



summer 1985

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The LOUISIANA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

SHREVEPORT CHAPTER NEWS

Karlene DeFatta writes: The Shreveport Chapter of The Louisiana Native Plant Society sponsored an exhibit of Louisiana wildflowers at the new L.S.U. Museum of Life Sciences, which is located at 8015 Vincent St. in Shreveport.

Beautiful photographs of wildflowers along with tapes and slides were rented from the Lafayette Natural History Museum and were shown the entire month of June. Dr. Steve Lynch had done some of the slides and tapes. There was also a film and tape on Briarwood, Caroline Dorman's wildflower preserve.

The Chapter held an open house Sunday, June 9th, serving refreshments and welcoming visitors to the museum. Enough members volunteered to have a member at the museum every day of the exhibit.

Also on exhibit were a wildflower quilt, pressed wildflower pictures, and dried and fresh wildflower arrangements in baskets made from native vines.

This exhibit was an excellent opportunity to bring attention to our native Louisiana wildflowers, and the need to preserve them and their habitats, as well as The Louisiana Native Plant Society!

CONFERENCE ON LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVE PLANTS SET

LNPS members Danna Michel and John Mayronne both sent in information on Western Carolina University's Conference on Landscaping with Native Plants. A three day conference, it is set to take place July 25 to 27. Unfortunately, by the time this newsletter is sent out, the conference will probably be over.

It sounds like a very interesting conference, with topics ranging from the economics of landscaping with native plants to how to start up a native plant nursery. John is scheduled to talk on activities concerning native plants that are going on here in Louisiana and also on successful landscaping projects using native plants. Hopefully John will be able to send in one or more articles for our newsletter so we can pass on some of what he learns at the conference to our members. How about it, John?

SCHIZANDRA COCCINEA UPDATE

Leonard Thien, LNPS member and botanist at Tulane University, is doing work on the Magnoliaceae, and is looking for locations of Schizandra coccinea, a native vine of the Magnolia Family that was mentioned in a previous newsletter. If anyone knows of any locations, you can write the editor (717 Giuffrias, Metairie, La. 70001), and he'll pass the information on to Leonard. Hopefully, he'll be able to write an article on what he learns for our newsletter. Stay tuned!

SEED EXCHANGE ADDRESS CHANGE

Mr. Larkin, our seed exchange chairman, has moved. All seeds and seed requests should be sent to his new address:

Mr. John Larkin
Route 4, Box 189 B
Mockingbird Hill Road
Franklinton, Louisiana 70438

Now is the time to start collecting seeds to send in to the seed exchange. Everyone's efforts are needed to make this a success. Remember, don't store seeds in plastic bags, don't collect seeds until they are ripe, always leave some seeds, never take them all. And lastly, mail seeds in a box, not an envelope. That way they stand less chance of being crushed by the Postal Service. Let's get to work!

DEADLINE FOR FALL NEWSLETTER

The deadline for submitting articles, chapter information, plant requests, etc. for the Fall 1985 Newsletter is October 10, 1985. Please mail your correspondence in as early as possible, at least several days prior to the deadline so it will arrive in time to:

David Heikamp
717 Giuffrias
Metairie, Louisiana 70001

PLANTSEARCH

LNPS member Neil Bertinot is trying to obtain a rhizome of the Louisiana iris cultivar BAYOU GLORY, an early hybrid of Sidney Conger. Anyone that can help with a rhizome or information can write Neil at the following address:

Neil A. Bertinot
Route 7, Box 16E18
Opelousas, Louisiana 70570

Another member is trying to locate a plant of white Lady Banksia rose, anyone that can be of assistance should contact the editor.

LOUISIANA NATURE CENTER TO START WILDFLOWER PROJECT

(Ed. note: the following information is taken from a story by Michael Perlstein of the Times-Picayune.)

Bob Thomas, director of the Louisiana Nature Center in New Orleans is starting his own "Project Wildflower" for Louisiana's state highways. Bob plans to start near the LNC, at the intersection of I-10 and Read Blvd., an intersection he says is "worse than weeds - it's dead weeds". Let's hope Bob has some help from upstairs when it comes to cooperation from the Highway Dept.!

