

LILY GROUP Newsletter

SPRING 2021



Awards for lilies
at the RHS Lily Trials
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Introducing our
Newsletter Editor
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2020 Virtual AGM & Bulb Auction
A first for The Lily Group **READ THE REPORT ON PAGES 4-5**

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Chairman's letter

Jamie Compton

Dear liliophiles, since you received my last missive the world has maintained its unpredictable turbulence in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. As I write this, it is near freezing outside and I am grateful that I had the forethought to dress my lily beds recently with well-rotted leaf mould.

During these lockdowns our reliance on various electronic means of communication has increased exponentially. The Lily Group Committee has held all of its meetings in 2020, including the AGM in October, via that now indispensable tool called ZOOM. This to my mind has its benefits. We can share important information while we all sit in front of our computer screens. This enabled Alisdair Aird to show us at the AGM a short



video of Mr Arakawa's remarkable nursery in Hokkaido, Japan. I must mention here that Alisdair has stepped down from his role as Vice Chair of the Group, but has agreed to

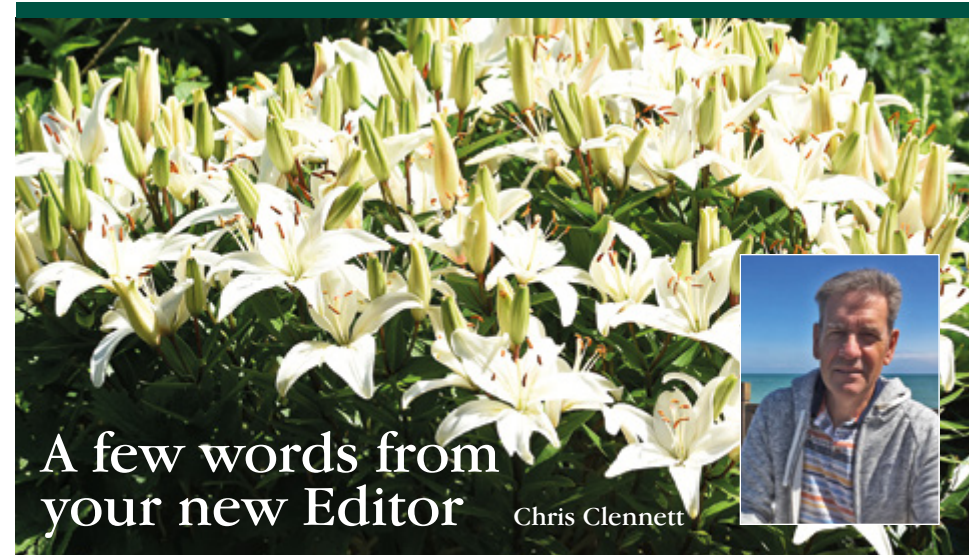
stay on the Committee. I thank him for his invaluable input into our affairs and for his longstanding commitment to the Lily Group. In his stead our Seed List collator George Battle has kindly agreed to become a Vice Chair alongside Nuala Sterling, by unanimous consent. Having known George since I arrived for my second stint on this Committee I can truly say that we are fortunate to have him in this role. I would like to add that aside from the seeds, George and our Lily Year Book editor Mel Herbert did a huge amount of behind the scenes organising to put together a most successful online auction of lily bulbs and lily related matter in October. Thanks must also go here to Duncan Coombes for getting us permission to use the facilities at Pershore College for the storage and packing of the lilies.

My personal thanks also go to Irene Hopton-Scott for taking on the unenviable task of organising our finances alongside her duties as Membership Secretary. Our other Vice Chair and former Chair, Nuala Sterling has been collating all the information she has gleaned from the RHS Lily Trial at Wisley. She will no doubt inform us on the outcome of the Forum's choice of AGMs to be awarded to some of the lilies in that trial in due course.

Finally, as I am in a grateful mood, I must leave you all in the capable hands of our new Newsletter Editor Chris Clennett.

Below, *Lilium* 'Apollo' growing in Chris's garden in Sussex.

Inset, Chris Clennett, the Lily Group's newly appointed Newsletter Editor. Photographs © Chris Clennett



A few words from your new Editor

Chris Clennett

As signs of spring appear, I am delighted to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

I worked as a professional horticulturist and botanist for over 40 years, at Oxford University Botanic Garden and then for 30 years at Kew's country estate at Wakehurst Place in Sussex. During that time, I have grown tropical glasshouse plants, alpine collections, botanical and ornamental garden collections and temperate trees, so a varied array of plants to enthral me. I became interested in bulbs early on, developing an enthusiasm for crocuses, irises and cyclamen. From this, I went on to join the Cyclamen Society, becoming Editor of their Journal for 10 years and studying cyclamen for my MSc at Reading University. So, geophytes always featured in my thoughts. When I came to study for a PhD through Kew and the Open University, the subject of *Erythronium* was proposed. After a near vertical learning curve, to familiarise myself with both the genus and with DNA extraction and sequencing, I did

eventually triumph, being awarded the PhD in 2007. After a further seven-year gestation, my thesis was converted into the Kew Monograph on *Erythronium*.

