

The growing of daffodils has been in John Hunters family since the late eighteen hundreds. His great grandfather George Cook grew daffodils on his farm in Riwaka in the 1880's for Henry Budden, one of the first N.Z. commercial growers of the flower. In the mid-1920s his uncle R.P. Cook also of Riwaka began exhibiting daffodils and it was gifts of daffodils from his collection that started John off on his hybridizing career. John showed his first daffodil as a 9-year-old in 1945 gaining 2nd prize in the open section of the Nelson Horticultural Societies Spring Show. Then in 1949 at the age of 13 and again with help from his uncle, he made his first eleven pedigree crosses. Unlike his uncle though, he was determined to keep accurate records of the crosses he performed as he foresaw even at this young age how knowledge of the daffodils lineage could facilitate more reliable introduction of superior traits into the flower. He now has kept meticulous records of his hybridising right up to present day, a total of 71 years resulting in some of his flowers having documented nine generations of his own breeding in them.

John joined the National Daffodil Society of New Zealand in 1956 with his main interest in exhibiting in Class 2 at their shows, which was for 12 distinct daffodils raised by an exhibitor. Over the years he has won this class many times and last September at the age of 85 was again awarded first prize at the South Island New Zealand Show.

John has accumulated an extensive library on the flower and knowledge gained from the reading of this collection led him to being asked to be Historian of the NZ Daffodil Society. His library includes John Parkinsons Book of 1629, and the complete collection of RHS Year Books from their first publication in 1913. He considers the information in these RHS Year Books written by the world's leading raisers of the flower as having helped him with his breeding programme. One article by Guy L. Wilson of Northern Ireland in the 1930's mentioned an observation that he himself later observed, i.e., that some resultant traits in the seedlings from a cross resemble the grandparents more so than the direct parents. He thinks it rather neat that seventy years on from Wilson's article, a book by Richard Dawkins on genetics and evolution stated the same finding and explained why this was so. This is why John considers accurate recording of pedigrees critical in a plant breeding programme, as one needs to go back more than one generation to get a reasonable idea of what to expect from a cross. With daffodils it is a five year wait from seed to flowering and so patience is a must and you want to use as much information as possible to give you the best chance of achieving the trait desired. To John, what makes the daffodil a fascinating flower to breed with is the very large variation in the species which has resulted in new hybrids being produced from the late 1840's to the present day. He also thinks that the daffodil has huge potential for advancement and that in future new colours and types will undoubtedly be obtained, and goes on to express frustration that his lifetime is not long enough to achieve what he has wanted to.. an all-red daffodil.

He has registered 165 daffodils with the Royal Horticultural Society London (these are all recorded in the RHS International Daffodil Register and Classified List) and gained First Class Certificates (FCC) for the following. An FCC is for 18 blooms of exhibition quality

3W-W Polar Convention

2W-P Tranquill Image

2W-P Polar Sky

6Y-W Flight Path

He has an Award of Merit (9 blooms of exhibition quality) for

1Y-Y Sulphur Monarch

1Y-Y Moon River

He has raised a number of Champion Blooms (best in show) at the New Zealand National Shows:

2Y-R Pacific Phoenix on 2 occasions

1W-W Cosmic Ice

2W-P Polar Sky 2 occasions

2Y-R Aspire

1Y-W Luminosity

He has produced many Premier Blooms (best in division) at the New Zealand National shows covering all divisions and subdivisions excluding division 9 tazetta and 10 bulbocodium. One, a 3Y-Y Moonwalker took him 7 generations of hybridising to produce - it has been exhibited only 3 times at the New Zealand National Shows and been awarded the best of its division each time. He considers it the best yellow short cup he has raised.

John has been awarded the David Bell Gold Medal in 1997 for the advancement of the daffodil by the National Daffodil Society of New Zealand (their highest award); the American Daffodil Society Gold Medal (their highest award) in 2011 for the advancement of the daffodil; and the Royal Horticultural Society's Peter Barr Cup in 2012, which is their highest award for a daffodil breeder. The Peter Barr Cup was first awarded in 1912 – one hundred years on John was the fifth New Zealander to receive this prestigious trophy. It was such an honour that he flew his family with him to London for the presentation.

He was awarded the Peter Barr Cup because of the breeding he had done to increase the fertility in the jonquilla group and extend the flowering season of the modern hybrids from March through to October. He achieved this by breeding the genetics of a primitive (small, spikey green petloid) autumn flowering species (n viridiflorus) from Morocco into a modern spring flowering cultivar raised in Wellington by the late Jim O'More called 'SeaDream'. The resulting cultivar 'Emerald Sea' is a multi-headed green crowned daffodil with a white perianth. It was a hugely sort after daffodil fetching \$500 for a single bulb. The variety has now served as a parent in many crosses in America and Germany by the worlds notable breeders with startling results.

John says he must acknowledge the daffodil hybridisers of the past for their flowers and accurate records of their breeding programmes for the success he has had. For without the dedication of previous growers worldwide new varieties would be unattainable.

John also has a number of varieties being grown commercially with one of the largest bulb growers in Holland (Pennings) who has taken out plant variety rights. Last year he was informed that they have 1-1/3 km long 2mt wide beds of one of his daffodils and of another just under a km. in length. These are jonquillas and triandrus. A frilled variety 2W-W Bridal Brocade is also being sold in Holland by several firms.

John is a Life Member of the NZ National Daffodil Society of N.Z, has served on their executive and been their historian for many years. He is a N.Z. National Daffodil Society Senior Judge and Life Member of both the Nelson and Brightwater Horticultural Societies.

John has spent most of his life breeding and growing daffodils, but that is not all. 35 years was spent in the family business as a (5th generation) watchmaker and jeweller. In his younger days he played rugby, indoor basketball and athletics. It was table tennis where he met Marie (they have

been married for over 60 years). John says “Marie knows where everything is and keeps meticulous records. I could not have achieved what I have done without her”.