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR 1985 DUES YET ?

If you still haven't paid your 1985 dues, you are way behind. Send your \$5 in before you forget to:

Elinor Herd
239 Pomeroy
Shreveport, Louisiana .

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO I. HEXAGONA ?

(Ed. Note: The following article appeared in SIGNA, the newsletter of the Species Iris Group of North America, and is reprinted here with their permission.)

Without self-imposed rules as guidelines, human affairs would undoubtedly become inextricably muddled, but the very real human factor is with us just as surely as are the rules. It seems incomprehensible that as a good species, the type and namesake of the Hexagonae apogons should be doubted or that another name be allowed for Iris hexagona . Whether it is to be included on the included list of "Louisiana" Irises is a matter of viewpoint, and anybody expounding on such matters should carefully make clear what distinctions qualify his terminology. The fact remain that an accepted species cannot be made to disappear on a mere whim; any such "vanishing act" must be regarded with suspicion. In-depth sleuthing by one of our researchers attempts to answer for us the question - Iris hexagona - what is it and where is it?

-Roy Davidson-

WILL THE REAL I. HEXAGONA PLEASE STEP FORWARD ?

by Ruby Buchanan

As far back as 1966 questions were being asked by the "Louisiana Iris" growers, as Ila Nunn (1) asked: "What about Iris hexagona ,.... Is this not native to Louisiana along with those normally listed as growing there? Or is Iris hexagona a synonym for one of these, as some early botanists thought might be the case? The most recent authoritative work on irises, GARDEN IRISES - AIS, 1966, includes Iris hexagona in the listing of species of the series Hexagonae and in other references to interspecies hybrids, but does not identify it further in any of the cultural articles. So, although apparently recognized and present in the South as a native, it remains somewhat of a mystery. The examples sent me from a pond near Bryan, Texas, looks for all the world like low-growing giganticaeruleas . One can only conclude that this member of series Hexagonae, relatively unknown to gardeners, must be very closely related to the 'Louisianas'."

Ila Nunn continued: "In THE IRISES OF THE ABBEVILLE, LOUISIANA REGION, (2) an article by Percy Viosca, Jr., Iris hexagona is referred to as the western counterpart of Iris giganticaerulea , which he locates at this time as near New Orleans, but this article provides the only reference I have been able to find among several American authorities on Louisiana irises since the period of early classification by Dr. John K. Small. So, I have concluded that, if

it is a species at all, it is closely related to those species called "Louisiana Irises", but its omission from so many sources of information puzzles me."

More recently, such informed members of our Society as Frank Chowning of Arkansas and Bee Warburton of Massachusetts have expressed surprise that Iris hexagona has received scant mention from those members of the Society for Louisiana Irises who, from time to time over the years, have written articles published in the A.I.S. Bulletin, in Special Publications of the Society and in its Newsletters. In many such writings it has been ignored entirely, especially in those listing the species which were regarded as ancestral to our improved present-day hybrids.

"All who are interested in the problem of determining what is, and what is not Iris Hexagona are in agreement, apparently, that much work needs to be done by competent botanists and geneticists before a number of collected forms can be properly identified. In the meantime, it is my opinion that Iris hexagona is indigenous to Louisiana in more than one form and that this species has made a significant contribution to the development of some of the modern Louisianas." (Frank Chowning)(3)

In 1788, Thomas Walter described Iris hexagona from specimens found in the eastern United States. In more recent times there have been differences of opinion, even among experts, as to whether Iris hexagona and Iris giganticaerulea (Small, 1929) are really two different species or variants of the same species. It appears to have finally been settled that the two are in fact different species."

The paragraphs above were taken from an in-depth article, IRIS HEXAGONA - DIVERGENT VIEWS. This article was a highlight in my search for information concerning Iris hexagona. Frank Chowning was working on the Iris hexagona problem as long as he was able to work.

