

Newsletter



This plant and the one below are two of Frank's new ones for 2003

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British Streptocarpus Society *Chairman's Comments*

My thoughts at this time are as always the wonderful start of our new flowering season for our beloved Streptocarpus. But in this column I have to turn my thoughts to the society and its endeavours. Because now we have over 600 members you realise it means a considerable amount of work for the main officers of your society and I thank members wholeheartedly who support us. Don Corfield our erstwhile Treasurer over there in Birmingham who keeps our finances in order and sends out lovely little reminders to members when their fees are due. A quiet man in his own right, but very efficient, and hard working for the society. Sue Long and her husband Gordon down there in South Wales doing their bit with the seed fund which is now quite popular also attending every function they possibly can where Streptocarpus are involved. Jim Ellis in the Leicester area carrying the Streptocarpus banner to area shows we are not able to get to. Chris Rose down in Bristol, a true amateur breeder with many varieties to his name, unafraid to try new concepts in breeding and a mine of information to us when we need more taxonomic information on some of the species. Kim Williams our one and only National Collection holder down there in Hampshire and building up her knowledge of these plants all the while. I can go on from all over the country of other members working away in the background for the good of the society people in Derbyshire, Nottingham, Cheshire, Weston Super Mare, Yorkshire and down there in the Devon & Cornwall area all doing their bit. But most of all the backbone ordinary members who religiously renew their membership purely out of interest in Streptocarpus, so be it they may just have a few on a windowsill or in a conservatory among a collection of other plants but all are interested. Some people, I have heard it said, say that we are parochial based as a society. Well members and officers come from all over as do a lot of other societies we just happened to start this society from the Burntwood area. But wherever a society is based it has to be somewhere, London Glasgow, Manchester or down in Cornwall, whatever it makes no difference. I know wherever it is you cannot all get to some of the shows we attend but I still thank you for being interested members. Our secretary Frank and his wife Mary have also once again done a marvellous job in looking after the society and

growing on and sending out a wonderful array of young plants to members. Frank's workload at this is quite something at this time of year and then having to send out the Newsletters. OK a mistake occurred last time with postage, regrettable I know, but Frank has duly apologised and hopefully it should not occur again. More work to for our editor Tom printing the Newsletter as fast as he is able. One thing he would still like from you is a few more articles coming in, it doesn't have to be pages, just a few lines will do. Anything you like to do with Streptocarpus your area shows, where you see them, how you personally grow them, what successes or what failures. You don't have to be the greatest writer in the world just spend half an hour putting a few things down and send it, we will edit it for you. Go on you can do it!

One more thing now before I close, in the past couple of months we have had approximately 10 new members join us from the United States. I would like to welcome you all to the British Streptocarpus Society and hope you enjoy being members. We grow our plants to a slightly different format to you guys over there I know and we don't grow such a wide variety of other gesneriads as the States and Canada but the love of plants is worldwide and I look forward to learning from you. Dale Martens who I could call our Ambassador over there has been a rock to us ever since I first had contact with lady some years ago. She has always supported us and I thank her very much for all the work she has done not only for us but Gesneriads worldwide. Well good luck to you all in our new growing season and may your plants bloom better than ever. I will close now I have a couple of batches of plants a little on the sick side to attend to! I should have known better of all people, my own fault too no excuses! Yes they are slowly recovering, what is or was wrong with them? I'll leave you to ponder that one for the time being, but at least one other member had the same thing happen this year as I did, I'll give you the answer when I write article next time.

Ken Jones
Chairman

Streptocarpus Variegation

by Dale Martens

“\$100!!”, I nervously bid to the auctioneer at the AGGS convention in the summer of 1999. “Going once, going twice, sold!” was the response. I’d just purchased two variegated streptocarpus leaves brought to the auction by Toshijiro Okuto from Japan. These leaves originally came from Margaret Gurr in New Zealand. She had *Streptocarpus rexii* seed x-rayed by her dentist and the result was a beautiful blue-lavender flower on variegated foliage. Shortly after I got home, I wrote to Margaret and encouraged her to name this strep. She was surprised there was so much excitement about this mutation. She called it, ‘Canterbury Surprise.’

