

## LECTURE MEETINGS AND DAY VISITS

### AGM & SPRING MEETING, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON – 10 April Pat Acock

Our President, Robert Sykes, welcomed the 38 attendees and introduced our first speaker. Jennifer Ide gave the first part of a report of the Society's April 2009 visit to Australia. With the aid of useful maps, Jennifer outlined our itinerary and explained why, as leader of the tour, she had chosen the eastern seaboard – fern numbers are higher in the east of Australia and rise as you venture northwards. She explained the significance of the vegetation, especially the adaptation of eucalypts to the high fire risk in summer. Poignant pictures of the 2008-9 fires reminded people of the frightful situation during that year but also showed how the eucalypts and some of the ferns cope with this environment and how rapidly they recover after the fire.

Martin Rickard carried on the Australian account in Alan Ogden's absence, as Alan had to attend hospital at very late notice. Martin showed some of the characters of the tour, along with many slides of his beloved tree ferns. He also showed that despite many people's vision of Australia being hot and sunny, we mainly experienced cool weather and had many wet days, especially when we were in the field south of Brisbane.

After a short coffee break, Sarah Whittingham gave a very well illustrated talk on the 'Further reaches of the fern craze', the subject of her latest book, *The Victorian Fern Craze*. Her research has been most extensive and a further book is to appear in early 2012. Even members of long standing enjoyed not only being reminded of the extent of the mania at this time but also were delighted by new evidence and ephemera that Sarah had unearthed in her researches. She also surmised that although in decline at the turn of the century, pteridomania never really died until the start of the First World War, citing evidence of book sales, enlarged catalogues of ferns to buy, much increased membership of the BPS and general interest both in the gardening and national press right up to the start of the war.

After lunch, during which much business and general socialising took place, our President gave his retiring talk, which is recounted elsewhere in this *Bulletin*. In his 'State of the Union' style address, he spoke of the strengths of the Society and concluded with a few observations as to where we could put more emphasis in the coming years. He then handed over to Mary Gibby for ten minutes to give her the opportunity to introduce herself. Mary gave a short history of how she had become involved with ferns during her life as a botanist, and acknowledged her good fortune in having most of the country's notable pteridologists as her supervisors and colleagues over the years.

The AGM followed, and business was concluded in a most efficient and practical way. Frank McGavigan was elected to fill the vacancy on the committee.



photo: M. Gibby

**Alison Paul receives her Outstanding Contribution Award from Robert Sykes, AGM 2010**

Following afternoon tea, two talks were given on the tour to California hosted by our sister organisation, the Hardy Fern Foundation. Martin Rickard enthused about the San Francisco area and the parks and gardens we visited, especially waxing lyrical about our time at Berkeley under the leadership of Alan Smith. Moving on to the Oregon border, he mentioned the redwood park we visited, and Humboldt State University's most unusual collection of ferns. Graham Ackers concluded by talking about the ecology and nature of the redwood forests, showing many superb slides of the vistas and the ferns in the understorey as well as describing the differences in the ecology and morphology of the two redwood species.

Our retiring President closed a very special meeting that had included a wide range of talks with something for everyone. He thanked our host for the day, Alison Paul, who had done all the background preparation, provided all the projection support and supplied all the refreshments.

## **AUTUMN INDOOR MEETING, TRUMPINGTON, CAMBRIDGE – FERNS OF SOUTH & CENTRAL AMERICA – 6 November      Matt Busby**

Bright sunshine greeted the 24 members who attended the Autumn Indoor Meeting organised by Sylvia Martinelli in Trumpington Village Hall near Cambridge. A very full day's programme had been arranged and the meeting began with a presentation by Sylvia on 'Chilean ferns'. Sylvia has visited Chile several times and it became evident that she has a wide experience of that country. Sylvia's photographs of the numerous species of ferns were remarkable and many had the stunning background of the Chilean Andes. I particularly enjoyed seeing the several blechnums she encountered, particularly those that produced colourful fronds, but what I found especially exciting was the illustration of *Polystichum andinum*, a fern that I have tried to raise from spores but always failed. This is a much sought after alpine gem.

'What has happened to *Doryopteris*?' was the subject of our next speaker, Jovita Yesilyurt from the Natural History Museum, who worked on the genus *Doryopteris* for her PhD project. *Doryopteris* is related to some members of *Pellaea* and *Cheilanthes*, and Jovita described the many problems and complexities of this group of ferns and explained that some species have been swapped between these genera. Jovita's efforts appear to be realigning some of the species to possibly one or two new genera. For example, the species related to *D. ludens*, which are found mainly in Asia from Indo-China to New



photo: J. Yesilyurt

### ***Doryopteris varians* in Brazil**

Guinea, have been recognised as the new genus *Calciphlopteris* by Jovita and Harald Schneider. We were pleased to see photographs of quite a few *Doryopteris*, mostly taken during Jovita's fieldwork in Brazil, notably: *D. feei*, *D. acutiloba*, *D. varians*, *D. lorentzii*, *D. stierii* and *D. majestosa*. It will be very interesting to see the final results of Jovita's work when it is published. There is a webpage devoted to *D. majestosa*, one of the new species described by Jovita, on the Natural History Museum website.

