International Rock Gardener

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Luca Magli begins this month's offering from IRG. Luca, an Italian now living in Australia, is particularly keen on alpine plants and their relatives. He writes, "I studied Horticulture at the University of Florence and have been working in wholesale horticulture for about 20 years. I started out with trees and shrubs, and over time moved more into seedling production.

A big turning point for me was an internship in the US, where I met my good friend, Connor Smith (now of Utrecht Botanic Gardens). He really sparked my interest in alpine and rock garden plants, which has stuck with me ever since. One thing I really enjoy is observing plants in their natural habitats—it's one of the best ways to understand how they actually want to grow. I garden here in Victoria, Australia, where conditions can be pretty variable—about 900 mm of rain a year, with temperatures ranging from around –1°C in winter up to 43°C in summer."

IRG rounds off this month with news of a new *Nerine* cultivar. This has been grown and named by John J. Weagle of Nova Scotia. The seed came from Sir Peter Smithers of the UK, the late nerine expert and John has now named this fine cultivar for his partner, Ken Shannick.

John Weagle and Ken Shannick with JW's Gold medal award and citation from the American Rhododendron Society.

Cover image: *Richea pandanifolia,* not small, compact plants, but still found in alpine boggy areas and endemic to Tasmania. Photo Luca Magli.

--- Tasmanian Bog plants ---

How are Tasmanian subalpine and alpine bogs made? Luca Magli

Like most alpine bogs around the world, the superficial rocky substrate forms a very slowly permeable layer. The last glaciers also carved holes into this layer, leaving behind areas that are constantly full of water - the modern day lakes.

The result is constant supply of slow moving water very close to the surface, which supports a very diverse extreme ecosystem.

There are some habitat-defining plants that colonize most of these areas, providing both organic matter to build new substrate and shelter for other plants to get established. Theses are, for the vast majority, several species of shrubs, cushions (most of which are, in fact, tiny shrubs) and ferns, although some less common gems are hiding everywhere! Most bogs are out in the open, exposed to sun and weather.

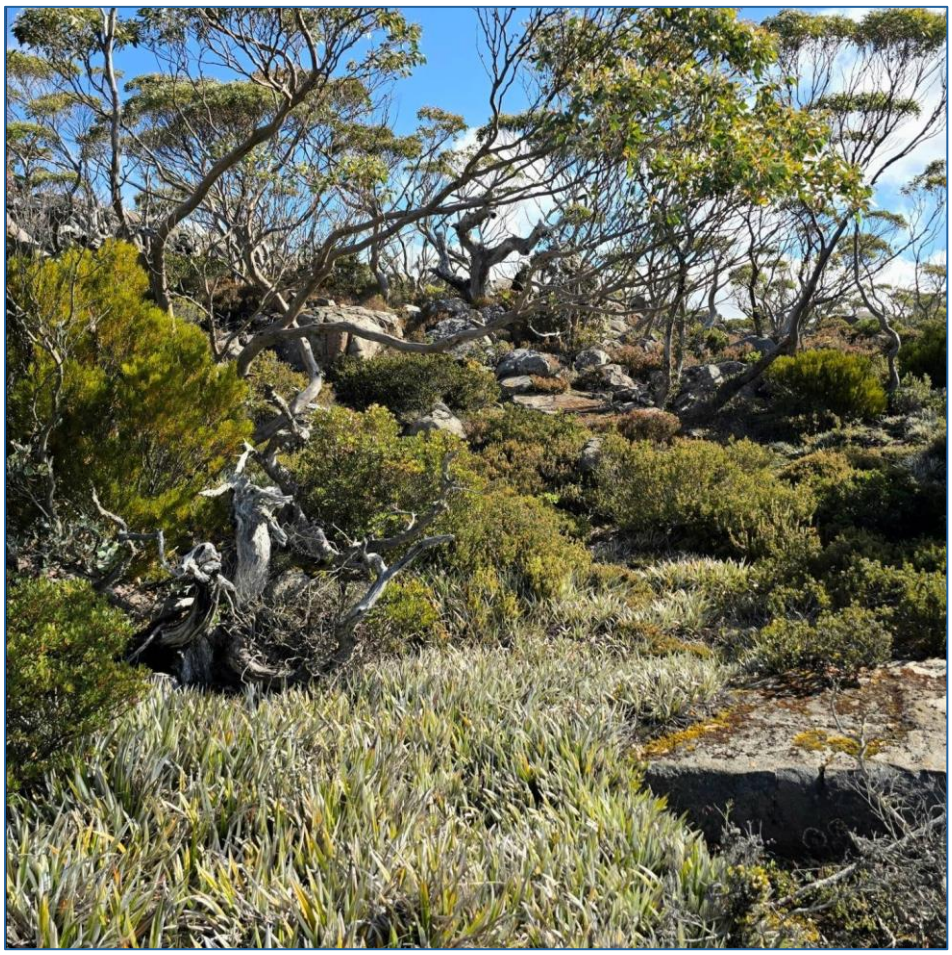
There is a staggering diversity in these bogs, making Tasmania a botanical hotspot for alpine flora.

