

# BSBA Newsletter August 2024



**Summer at the American Museum**

## **A welcome to the BSBA summer newsletter from Jan Robertson our chair:**

It's hard to believe it's August already but at long last, dare I say it, we seem to be getting some summer weather and our gardens can be enjoyed. A few members have been hard at work organising our exhibition in November. It costs us about £2500 to put on a three-week exhibition at BRLSI. We do, of course, hope to recoup some of this cost through our 20% charge on all sales but we never know what this sum is going to be until after the event. For this reason, fund raising is very important and it is great that we have already reached the target we set in April of £500. This is partly due to the very kind anonymous donation of £100 we have received from one of our members for which we are extremely grateful. We should get some good publicity from the American Museum itself so let's make this an exhibition to be remembered and enjoyed – it's up to us all to produce those paintings!

I do hope you can enjoy the rest of the summer. Happy painting!

## **Moth Survey**

In July, Bath Natural History Society Moth Group brought two moth traps up to my home in Bath one Saturday evening. These were set up at the front and back of the house with their bright lights to attract moths overnight. At 8 am on the Sunday morning, the traps were opened up carefully and a record made of all the moths found under the old egg boxes in the traps. The moths were, of course, then released. An amazing 236 moths were recorded of 80 different species plus a few micro moths still to be identified. It was a really rewarding result and they hope to repeat again next year. These surveys provide a useful record of the state of our wild life and whether things are improving or declining.

Jan

Privet Hawk-moth



## Also from Jan: Invasion of foreign monster weeds!

A 'monstrous' white-flowered weed known as Sosnowsky's hogweed that can tower up to five metres in height and is highly invasive (a single specimen can distribute up to 100,000 seeds) is tearing across Russia. The plant's highly toxic sap causes third-degree burns that can take months to heal and puts thousands of people in hospital every year. This hogweed was imported from its natural habitat in the Caucasus Mountains after the Second World War to provide cheap feed for livestock and in no time started getting out of control. The government has now belatedly ordered landowners to remove it from their properties or face hefty fines but it is doubtful if this will curb the spread.

## From Angie: My trip to Transylvania 2024

This year my trip was slightly later than in previous years and I travelled from Luton rather than via Munich. Last year I spent half the time on my own and half with Sarah Howard this year Laura Silburn and I worked together. I met Laura and her friend Jan at Luton Airport and we flew into Sibiu, arriving about 10 pm and spending two nights in a Sibiu hotel. It was a delightful hotel in the centre on the city and we enjoyed a lovely day sightseeing and getting to know each other. Jan came for the trip rather than to paint but she did paint a lovely clover for the project. Mihaela our botanist picked us up the next day and drove us to Copsa Mare. James and Rachel made us very welcome as usual and we soon got back into life in a small village, collecting flowers and painting them under Mihaela's supervision, making sure we showed all the distinguishing features of each plant. It was extremely hot and we were working in what looked like the ground floor of a barn rather than the studio which I used the year before. On one day I worked with my feet in a bucket of well water as my feet had swollen the previous two days. It looked funny but helped a lot. In all Laura and I produced 6 pictures each although I did have an extra one from last year which I finished off this year. It turns out that the project has been popular with other artists so we will not be going next year as James has lots of people for the project but we may go again in 2026. The project is to be finished at the end of 2026. So far 55 pictures have been completed out of a possible 300. So lots of work to be done. It's a beautiful place with so many wild flowers to appreciate and paint. I enjoyed my time being in the village with all the dogs barking, cockerels crowing, sheep bleating, birds singing, and of course enjoying the company of Laura, Jan, Mihaela, James and Rachel.

Below: Meadows at Copsa Mare, *Gymnadenia Conopsea* and *Prunella grandifolia*



**From Julia who has been teaching further afield in Colorado:**

The scenery and weather have been spectacular. However the dry heat meant that it was harder to paint wet-in-wet and we had to abandon the 140lb paper that I had recommended in favour of heavier-weight paper that stayed wet for longer - whoops!



