Issue No. 27 June 2010

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter

Open Day a Success!

This year's open day, which was held on 23rd May, was a great success. We were blessed with hot sunny weather which encouraged a larger number of visitors than ever. The teas were heavily in demand and scones were sold out by lunchtime, so we had to slice up most of the cakes for sale to keep up with demand and send out for more orange juice to slake the thirst of hot visitors!

An added excitement this year was the huge swarm of bees found in the afternoon by a visitor on a small tree near the footpath to the lake. This encouraged many interested viewers, but caused a small panic initially

because of the risk of stings to anyone going too close. The area was quickly cordoned off to ensure safe viewing whilst retaining a clear view of the swarm. However, we were later assured that bees are not likely to sting unless threatened at this stage of their life cycle, as they are too busy looking for another nest to colonise to worry about anything else.

Takings for the day (last year's figures in brackets) were:-

Gate	£565.16 (£330)
Plants	£360.51 (£195)
Refreshments	£259.25 (£170.03)
New members	£174.00 (£160.50)

…..making a grand total for the day **of £1,358.92 (£858.53) brilliant!**

As usual, we could not have done so well without the help of all the volunteers who made cakes, provided plants, manned the stalls and did all the preparation work – and the washing up! So thank you very much to everyone who helped in any way, particularly on such a hot day.

Thanks particularly to Pam for organising the duty rota, to Vic for cleaning and preparing the corridor, to the ground staff for making sure the grass was cut and to Marilyn Page, who, though not a member of the Friends, always provides us with dozens of lovely freshly bakes scones.

Diary Date!

AGM 2010 – 5th October

Memorial Seat for Julie Bentley

Near the tennis courts, beside the lake is a beautiful carved oak tree trunk donated by friends and family to Thwaite Hall Gardens.

Julie Bentley, *née* Rennard, who died on March 10th 2009, left a husband, a lovely son aged 6 months and deeply sad parents, family and many friends.

Julie was 36 and had suffered, without complaint from the age of 21, with a malignant brain tumour which was operated on three times over the 15 year period. Unfortunately, following the last operation in February 2009, despite recovering and returning home, Julie's symptoms overwhelmed her in the March.

Julie was a very talented artist who had exhibited at the Ferens Art Gallery several times. One of her greatest loves was mosaic, following a holiday in Barcelona and being inspired by Gaudi.

Julie was a beautiful person with a beautiful mind who is greatly missed by many people. She loved strolling through the gardens at Thwaite during all the seasons. Therefore it is hoped many Friends members and visitors to the gardens will enjoy resting awhile near the lake on an oak trunk.

Barry and Hilary Rennard

Conker trees facing peril from alien invaders!

Conkers, a favourite playground game in British schools, could soon be just a fond memory if a serious threat to horse chestnut trees continues to spread.

Photo by Ian Kember

Now academics from the Universities of Hull and Bristol are asking for the public's help in keeping an eye on the country's beloved conker trees, whose beauty is gradually being destroyed by an alien moth.

The horse chestnut leaf miner is an 'alien' (non-native) moth which arrived in the UK in 2002. Since then it has spread at a rate of 40-60km per year and now covers half of the country, including much of south-central England, East Anglia, the Midlands and most recently East Yorkshire and Cornwall.

This alien moth has caterpillars that live inside the leaves, forming distinctive patches of damage called 'leaf mines'. Up to 700 leaf mines have been recorded on a single leaf and the damage caused by large numbers of larvae can be striking. Severely damaged leaves shrivel and turn brown by mid summer and fall early, well before the autumn, giving the impression that the tree is dead.

The spread and establishment of the horse chestnut leaf miner is of particular concern because, once established, the moth maintains exceptionally high rates of infestation without any evidence of decline. Although the moths do not kill the trees directly it appears that they

weaken the trees, which then produce smaller conkers and may become more susceptible to lethal diseases.

No one knows exactly how far the miner infestation has spread so Dr Darren Evans and Dr Michael Pocock are inviting schools and members of the public to take part in an exciting national web-based experiment to monitor the rate of spread of this ‘alien’ insect and discover the natural pest-controlling insects that might control its spread. This is the largest project of its kind in the UK and is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

Dr Michael Pocock from the University of Bristol explains: 'We are inviting people from all parts of the country to see if horse chestnut trees in their area have been infested. The whitish blotches on horse chestnut leaves that appear during the early summer are an indication that the ‘alien’ moths have arrived in their area. People can then log the location of the tree, either with or without the indication of alien moths, into our website.