At that same convention came another surprise! A single plant of *Streptocarpus* ‘Winter Dream’ with a dusty rose flower and variegated foliage was brought to convention for sale. This hybrid was created about 25 years ago by Michael Kartuz and thought to be long gone. Gary Dunlap purchased it and gave me a leaf.

Now I had leaves of two different variegated streps which I immediately propagated. Some of the babies sprouting from those leaves were solid white, some were solid green, and the rest had a varying amount of variegation on them. The solid white ones died, and I threw away the solid green ones after their fourth leaf proved to be solid green. Variegated foliage may be the reason why the streps grew so slowly from cuttings.

The first thing I did was hybridize them when they finally bloomed. Initially I selfed S. ‘Canterbury Surprise’ and found only 30% viability. In addition, not all the seedlings had variegated leaves. This showed that variegation in this case wasn’t exactly simple recessive. In addition, I used S. ‘Canterbury Surprise’ as the seed parent with ‘Winter Dream’ as the pollen parent. Eagerly I awaited the outcome. When I finally harvested seed, I made an offer to the gesneriad growers on the computer Gesneriphile list. I offered to distribute seed to the first 25 people who responded and would follow my specific conditions. The last thing I wanted was look-alikes being named, so I received promises from all to keep me informed about the seedlings and to send me photos or computer scans when the plants bloomed. In addition, no seedling would be named without my approval. A big problem was soon realized: viability of seed from variegated parents is very poor. Out of about 30 people who did receive seed, only about 8 got any seedlings at all. I personally sowed about 40 seeds and got 24 plants and 3 of those were solid green. This again confirmed to me that variegation in streps is not simple recessive.

Sandy Morgan of Canada received seed in October of 2000. She was the first to bloom the seedlings. We decided between us that perhaps all the named seedlings from crossing S. ‘Canterbury Surprise’ x S. ‘Winter Dream’ would have the alpha name of ‘Ice’ or ‘Iced’. I suggested Sandy name this very first seedling and she called it, ‘Ice Wine’. Subsequently there are now ‘Ice’ or ‘Iced’ streptocarpus hybrids in several countries! Sandy and I were able to exchange leaves and grew out each other’s best hybrids for comparison of flower color. In addition to ‘Ice Wine’

we now have ‘Iced Amethyst Show-off’ and ‘Iced Pink Flamingo’, ‘Iced Canadian Sunset’ and others.

Variegated streps grow slower than green leaf varieties. I’ve also learned it’s best to cut back fertilizer to 1/8 teaspoon per gallon of water. If a strep becomes too white, high nitrogen fertilizer seems to have little to no effect on making leaves greener. What seems to affect variegation is light intensity and heat. More light equals more variegation. Heat decreases variegation. This isn’t surprising because that’s what happens with variegated African violets.

I’ve propagated enough of these leaves to know that you must have some white material at the edge of the cut leaf in order to get a variegated baby. If the leaf section is all white, then an all white baby is most likely to develop and eventually die when removed from the support of the mother leaf’s root system.

Hybridizing variegated streps is so new that we are all learning together about them. Hybridizing a variegated strep usually stresses the plant so much that the plant will turn a yellowish-green. After the pods are harvested and the plant is given a rest, then it will revert back to variegation.

Hybridizing the very first flowers of a young, variegated streptocarpus may result in the death of the plant. It won’t die until after the seed pod is harvested, but it does have a good chance of being dead shortly after that. I suggest first taking a leaf and propagate it, making sure you have variegated babies before hybridizing a young strep. By young, I mean a plant younger than 6 months or if you are fertilizing flowers on the first 3 leaves it produced.

I have gone onto crossing the ‘Iced’ seedlings to green leaf streps and all the seedlings from those crosses have solid green leaves. The next step I’ve done is to cross the best of those green leaf seedlings to each other or selfed them. Again, viability is extremely poor and the chance of getting a variegated seedling is low, but one does get some with variegation! This is the only way we’ll get a variety of flower colors on variegated foliage.



Iced Streptocarpus
One of Dale’s variegated streps

Have a go at Hybridising

By Kim Williams

A few words to encourage everyone to have a go at hybridising, you do not need expensive equipment, just a bit of patience.

Although I have been collecting *Streptocarpus* for many years, Hybridising was not something that crossed my mind, if it did it was dismissed immediately with the thought that it has been done before by the 'big boys' what is the point colours will just come out the same. How wrong I was, especially in recent years with such a wide range of colour variations.

