

WEEKLY UPDATE - MAY 14 - 21, 2016

**"Sweet May hath come to love us.
Flowers, trees, their blossoms don;
And through the blue heavens above us
The very clouds move on."**

**Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) *Book of Songs*
"New Spring" 5**

Another beautiful, busy week in the garden. There is very little to report.

- 1. Please remember to record your statistics.**
- 2. A May 7 visitor remarked on the lack of conifer labeling but appears not to have specified where.**
- 3. The Mother's Day Truffles pop-up appears to have impeded carts, but, again, where this occurred is not specified.**
- 4. Seen in the garden: fluffy ducklings and goslings.**

Guide Goings On

Thanks to Malcolm H., Sunday guide, for sending out the list of excellent British websites for some interesting and inspiring reading.

Garden Goings On

- 1. All British Field Meet ABFM 2016 - 31st Anniversary
Saturday, May 21 - 10:00am-4:30pm
Great Lawn
See the VDG website for ticket prices**
- 2. Sumi Bonsai Show
Saturday, May 21 and Sunday, May 22 - 10:00am-4:00pm
Floral Hall
By Donation**
- 3. Bird Walk with Jeremy Gordon
Saturday, May 28
10:00am
Meet in the Atrium**

An oversight: this past week has been Vancouver Bird Week. We have not yet had the opportunity to vote on a Vancouver City Bird, 2017. Does anyone know if this going to happen? Last year's was the Peregrine falcon and the year before, the cheerful little chickadee.

A correction: last week's "WU" suggested that lily of the valley are 'white choral bells' when actually they are 'white coral bells', most likely a reference to *heuchera*. Thank you to Lynn G., Sunday guide, for pointing this out. Furthermore, the correct botanical name is *Convallaria majalis*, not *Convollaria majalis* as I identified it.

A Celebration of Weather

For those of you who enjoy the imaginative pastime of viewing cloud formations, or an exhilarating storm as it comes sweeping down valleys and across the water or listening to the wind sigh through the trees, a newly published book about British weather might be of interest to you.

Weatherland: Writers & Artists Under English Skies by Alexandra Harris is "an exploration of imaginative responses to the weather in England across the centuries."

Combining art (poetry, prose, drama, visual arts etc), science (especially in the 17th century and the beginnings of the Royal Society), philosophy, economic and social changes, Harrison maps how responses to weather in all of our human endeavours contribute to the culture and how we see our world.

There is very little sunshine in the fragments of writing to emerge from Roman Britain and the Anglo-Saxons seem to endure nothing but a grim, cold, predominantly wintry landscape. Spring doesn't appear to arrive in England until the medieval period. The cult of landscape and weather appreciation has its beginnings in the 17th century and flourishes for the next two. And throughout, the tradition of experimental gardening is directly connected to the English predilection for weather talk and weather feelings

She identifies extreme weather events: fierce storms in December, 1287 and in January, 1328 during the "Little Ice Age" that broke off slices of the busy cliffside port of Dulwich on the Sussex coast and washed them into the sea with the loss of whole streets of houses as well as entire parishes; the freezing over of the Thames at various times during the passage of centuries; a hurricane in November, 1703 that took 8,000 lives; the heatwaves of the summers of 1900 and 1976 (which I experienced first hand); years of rain, rain, rain which destroyed crops and years of drought which had the same result.

Interestingly, while the Index lists a number of weather conditions and their effects, e.g. fog, rain, clouds, floods, heatwaves, mud, storms, snow, sun, wind, it does not mention fire. Indeed, throughout the book, it is challenging to find a reference to fires caused by the heat but there are a few. Nothing is recorded that is comparable to the massive forest fires we are seeing with increasing frequency in North America.

At the beginning of her book Harris emphatically states:

"We have arrived, in the 21st century, at a critical juncture in the story of weather. Unless decisive action is taken very soon, the next generation will see the last of the weather we know. We will have written our own ending to the history of life in a temperate climate which has endured for about 11,500

years. Whatever the future holds, we are at a point of divergence. Either there will be substantial changes in the way we live or there will be substantial changes in the climate – which will in turn necessitate new ways of life. Things will not stay the same; we will never again stand in the same relation to our weather.” Although she is speaking about England, her words ring true for us too. A great read!!

Tree Highlight - The Flowering Ash (*Fraxinus ornus*)

“The leaves of the ash tree)
Like the gloved hand of puppets,
Like Aztec stars of the thinnest
Beaten gold...”

David St. John (1949-present), “The Ash Tree”, 1983

The flowering ash, also known as the manna ash, is a deciduous tree native to southern Europe and the near Middle East.

The flowers are dense, fragrant and creamy coloured clusters, produced after the new leaves appear. The fruits are slender samaras.

In North America, the tree’s purpose is primarily ornamental. However, in Sicily, it is commercially grown on plantations to harvest the manna, a sugary extract made from the sap, which is used to produce mannitol, a sugar alcohol, and mannose, a type of sugar. Mannitol is used medicinally as a digestive aid. It is suggested that the manna is comparable to the Biblical manna which was thought to have been exuded by the *Tamarisk gallica* var. *manniflora*, although it is more likely a secretion from the bodies of coccid insects which puncture the bark.

You can find 3 examples of *Fraxinus ornus* in the Ash Collection, including *F. ornus* ‘Victoria’, a seedless manna ash. They were at their peak a few weeks ago but are still lovely to look at.

Thanks to Annie M., Thursday guide, for pointing this tree out. *The Vancouver Tree Book* identifies a splendid example on Cornwall between Yew and Arbutus in Kitsilano.

Don’t forget that the first episode of Monty Don’s “Secret History of the British Garden” will air on May 19 on Knowledge.

As always, please send your feedback to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca . You can also find past “issues” of the “Weekly Update” at www.ericanotebook.com

“The world’s favourite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May.”
Edwin Way Teale (1899-1980), American naturalist, photographer
and writer

HAVE A GREAT WEEK OF GUIDING