Bellendena montana: an odd Proteaceae shrub, low growing and endemic to Tasmania. Quite showy when in flower.

Milligania densiflora: I am not familiar with this genus at all (I only grow one small species), so this one was a surprise. It grows amongst carpets of *Astelia alpina* and can be missed if not in flower as the leaves show amazing convergent evolution with *Astelia*, although they are overall more green (*Astelia* is mostly silver in appearance due to trichomes). The whole genus is endemic to Tasmania.

Gleichenia alpina: small fern and a staple of alpine areas, creating habitat for other species. This is a tough fern which deals with a lot of direct sun (but with constant moisture as well).

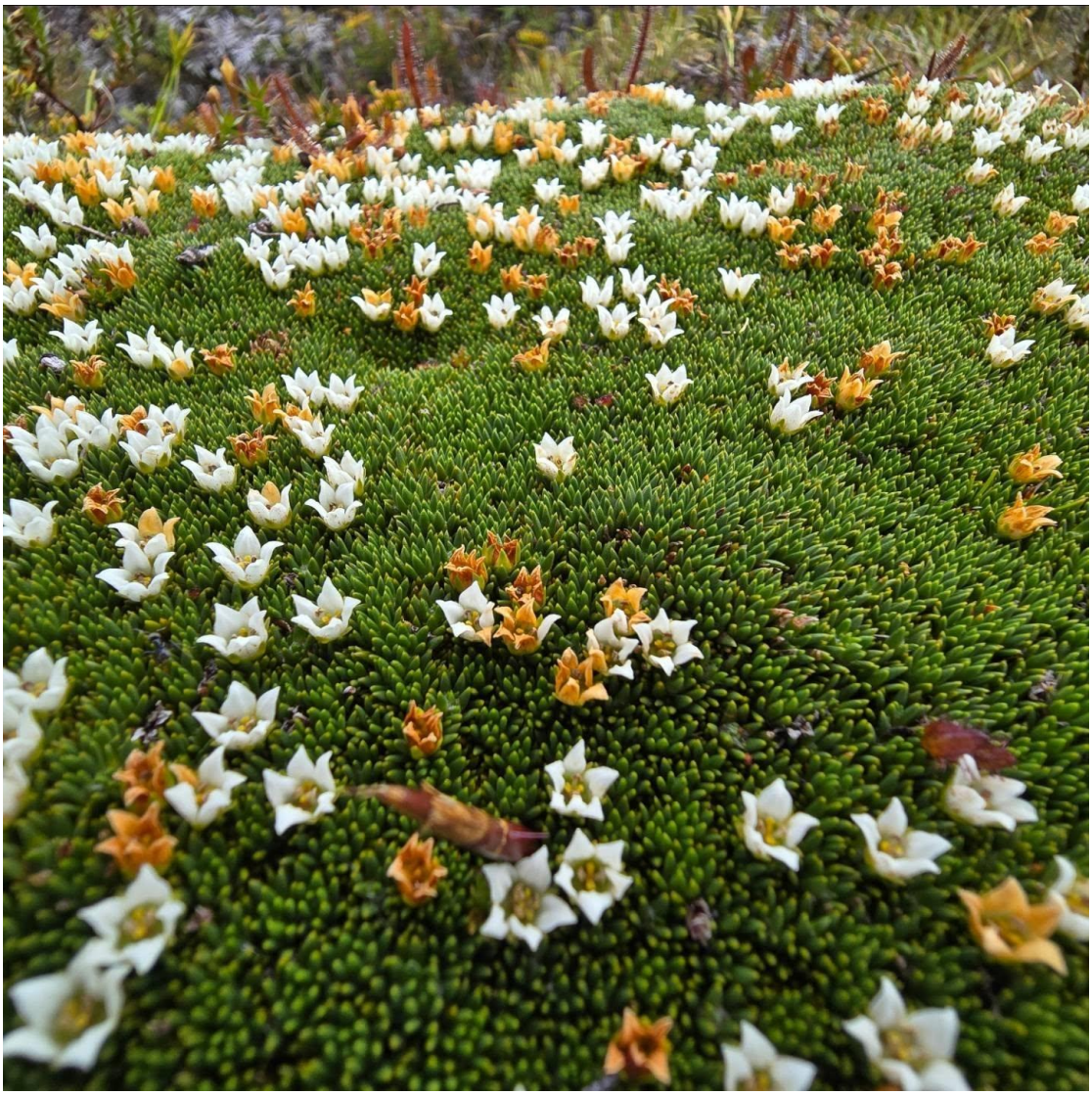
Baeckea gunniana: a very tight, small shrub in the Myrtaceae. You could recognise this just by looking at how tight the leaves are (pinky finger for scale).



