

Foreword to no. 24

The range of topics covered by papers published in volume no. 24 demonstrates the significance of botanic garden horticultural knowledge, research and facilities for conservation and understanding the world of plants. There is a theme of conservation horticulture running loosely through many of the papers. The prevalence of this theme, which was not an intentional editorial decision at the outset of the volume compilation, illustrates the prominence that the term 'conservation horticulture' has rightly gained in our botanic garden community.

One of the principal messages from the 8th Global Botanic Garden Congress (8GBGC) in Singapore in August 2024 was 'Conservation horticulture is key'. Griffith puts this message at the heart of his Guest Essay, and he is clear that botanic garden and conservation horticulture activities cannot be separated if we are to effectively tackle the pressures on species resulting from the biodiversity and climate crises. Zale *et al.* have taken a comprehensively local, national and international approach to the conservation work at Longwood Gardens. They describe the fascinating cultivation processes for orchid species to protect populations for biodiversity and human wellbeing. Hughes' Student Project describes the findings from interviews with experienced conservation horticulturists to better understand the detail of conservation projects either *in* or *ex situ* and the horticultural resources required to ensure success.

The relatively recent description of *Wollemia nobilis* and the work that followed to safeguard the small wild population and genetic diversity in many ways provides a textbook example of the applications of the principles of conservation and the role of

horticulture in these for plant species. Offord & Zimmer provide a thorough account of the accumulation of knowledge about *W. nobilis* through horticultural experience and scientific research methods. They conclude with the establishment of a metacollection for this species. The *W. nobilis* metacollection is an excellent example of this message and the power of gardens to work together for the benefit of a species that needs all the resources available to ensure its persistence.

Opgenorth *et al.* propose a framework for the variety of research approaches that can be found in botanic gardens following their survey of 128 researchers in 116 US institutions. The merit of this framework is that it embraces the information that so many horticulturists know is valuable learning, but which is not published – or always publishable – because it does not follow traditional scientific methods. One of the aims of *Sibbaldia* is to provide a venue for this type of information, often informally acquired but crucial for deepening our understanding of plants and how to grow them. One respondent in the survey was 'interested in information about specific journals considered useful by peers'. I hope that respondent has discovered *Sibbaldia* since replying to the survey!

Another key message from 8GBGC was 'Climate change and biodiversity loss elevate the role of botanic gardens in connecting people and plants for a sustainable future'. Ben Ong's presentation there about the mission of and programmes at Rimba Ilmu inspired me to visit the garden on my return journey through Kuala Lumpur. Education and engagement are a strong feature of Rimba Ilmu's activities. Ong *et al.*'s Garden Profile describes the achievements of the

Garden over 50 years including the extensive activities involving the local population organised for the anniversary celebrations.

Gray's diligent examination of local archives uncovers new information about the history of the Benmore Fernery, at Benmore Botanic Garden in Argyll and Bute. This work shows how important it is to keep asking questions of these resources and digging deeper into them. The article highlights how this building is at once unique, the dramatic setting of its location enhancing this quality, yet in the 19th century it was one of many. The widespread construction of ferneries was fuelled by the availability of finance

and coal plus a fervent passion for socially demonstrative cultivation of half-hardy and tender ferns along with other climatically suitable species that were also considered 'new' and 'exotic' in the UK then.

The year 2026 promises to be an exciting one for *Sibbaldia*. There are plans to publish a special issue on the rhododendrons in botanic gardens as well as the customary volume. Please look at the website if you are interested in submitting to either of these volumes and register to receive notification of new publications: <https://journals.rbge.org.uk/>

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