See all of Julia's news at [www.juliatrickey.co.uk](http://www.juliatrickey.co.uk)

**From Barbara: HAIKU**

At my care home we were recently given a talk on Haiku by a globally recognised practitioner. I expected to be bored but came away fascinated.

Haiku are short Japanese non-rhyming poems. Although they go back to antiquity, in the 17 century a famous poet called Matsuo Basho set a standard for the Haiku of 19 syllables in three rows of 7-5-7. This does not however seem to be very strictly adhered to. Indeed those relating to Zen Buddhism are often only two lines. Each Haiku should have a Kygo, this being a word associated with the natural world. The whole idea is that the poet leaves space for the reader to complete. This personal involvement is because the poet knows that words are not enough to capture the fullness of the moment. The Haiku is often associated with a drawing of a natural feature, the emphasis being on the negative spaces, again meaning to involve the viewer.

At the end of the talk we were invited to write a Haiku. I was the only person who tried!  
This is my effort:

MUSHROOM  
A small umbrella  
concealing the thread  
which binds us all

The speaker was very pleased with it!

## GARDENS ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT, from Celia.

The Isle of Wight has many interesting and historical gardens and during a recent walking holiday on the Island I managed to fit in a few visits.

The first was to the Ventnor Botanical Gardens. Situated on the south coast, the temperature is on average 5 degrees centigrade warmer than the rest of the island. This enables many plants usually seen under glass to flourish in the gardens. They also aim to present what the UK's flora might look like in the future. I could have spent more time exploring the gardens but the shape and red bark of the *Arbutus xalapensis* caught my eye, and soon afterwards I was delighted to sight a red squirrel. A visit to Osborne House met my expectations, I had not realised how extensive the grounds and gardens are. The walled fruit and flower garden was particularly interesting with an impressive display of flowers, fruit and vegetables. The secluded Farringford Estate had been the home of Alfred Lord Tennyson from 1853 to 1892. It is privately owned and after having been a hotel, the house and garden have been restored to reflect the Tennysons' tastes and lifestyle. The garden is currently an RHS partner garden. Walking through the National Trust's Mottistone gardens was an unexpected bonus. On one of our walks, we took a wrong path and instead of going round the Mottistone Estate walked through a rear entrance into the lovely garden and herbaceous borders. The NT staff were very understanding, allowed us to linger without paying an entrance fee and also let us use the toilets!



Celia's Isle of Wight photos



### From Annabel: Botanical sketchbooks:

Sketch books seem to be all the rage. Lucy Smith has just written a book called 'Botanical Sketchbook' talking about how she uses sketchbooks and why they are so useful. You may have also seen Shevaun Doherty's paintings on her sketch book pages and Dianne Sutherland who has also shown pages from her sketch book, again with beautiful paintings, on Facebook. Sketchbooks are quite expensive to buy in art shops, Jackson Art have many different ones available. On Jackson's website there is an interesting talk given by Simon Frisby the CEO of Etchr (an Australian firm) about his special designer sketch books some of which have Fabriano paper although he doesn't say which generation Fabriano they are. Etchr also make accordion sketch books.



I have been using Stillman and Birn Zeta Sketch books for the last few years. The paper is very smooth and I understand the Zeta range is designed for watercolour. I have found them great for ink, graphite and watercolour but not too good for 'wet in wet'. You can buy these books in various sizes, bound with wire or laid flat, whatever you choose. So far I have had two Stillman & Birn sketch books. I find it so useful to be able to paint small plants or trying out sketches for a new paintings and making written notes. It makes me more relaxed as once these is something already on the page you have not got the stress of starting a fresh piece of paper. It's fun to fit the plants together on the page, also interesting for me as I normally use Sanders Waterford 'not' paper and it has taught me how to try to 'manage' flat hot press paper. I usually date my drawings or paintings in my sketch book and so when I look back the next year I see when plants were flowering the previous years.

