



## **BSBA Newsletter, December 2023**

Welcome to our last Newsletter of the year. I hope you have been able to enjoy your free entry this year to the American Museum Gardens. I know many of you have been busy painting plants there ready for our next exhibition. This is now booked for 1<sup>st</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024 at BRLSI again as the American Museum doesn't have any suitable exhibition space for us.

I know some of you have had a difficult year with illness and other problems and I hope next year will be a better one for you. We are thinking of you.

Wishing you all a happy Christmas and very best wishes for 2024.

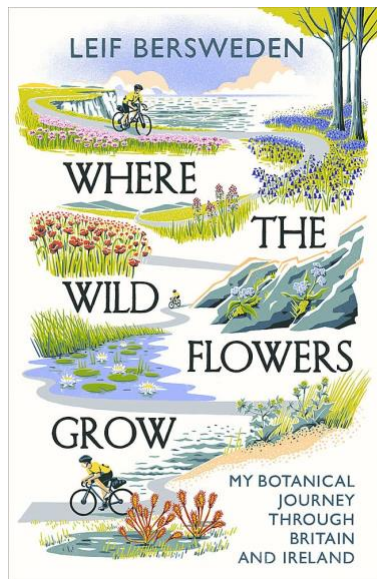
Jan

Thank you Jan, also thanks to Barbara for the beautiful seasonal Robin header on this newsletter. (Janet)

The following two items are also from Jan:

### Did You Know?

There are 59 species of butterfly in the UK, but 2,500 species of moth. The biggest UK moth is the privet hawk moth with a wingspan of up to 12cm, and the smallest is the sorrel pygmy moth with a wingspan of just 3mm.



Leif Bersweden is a botanist who, over the course of a year, goes on a journey around the UK and Ireland, highlighting the unique plants that grow there, their history and the threats that face them.

His journey takes him from the Cornish coast to the pine forests of Scotland - even to the streets of London, proving that nature can be found in the most unexpected places. Along the way, Leif highlights the joy and positivity that can be found through understanding nature and why it is so desperately important to protect our wildflowers.

### **Workshop reports:**

From Brenda:

#### **PENNY BROWN GRAPHITE WORKSHOP 'AUTUMN TREASURES' 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023 in the Community Centre**

Twelve members attended the Workshop. Penny brought a huge range of preserved and living material associated with Autumn for us to draw.

We started with exercises to familiarise ourselves with our graphite pencils and the range of tones that can be achieved with them. Next, we experimented with making shapes look three-dimensional.

We then chose a subject to draw and spent the rest of the day making it look realistic on paper. Penny gave much good advice throughout the day and some excellent drawings were produced.

Penny has produced a new book, this time on painting watercolour flower portraits:  
'Paint 50 Watercolour Flowers' – by Penny Brown – published by Search Press.

Once again, a bring-and-share lunch was enjoyed by everyone.

We depend on at least twelve members attending a workshop to break even. Thank you to all members who supported this workshop!

From Lyn:

**Fungi workshop:**

The mini workshop in November was about fungi, in particular some of the many fruiting bodies around at the moment. We were guided by Brenda and some 15 varieties had been gathered and brought for inspection, however not all were identified as so many look similar. Everyone went home with a couple of fungi to make a spore print by removing the stem and placing the caps gills down on paper to see the ghostly pattern made when the spores dropped, see the photographs below:



Angie's Mandala workshop in October produced some beautiful designs. The ones below are by Penny Lad and Brenda:



From Barbara:

### **A Helping Hand for Forests?**

At the birch and pine forest of Gleann Shildeag the prevailing SW wind means the vast majority of the seeds and spores blow into the sea. Solitary saplings on the landward side failed to thrive, missing their connection to the mycorrhizal network. Trees require ectomycorrhizal arbuscular fungi, while the moorland plants need ericoid arbuscular fungi.

Workers from the Woodland Trust searched the moors for lone saplings. They found 33 lone birch seedlings, 32 of which were associated with willows. These were the creeping willow, which grow in clumps 15cm high and were always close to the new seedlings, a metre away at most. This suggests something very unusual: the willow may be acting as a source of both arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi so it can both colonise the moors and act as a go between for birch and pine.

If the relationship can be confirmed by sequencing of the fungi and experimental planting, this may mean new pine and birch forests can be established more successfully.

From Julia:

### **Online Botanical Art Talks:**

I have been running online talks for three year now. As many of you will know, these talks (where I host a leading botanical artist as they talk about their work or recent projects) came out of the Pandemic when I started teaching my regular classes via Zoom. This naturally progressed to providing something that would address the isolation felt by some in the wider botanical art community during lockdown, and would support both the speakers and myself financially. These talks now regularly attract those passionate about botanical art from all round the world with a recent talk attracting an audience from 35 different countries from Belgium and Bermuda to Puerto Rico and Peru.

