

## **NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Surprise Inverewe rhododendron is world first**

Rare species thrive in the heritage garden at Inverewe near Poolewe in Wester Ross thanks to the effect of the Gulf Stream. But staff at the National Trust for Scotland property have been astonished at the blooming of what they believe to be a world first: a dazzling, multi-coloured rhododendron.

As gardeners prepared for the annual rhododendron festival, which runs from today until the end of May, they were surprised to find something that they had never seen before in amongst their national heritage collection of over 400 different varieties.

In the early 1900s, Osgood Mackenzie started planting rhododendrons at Inverewe. His daughter continued the tradition before passing the property to the National Trust for Scotland in 1952 and the conservation charity's gardeners have built on the Osgoods' work since then.

Over the years the rhododendrons have been generating hybrids and a peculiar combination of conditions appears to have been responsible for this season's unique kaleidoscopic inflorescence.

Typically, the *Rhododendron macabeaenum* produces single coloured 'trusses' but this new hybrid, being called *Flora Pi Lo*, is a riot of pastel shades from dusky pink to saffron yellow and ivory white. Osgood's vision was to 'grow as many exotic plants as possible' but nothing has ever been seen as unusual as the new flower that is growing at the property.

Head gardener at Inverewe, Kevin Ball is astounded at the appearance of the flower. "I've been a professional horticulturalist all my working life and this *Flora Pi Lo* - as we're calling it - is quite the most unusual flower I've ever seen," he says. "Osgood Mackenzie prided himself in creating a garden that was nothing like anywhere else on earth and I'm sure he'd have been thrilled to see these plants."

"We're not entirely sure what has caused this unique hybrid but we've got our theories. It might sound bizarre but it could be down to rainbows. The weather has been particularly changeable this growing season with more sun and rain than usual and we've had an unusually high amount of rainbows."

"We did notice that when we were taking cuttings for this plant that there was the rarely seen triple rainbow above the gardens. A rainbow is just the way that light is reflected as it enters a raindrop so could it have been that the spectrum just kept bouncing around and the colours transferred to this extraordinary plant?"

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