

INTRODUCTION

I first met Sophia Shaw, president and CEO of Chicago Botanic Garden, at the BGCI Global Botanic Garden Congress held in Dunedin, New Zealand in 2013. I was immensely impressed with her presentation, 'Why Botanic Gardens are Important, Especially Now' for its conviction and clarity of thought. I was therefore delighted when Sophia accepted the invitation to write this issue's Guest Essay, and even more pleased when she chose the topic of gardening and mental health. While many have appreciated the generally positive effects of gardening on mental health for a long time, there has been little hard evidence and little active promotion of the issue in botanic, and other, gardens. This is changing rapidly now as more research is undertaken and more evidence is emerging. Botanic gardens, many of which are located in densely populated cities with little green space, are also realising their potential for contributing to the public's physical and mental well-being. Sophia's paper, which draws on personal experience and a true commitment to the issue, demonstrates the extent to which gardening can genuinely contribute to mental well-being. While I'm always grateful to receive one paper for a Guest Essay, Sophia has graciously provided two, such is her enthusiasm for the value of gardens and gardening to mental health. In her second paper, she pursues the theme of her first paper but focuses on the benefits of visiting botanic gardens as opposed to the activity of gardening.

In the Botanic Garden Profile, Axel Dalberg Poulsen, Head of the Botanical Garden of the University of Oslo, describes the history and development of that garden then goes on to explain the design and construction of a new garden area called the Viking Garden. This garden is dedicated to the cultivation and interpretation of plants native to Norway which were used medicinally and in other ways by Vikings. Kathryn Braithwaite, a student at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, has submitted a shortened and reworked version of her final-year student thesis for the Student Project, a comprehensive review of the subject with the discussion based on an extensive survey.

The editors of *Sibbaldia* are always keen to include papers on cultivation, especially when the taxa in question are threatened, difficult to cultivate or are a speciality of a particular botanic garden. Sofi Mursidawati and others from Bogor Botanic Garden describe the cultivation of the threatened holoparasite *Rafflesia patma*, which defied all attempts at seed propagation but was finally successfully propagated and cultivated through grafting. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has had a particular interest in the taxonomy and cultivation of Ericaceae, especially rhododendrons, for many years. In his paper Tony Conlon reviews Edinburgh's collection and cultivation of a less well-known genus within the family *Agapetes*.

Novel pests and diseases, climate change and habitat restoration are three of the major issues of our time and are subjects where botanic gardens can make a real contribution. It is therefore appropriate that this issue includes updates on two recently formed groups – the International Plant Sentinel Network, launched by BGCI at the New Zealand Congress in 2014, and the Ecological Restoration Alliance of Botanic Gardens,

launched by a consortium of members including BGCI and botanic gardens in the UK, USA, China, South Africa and other countries. The former is a network of botanic gardens that will monitor and communicate the arrival of novel pests and diseases, while the latter is a group of partners working towards whole-habitat restoration (as opposed to single-species restorations). The editors look forward to publishing many papers in the future from both these groups and are sure that introductory papers from both groups at this stage of their development will be a useful reference point to refer back to. 'Forward planning for Scottish gardens in the face of climate change', by Chris Smart, describes the use of climate modelling techniques to assess the prospects of familiar plants in Scottish gardens with the expected changes in growing conditions due to climate change.

The Rock Garden at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has always been regarded as one of the Garden's treasures and it has now been in the same location for 140 years. However, during this time the size, shape, design and species range has changed enormously and, in his paper on the subject, Robert Unwin describes its history. Finally, Terry Huang from the University of Washington gives us a very personal perspective of British gardens from the time he spent in the UK as recipient of the RHS/Gardening Club of America scholarship.

The editors are constantly seeking improvements to *Sibbaldia*, including its marketing, readership and distribution. The latest improvement is that, starting with this issue, not only will *Sibbaldia* continue to be available as a bound volume, but individual papers will now be available to download free from journals.rbge.org.uk. Please address all enquiries including purchases and suggestions for papers to: sibbaldia@rbge.org.uk

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