



©Helen Mount

Iris variegata var. *reginae* 'Bozhmir Davidov'

A delightful medium-sized *Iris* (an Intermediate Bearded) was introduced to the HPS Conservation Scheme about 10 years ago. Penny and Roger Gray, HPS members, had purchased the plant at Boughton Dower House – the home of the late Sir Peter Scott and Valerie Finnis – over 30 years previously.

Penny and Roger had grown it successfully in their garden, and felt it was worthy of introduction to the scheme. Their plant had been named *Iris variegata* var. *reginae* forma *davidovii*, but enquiries to establish its origins resulted in numerous confirmations that the name was invalid.

This iris reaches around 30cm high when in bloom. Its flower has pure white tepals and style branches, all heavily veined in dark violet. In the wild, *Iris variegata* L.¹ is a deciduous, medium-sized bearded plant; it too has bi-coloured flowers, but they're usually whitish or pale yellow and the strong veining is reddish-brown to violet.

Thanks to the research carried out by Wendy Sime from the Shropshire Group, we knew the name was invalid because of changes in accepted nomenclature for all Latinised clonal names. However, in the Conservation Scheme we needed to be confident that

the iris's name conformed to current taxonomy if it was to be distributed widely.

Penny and Roger Gray had a copy of an article entitled *Perennial Assets* by Christopher Grey-Wilson in the RHS *The Garden* (May 1995). The article included a photograph of an iris apparently identical to our own, named as *Iris variegata* 'Alba'; it had been circulating in the trade under that name, but unfortunately it also was invalid. No more information was given about the source of the pictured iris, and the quest to find an acceptable name floundered.

At the beginning of 2017, however, HPS and

A recognised name – at last!

Helen Mount

¹The L. after *Iris variegata* refers to the author who first validly published the name. In this case it is Linnaeus (or Carolus Linnæus) (1707–1778), whose accepted abbreviation is L.

AGS member Ivan Pinnick suggested I get in touch with Brian Mathew – *Iris* expert and now President of the British Iris Society – and Tony Hall – previously manager of the Alpine and Woodland Unit and currently Honorary Research Associate at RBG Kew. They have both been extremely helpful in establishing a name that recognises this significant variant of *I. variegata*, collaborating once I had contacted them individually.

Brian Mathew commented: “This version of *Iris variegata*, which lacks the yellow ground colour of the more typical form, is worth upholding under the name *reginae* even if it does fall within the overall remit of *I. variegata*”.

Tony Hall investigated further and discovered that ‘our’ plant was collected in 1915 by a Bulgarian botanist, Bozhmir Davidov (1870–1927). He became so interested in the iris that he wrote an article for the British Iris Society’s 2017 *Iris Yearbook* in which he proposed the name *Iris variegata* var. *reginae* ‘Bozhmir Davidov’. Crucially, upon publication the name is confirmed, so



©Helen Mount

Iris variegata var. *reginae* ‘Bozhmir Davidov’

at last our iris has a valid identity, albeit a bit of a mouthful!

I am most grateful to everyone who has helped in establishing a valid name for this beautiful iris, and particularly indebted to Brian Mathew for his extensive knowledge, observations and comments. Tony Hall deserves special mention for additional

research and for his article in the *BIS Yearbook* which has given us an approved name for this super plant.

What’s more, RGB Kew deemed *Iris variegata* var. *reginae* ‘Bozhmir Davidov’, our HPS Conservation Scheme plant, worthy of inclusion in its collection, and it was a pleasure to donate a plant on behalf of the Society. 🌸

Helen Mount gardens on the Isle of Wight. After four years as national coordinator of the Society’s Conservation Scheme, she still can’t resist the challenge of establishing the correct names of plants with questionable identities.