

Rare and safe

Ruth Sands

The Conservation Scheme sets out to safeguard rare plants, but how would you define 'rare'? Of course some nurseries don't feature in the *Plant Finder* (PF), but our simple rule of thumb is that a rare plant is one that is listed there as available at fewer than four nurseries.

A lot of 'rare' plants in the Scheme need TLC to get them through the first couple of years, which is probably why they are not available commercially.

Among our conservation successes is *Lychnis coronaria* Gardeners' World (fig. 1 & cover) – a lovely silver-leaved plant with double crimson flowers. Geoff Hamilton noticed it on a garden visit and was told it had been handed down from mother to daughter for generations. He was given a plant and it was shown on the TV programme, hence its name. Four years later two members from Hampshire found it in a nursery in Norfolk. It had plant breeders rights (PBR), so they could only pass it to their Group members and the Conservation Scheme. In 2003 the PBR were removed, so we gave the plant to two nurseries for commercial propagation. It has become very popular and now has 22 entries in PF. It's difficult to get going, but makes a good plant when established. Mine is about to flower for the first time after two years. I can't wait...

We have several heucheras in the scheme, but the one that stands out to me, not being a lover of heucheras in general, is *Heuchera x brizoides* 'Snowflakes' (fig. 1). Raised by Alan Bloom and trialled at Wisley in 1938, it was re-introduced in 1950. As Alan Bloom was among the founder members of the HPS and of the Conservation



Fig. 1 *Lychnis coronaria* Gardeners' World



Fig. 2 *Heuchera x brizoides* 'Snowflakes'

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Fig. 3 *Phlox paniculata* 'Grey Lady'

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Fig. 4 *Geranium x oxonianum* 'Trevor's White'

Scheme, and our President, I reckon it's an important plant for our safekeeping. Again, it's rather a miserable specimen until it gets going, but the very unusual flowers make it worth the effort.

Probably my favourite of our rescued plants is *Phlox paniculata* 'Grey Lady' (fig. 2). First mentioned in *The Encyclopaedia of Modern Gardening* c. 1950, it was rediscovered by Diana Grenfell in the 1990s, but she was unable to trace the breeder. It has a blue-grey flower with a white centre and the most wonderful scent. Although it propagates well and is popular with its Conservation Scheme growers, it is still not mentioned in PF.

I hope we make a difference to the conservation of rare but good, garden-worthy plants, although sometimes a plant seems to recover all on its own. I was concerned to conserve *Geranium x oxonianum* 'Trevor's White' (fig. 3) 18 months ago, when according to PF it was stocked at just one nursery, Long Acre Plants, where I bought it. But its merits must

have been recognised more widely, for after I had propagated it ready to distribute through the Scheme I found that five nurseries are selling it this year!

I hope this small selection has whetted your appetite. If you'd like to grow some of these delights yourself, why not take part in the Scheme. You may find your Local Group co-ordinates the Scheme in your area, but you can join in on your own – I've recently sent plants to two members in Scotland who live too far away from their nearest Group but are very keen to participate. All I ask is that every year you fill in a short form.

I'd like to thank our Historian, Jennifer Harmer, for finding out where, when, who and how these plants have come to us, and to the many members who grow them to ensure their survival. 🐝

Ruth Sands gained a Horticulture Diploma and has worked for a time as a gardener and designer. She also runs a small nursery.

If you'd like to get involved in keeping good plants in cultivation, contact Ruth, our Conservation Scheme Co-ordinator, on 01335 344028 or email conservation@hardy-plant.org.uk