I have always preferred the smaller flowered varieties, that is my personal taste I prefer small flowers on any plant, I also preferred the neatness of the compact plants, rather than the big leafy show-stoppers. I was starting to have thoughts about trying hybridising to make the plants more compact, when I found out someone had already beaten me to it, Chris Rose which most of you will have heard of through the *Streptocarpus* society, now here is a man who knows so much about the *Streptocarpus* make up it makes me jealous, and those of you that own one of Chris's *Streptocarpus* hybrids will understand what sort of compactness I am talking about. This encouraged me to want to have a go myself, so I made up my mind which two plants I was going to cross, I took a tiny paintbrush and dabbed it into a freshly opened flower of a tiny species *S. Kentaniensis* whose flowers are white, very tiny but so perfect, then dabbed it into another freshly opened flower of a compact hybrid Kim, with it's such dark velvety flowers one of my favourites. I marked the stem with a bit of wool and eagerly waited, a seed pod appeared so I was hoping I was successful, not knowing at this stage whether it was my cross or if the plant had selfed (fertilised itself). When the seedpod turned brown I collected the seed carefully and stored it until I was ready to sow it.

To sow the seed I used sieved multipurpose compost into a quarter size tray and stood the tray in water until the water soaked to the top, I sowed the seed on top of the compost and put it into a propagator covering the tray with a piece of glass and a sheet of paper on top of that, this was done in January. After what seemed an age the seeds

germinated and I was still unsure whether my cross was successful, after pricking out and watching the plantlets grow I could tell that they were indeed the cross that I had made, some plants had the leaves of the species, narrow and more stiff, I was now most excited to what the flowers would come out like, I had months to wait.

So far I have only one plant in flower, suddenly noticing it on one of my many trips to the greenhouse, it stopped me in my tracks, I nearly had tears in my eyes, I took it indoors to show my husband. Was it a colour not seen before? Was it so beautiful to take your breath away? No it was none of this things, it was just something I had achieved, created if you like, as they say beauty is in the beholder. The plant is compact with narrow leaves and tiny dark flowers with a diffused lighter throat. Most would say it is boring, but in one attempt at hybridising I already achieved what I wanted out of a plant, the compactness, everybody has there own tastes that is what makes us all interesting as people, so as long as you are happy with pleasing yourself you will not be disappointed.

Have a go, if I can do it anyone can, when you see your first cross flower you too will experience the same emotion as I did, it is truly wonderful. Do not have such high aims to begin with, you will be disappointed, just take two different plants and marvel at your creation, it does not matter if someone else is producing real gems, it is your creation enjoy it.

My open days were advertised in the last newsletter, I would just like to add that regrettably the garden and greenhouse are not suitable for the disabled.



Kim's first cross

New use for Cling film

by Brian Grieve

When I first mentioned to Frank Davies that I used Cling film on my cuttings in pots he was somewhat sceptical. However when Frank and Mary Visited us during the R.H.S. Flower show at Tation Park the ease of use for a small time grower became obvious. "What a good idea, you must write an article for the newsletter" ----So here goes.

I like to take my cuttings during July and early August. First prepare a suitable porous compost, water retentive but allowing the roots to breath. A suitable mix would be 2 parts Multipurpose compost eg. Arthur Bowers, 1 part Vermiculite (for water retention), 1 part coarse Growers sand (to aid drainage). If the compost is too dry, I spray it and remix to distribute the water. Fill a suitable shallow pot, i.e. "5 ½ inch 14D" about 1 inch from the top with compost. Prepare the leaf by cutting it across, into pieces about 1 ½ inches long with a sharp blade (fig 1)-usually 4 or 5 pieces per leaf. Dip the lower cut edge in rooting hormone powder—not vital but might make all the difference if your conditions are less than perfect. Insert the cutting into a slit in the compost at 45 degree angle (fig 2) to allow plenty of light to be absorbed. I usually place 5 or 6 overlapping cuttings round the edge of the pot (like the spokes of a wheel). Lightly spray to moisten and settle the compost.