From my cyclamen studies, I grew to love the flora of the Mediterranean more generally. My wife and I have spent innumerable holidays in Cyprus, with me crawling around in the undergrowth photographing the native flora. I particularly enjoy autumn flowering bulbs from this region, and after many years have finally 'cracked' flowering *Narcissus serotinus* every season.

My lily growing credentials are rather less impressive! At my parent's home near Oxford I grew *Lilium pumilum* quite successfully and at Wakehurst Place I introduced several species. However, at my home I have only managed to grow a single pot of 'Apollo'. Despite being attacked by lily beetle every year, it thrives. I have lily seed sown from the Group exchange, so perhaps before long there will be a wider selection to admire.

The 2020 AGM and Bulb Auction

Saturday 17 October 2020

Tony Dixon

The year 2020 brought great changes to our Annual General Meeting, as it did to many other areas of our lives.

Unable to meet face to face, 17 members from four different countries used the Zoom service to meet on a computer screen without leaving the comfort of our own homes. This enabled members from Canada, Germany and France to join in.

Chairman Jamie Compton reported that although our planned visits had to be cancelled, Zoom enabled us to continue to meet to carry on with committee business. We also developed our online presence, with expansion of the photo gallery area of the website by George Battle and even an online bulb auction (see opposite page).

Membership

Our Membership Secretary, Irene Hopton-Scott, generously agreed to look after our accounts until such time as we are able to find someone to take on the Treasurer's role. She is using the online service Quickbooks to do this, and was able to report a healthy financial situation and also an increase of nine in our membership numbers since last year.

Lily Group Publications

Our publications are in good hands too—*Lilies and Related Plants* editor Mel Herbert already has much of the material for the next issue and Chris Clennett is taking on the editorship of the Newsletter.

Seed Distribution

George Battle reported that the seed distribution had been rather smaller than usual because of unfavourable weather; nevertheless, a number of unusual items had been included and a good range of hybrid seed from active hybridizers in North America.

An invitation to see lilies in Germany

Dr Jürgen Koch from Germany expressed his appreciation for being able to join the meeting and suggested that a visit could be arranged to see our nearest wild lilies growing in their natural habitats in the rye and barley fields of Germany. Watch this space!

2020 Bulb Auction

This year we had to forgo the pleasure of sharing refreshments after the meeting and poring over the bulbs about to be auctioned. However, our innovative online auction was very successful—something we would certainly like to repeat later this year.

Award of the Lyttel Cup

One advantage of holding the AGM by Zoom was that we could welcome Darm Crook from Canada to the meeting—to receive the award of the Lyttel Cup. Darm's achievements in lily growing are outstanding, especially as he grows them further north than almost anyone else. His meticulous record-keeping

Below, *Lilium parvum* var. *hallidayi*. Photograph © Darm Crook



and generosity in sharing his information and knowledge with the wider lily-growing community is much appreciated by many, beginners and experts alike. Darm expressed his thanks and appreciation for the award, mentioning the warmth with which it had been greeted by lily growers throughout North America and elsewhere.

Online Bulb Auction 2021 available to UK members

We will be holding our next Bulb Auction online...but not 'just' because of COVID-19!

Our inaugural online bulb auction held last October was a resounding success. We had three times as many bidders as usual, most of whom had never bid previously. The range of bulbs on offer was superb and included rarely seen species such as the yellow-flushed species *Lilium martagon* var. *flavidum*, the beautiful pink form of *Lilium parvum*, var. *hallidayi* as well as some of the

BIDDING OPENS

00:01 MONDAY 25 OCTOBER 2021

BIDDING CLOSES

18:00 SATURDAY 30 OCTOBER 2021

most cherished hybrids such as 'Lake Tulare' and a wide range of 'North' hybrids.

How to contribute bulbs

As ever, without your donations of bulbs (other bulbs and corms are very welcome), there will be no auction. So the first step is to please, quite literally, dig deep! Bulbs should be sent to me: George Battle, Oaklands, Gorst Hill, Rock, Kidderminster, DY14 9YR

Donations to arrive:

Monday 11 to Saturday 23 October 2021

Bulbs despatched: w/c 3 November 2021

As in 2020, we can only accept bids from Lily Group members living in the UK. Looking forward to your support again this time around!

Below, main image, *Lilium chalcedonicum* growing on Mt. Vermion, NW Greece at around 750 metres.
 Bottom, *Lilium rhodopeum* growing near Livaditis, northwest Greece. Photographs © Alan Mitchell



The Lily Group is looking at how we might become more involved in protecting lilies in the wild. In this article, George Battle asks Lily Group members to contribute to the conversation on this important issue.