The following are taken from letters to Marie Caillet from Chowning:

October 8, 1979: "The Lake Catahoula hexagona is such a late bloomer and is such a hardy "Doer" that the same thought came to me as to Sidney Conger (independent of any suggestion by either of us to the other) that 'This form could be used to produce a late blooming strain that would extend the blooming season by an additional month or so.' Sidney was thinking that these would be great as complements in the garden to hemerocallis."

January 7, 1980: "I may have something to add to my article on I. hexagona immediately following the 1980 bloom in my garden, since I will have CATHEDRAL BLUE, "Catahoula Blue" and some other hypothesized hexagona forms blooming at that time."

June 14, 1980: "The Lake Catahoula hexagona was still in full bloom when we returned home from New Orleans, thus maintaining its record of being the latest bloomer I have ever grown in the Hexagonae family....I hope to self pollinate all of the new hexagona forms in 1981 to see if the seedlings come true to form...."

Frank lived through the bloom of 1981 and probably made those crosses and could have planted the seeds. I hope someone is continuing to care for his Hexagonae.

In tackling the problem of what is happening to Iris hexagona I have been like the man who was sent into a dark room to find a black hat that wasn't there! I think the Hexagonae iris growers in Louisiana have failed to see the forest for looking at the trees. Bee Warburton wrote about the "Louisiana Iris" this way: "Their sponsors omit Iris hexagona, the type species from

their lists of 'Louisiana' species and ignore it so completely that anybody who didn't know would think that no such species exists. Actually, it is the one iris to grow along the Gulf coast from Texas to Florida, so one would think it would receive special attention rather than being thrown into limbo."(4)

Of course, I contacted members of the Society for Louisiana Irises in several areas, including Louisiana, asking for a source for information concerning Iris hexagona.

One of the charter members of the Society for Louisiana Irises informed me that "Iris hexagona is not a species, it is a sub-section!" Another prominent hybridizer, Joe Mertzweiller, put me into the picture by telling me that there was a continuing controversy on the question of whether Iris hexagona and Iris giganticaerulea were two separate species or variants of the same species. He also sent me a few pages from his rough draft of Chapter II of the forth-coming book LOUISIANA IRISES. I was amazed to discover that Iris hexagona was not among the Louisiana species and hybrids to be included there. So far as I could comprehend the attitude of the iris growers in Louisiana, it seemed to be understood that "If it grows in Louisiana, it is not Iris hexagona!"

"It is not very desirable for amateurs, not trained in taxonomy, to determine 'This is Iris hexagona' or 'This is Iris giganticaerulea.' We have no scientifically demonstrated way to distinguish between the two. Location is generally cited as the distinguishing feature, (If it grows in Louisiana, it ain't Iris hexagona ? RB) but this is not a scientific difference. I am familiar with a large colony of Louisiana irises considered to be Iris giganticaerulea and growing wild in a very remote area near Houma, Louisiana. This is a general area where both Dr. Small and Mary DeBaillon are known to have collected. Variability in size, form and color is much greater among these irises than in other colonies of Iris giganticaerulea in southwest Louisiana. Many of these Houma irises could certainly be mistaken for Iris hexagona.

"The species Iris fulva and Iris nelsonii are becoming extremely scarce and the varieties CATHEDRAL BLUE and "Catahoula Blue" are virtually unknown today, at least in catalogs. I know Mr. Chowning of Little Rock, Arkansas had CATHEDRAL BLUE but he died over a year ago. But please understand, I am uncertain, in spite of Chowning's statements, that these two irises are Iris hexagona. These irises are from Louisiana. (J. Mertzweiller)

I'm sure the persons who encouraged me to undertake this research had no expectation that we could find answers to those questions - "Where is it? - What is it?" A much more important problem confronts us: What are we going to do to prevent the destruction of, and to work for the preservation of, our neglected Hexagonae species. I have found no positive answers - but there is light at the end of the tunnel. Recent correspondence with Mr. Mertzweiller indicates that Iris hexagona will indeed be included in the LOUISIANA IRIS book and his latest letter has this to say:

