



Gleanings

a monthly newsletter from The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

(articles and photos selected from chapter newsletters, our journal *Gesneriads*, and original sources)

Volume 7, Number 12

December 2016



Welcome to the latest issue of **Gleanings**! This issue includes an article and photos from Frank Davies, one of the founders of The British Streptocarpus Society, and information about the Annual Appeal.

Hope you enjoy **Gleanings**!

Mel Grice, Editor

The photo on the right shows Frank Davies in his greenhouse in the UK around 1994 or 1995 when he had only been growing streptocarpus for a few years. See Frank's article about how he and the British Streptocarpus Society got their starts on the following pages.



British Streptocarpus Society

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The society was formed in 1999 with nine people attending a meeting held in Staffordshire, England. This meeting was advertised in a garden magazine a month before.

This was the beginning. It had been in my mind and Ken Jones's as well for over a year. After having a word with Rex Dibley, who at the time said you could give it a go, we did.

Our society has had a membership of over 800, but now like all the societies in the UK, membership has fallen off. Today we have 425 members, which by UK standards is quite good. We would like more, especially more overseas members who can benefit from a PDF format newsletter three times a year. PDF format is so much better for overseas members because our postage rates are high and going to get higher so we will have to charge more for snail mail.

I first found *Streptocarpus* at an old friend's place (Ken Jones) after being made redundant (British for - no longer employed because there is no more work available). I had time to visit while trying to get a new job. He had a large collection of Dibley's varieties in 1992. This was nowhere near what is available now even at Dibley's Nurseries. I was hooked. It was late in the year and the greenhouse was FULL of flowers – *S. 'Gloria'*, *S. 'Falling Stars'*, *S. 'Susan'*, etc. How do I get hold of any I asked? Dibley's was the answer. He gave me the address and 16 plants the next day. By the way, *S. 'Falling Stars'* still makes a very good show plant and still wins if grown correctly.

So off we went (we being my wife Mary and myself) the following Sunday to Dibley's Nurseries, a two hour drive each way. It was hidden in a small valley with no signs in those days. Today, it is brown-signed from quite a few miles away. What a site! About one third of an acre of glasshouses full of *Streptocarpus* hybrids and a few species which I had never seen before. I was fascinated by that single leaf two feet long, one foot wide with a flower sticking out from the back. I had to grow them and I still do grow quite a lot of them. But back to the hybrids – I bought £55.00 worth (about \$137 in 1992). Mary does not know how much I spent, but she will now when she reads this. £55.00 was a lot of money back in 1992 with no job, but we got by. That was the start of my *Streptocarpus* growing.

I kept in touch with Ken. He wanted to hybridize and had made some crosses with *S. 'Susan'* × others. They were different to what he had so he wanted to register them, but we had no idea where to do this. He wrote to the *Gloxinian*, c/o the USA. It took nine months, but we did get a reply from Judy Becker. Excellent service from the USA postal system! He did register them and received a little ticket with the names on it plus all the details. So it was my turn – out with the paint brush, a very fine one. I use this to pollinate because it has black bristles that shows the pollen. I only used one plant for the seed parent, but I did pollinate quite a number of flowers from all the ones I had at that



The amount of seed collected was, as you well know, quite a lot. Being full of enthusiasm, I sowed four full-size seed trays. I think every seed came up – far too many even for a commercial nursery to handle. We selected a few from each corner, out of the middle, and just a few from all over. Both Ken and I grew them on. We kept a few, but most of them were just run of the mill, so they ended up on the compost heap. After this, we started to cross these with Dibleys' varieties and this resulted in the FRANKEN prefix.

Our first overseas member was Dale Martens. She agreed to collect our overseas membership fees for us. This has been a great help over the years and still is today. Even with the society having an account on Pay-Pal, some members still prefer to send their fees to Dale.

We wanted to promote the society. To do this, we had to get word out to the public. We had no money to advertise. The best way to do this was to show the plants off at local shows. The first main one we did was at Shrewsbury. We entered class one which was the best one for *Streptocarpus* plants. It was also the largest area. The class had to include three types of plants. We put a tiered stand up with 95% streps and the rest made up of Florist Gloxinias and I cannot remember what the other one was. We came in second. A very large display of begonias was first, but we had the crowd since they had not seen streps shown off that way. The display was mainly Dibleys' varieties plus some of the early



Franken ones and these were the ones they all looked at. After this, we started to collect members, so we were off. The next step was to try to show at the Royal Horticultural Society shows. I think the first one was Malvern in 2000. After that, we went to BBC's Gardeners World at the NEC in Birmingham. This show was good for a start, but the gardening side of it fell on the wayside in the latter years. RHS Tatton Park was the first one where we got a gold medal. That is the top award in the RHS Shows. At the beginning, both Ken and I put plants on the stand. But after the first two years, it was all my own plants which meant I had to grow about 800 show plants. We put between 50 to 60 plants on the stand. Alongside that, we had a small table of species, which are difficult to transport. The hybrids went on a tiered stand so they mainly had a front. They were not full-round plants that you would put on a show bench. We also put an educational area along the front of the floral display. This was to show how to take cuttings, wet and dry plants, plus seed pods.