The aim is to start by focusing on the species that are native to Europe and in particular those endemic to Bulgaria, Greece and the Balkans: *Lilium albanicum*, *L. jankae*, *L. carniolicum*, *L. chalcedonicum*, and *L. rhodopeum*.

These European species face a number of challenges: colonies have been ploughed up to create arable land; grazing by domestic animals is an important cause of decline; sometimes land is lost to house building, and lily growers can be responsible, too. Rarities such as *Lilium rhodopeum* are under increasing pressure because of unauthorised seed collection. Instead of ripening and being allowed to help regenerate the parent population, such seed appears on internet sites and is bought by avid lily growers.

There are simple but proven interventions



which can help wild populations to thrive and increase. Delaying late summer mowing of wild meadows by two or three weeks can help allow seed to set. Fencing off small areas can prevent cattle or other domestic stock from browsing off the parent plants. Regular monitoring of key areas can prevent loss of important colonies.

The Lily Group is hoping to work with a partner organisation in Greece or Bulgaria, such as the Hellenic Society for Protection of Nature—who are based in Athens (<https://www.eepf.gr/en/>). We will keep you up to date on how we get on with this via the Lily Group Newsletter and the website.

In the meantime, I would ask members to get in touch to offer their thoughts and in particular I would be delighted to hear from any of our members who may have previous experience of plant conservation. You can contact me at: geordiebattle@gmail.com



In memory

Last year we heard of the death of Richard Beal. On the Lily Group Committee he was greatly valued for his calm reflection, kind guidance and quiet common sense, serving as Treasurer from 1998 to 2007. An enthusiastic grower, he had a magnificent stand of *Lilium chalcedonicum* in his Dorking garden. He leaves many fond memories.

RHS Lily Group

Honorary Officers and Committee 2020–21

Jamie Compton, Chairman

George Battle, Vice Chairman, Seed List Compiler and Website Editor

Dr Nuala Sterling CBE, Vice Chairman and member of the Bulb Committee

Tony Dixon, Secretary & Pollen co-ordinator

Irene Hopton-Scott, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Melvyn Herbert, Editor *Lilies & Related Plants*

Chris Clennett, Newsletter Editor

Duncan Coombs, Programme coordinator

Pat Huff, Seed List Distribution Manager

EMERITUS

**Chris Brickell CBE VMH
 Harris Howland (Past Chairman)
 Rose Voelcker**

CORRESPONDING MEMBERS

Keith Baldie, Walter Erhardt, Jürgen Koch

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Alisdair Aird, Caroline Boisset, Colin Pope,
 Madeleine Tinson**

AWARDS FOR LILIES AT THE RHS LILY TRIALS

JAMIE COMPTON

The 2017–2020 trial of lilies at Wisley was fraught with difficulties from the start because of unseasonably cold weather following unseasonably mild weather one year and intense summer heat blasting down on the plants in another.



The exposed Wisley trials ground is not ideal for the cultivation of lilies, which are for the most part woodlanders. The dry sandy soil, albeit enriched with a layer of pine needle mulch, still dried out quickly in the heatwaves in spite of a mechanised watering system.

The nine cultivars that were awarded an Award of Garden Merit for the first time were carefully chosen by the ten Forum members. These included well respected Dutch lily growers and several lily connoisseurs in the UK, chaired by Dr Nuala Sterling (former Chair and now Vice Chair of the RHS Lily Group). These lilies were fully put through their paces climatically and truly deserved their new awards. These were as follows: ‘Red Velvet’, a rich red tiger lily; ‘Yellow Bruse’, a golden yellow recurving lily with chocolate streaks in the centre; ‘Anastasia’, a vigorous recurving pink-spotted orienpet hybrid; ‘Friso’, a large white oriental with dark burgundy centre; ‘Scarlet Delight’, a red recurved petalled orienpet; ‘Brusago’, a dark pink oriental with a white centre; ‘Conca d’Or’, white with butter yellow zoning to the centre; ‘Bandiera’, deep reddish-pink with white margins to the petals and ‘Fusion’ recurving with clear red tips to a brown speckled centre on a yellow ground.

In addition to the nine new recipients, four lily cultivars were given an AGM subject to their commercial availability. These were ‘Gaybird’, a pinkish Marhan type; ‘Gold Class’, golden

yellow with soft brown streaking; ‘Agostini’, clear white upright with pale pink buds (see photo, front cover) and ‘Clearwater’, white flowered upright with green buds.

Three old trumpet lily favourites had their AGMs reconfirmed: **African Queen Group**; **Golden Splendor Group** and **Pink Perfection Group** as well as the more recent but nonetheless stalwart ‘Casa Blanca’. Three species lilies survived the inclement weather and unsuitable conditions on the trials field and were considered to have been tough enough and attractive enough to retain their AGMs. These were: *Lilium henryi*, *L. martagon* and *L. regale*.



Lilium ‘Friso’, one of nine cultivars awarded an AGM for the first time, at the Wisley trial field. Photograph © Chris Clennett