"Presently I am toying with the possibility of trying to get some qualified people involved in the problem. As I emphasized previously, I do not know who such people are or if they would be interested in working on irises. But you can never be certain without trying. My proposal is to put out an inquiry to the Scientific Committee of the A.I.S. I have solicited reactions from Charles Fritchie and Marie Caillet for their comments. If they agree, I will write to the chairman of the Scientific Committee asking for his suggestions. I would hope he might come up with something positive or suggest some University person who might be interested. This is only in the idea stage at the moment.

"Possible distribution of Iris hexagona in Louisiana is a significant part

of the problem. There is the information in THE GENUS IRIS as to distribution of Iris hexagona, in the New Orleans area. Then there is the matter of CATHEDRAL BLUE and "Catahoula Blue" both from south Louisiana and being identified as Iris hexagona. While this may be true, it is difficult to reconcile that two almost identical and nearly indistinguishable species would be intermingled. The species Iris brevicaulis, Iris fulva, and Iris giganticaerulea are certainly intermingled in south Louisiana but they are recognized as being readily distinguishable. One is almost forced to the conclusion that if Iris hexagona and Iris giganticaerulea are intermingled in Louisiana the more plausible consideration is that Iris giganticaerulea is a variant of Iris hexagona. But I cannot accept this in the absence of qualified taxonomical work."

Let us not cease in our efforts, however, until the cytological work is underway. A recent letter from Dr. Charles Fritchie to John Wood seems to be less optimistic: "Joe and I have been exchanging letters on this subject as it influences the reference book in progress. I am not so optimistic as you two that root tip studies, or other cytogenetic or karyotyping studies can finally resolve the issue of whether hexagona and giganticaerulea are two or one species. Perhaps I exaggerate the influence of judgment in the matter of species identity, but it seems to me we would still be left with the judgment of one or more taxonomists less familiar with field material than Dr. Randolph and Dr. Small.

"It is not impossible that such a current researcher could study field material throughout coastal and inland Louisiana, and more easterly coastal regions, but time and cost imply that this would be an expensive and serious proposition. Because of the evident similarity of most morphological characters (to the layman, at least), I suspect that karyotyping, even including banding and staining, would show similar chromosomal resemblance. In this case it would be easy to conclude, perhaps incorrectly in the judgment of others, that giganticaerulea is a variant.

"Of course, differences might be more pronounced at the chromosomal level. If so, it might be equally easy to conclude that the two are distinct species. In this case, such studies could be very helpful in categorizing Chowning's CATHEDRAL BLUE and other atypical Louisiana giganticaerulea-like material."
(2/3/85)

I would like to thank all those persons who have shared information with me, though some of it may not be included in this writing. My problem at present is trying to compress a mountain of material into something readable. However, the real purpose underlying my efforts has been to underline the fact that Iris hexagona has really been neglected far too long and to suggest that there may be a wonderful source of genes for extending the season of bloom and increasing the hardiness of our modern hybrids. Why not research out those rare and difficult to find species? You'll be glad you did.

References:

- (1)THIRTY YEARS WITH LOUISIANA IRISES IN TEXAS, Ila Nunn, Society for Louisiana Irises, 25th Anniversary Publication, 1966.
- (2)THE IRISES OF THE ABBEVILLE, LOUISIANA, REGION. American Iris Society, Bulletin 102, July 1846.
- (3)IRIS HEXAGONA - DIVERGENT VIEWS, Chowning, Society for Louisiana Irises, Special Publication, 1941 - 1981.
- (4)CLASSIFICATION * UP TO DATE, Bee Warburton, American Iris Society, Bulletin 225, Spring 1977.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION
LOUISIANA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY & STATE _____ ZIP _____

Dues are \$5 per year, mail your application, along with your dues
to join the Louisiana Native Plant Society to:

Mrs. Elinor Herd
239 Pomeroy
Shreveport, Louisiana 71115

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