Newsletter No. 1. Autumn 1988

Society for Growing Australian Plants (Europe)

At the meeting held on June 11th.at Kew Gardens it was decided to form a European Region/Study Group of the SGAP. Your Secretary wrote to Australia asking for registration, but up to now has not received a reply. Consequently matters are in limbo.

However not everything is uncertain. One thing that is known is that Kew Gardens will be holding a Seminar to celebrate the Australian Bicentennial. It will be on November 8th. and SGAP members are invited to attend. Details of the programme are enclosed with this newsletter. The fee is not yet known, and members who may be interested in attending are asked to send a stamped addressed envelope to Jeff Irons so that they may be sent the full details as soon as they are available.

The cool wet conditions experienced in July have suited several Antipodean plants. In particular the Scleranthus have mounded up beautifully, and show how useful they are as ground cover plants. Another Australian plant which makes good ground cover is Baeckia gunniana. Several readers will recall the wide spreading mat of it at Kew. I used to think that Grevillea australis was another good ground cover plant, but the 1985-86 winter killed my specimen and put paid to that idea. Do you have any experience of Australian plants as ground cover? If so please pass on your knowledge to others, and let us have a contribution from you for inclusion in the newsletter.

Australian conifers: Brian Halliwell has agreed to write a series of articles on Australian conifers for us. The first of his contributions deals with Microcachrys tetragona, the Creeping Pine, or Alpine Strawberry Pine.

In the family Podocarpaceae Microcachrys tetragona is a monotypic genus endemic to Tasmania, where it occurs on mountain moorlands above 3500' (1100m.). This slow growing conifer, which is sparsely branched often has just a single stem which can reach 3 ft. (0.9m) in length, and is prostrate. The green thickened scale - like leaves overlap and are compressed against the stem, so producing

Today this monotypic genus in the Asteraceae is called Calomeria amaranthoides, from the Greek kalos - beautiful, and meris - part. The earlier name was a reference to Lady Hume, who had plants from seed collected in the vicinity of Port Jackson (New South Wales) and given to her by Sir Joseph Banks. The early cultivation of this Australian native, which is found in New South Wales and Victoria, is described in two books. They are Smith's 'Exotic Botany' and Venenat's 'Le Jardin de la Maison'.

It is often said that germination of Calomeria seed is poor, but in such instances examination will show that most of the husks are empty.Cleaned seed germinates well. Ken Hulme of Liverpool University's Ness Gardens tells a story about an old gardener who threw out some Calomeria seed, then watched it come up 'like mustard and cress'.

Two methods of cultivation are in general use. One is to sow seed in September, and to overwinter the plants in a cold frame or a frost free greenhouse. They should be in 4" pots.Potting on in spring should be progressive, with plants either in 10" pots or planted out by May. The other, which is preferable for unheated greenhouses is to sow under glass in March or April. Plants produced this way are a little smaller than those resulting from autumn sowing. In either case each plant will need a 6 ft.cane. Flowering is from June onwards and the aromatic scent of the flower heads has given rise to the common name of Incense Plant. Unfortunately this is not the only smell. Some strains have, or perhaps some soils cause, a a catty smell in the leaves. In the sun it can be quite powerful. Nevertheless it should not put one off growing Calomeria. Flower arrangers will find that the dried heads keep both their colour and their smell for months. The fine hairs on the leaves can cause a rash on some people.

This has been the first publication effort of the SGAP(Europe). The next one will be its first Newsletter. Please help to make it a full one and send your contributions to Jeff Irons.

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