Rosie Sanders teaches people how to make their own sketch books and bind them although I have not been to any of these classes. Some botanical painters use their sketch books to do quick sketches and make important colour matches to the plant, particularly if they are going to use photographs later as the photos often do not show the correct colour shade of the original plant.

Composition can also be practiced and sketched out on the pages. All this and more can be read in Lucy T Smith's book: Botanical Sketchbooks. Enjoy your sketch book, I do!



A page from Annabel's lovely sketchbook.

Botanical Sketchbooks, an artist's guide to plant studies by Lucy T Smith  
Published by Crowood Press Ltd., 2024.

### News from Josie:

My developing work, painting with oil pencil on cotton tissue was acknowledged by the SBA in the SBA Spring /Summer 2024 magazine .

This work is still ongoing however a new piece is almost complete. I'm looking for a style name for this technique, perhaps members have some ideas?

Also an oil pencil painting on cotton vellum of a leaf cutter bee was selected for the raw talent exhibition in Cirencester.

Please contact Josie if you have an idea for a name or wish to know more about this.

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



### Workshops:

**June** saw a very successful mini-workshop exploring wildflowers. Members took a wide variety of wildflowers to name and examine, followed by the usual fund raising lunch. Thank you Lyn for the photograph above.

Later in June, **Marian Hill** gave a very interesting workshop centred on depicting insects using collage. Marian is very knowledgeable about her subject and gave us an interesting introductory talk about her background and work before we tried our hand at creating our own collage insects. We spent time leafing through magazine pages searching for the correct colours and textures to cut and stick. It was a contrast to our usual workshop subjects but kept us all in rapt attention all day. In fact the day was not long enough for me to finish my bumble bee but the photo below shows a selection of the finished works.

**Janet**



## Exhibitions:

**The Summer Exhibition at Gallery Nine** includes work by Louise Young (a friend of Lyn) who paints botanical subjects in watercolour and has now branched out into painting shells in watercolour on gesso. I have visited this small but charming exhibition. Louise's work is beautiful and it is always interesting to see how other artists frame and present their work. There are cards for sale along with modern jewellery and studio pottery. For further information and opening times visit: [www.galleryninebath.com](http://www.galleryninebath.com)

### Janet

**'Light into Life'** runs until 29 September at the Shirley Sherwood Gallery, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Curated by Dr Shirley Sherwood OBE and Marc Quinn the artworks on show depict plants that have inspired 'Light into Life', including orchids, irises and plants that can be used for medicines.

**The Iris Florilegium of Cedric Morris** is on show until November 3 at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury, Suffolk. The Florilegium consists of 27 botanical watercolour paintings of unique, award-winning bearded irises bred by Sir Cedric Morris. Both Angie and Julia have paintings in the exhibition, the Florilegium was the winner of the Finnis Scott Foundation Botanical Art Award of £10,000 in 2018. More information at [www.gainsborough.org](http://www.gainsborough.org)

## **New Books:**

**‘Shirley: The life of a botanical adventurer’** by Dr Shirley Sherwood with Ivan Fallon  
Shirley Sherwood reflects on the highs and lows of her 90 years. Unicorn Press, 2024.

**‘The tapestry of life’** by Susan Christopher-Coulson.  
Includes 80 full colour illustrations and insight into the botanical inspirations, processes and techniques that have influenced the artist.  
Published as part of the ‘Two Rivers Press Botanical Art Portfolios’ series.

**Do you belong to the BSBA WhatsApp group?** It’s a great way to keep in touch with the latest happenings as soon as they happen! Contact Jan Robertson if you would like to be added to the group.

Many thanks to all who have supplied items for this newsletter – keep them coming! Janet

And to finish a little quote from Ai Wei Wei (via Lyn):

**‘Art is not an end but a beginning’**