Now for the cling film. Take a piece of cling film and stretch over the pot. Secure with a large elastic band (fig 3). Minimal condensation develops on the inside of the cling film compared to glass so there is no need to turn it. Pots of cuttings ideally root quickly in a propagator, but will also root well on a warm window ledge if shielded from direct sunlight. The clingfilm can be left in place for 6 to 8 weeks till new plantlets appear. To harden off the plants make a slit in the cling film and gradually enlarge over the next few days before removing

it.

I am fortunate in keeping tropical fish in the small bedroom. I have a shelf on the wall with an old 3 foot and 4 foot aquarium hood supported above—hence 7 feet of light shelf ! The space between shelf and light is 18 inches. I find a single warm white tube over a 9 inch shelf works fine. The temperature is 65 to 78 degrees F and the lights are timed for 14 hours a day i.e. (fig 4) the same as my tropical fish.

Cuttings taken in July/August are moved to a cooler south facing bedroom window ledge in October and remain there growing slowly till the following March. In March they are potted into individual shallow pots (3 ½ inch) to grow on in the greenhouse (fig 5)—Greenhouse is kept at a minimum 50 degrees F.

The same system works well for seed sown in October/November in ¼ seed trays, each covered with cling film with an elastic band round. Tinfoil folded round the base forms a tray to allow limited watering from the bottom if needed.

Seeds germinate rapidly, making nice flowering plants by May/June the following year.

Brian Grieve.



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5

Streptocarpus Saxorum

by Ken Jones

Streptocarpus Saxorum

In the wild this species grows on cliff faces by damp cave mouths or close to waterfalls but always where mist occurs, very often in quite sunny situations.

This then should give us an idea of the kind of growing conditions it will tolerate. Grown well it is very closely packed with small thick fleshy leaves of a bluey green colour and it is capable of flowering all through the year though it usually rests for me from around Christmas until February. It grows best in the sunny side of my greenhouse. Many people are successful in a bathroom with a good light situation; it appears not to like too much disturbance once you have found an ideal place for it to grow.

Method of growing on

A small plant in a 3 1/2 inch pot can be transferred into a 6 inch hanging basket quite easily. I would suggest 3 inches of gravel at the bottom of the basket and then your normal compost to pot on. Pinch out the centre point of the plant when 3-4 inches high it should then produce plenty of side shoots, some of which will run along the top of the pot and readily root into the compost. When new shoots reach the sides of the pot and are 3-4 inches long pinch out again thus creating even more shoots and making a good shaped plant. You can continue to do this until you have the shape you require.

A quicker method of doing this is if you have an established plant or can get hold of about 6 cuttings which once rooted can be placed around a hanging pot and treated in the same way, thus giving you a denser plant in a quicker time.

Cuttings

Taking cuttings of Saxorum is very easy, cut each one between 2-3 inches long, remove lower leaves and insert stems in your chosen compost, they root readily in about 2 weeks.

Saxorum flowers at its best during summer, it tolerates heat and sun better than hybrids. It will withstand periods of dryness and even being very wet provided it can drain away excess water. During its main growing and flowering time it does appreciate being really well misted over, I tend to this early morning several times a week. Its single pale blue flowers are borne along its many stems on very thin wiry stems about 3 inches long, if you stand about 8 feet away from a good globe shaped plant you tend to see the dense green centre of the plant and the flowers appear almost like a pale blue halo around it.



Streptocarpus Saxorum
Growing in Ken Jones
greenhouse

A First Hybrid of Streptocarpus Daviesii by Chris Rose

The first of three *S. daviesii* hybrids that I managed to raise off 2 different crosses has just come into flower (end of April). My *S. daviesii* (seed obtained from Jaco Truter in South Africa) failed to set seed with pollen from other plants but did prove viable as pollen parents. Germination where I did get seed was very poor, however.

The plant that has flowered has the parentage
{ [*parviflorus* x (*johannis* x 'Elsi')] x *gardenii* } x *daviesii*

Habit and form is very *daviesii*-like with the second leaf growing over the top of the first (which is about 9 inches long) in the same direction and a third one heading the same way. The veins on the underside of the leaf near the base are red-purple.

The flower bud was relatively narrow-tubed with a rather angularly bulbous 'head' - again *daviesii*-like.

