

Old is new and new is old:  
Rhododendrons lochiaie and notiale

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*As any good rhododendron grower will tell you, "there is only one rhododendron in Australia, R.lochiaie, and it grows on Mt. Bartle Frere in north Queensland." We parrot this dogma off to our non-rhodoholic friends as if it was chiselled in stone. Alas, as with so many things, the stone exists only in our own minds.*

Over the years there have been several anecdotal reports as to the existence of another, usually yellow-flowered, species of *Rhododendron* in the hills of north Queensland but, to date, none of these reports has been backed up by specimens. So it was with some scepticism that Lyn visited Bob in 1992 to see his "unusual *R.lochiaie*". Bob had bought the plant from a Sydney nursery. The flowers were the colour of the well known form of *R.lochiaie* that was introduced to Australian horticulture by the Melbourne nursery of Basil Hodgins in the 1940s but they had a different shape. The corollas had a curved shape and the anthers were clustered at the top of the throat. The Hodgins form has a straight corolla tube and the anthers are spread around the perimeter of the throat with most of them being in the lower half. The differences in flower form are shown in the accompanying plates.



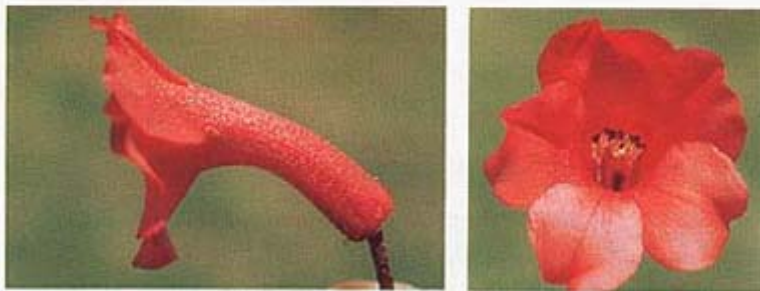
Above *R. ustiale*. See page 5.

It transpired that Rodger Elliot, horticultural author and nurseryman, had plants of both the curved-flower type and the Hodgins plant in his nursery. Rodger was propagating and selling plants of both forms and it is possible that Bob's plant had started its life at Rodger's nursery. The provenance of Rodger's curved flower plants was Mt. Bartle Frere in the Bellenden Ker Range, from which the Hodgins form reputedly came. It is worth noting here that the cover of issue 4 of Volume 27 of *The Rhododendron*, depicting a painting by Vera Scarth-Johnson of *R. lochiae* from Mt. Bartle Frere, clearly shows that the flowers have curved corolla tubes.

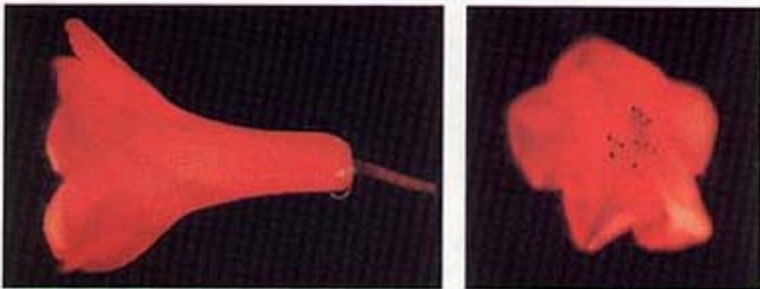
So we had a small puzzle. Lyn borrowed herbarium specimens from the herbaria at Atherton, Brisbane and Melbourne and studied these together with specimens lodged at the Canberra herbarium. Rodger Elliot allowed Lyn to collect flowering specimens of the curved flower plant from those he was cultivating at his nursery and these were pressed and dried for study along with the other materials. The straight-flower plants all came from localities northwest and north of Cairns whilst the curved-flower plants came only from the Bellenden Ker Range which is south of Cairns. After some deep thought, the decision that two species should be recognised was made.



Above *R. lochiai*, collected at Thornton Peak, Queensland. See page 5.



Comparing corollas – *R. notiale*, with its distinctly curved tube (above) and the straight tube of *R. lochiai* (below).



This raised another problem as the type specimen of the name *R. lochiai* belonged to the curved-flower form. But, the name *R. lochiai* is associated with with the straight-flower form as that is the form that is well known in Australian horticulture and apparently is the only form cultivated overseas. Another consideration is that all the named hybrids that have *R. lochiai* listed in their parentage involve the straight-flower form.

Under the general provisions of the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN) the 'new' species, the curved-flower plant, bears the name *R. lochiai* and the 'old' species, the straight-flower plant that we call *R. lochiai*, requires a new name. Fortunately, the ICBN has provisions

whereby the application of names can be conserved so as to preserve common usage.

An important objective of the ICBN is to maintain, wherever possible, stability in plant nomenclature. People sling off about name changes usually without good reason; every time a new species is segregated from the variation encompassed in a particular species an additional name will have to be found. Sometimes the 'new' name belongs to that part of the variation that is especially well known to one or more groups of people, e.g. horticulturists, for whom it would be desirable if the older name could be maintained. Or it may be that when species are combined the name that should be used under the ICBN is not well known and the better known name will have to disappear. For both of these cases the ICBN has a process to allow well known names to stand IF the argument for retention is accepted by the Committee established to consider these proposals.

Lyn has proposed that such conservation apply in this case, the reference being: Craven, L.A. 1996. Proposal to conserve the name *Rhododendron lochiaie* F.Muell. (Ericaceae) with a conserved type. Taxon 45: 135-136. Keep your fingers crossed that the Committee accepts the proposal!

The name given to the curved-flower plant, that represents both an 'old' and a 'new' species is *R.notiale*, the epithet notiale coming from the Latin word notialis, meaning southern. *Rhododendron notiale* has been described and named in the following paper: Craven, L.A. and Withers, R.M. 1996. A second species of *Rhododendron* (Ericaceae) from Australia. Edinb. J. Bot. 53: 27-37. A copy of this paper is held in the Society's library. The major differences between the two species are as follows:

*R.lochiaie* - Corolla straight, the limb +/- at a right angle to the tube. Anthers dispersed around the corolla throat (mainly in the lower half). Style positioned in the lower part of the corolla tube.

*R.notiale* - Corolla curved, the limb +/- at an oblique angle to the tube. Anthers clustered in the upper part of the corolla throat. Style positioned in the upper part of the corolla tube.

Unraveling the taxonomy of the Australian rhododendrons has been enjoyable; species delimitation and speciation are absorbing subjects. The nomenclatural aspects involved with the name *R.lochiaie* are equally fascinating as the old changes places with the new.

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*Both are members of the Australian Rhododendron Society Victorian Branch (Inc.) and are highly respected in the Horticultural arena. The above article was generated by Dr. Withers' investigations during the preparation of his presentation of the Fifth of the Baron von Mueller Memorial Lectures in 1992.*

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