I have learnt so much and still am learning, about the technical side of using Zoom. But more than this, I have been privileged to host some wonderful fellow botanical artists from all around the world, with a whole range of interests and ways of working. These have included:

- Yanny Petters - An Irish artist who etches and paints botanical subjects on glass.
- Dick Rauh - An incredible 98-year-old, who died at the start of October, who took up botanical art when he retired from the special effects industry. He became a tutor at the New York botanical gardens and was still teaching just a few weeks before his death.
- Denise Walser-Kolar who has created a whole series of beautiful studies on vellum in the style of Joris Hoefnagel.
- Exhibitors from this year's RHS show and members of the Eden Project Florilegium Society.

Below: A painting on glass by Yanny Petters, a recent work by Dick Rauh and two works by Denise Walser-Kolar:





### **Charles and Annabella Telfair – plant collector and artist:**

Charles Telfair (born Belfast in 1778, died Port Louis 14 July 1833) was appointed as Chief Secretary to the Government in Mauritius in 1812. He bought the Domaine de Bel Ombre, a 4000 acre sugar estate in the southern part of Mauritius. Charles set out to modernise the running of the estate and was the first Mauritian farmer to use a plough to cultivate his land to compensate for labour shortages. He built a hospital, accommodation for workers and a school for the children.

A doctor and botanist by profession he introduced a multitude of species to the island. He is credited with introducing bananas into Mauritius from China and sending plants on to Lord Cavendish (6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Devonshire) hence the Cavendish banana was born. He is commemorated by the plant genus *Telfairia*, the lizard species *Leiopisma telfairii* (Telfair's skink), and the mammal species *Echinops telfairi* (lesser hedgehog tenrec). In 1829, along with others, he created the Natural History Society of Mauritius and managed the Botanical Gardens at Pamplémousses for some years.

His wife Annabella Chamberlain was a botanical artist and collector of plants. She married Charles in 1818 and the couple settled in an ornate French inspired chateau with formal flower borders on the Bel Ombré estate. They became famous for the receptions held there and renowned for their great sense of hospitality and generosity, receiving visitors from all over Europe, who were keen to admire the natural treasures that Mauritius had to offer, including its unique flora and fauna.

Between 1826 and 1830 Annabella's paintings were published in the Curtis Botanical Magazine and after her death, her collection was entrusted to the Zoological Society of London, it has since been dispersed. Some of her works can still be seen in the Chateau Bel Ombré which is now a restaurant in the centre of the nature sanctuary and Eco Tourism site on the former sugar cane plantation site.

Below: Photos of Chateau Bel Ombré and the now disused sugar cane processing plant



(Janet)

### **How much Japanese knotweed is in your area?**

Each year we spend £150 million on trying to eradicate Japanese knotweed across the country. Identified by its heart shaped leaves and sprays of white flowers it often spreads

along railway lines and can block water courses. It has been discovered that a sap-sucking speckled brown insect 3mm long could be the answer to controlling this noxious weed. *Aphalara itadori*, a type of jumping insect of the psyllid family, is getting its teeth into the most aggressive type of knotweed in Britain. The insects were the first to be approved as a biological control in Europe and were initially released in Britain in 2011. Although the insects are hardy in their native Japan and can survive under snow, the British winter wiped them out. Studies this summer however have shown very promising results for the future.

(Janet)

### **The year of the hornet.**

Our native European hornet *Vespa crabro* is more friend than foe. It is primarily a predator of other insects and useful in controlling crop damaging wasps, flies and caterpillars. It has increased in numbers in recent years due to warmer temperature both in summer and winter. However, the non-native Asian hornet *Vespa velutina* with their distinctive bright yellow legs are also benefitting from the warmer climate. This is a vicious thug with a penchant for preying on honeybees from around beehives. Over this year 65 Asian hornet nests have been discovered in 49 locations in England and reported to Defra who are tracking and destroying said nests.



Josie White was unlucky enough to have a close encounter with some Asian Hornets when they decided to invade her house this summer. Luckily Defra came to the rescue and no harm was done - except to the hornets. This photograph shows the hornets who have suffered somewhat from being stored in Josie's freezer!

(Janet)

From Theresa:

Due to popular demand, here is the recipe for Bread-And-Butter Cucumber Pickle. It is from 'Pam the Jam, The Book of Preserves' and would be excellent for Christmas. I substitute cumin seeds for dill seeds and use 350 ml of cider vinegar – the spices depend on personal taste and what is in the cupboard!

## **BREAD-AND-BUTTER CUCUMBER PICKLES:**

Makes 3 - 4 300ml jars

This crispy, sweet-and-sour pickle picked up its nickname, 'bread-and- butter pickles', during the Great Depression years in America in the 1930s. Pickles were low-cost and a cheerful way to brighten up the monotony of eating bread and butter every day. It's delicious with so many foods including bread and butter, naturally. Vary the spice mixture as you like but do measure the turmeric carefully; too much will flood the pickle with yellow and overwhelm the other spices.