Astelia alpina: another dominant, short species found close to bogs or anywhere there is consistent moisture. It forms large mats of silver-looking spiky leaves, due to the underside of each leaf covered in white trichomes. Although it can reach 30cm in length it is very common to find much shorter plants.

Blink and you will miss them – some other bog plants.

Alpine plants exhibit great adaptation to an extreme environment: harsh winds and sun exposure in summer, snow cover in winter and often very poor substrates to grow in. The most remarkable outcome of all this is a stark reduction in size. If you want to survive here, often small and slow are the answers.



Donatia novae-zelandiae: a cornerstone of alpine bogs, where not only it thrives, but it modifies the microclimate immediately around it, providing shelter to both plants and fauna. Most alpine cushion are considered "nursery" plants.

Scapisenecio albogilvus: a new one for me and a Tasmanian endemic. It has stiff, almost succulent, tiny rosettes and white flowers. Often found growing in association with *Donatia.*

Euphrasia striata: another Tasmanian endemic and a semi-parasite.

Sprengelia minima: new species to me and Tasmanian endemic. A tiny, tough Ericaceae. Another one that often grows out of *Donatia* cushions.

Drosera arcturi: quite common in alpine bogs and often growing out of cushion species.

Drosera arcturi, in flower – image courtesy of N.Z.P.C.N. CC BY Jeremy R. Rolfe.

Euchiton lateralis: yes, weeds can be cool too! (Look at those tiny silver rosettes.)

Plantago gunnii: another “cute weed” and also a Tasmanian endemic.

---- New Nerine Cultivar ---

***Nerine* 'Ken Shannik - Grown, raised and named by John K. Weagle.**

From 1992 - 1994 Sir Peter Smithers (now deceased) sent many waves of hand-pollinated Nerine seed to John Weagle. One of these plants, given the grower's original code of PS03-05 firs flowered on October 7th, 2023, and John K. Weagle decided to register this Nerine as 'Ken Shannik'. This plant has the parentage 'Luella' x ('Blanchefleur' x 'Mariloo')-27111a and arises from hand-pollinated seed. This is a complex *Nerine sarniensis* hybrid. No seed has yet been set but cross-pollination has not yet been attempted.
Green ovaries were observed but were undeveloped in October 2025.

Nerine PS-03-05 Now known as *Nerine* 'Ken Shannik'

Cultivar Description

Flowering is mid-season (October) on the coast of Nova Scotia. The plant is tender, tall, with a round scape and winter growing. Leaves are medium sized, flat, light green, emerging as the flower senesces and entering dormancy in mid-April. Leaves are straight initially, until fully expanded.

The somewhat open flower makes a star-shaped symmetrical floret. The tepals are flat but have slight crinkling to the recurved tip. Flower Tepal 1.3cm wide & 1.905cm long. Reproductive parts of the flower are mostly erect, and the pollen has the colour Pink 49B, fading to light grey. Reproductive parts - 6.35cm tall. Head - 17.78cm diameter, 12.7cm tall. 14 flowers per head.

Flower colour is highly variable in its placement. White base with Red Group 49B. RHS Red Group 49B is erratic - chiefly on the Tepal central stripe and on the last third of the petal tip but again not constant. Colour of central stripe can be 1/3 the width of the tepal varying from a very thin line of colour to more than half the tepal width. Often, though not always, the very centre of the central stripe can be a slightly darker shade of this colour. White tepal edge varies proportionately with the width of the coloured stripe to grand effect. Anthers pink fading to light grey. Unopened buds are solid Red Group 49B.The bulb size is large with a normal-thick base at the neck of the bulb.

John K. Weagle applied to register the cultivar with the Nerine and Amaryllid Society, which is the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for *Nerine.*

First flowering of the cultivar, 2023.

This nerine has been named by John Weagle for his partner, Ken Shannik. These two are renowned rhododendron and bulb enthusiasts. John Weagle from Halifax, Nova Scotia, has been breeding Rhododendrons and Evergreen Azaleas for 40 + years and maintains four gardens in Nova Scotia with Ken Shannik, who is associated with Insigne Gardens. Previous to his retirement, John worked in British Columbia as well as a wholesaler in Halifax. His interests include bamboos, cyclamen, hellebores, and shortia, and he belongs to many plant societies, as does Ken Shannik. Thanks to John Weagle for this permission to publish this new nerine.

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