‘The moth is spreading year-by-year and so this will give us the most up-to-date picture of the spread of this moth. Verified records will then be passed to Forest Research to add to its national database, which has been recording the spread of the moth since its arrival in 2002.’

The second part of the experiment will start in July, when members of the public can help to record the next stage of the invasion and the appearance of Nature’s pest controller. Dr Darren Evans from the University of Hull explains: 'Nature’s form of defence against this alien invader is a tiny parasitic wasp which eats the moth caterpillars from the inside out – the wasps are natural pest controllers. We think there is a time lag between the moth infesting a tree and the wasps attacking the caterpillars. We need the public’s help to test whether this is the case, especially in areas that have recently been invaded.'

Dr Pocock continues: 'We are asking people at the beginning of July to take part in a simple, but important, study – using just a plastic bag – to see if their alien moths have been 'zapped’ by the natural pest controllers. We want them to collect a single infected horse chestnut leaf and put it into the bag. Within 2 weeks either moths or tiny parasitic wasps – or possibly both – should emerge. People can then record on our website what, if anything, comes out of their leaf, and so give us vital data to help us understand why this moth has spread so rapidly. We could even predict how well our conker trees will fare in the future.'

Dr Evans and Dr Pocock recently ran a pilot study in Bristol city centre to raise awareness about the effect of alien species on biodiversity; they used

a large Jenga game to demonstrate that we rely on nature and the fact that once enough animals and plants are taken away, there can be a catastrophic effect on people.

Dr Evans explains: 'Any alien species is a major threat to biodiversity because all organisms live in relation to each other and once an imbalance occurs, the whole system could begin to unravel. The horse chestnut leaf miner is just one example of how destructive an alien species can be.'

For further information see:- www.ourweboflife.org.uk

BritishRedCross

Open gardens

THWAITE HALL GARDENS

Sunday 1st August 2010 11am – 4pm

Refreshments, cakes, tombola, books, bric-a-brac, plants
Entry £3 - children free

Redcross.org.uk
The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949) and Scotland (SC037738).

Please support the above open garden if you can as it helps to support the work of the Red Cross in providing much needed services in the local area. Many of the volunteer helpers are also members of the Friends, so if you have any plants, cakes, bric a brac or tombola prizes to spare, they will be gratefully received. Thank you!

PLANT of the MONTH Foxtail Lily (*Eremurus robustus)*

There are so many plants of interest at this time of year that it can be difficult to decide which one to pick.

One of the best ways I have found to help with the choice is, when giving a guided tour, to see - without prompting - which plants catch the attention of visitors. On a recent tour the "what on Earth is that" response was directed towards a small group of foxtail lilies growing in one of The Friends newly restored borders. It was particularly gratifying to find that people do notice Friends' efforts in this way, because a fundamental part of the reason for resurrecting Thwaite gardens is to enrich people's lives by enthralling them with a world of unusual plants that they might otherwise never discover.

It is quite easy to see why anyone might be amazed by *Eremurus robustus* however because of its arrestingly tall flower spike. The inflorescence towers well over two metres in height in a single column of densely packed small, starry, pinkish -white flowers. Hence the name "Foxtail Lily".
At the base of the spike (which is a bare stalk below the flowers) lies the sparsely radiating crown of strap-shaped leaves, incongruously humble and somehow improbably likely to produce such a startling flower.

E. robustus originates from Central Asia. It requires sandy and well drained, but fertile, soil to flourish. The plants are basically hardy, though susceptible to excessive wet and also spring frost. They are plants of deeply continental origin and it is said that they flower best following a cold winter – which may explain why they seem to have bloomed well this year.

E. robustus is quite uncommon as a garden plant perhaps because of its size. Other species are more widely grown of which the most popular is perhaps *E. stenophyllus* (often known as *E. bungei*). At 1.5m this species is still reasonably tall, though not quite so 'outsized' as *E. robustus*. It is a rich golden yellow colour in flower.

