



## Primulas

Hello everyone, I'd like to talk it contains over 400 species. Now about 300 of these grow in western China and the Himalayas, the rest come mostly from the northern hemisphere, 33 Primulas are indigenous to France and Europe, and 20 species from North America.

I want to begin with the first oriental species that reached Europe, and this was the drumstick primula *Primula denticulata* an early introduction from about 1837. It is easily grown and is one of the most popular of the Asiatics, with at least 30 different varieties raised from it. It was first discovered by Dr Francis Buchan a Scottish physician with the East India Company, he was a geographer and zoologist, and surveyed much of Nepal, which is where he found what was known by the Nepalese as '*Neckabu Saw*'. Another rosette-forming Candelabra primula was introduced by that renowned collector George Forrest, this one is named *P. rinmula beesiana* a delicious cerise frothy beauty which he found high up in a mountain meadow, another of his finds was *P. bulleyana* again it is a Candelabra primula, and is a wonderful yellow fading to orange.

Because of the opening up of China during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries a veritable avalanche of plant hunters and explorers travelled to eastern Asia, all of them sponsored by either nurseries, or private individuals who were developing their gardens, and there was great competition as to who sponsored who. Over 50 years later Ernest Wilson perhaps the greatest collector of Asiatic plants, found *Primula wilsonii* in west China growing profusely, a green-eyed purplish flower with a slight smell of aniseed-scent. His second primula was *Primulachugensis*, which he found again in west China and is similar to *Primula bulleyana* in colour, yellow/orange but it has more floppy flowers, they hang down. Following the First World War. Frank Ludlow, Vice-principal of Sind College in Karachi, and a Scot, George Sherriff, who was the Vice-Consul in Kashgar, teamed up between 1933 and 1949 and explored Tibet and Bhutan. They introduced over 66 new species of Primula, including *Primula ioessa* which they discovered when they were climbing at 14000ft on a bare hillside, rarer still is *Primula bellidifolia* which they found at 16000ft. *Primula whitei* was a 1937 discovery, and George Sherriff wrote that they saw hillsides smothered in them, he wrote 'Each time I see that primula I think it is one of the prettiest. ones I have ever seen, and always feel elated however many times I see it' That's a true plantsman isn't it?

Friends who have only recently returned from Bhutan remarked on the proliferation still of this primula.

Probably the most engaging of all the explorers at this time, and the last great

exponent of collecting plants was Frank Kingdon Ward – his whole life revolved around travelling, exploring, and collecting. He found and introduced to his sponsors primulas, one of the first was *Primula Anapagleniana* which he came across near the northern border of Burma at about 10,000ft . Later on he wrote of the instance

‘I stood there transfixed... in a honeymoon of bliss, feasting my eyes on a masterpiece. The vulgar thought – is it new? Is it commercial did not occur to me...It was enough to know that I had never set eyes on its like before’.

