



The Scottish Rock Garden Club

Forrest Medal - Aberdeen 2019

Ramonda nathaliae JCA 686

Shown by David Millward



Most times that *Ramonda nathaliae* is exhibited we see a smallish plant with a few rosettes, in stark contrast to this winner with dozens of rosettes. It must be difficult to maintain it in this perfect state as it continues to increase in size. A triumph of cultivation for this great grower who is amassing a trove of Forrest medals. Dave won the Forrest medal with this plant last year and I wrote up quite a lot of information about the plant and its introduction to cultivation. I have appended the Forrest report from the 2018 Aberdeen show so that I don't have to repeat myself. Compare the pictures of the plant and you can see how much it has grown.

Well done Dave! [encore!]

At Aberdeen it was another case of Dave-ja-vue! [yes I have seen Dave's plant before].

The judges were unanimous in their decision that *Ramonda nathaliae* was indeed the best plant in the show. As you see its dark green crinkly foliage was almost hidden by the mass of flowers. Perfect on the day, it sat on the bench, at the end distant from the entry. Like an amethyst in the sunshine, it twinkled and beckoned you to approach. 'Never mind the others,' it seemed to say. I exaggerated about the sunshine as the rain poured down nearly all day but the glasshouses in the Duthie park provide a bright venue for the show. Most other flower shows are held in halls with much less light. No matter where it was to be exhibited, Dave's jewel would stop you in your tracks and grab your attention.





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David Millward's *Ramonda nathaliae* took the top award in Aberdeen. I was unable to get to Aberdeen again this year but from the photograph taken by Stan da Prato I can tell that this was a magnificent plant, try counting the flowers. I stopped at 100! In my garden I am happy if my *Ramondas* flower at all. David's plant also has perfect leaves. Mine have leaves which turn brown at the hint of sunshine. It also looks good all from all sides. This degree of perfection is a tribute to David's skill as a cultivator. Well done David



*I was interested to see that David's superb plant has been raised from seed collected by Jim & Jenny Archibald. According to Jim's field notes which are on the SRGC web site, it was collected as *Ramonda serbica*, [difficult to tell the difference out of flower] in the Radika Valley and Gorge in 'Yugoslavian Macedonia', along with *Lilium martagon* and *Sempervivum heuffellii**

Ramonda nathaliae grows in Serbia and Macedonia, mostly in the east of both countries. Whereas most flowers in Gesneriaceae have of five lobes in their flower, *Ramonda nathaliae* has two fused petals which give the overall appearance of four lobes (usually), making it distinctive among Gesneriad flowers. The *Ramonda nathaliae* flower is considered a symbol of the Serbian Army's struggle during World War I. The plant was scientifically described in 1884 from specimens growing around Niš, by Sava Petrović and Josif Pančić, who named it after Queen Natalija Obrenović of Serbia.

From Queen To Nun: Queen Natalija Obrenović of Serbia

Natalie was born in Florence on 15th May 1859, grew up in Bessarabia, [part of Ukraine] and died aged 81 in Saint Denis, Paris on 8th May 1941. A celebrated beauty during her youth, she was later regarded as one of the most beautiful queens in Europe. She married to her second cousin, Prince Milan Obrenović IV of Serbia on 17 October 1875. When Prince Milan proclaimed the Kingdom of Serbia in 1882, Princess Natalie assumed the title and rank of a queen. At the Easter reception of 1886, Queen Natalie publicly slapped the wife of the Greek ambassador.^[9] The

Greek woman was rumoured to have had an affair with King Milan. Her only surviving son was the future King Alexander of Serbia.

The relationship of the royal couple reached a critical level in 1887, following not only many affairs of the king with other women, but even political differences between king and queen. Natalie and Alexander left Serbia to live in Ukraine. There was a divorce, a reconciliation, an annulment of the divorce and King Milan abdicated leaving Alexander king but with restrictions on Natalie being allowed back to Serbia. The politics is analogous to but more complicated than Scotland under Mary Queen of Scots and the young James VI. Things did not really get much better as when Alexander chose Draga Mašin, a former court lady of Queen Natalie, in 1900, as his bride, his parents rejected the future queen as improper. Ex-king Milan left Serbia for good and died in Vienna in 1890. King Alexander and his wife Draga were killed in 1903 during a military coup. This left Natalie the sole member of the Obrenović dynasty. She donated the inheritance to the University of Belgrade and various churches and monasteries around Serbia. The same