The plants tend to go dormant after flowering in late summer and are quite happy to be dry at this time. For this reason they are often sold bare rooted, along with autumn bulbs by nurseries.

Quite one of the most astonishing things about these generally astonishing plants is the visual appearance of the roots, which are often described as looking like an octopus. If you are lucky enough to obtain an *Eremurus* this way – plant your 'octopus', not too deeply in early autumn in a sunny spot and give it a mulch after planting, avoiding covering the crown itself.

John Killingbeck

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OPENING TIMES REMINDER

The Gardens are open to Friends on ***Mondays to Thursdays from 12.30 to 3.30 and Fridays from 12.30 to 3.00*** *(except Bank Holidays and other times when the University is closed)*

TREES of THWAITE No.7 TREE OF HEAVEN (*Ailanthus altissima)*

Twixt Heaven and Hell is the Ailanthus! Any tree bearing such an exalted name as “Tree of Heaven” is surely bound to disappoint when seen in the flesh. So it proves with the Ailanthus which superficially resembles nothing more than an exceptionally vigorous and luxuriant common ash (to which it is completely unrelated).

The leaves of the tree (which emerge an eye catching copper colour in spring) are undeniably fine however, and can exceed two feet in length, though bear a pungent, vaguely hemlock signature aroma when bruised.

The grey bark is unlike the ash, having an almost beech -like refinement. Flowers are in fluffy creamy white clusters in mid-summer but are inconspicuous among the rich foliage. Conversely the “key” fruits on the female trees are rosy pink before they ripen so can be quite a feature.

However, even at their best, Ailanthus are undeniably no more heavenly than most other trees and arguably less so than many. Some authorities speculate that the heavenly appelation is derived from the Latin name “altissima” which means “tallest” (by inference – close to heaven?). Yet

even in this respect the Ailanthus is perversely less tall than a great many other species.

In one quality however, this tree (of Chinese origin) is second to none; it is an urban tree par excellence. Seemingly perfectly at home in Man's roughest conurbations, its rudely healthy green vigour refreshes many a concrete jungle across the temperate world wherever it has been introduced. Its relatively late leafing allows spring sunshine to enter, before deep shade is cast in the heat of summer which would seem ideal. Although not a common street tree in Hull, it is by no means rare and provides a distinctly exotic contrast with the more sober limes and sycamores.

Unfortunately with Ailanthus it is easy to have too much of a good thing. In regions of the world with summers deserving of the name, much hotter than ours, the tree's phenomenal regenerative power is unleashed and it rapidly conquers its environment with a combination of profuse wind borne seed and vigorous suckering. In southern Europe it easily forms copses on derelict land. In seedier districts of cities in the eastern US it erupts from pavements and bursts out of abandoned basements at every opportunity (fans of "The Wire" on TV – set in Baltimore- may even have spotted its starring role!). This has led it to be dubbed, sardonically, the "Tree of Hell" in such places.

In the UK Ailanthus is far more restrained and easily tamed. Only in the urban heat island of central London does it betray any hint of its latent power where it may be observed venturing onto some railway engineering works. Nevertheless with the advent of global warming, it has been suggested that the tree may become a problem in Britain in the future, though in East Yorkshire, the summer climate might need to warm by several degrees before this becomes the case here!

John Killingbeck

Plants Growing in the Glasshouse
1. Crinum X powellii

This is a cross between *C. bulbispermum and C. moorei*
Country of origin S. Africa
Common Name: Cape lily
Family : Amaryllidaceae

Our plant is growing quite happily in the glasshouse corridor where it is protected. However, it can be grown outdoors in milder areas. The plants require little maintenance but need to be well established to produce flowers, as can be seen from our specimen which has been there in excess of 20 years and has produced a large clump which always provides a good show of fragrant white or pinkish flowers in May/June.

Plants will grow well in partial shade, but flower more prolifically in full sun. The clump of leaves on which the lily grows are 3 – 4 ft long and arise from large long-necked bulbs which can be as much as 7 inches in diameter.

Vic Swetez

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We welcome contributions to the newsletters from all members, so if you have any articles, ideas, photographs, letters etc which you think would be of interest or would provoke discussion, please send them to the Newsletter Editor at the address above.

Note: Articles are published on the understanding that they represent the views of the writer.