

Iris in March?

By Alan McMurtrie

Reticulata Iris are one of the first Irises to bloom each year. Typically that's right at the end of March here in Toronto. Of course in recent years there has been a lot of variation in that start date. In 2008 the Retics were poking through the snow on April 1st (we had a lot of snow that year). Last year the first few were up, ready to open when I left for Paris and Holland on February 23. Fortunately slightly cooler weather came and held them back somewhat. But then the warm spell in the last half of March sped things up and they were finished by the end of the month.

Very, very unusual. Normally when bloom starts early, cool temperatures come along and keep things growing slowly, so you actually end up with a much longer bloom. For example in 2002, I had Retics in bud on February 23, with the first flower opening on the 25, and bloom finished sometime after April 17. Typically the last flower finishes about April 21, which means Reticulata Iris bloom for just over 3 weeks.

Back in 1985 and 1986 I went plant collecting in Turkey. One of my goals was to collect a diploid form of *Iris danfordiae* so that I could use it in hybridizing. *Danfordiae* is lemon yellow in colour, whereas most other Reticulatas are blues and purples. Over the years I made a lot of crosses and in the process, I opened up a whole new world. A world no one would have thought possible. It could easily be that I have only just started to scratch it's surface.



Spot On field

Would you believe I have introduced 40 Reticulatas so far?

Most have only been available through **Janis Ruksans** in Latvia. Last year Dugald Cameron at Garden Import, a mail order bulb retailer here in Toronto sold three varieties. He is planning to sell some again this year depending



Spot On

on what I have available. My interest though lies in hybridizing. The availability of the bulbs comes from my using a small bit of land at a farm near Lake Erie for propagating bloom-size bulbs for hybridizing.

For more than 15 years **Wim de Goede** and his son **Mark** have been building up stock

of some of my hybrids in Holland (I really should be saying The Netherlands). We are close to starting sales of *Spot On*, *Scent*sational*, and *White Caucasus*. A very small number of bulbs of *White Caucasus* have been sold since 2010. It's possible that 10-25,000 bulbs each of *Spot On* and *Scent*sational* will be sold starting in 2014.

Wim has been testing a number of my other hybrids and over the years has rejected quite a few. Several are ones I think should be introduced. Therein lies the Catch 22. If I was just creating more blues and purples I would understand, but I'm not. I'm creating some amazing never-before-seen colours and patterns. Yes, I can't really expect Wim to introduce all that I would like him to, but he's rejecting a number that I really think should be introduced. So far my tendency has been to hand many off to Janis, so at least a few people ▶



*Scent*sational*



White Caucasus

his were different enough that we could work together. I couldn't say where I'd be 10 years from then (i.e. now), but I knew there was a reasonable chance I could create some wonderful thing that would be quite different from anything they might create.

So what do you think?

Take a look at www.Reticulatas.com, and in particular *The Big Picture*. That webpage shows the current range of my hybrids. Some are being tested by Wim, but all are in need of growers to propagate them and get them to market. ...one day you will hopefully be able to buy my hybrids at your local nursery.



Canadian Historical Iris

We are trying to locate any Historical Canadian iris; but in particular we are looking for the following – *Toranda, Canadaway, Sultan's Glamour, W.J. Moffat, Okon, Kum-on, Centennial Gold, Point Petite, Judean Star, Richmond Gold, Richmond Pink, City of Stratford, Shah Jehan, Snow Glory*, and *Fancy Biscuit* or any other Historical Canadian Iris.

If you have any of these or know of anyone who has any of these would you please let the editor know at the following address:

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