The flower, about an inch wide, is pale violet with a complete network of light mid-violet vein colouring on all lobes. The outside of the tube is green. There is a bright, rather greenish yellow band up the centre of the floor of the tube - with a blackish, slightly broken line of colour up the middle of that. This coloured band splits into 3 at the mouth and there is a slightly raised ridge between each fork. *S. daviesii* itself has a somewhat greenish yellow band and *gardenii* is

green on the floor of the tube.

As I had hoped, the calyx is of the highly distinctive *daviesii* pattern with the lobes broad at the base and conjoined for about half their length. This is the particular feature of this species that I am interested in bringing into other seedlings.

I will not be naming this plant as 1) I don't believe in whacking names on things as soon as they open a flower and 2) the growth habit isn't of sufficient horticultural merit. However, this is the start, perhaps, of yet another little avenue bearing away from the mass of *Dibleys*-style 'standard' hybrids.

I'm not aware of any other *daviesii* hybrids having been made, though I wouldn't be surprised to hear that Toshijiro Okuto in Japan has produced some.

Best wishes, Chris.

Secretaries report

First of all I must apologise for the postal mix up on the last newsletter it appears that some of them went over the 60 grams for the postage of 19p, the heaviest we have had reported was 61 grams, in my estimation to implement this cost the P/O time and money, no wonder they are running at a loss, if it was 70 or 80 grams you could understand it, anyway must not keep on about P/O, it will not happen again I promise.

Mary would like to thank all who had plants and hope you were pleased with them, these all went out in time for you to have had them 3 months before the society's show on Saturday 27 July. All show details will follow at the end of June.

We have had a suggestion from a few of you about selling the label we use on our envelope, you could have your address added if so required they would cost £4.00p for 5 sheets, if any of you are interested let me have details and will print you a sample for your approval.

Now to the best bits! How are your streps growing? Mine are doing very well in fact they are the BEST I have grown for a few years, well the best at this time of the year anyway. Lost a few over the winter too much of the wet stuff, **WATER**. That plant looks as if it needs a drink, give it a drink, a week later it still **LOOKS** as if it needs a drink! I've over watered it, it must have been wet when I gave it that last drink should have picked the pot up and checked, blast it was a good plant as well, why is it always the best ones we loose?

Over the past year quite a number of people have told me they can root cuttings in water, so I have been asking the question to all who visited the stand can you grow cuttings in water? The reply has been about 50/50 yes and no. The ones who can seem to have soft water the rest their water is hard, my water is very hard and all they do for me is rot. Sue Long has been doing a little trial on this with tap, rain and bottled water no doubt she will in due cause be putting this on paper for all to enlighten themselves on.

During 2000, Chris Rose Ken and myself made quite a few crosses. All the seed sown in 2001 was by myself and grown on by Ken and myself, Chris having no more room in his growing area, what we ended up with was a large number of very good NEW hybrids (no reds). These are now being grown on for a second year to make sure that they perform correctly, and hopefully some will be on show for you to see on JULY 27th. I think most of you will be astounded by what Chris, Ken and myself have arrived at, hopefully we will be putting a few pictures in the October newsletter for all of you to see.

You will be reading an article by Chris Rose re crossing *S daviesii*, this species grows with one leaf first, up to flowering and then puts another leaf over the top of that. The flowers are Violet blue and the petals seem to be fused together to form a bell shape flower. No doubt, Chris will be using this plant in future crosses, we will have to wait and see the outcome in another 2 years.

Over the past month Dale Martins has kindly been collecting fees from new members in the USA so far to date we have 10 and we welcome all of you and hope you enjoy the society. I must let you all see an e-mail received from one of the members in New York. This is just one of many such notes received from members all over, we are pleased so many of you find the newsletter of help and enjoy it. It is becoming hard to fill the newsletter we have at the moment nothing in hand for our next issue. So please, please send your comments in to Tom or myself, any queries regarding your plants to our expert plants man Ken who will try his hardest to answer, we can then print them for the rest of you for future reference.

So let us have **anything** you think may be **of interest** to the rest of us please.

ALL ADDRESSES ARE ON THE BACK PAGE.

Now for that e-mail.

Hi Guys,

I just received my first copy of your newsletter and wish to convey my hearty congratulations for a wonderful effort. I read it cover to cover on the way from the post box. It is highly informative and relays a nice sense of informative enthusiasm. Thanks for all the good information and keep up the good work please.

Sincerely- Michael Riley in NYC

