

Rhododendron konori, a variable Vireya

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Many forms of *R.konori* have been described, ranging from pure white, white with pink markings in varying degrees and a dark red form collected at Kasonombe at an altitude of 5,600 feet in the Mount Salawaket region of New Guinea, which was first thought to be *R.hellwigii*, but was eventually identified by Dr. Sleumer as being a dark red form of *R.konori*.

The two particular forms I propose describing are the West Irian form raised from seed collected by Dr. Sleumer and the one raised from material collected at Kundiawa for the Australian Rhododendron Society by Lou Searle.

The West Irian form, white or white with small pink markings has flowered for me for a number of years, and in March 1979 produced an outstandingly beautiful truss of seven flowers measuring 3 1/2 inches across the lobes. The flowers were highly perfumed and had an indefinable aura of elegance.

In 'The Rhododendron', March 1972, appeared an account of the late Don Stanton's "New Guinea Adventure", the culmination of a long cherished ambition to visit New Guinea and see for himself some of the rhododendrons in their native habitat.

One of the highlights of his visit was the meeting of his friend Lou Searle at Kundiawa in the Chimbu district, where they made several collecting expeditions. Lou was building up a comprehensive collection of rhododendrons on a sloping bank near his home, including several forms of *R.konori*.

A large consignment of plant material was kindly sent to the Australian Rhododendron Society by Lou, which of course, went through the normal

procedure and was fumigated with methyl bromide by the Department of Agriculture before it was released to the Society.

In such consignments there is usually a percentage of mortalities, the methyl bromide seems to more adversely affect the smaller leafed species. As a matter of interest, it has been found that when material is sent as small branches rather than individual cuttings, and then cut to size after fumigation, losses have been considerably reduced.

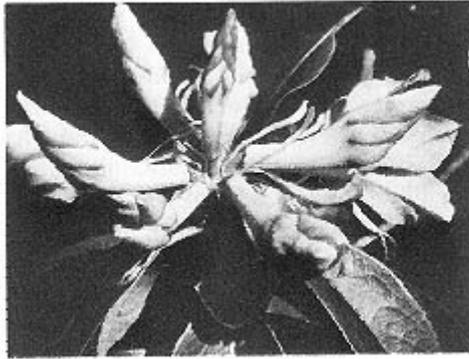
The cuttings were potted up and placed in a heated bench in the Society's quarantine house and inspected at regular intervals by the Department, who eventually authorized their release for potting on and planting in the National Rhododendron Garden at Olinda, but after some weeks, several plants started to show some signs of deterioration.

Brian Clancy, a highly successful amateur propagator, took some of the plants home for special treatment. This was not the first occasion upon which he had saved plants, that to all appearances had passed the point of no return.

One particular plant, from which the label had been lost, responded and was duly transferred to Brian's favourite growing medium, a piece of fern log standing in a shallow tray of water. It would appear that his special incantations again achieved the desired result for after five years, the plant, nearly five feet high and with healthy dark green foliage, produced five flower buds which were watched with great anticipation.

Several buds duly opened and the flowers were very striking, white with deep pink markings, however the 'piece de resistance' was the very large bud at the top of the plant which made a spectacular display in its half open stage with seven long pointed buds with deep pink markings, and it exceeded all expectations when fully opened, the flowers measuring 3 1/2 inches across the lobes and still carrying the attractive pink markings.

R. konori, L.S. 37 Bud stage.



I immediately photographed it and wrote to Lou Searle enclosing a slide for identification purposes, mentioning that I had temporarily labeled it 'Candy Pole Pink', and quote from his reply:

"Thank you for your letter and the enclosed slide of *R.konori* which is surely a beautiful specimen. The colour variation in this species throughout the New Guinea highlands is very wide, particularly in Chimbu District, I believe it is now a Province. In all cases I found the flowers very fragrant. On one occasion, going to one of the outstations, I drove through a belt of fragrance even though no flowers were in sight. We eventually found them on a bank some thirty feet above the road. There must have been fifteen to twenty plants, all in bloom.

Unless my memory is playing me tricks, the most deeply coloured flower I saw was during the second World War at 11,000 feet in the Finisterre Mountains east of Madang.

The palest, almost off white and with leaves so lax it appeared not to be *R.konori*, I saw in company with Don Stanton when I took him up to the Wahgi-Sepik Divide. Growing alongside it was the most magnificent plant of *R.multinervium* I have ever seen. It must have had 200 trusses and Don took many pictures of the two.

Michael Black told me when I met him on one of his collecting expeditions, that konori was the name of a native god, of which country I do not know, and

please forgive me, but I don't think a god would relish the name 'Candy Pole Pink'.

Brian's particular plant of *R.konori* must have been very striking with its five trusses and also very well grown to have attained this size."

Lou has since left New Guinea and is endeavouring to build up his collection at his home in northern New South Wales.



www.vireya.net

A search in Encyclopedia Britannica, an old dictionary and other likely publications were of no help, but a thought occurred to me, Brian Clancy's daughter, Cathy, a successful propagator and very interested in her father's rhododendrons, was at the time on school holidays and I asked her if she would like to help by making a search in our local Municipal Library, which has an extensive collection of technical and reference books.

Cathy's diligence was eventually rewarded and the following brief explanation was extracted from 'New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology', introduced by Robert Graves: Oceanic Mythology.

"Thus, the creation of the world is usually attributed to Tangaroa in Polynesia, but to Laulaati in Lifu Island (Loyalty Islands), to two deities, Tamakaia and Maui-Tikitiki (the latter of Polynesian origin), in Efate (New Hebrides), to Nobu

in Eromanga (New Hebrides), to a prophet called by different names such as the unique, the old man, the man rejuvenated, or to his son, Konor, in Geelvink Bay (New Guinea)."

Lou has now identified the plant in question as being *R.konori* L.S.37, his original description when the material was sent to the Australian Rhododendron Society, and as previously mentioned, from which the label had been lost. In future it will be referred to as *R.konori* L.S.37, and it is hoped that everyone, including the god Konor will be satisfied with this appellation.

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