivation through his skill and generosity in making them available to others. For all of these reasons we owe him our thanks.

## Do you create your own lily hybrids?

No-one knows how many keen hybridisers there are in the Lily Group. Our annual Seed List provides a few clues but there must be many beautiful crosses we never get to see. A new web page featuring photos of hybrids created by our members would be a great place to start showcasing them... a page that may even inspire more of you to share your ideas and successes with other members?

We're really looking for hybrids you've created through hand pollination...rather than through serendipity... though we are always happy to feature an exceptional plant. Please send your photos (see below) via email to George Battle at: [georgehslilygroup@gmail.com](mailto:georgehslilygroup@gmail.com)

- A close-up of your new hybrid
- A photo of the pod parent—the actual plant, not a generic photo
- A photo of the pollen parent—again your particular plant



A yellow *Lilium henryi* hybrid grown by Rimmer de Vries in the USA. Photograph © Rimmer de Vries

### RHS Lily Group

**Jamie Compton, Chairman**

**Alisdair Aird, Vice Chairman**

**Dr Nuala Sterling CBE, Vice Chairman and a Bulb Committee Vice Chair**

**Tony Dixon, Secretary & Pollen co-ordinator**

**Irene Hopton-Scott, Membership Secretary**

**Melvyn Herbert, Editor *Lilies & Related Plants***

**Duncan Coombs, Programme coordinator**

### Honorary Officers and Committee 2019–20

**Pat Huff, Seed List Distribution Manager**

**George Battle, Seed List Compiler and Website Editor**

**EMERITUS**

**Caroline Boisset**

**Chris Brickell CBE VMH (Hon. Member)**

**Harris Howland (Past Chairman)**

**Rose Voelcker**

**OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Chris Clennett, Chris Hind, Richard Hyde,**

**Colin Pope, Madeleine Tinson,**

**Pontus Wallstén**



## The Wisley lily trial—a personal view Alisdair Aird

Later this year, or early next, the RHS will announce the results of its three-year trial, naming those lilies which have won its Award of Garden Merit.

**The trial has been exceptionally severe. I think it's fair to say that, overall, the lilies were planted and grown just as a casual gardener—rather than a lily enthusiast—might plant and grow them.**

So, just as in real life, some may not have been planted at the optimum time; stem-rooting lilies may not have had their perfect planting depth; there was little or no shade, like it or lump it; a mole ran amok among the roots of many lilies, month after month.

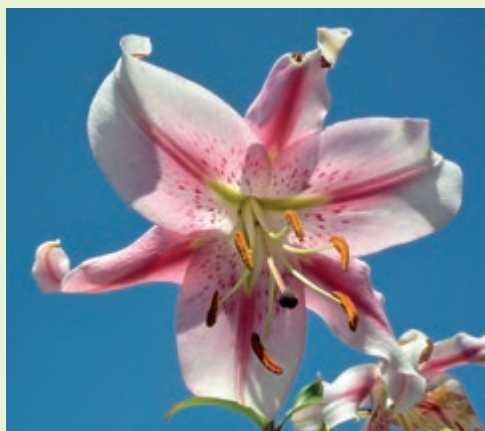
Weather has been particularly testing, with long unusually hot and/or dry spells, some extremely wet and humid conditions just when they're not wanted, and this year record early warmth prompting premature growth followed by sharp mid-May frosts. Botrytis did not seem to be the only disease attacking the plants.

On top of that, in this final decisive year of the trial, Covid-19 added its own extra hurdle to the trial. Wisley went into lockdown, and the entire Trials staff was put on furlough throughout the season. Just four skeleton garden staff did a heroic job of looking after the lilies, along with the many other demanding trials running alongside. The usual programme of fortnightly assessments by a ten-strong panel had to be replaced by fewer visits by just some members, though photos were also circulated.

A proposal to extend this and other trials by a further year, because of this year's hiatus,

was abandoned as the current trials area is now to be redeveloped, with a new trials area in a different part of the gardens. However the first two years of the trial had already established a pretty clear pattern, and this year's ad hoc visits supplemented by photographs will also help the panel's final deliberations (in Zoom virtual meetings) this autumn. The Award decisions will be a matter for the RHS's Bulb Committee.

What is certain is that any lily which emerges from this three-year ordeal with an Award of Garden Merit will not only be very attractive, but can also be guaranteed to be practically bomb-proof. We don't know yet which lilies will be judged worthy of the Award, but the pictures show a few of those which at least caught my own eye—and see front cover.



**Top left**, African Queen Group, raised over 60 years ago—still one of the best in the trial; **top right**, 'Red Velvet', another veteran, increasing strongly during the trial; **above**, 'Anastasia', impressive in scent as well as on sight.