3 cucumbers (about 1kg)

1-2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced. (200g prepared weight)

1 tbsp fine sea salt

100ml water

300ml cider vinegar

150g granulated sugar

½ tsp ground turmeric

1 tsp dill seeds

1 tsp celery seeds

2 tsp yellow mustard seeds

Pinch of chilli flakes (optional)

Trim the ends of the cucumbers - there is no need to peel them unless the skins are tough. Remove the seeds by running the rounded end of a teaspoon down the length of each cucumber half. Slice the cucumber into 4-5mm pieces. Put into a large bowl with the sliced onion and sprinkle with the salt, tossing the bowl to coat. Cover the surface with baking parchment and a large plate and leave in a cool place for 2 hours or longer - up to 24 hours will be fine.

Sterilise your jars and twist-on lids. Rinse the salted cucumber under very cold water, drain and dry thoroughly by patting with kitchen paper.

Put the remaining ingredients into a large pan and heat, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Add the cucumber and onion slices and bring to simmering point, then cook for 3-4 minutes, or until the pieces of cucumber are hot throughout and slightly translucent. Remove from the heat.

Pack into your sterilised jars, filling to the brim and making sure the liquor completely covers the cucumber. Seal immediately. Invert the jars for a minute or so, to ensure the lids are sterilised, then turn the right way up and leave to cool.

This pickle can be eaten straight away. Otherwise, store in a cool, dry, dark place for up to a year. Once opened, keep in the fridge and use within 4 weeks.

Variation: CUCUMBER, APPLE & GINGER

Replace one of the cucumbers with a couple of crisp eating apples - Cox is a good variety.



There's no need to peel the apple, just quarter and core and thinly slice crossways, then brine along with the cucumber and onion. Add 1-2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh root ginger with the spices.

From Rachel:

**A recent visit to Kew and the Shirley Sherwood Gallery:**

I took my mother to Kew Gardens on her 98<sup>th</sup> birthday in late November, on a gloriously mild sunny day. There was lovely autumn colouring, mostly brilliant gold. I was surprised to see several camellias in flower already.



There were two exhibitions at the gallery, both continue until early April 2024. Mat Collishaw had a varied and thought-provoking display of work involving digital art; there were paintings that looked like 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch flower paintings until one looked closely and saw that some flowers were actually painted as insects. I believe this was to show that plants, like the rest of nature, can be 'red in tooth and claw', using insects as food just as insects and animals eat plants. There was a video of a series of Wardian cases with seedlings in, that floated out, to see the plants growing, and then arrived at a tropical island; Later, the plants were all destroyed. I took this as a metaphor for what humans are doing to the Earth. There was a sequence of pictures that began with a tulip, which morphed every few seconds into varicoloured elaborate flowers (see below). There was a fine 3-D graphic of an oak tree on a screen and also a couple of installations that I really could not relate to, made up of fabric and plastic flowers. I hadn't heard of Mat Collishaw, but on reading about him, he is a contemporary of Tracy Emin and Damien Hirst, and his early work was well regarded by critics.



The other exhibition was much easier on the eye and brain: young people who aspired to be botanical artists were invited to submit work on the subject of trees, in two age groups: 16-18 and 19-25. Entrants came from 77 countries. The standard, to my mind, was extremely high. All entries showed great technical ability, and many were beautifully composed as well – one would not have guessed that the artists were not already experienced and mature. I disagreed with the judges on their awards of first prize: these were to my mind very dull compositions, though technically well done. I would have liked to know the criteria! I am glad I will never either be a judge or have a painting good enough to enter in a competition.

A selection of the entries in the young botanical artists exhibition including *Prunus serrula*, one of the prize winners:



Thank you, Rachel, for this interesting article.

The Shirley Sherwood Collection has a very good website with more information about the Young Botanical Artists competition. It is also a mine of information about the Shirley Sherwood collection of botanical paintings and related books. (Janet)

[www.shirleysherwood.com](http://www.shirleysherwood.com)

You can also sign up on the site to receive a bi-monthly newsletter to your inbox that is full of interesting up to date information.

**Some newly published botanical books:**

**Palms of New Guinea.** William Baker et al. Illustrated by Lucy T. Smith. An in-depth study (over 20 year's work) of the 250 palm species of New Guinea. (Published February 2024 by Kew Publishing.)

**Marianne North's Travel Writing: Every step a fresh picture.** Michelle Payne. A refreshing insight into the work and life of Marianne North. This book includes copies of her letters and sketches sent to friends, bringing her history to life. (Kew Publishing)

**Botanical Sketchbooks.** Helen Bynum and W. F. Bynum This book explores the creative thought processes behind key botanical art masterpieces of the past including sketches and drawings produced in their making. (Published 2023 by Thames and Hudson)

Do not forget our meeting at the American Museum on Wednesday December 13<sup>th</sup> for coffee and a last chance to see the garden this year.

**With all best wishes to everyone over the festive season and for 2024!**

Janet