Gardens of Excellence

Stangate Camellia Garden, South Australia

Kevin Bowden

It has been a tough year for camellias in South Australia. Average winter rainfall in 2012 and a very dry summer resulted in significantly fewer blooms during September 2013. Although we did not experience the blistering prolonged heatwaves of the previous two years (several days of maximums above 40°C/104°F) the average daily maximum temperatures were the highest for some years and the rains stopped in October 2012 with only some 25mm (1 inch) of rainfall during the following three months.

Since 2003, the amount of supplementary watering has been significantly reduced. This has been brought about by several factors including drought, restrictions, cost and quality (the 1.6 ha/4.5 acre property can be very thirsty). Towards the end of summer many of our camellias exhibited signs of distress and began dropping leaves. Nevertheless it has been an interesting year to observe how differently various camellias performed. Reticulata camellias have produced many blooms, as have many of the hybrids (x williamsii). The darker coloured camellias have also performed well, but many of the white/lighter flowers have ‘gone missing’ this year, *C. j.* ‘Brushfield’s Yellow’ being an exception. The flowering season has also been much shorter with the majority of blooms finishing before the end of September (mid-spring). Watering during the driest part of the year is necessary to obtain that blaze of winter/spring colour.

Lola Bennier, a founding member of Camellia Society Adelaide Hills (formed in 1972), has been working on an audit of our camellia holdings using original records, tags on plants and nameplates placed at the base of the camellia. Checking has been a mammoth and frustrating task. Named camellias can be readily referenced against the Camellia Register, but difficulties arise when trying to identify un-named cultivars. Armed with an ipad (and Wi-Fi connectivity) the task has become easier as the Web Camellia Register can be searched by either name, part of a name, description or part description. A website, Australian Originated Camellias, containing some 745 photos is also useful, but even that is not foolproof. At Stangate there are many examples where blooms on the same cultivar can vary. There are also localities and climatic variations leading to both colour and size variations for example ‘Dona Herzilia De Freitas Magalhaes’ can vary from deep purple to pink.

One recent anomaly came to light whilst checking via the WCR for *C. j.* ‘Red Waratah’. It is not listed in WCR however a camellia with a similar name, ‘Palmer’s Red Waratah’ with the WCR descriptor – “Harrison ed., 1835, The Floricultural Cabinet, p89. No description. Originated in England (believed to be extinct)” did come up during the search.

*C. j.* Red Waratah’(Stangate Sept 2013)

*C. j.* ‘Mariana’ has the WCR descriptor “Guilfoyle Nursery Catalogue, 1866. A Camden Park seedling originated by Macarthur, N.S.W., Australia. A bright crimson lake, very double, outer petals

C. j. ‘Mariana’ (Stangate 2013)
At Stangate we have cultivars with both names and they appear to be two distinctly different cultivars, raising many questions, which may never be solved without the knowledge of where the Stangate camellias were sourced in the 1970s. The most important question being - does Stangate have the extinct C. j. ‘Palmer’s Red Waratah’?

CSAH had a very successful Royal Adelaide Show in September 2013.

C. japonica x C. reticulata’ Harold L. Page’ was awarded Grand Champion Camellia

while C. pitardii hybrid ‘Adorable’ was awarded Champion Non-Reticulata hybrid.

**A cruel winter at Park ar Brug, Brittany, France**

Roger Salaun

A particularly wet but mild autumn followed by a more clement but equally wet beginning to winter, promised a very good flowering season for the camellias. The latter part of the winter, however, was very harsh in some parts of Brittany, especially the Côtes d’Armor where the beautiful Garden of Excellence, Park ar Brug, is located.

Heavy falls of snow occurred between 10th and 12th of March causing damage to many magnificent camellia flowers. Many plants were at the peak of their flowering season and laden with blooms; these were crushed under the weight of the wet, heavy snow, rupturing main branches and in some cases, even the trunk itself. It was a scene of desolation. This degree of damage can only be repaired after many years of patient and careful nurturing. Fortunately, the camellia is a vigorous plant with a great capacity for regeneration and can rebuild itself to flower again after two or three years.

Camellia in full flower snapped by weight of the snow

Sadly, this was not the only misfortune to affect Park ar Brug in this terrible winter of 2013. In May, a new freak of nature struck the garden that had already suffered so much. On the night of May 25 to 26, a late spring frost destroyed many of the new shoots, resulting in a new disaster that will affect the flowering season of plants in the winter of 2013/2014.

New shoots damaged by late spring frosts