For the first few years of the society, we attended eight or even nine shows in a year that ran from mid-May to the last weekend in September. But some of the smaller shows closed or were not worth going to with people showing very little interest. You do not want to stand around for three or even five days doing nothing, so we ended up doing only five shows for the last few years. The last show we did was Malvern Spring in 2014. After that, I was unwell and had to give up showing on a large scale. By the way, we did get a gold at our last show.



Mary Davies with first RHS Gold



The society grew to over 800 members at one time. It now stands at 450 which is still doing OK as far as the UK societies go. They are all suffering with low membership since our young people do not seem interested in gardening very much. They also have very small gardens in the new housing.



Frank Davies (striped sweater) demonstrating his growing techniques

As you will see from the photos, I grow all my own cuttings in a greenhouse 6 feet by 8 feet long. It has two sand beds, each 2 feet wide with heating cables above that on one side is a heat mat covered with $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of sand so that it keeps moist. The other top shelf has no heating. My young plant house is a greenhouse 12 feet long by 8 feet wide. The benching is at two levels. All the young plantlets from off the leaf go into this house potted into 6cm pots until ready to be potted on into 10.5cm pots. They then go into one of my large houses. One I keep at about 50°F with my stock plants. In the other one over winter is a cold greenhouse. I use this for growing a few daffodils and anything else that will go below zero. In March, we empty this one and put all our new potted stock in it, again heating to 50°F. When they are growing well, some go into the other large house and any old stock not doing well is composted. These greenhouses are 24 feet long by 12 feet wide with double benching on one side, single on the other.



Single leaf species below



We do not do any large shows now due to my health. I cannot walk very far or carry anything and Mary has a problem with her legs as well now. The people who helped are also getting past it, so the only show we do now is our own society show. It just so happens that this show is only just up the road. I live about in the middle of the UK – well as near to the middle as you can get. We have a good network of roads running to the midlands, so it made sense to hold the show in this area.



All photos
courtesy of
Frank and
Mary Davies

I hope you enjoy the photos with this article. Have a look at our website <http://www.streptocarpussociety.org.uk/> .

You can contact me at fkstreps@aol.com.

Thank you, Frank Davies, B.S.S. Secretary and founder.

The Gesneriad Society Annual Appeal

The [Annual Appeal](#) helps support gesneriad research, education, and conservation by ensuring that grant money is available for eligible applicants. The target fund for 2016 is The Conservation Fund, which supports conservation efforts in different localities where gesneriads are endangered. Recent grant recipients include the Gesneriad Conservation Center (China), Brazil Plants (Brazil) and The Universidad Estatal Amazónica (Ecuador). Your donation will ensure that this fund remains healthy and growing to enable The Gesneriad Society to award grants for conservation efforts around the world. [Donate now!](#) You may make a donation online – using the existing donation link in the Gesneriad Society store and indicating that it is for the Conservation Fund Annual Appeal.

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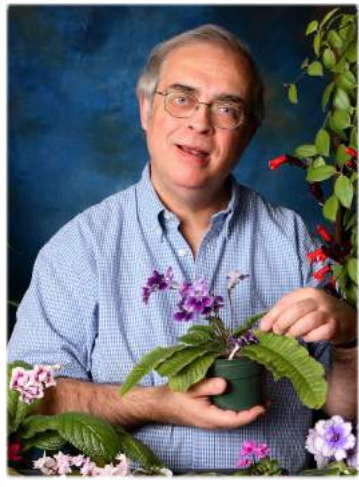
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Happy Holidays!

John Beaulieu created this holiday tree originally in black and white and Stan Sudol added the color a few years later.

Thanks to both for sharing!





From the editor —

December is flying by! The snow is piling up where I live. Hopefully, it will stay around for the holidays. I am really looking forward to spending some extra time inside with my green and blooming plants!

If you have suggestions, comments, or items for possible inclusion in future issues, please feel free to contact me at melsgrice@earthlink.net

Happy Holidays!

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Application for Membership — The Gesneriad Society, Inc.

WELCOME — membership in our international society includes quarterly issues of *Gesneriads* — *The Journal for Gesneriad Growers*, a copy of *How to Know and Grow Gesneriads*, a packet of gesneriad seeds and a wealth of information about our chapters, flower shows, publications, research, programs and seed fund. Membership begins upon receipt of dues.

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