I checked the Society's Spore Exchange lists and found that only half a dozen *Doryopteris* species have ever been offered to the membership. Happily, *D. pentagona* will be on the

2011 list for the first time. Sadly, growers in the UK generally seem only to have the opportunity to acquire the delightful *Doryopteris pedata* for cultivation.

Unfortunately, Mamen Peña-Chocarro was unable to attend to talk on Paraguayan ferns as her daughters were ill, so it was agreed that we enjoy an early lunch.

We resumed after lunch, to hear Martin Rickard's illustrated talk on 'Chilean ferns'. This was mainly based on his visit to the Juan Fernandez Islands, which are situated about 400 miles into the Pacific Ocean. Martin explained the difficulties of getting to the islands, a journey that involves small boats and aircraft. The islands consist of narrow and barren coastal plains that give rise to sudden precipitous mountain-sides covered with rainforest. Martin explained that of 212 native species on the islands, 55 are ferns of which some 47% are endemic to the archipelago. I was particularly taken with the photographs of *Dicksonia externa*, *Adiantum chilense*, *Polystichum tetragonum* and *Asplenium obtusatum*. What really fascinated me was the glimpse of apparently inaccessible areas that have never been surveyed botanically. One wonders what unknown treasures await those brave, or foolhardy enough, to venture there. Martin also gave a brief account of some of the ferns of central Chile, complementing Sylvia's earlier talk. I was particularly impressed by the very lovely *Adiantum sulphureum*.

The afternoon break gave members another chance to raid the magnificent plant stall and retire to the kitchen to enjoy excellent home-made cakes supplied by members. Then we settled down to listen to Alison Evans' account of the 2008 BPS visit to Costa Rica. I was especially pleased to see photographs of the various locations as well as of such attractive species as *Plagiogyria costaricensis*, *Bolbitis oligarchica* and *Adiantum pectinatum*. I was intrigued to learn that two genera are named after muses: namely the Muse of Dance, *Terpsichore* (Alison showed us *T. senilis*) and *Melpomene* (we were shown *M. moniliformis*), which we later discovered is the Muse of Tragedy. It was such a joy to see the wonderful *Jamesonia scammanae*. Let no-one say that our meetings are not fascinating and educational.

Announced on the programme as a 'Mystery lecture', our next speaker proved to be our hard working Secretary, Yvonne Golding. Yvonne gave us a brief talk on another of her passions, namely phasmids, or stick insects to those of us not familiar with this group of the insect world. Yvonne's knowledge and enthusiasm came across very well and she kindly brought along two tanks containing these interesting creatures for us to examine. I was especially interested to learn that these colourful South American species feed exclusively on ferns; in this particular case, phasmids and ferns do not mix. A delightfully different talk.

Sylvia Martinelli gave the final slide-show. She has been trying to persuade the BPS to hold a meeting in Ecuador for years and hoped to whet members' appetites with pictures of some of the high Andean *Jamesonia* species, little elaphoglossums in rock crevices, myriad *Thelypteris* tall enough to walk under in the rainforests, furry looking *Alsophila* buds and delicate *Melpomene* clinging to trees. She joined an American group led by Alan Smith but unfortunately was too far in the rear to get names for many of the ferns seen on hikes. However, there were plenty of fern genera familiar to Europeans: *Adiantum*, *Asplenium*, *Pteris*, *Blechnum*, *Polystichum*, and the ubiquitous *Cystopteris fragilis*. Most of the polypodiaceous genera, such as *Belvisia*, *Campyloneurum* and *Niphidium* were unfamiliar to Sylvia. Lycopodiums in the high Páramo plateaus had stunning red and gold colours. Ecuador is obviously well worth visiting for its ferns, scenery, food and ambience.

May I express my thanks on behalf of the members present to the speakers and the plant sale suppliers, to Tim Pyner for organising the plant sales table, to Gill Smith for attending to the refreshments, to Yvonne Golding for providing and taking charge of the booksales table and to Sylvia Martinelli for organising the day. I was especially pleased to hear that the sale of plants raised £254.11 and the sale of cakes raised £15.35 making a total of £269.46 towards the cost of the meeting.