

Eurogard 97 – from European Gardens Consortium Home Page

o"Eurogard97", the 1st European Botanic Gardens Conference, was held at the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh from 2-5 April, organized by RBG Edinburgh, BGCI and IABG. The aim of the conference was to identify priorities for botanic gardens for inclusion in a European Botanic Garden Action Plan for the countries of the European Union and to promote closer cooperative links and collaboration amongst botanic gardens throughout Europe.

The conference was proposed and organized through the BGCI/IABG joint advisory European Botanic Gardens Consortium, a body established in 1994 to plan Europe-wide initiatives for botanic gardens, especially within the context of developing national action plans to contribute towards implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, and to promote the implementation of European and other international legislation such as the European Commission's Habitats Directive, the Bern Convention, CITES and the Ramsar Convention.

Introduction

Europe has provided a cradle for the establishment of the world's botanic gardens. Not only were the earliest botanic gardens European, (Pisa, Padua, Leiden, Oxford etc) but so too were the earliest tropical botanic gardens established by the European colonial powers.

Today in the European Union there are up to 400 botanic gardens. In the whole of the continent of Europe that total rises to over 550 botanic gardens, about one third of the botanic gardens of the world. This can be compared with 155 in the countries of the former Soviet Union and 250 in the United States.

Although international exchange of plant material and scientific publications between botanic gardens have been a feature of their operations for centuries, the last two decades has seen a burgeoning number of new and active national and international cooperative alliances between botanic gardens nationally, regionally and internationally. Botanic Garden networks have been established in many countries including Australia, Indonesia, Latin America, and the United States. In Europe there are now botanic garden and plant collection networks in most countries, - the Baltic States, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Portugal, Russia, and the United Kingdom.

Botanic Gardens Conservation International was itself established ten years ago in 1987 and now includes 180 institutional members in Europe of which 130 are botanic gardens situated in the countries of the European Union.

At the beginning of 1994, David Bramwell (Las Palmas Botanic Garden, Spain and a BGCI Trustee), Esteban Hernández Bermejo (Secretary General, IABG and Córdoba Botanic Garden, Spain) and Peter Wyse Jackson (Secretary General, BGCI) met in Córdoba not only to plan future cooperation between Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the International Association of Botanic Gardens but also to consider how a new networking initiative for European botanic gardens could be launched. We were all concerned that botanic gardens were receiving insufficient recognition from national and European authorities and, of course, very little European Union funding.

As a result of our meeting, David Bramwell and the Viera y Clavijo Botanic Garden in Las Palmas agreed to host a first exploratory meeting of representatives of major European botanic gardens which was held in Gran Canaria in May 1994. At that meeting the joint BGCI/IABG advisory committee, the European Botanic Gardens Consortium, was born.

The meeting proposed that the aims of the Consortium could be best achieved by formulating a European Botanic Gardens Action Plan to help to develop a framework for concerted action by botanic gardens within Europe and subsequently working for its implementation. It was agreed that botanic garden activities should be considered in a wide sense, to include conservation, environmental education, ethnobotany, amenity horticulture, landscape and habitat restoration and management, species recovery, research, tourism and many other fields.

Subsequent meetings of the Consortium were held in:

Frankfurt, Germany, November, 1994 Meise, Belgium, April, 1995 Utrecht, The Netherlands, November, 1995 Pisa, Italy, April, 1996 Córdoba, Spain, December, 1996 Membership of the Consortium was by invitation, selected by BGCI and IABG, although the members of the Consortium have been drawn from a wide variety of major botanic gardens in the European Union. However, at "eurogard97" a new representative structure was proposed to ensure that each country could select its own future representation in this forum. To date, the gardens represented at the Consortium meetings have been from: AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, DENMARK, FRANCE, GERMANY, IRELAND, THE NETHERLANDS, PORTUGAL, SPAIN, U.K.

At a meeting of the Consortium it was proposed that the 1st European Botanic Gardens Conference be held, to help ensure that the broader botanic garden community could be involved in and contribute to the work of the Consortium and in the formulation of the Action Plan. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh agreed to host the meeting which was subsequently held in April 1997.

Some of the achievements of the Consortium in the three years since its establishment are:

- a strengthened network for botanic gardens within the European Union - establishing or renewing friendships and cooperative links and providing a regular opportunity for participants to share information on the major national activities and priorities of botanic gardens in their own countries
- new links have been established between European botanic gardens and European Union structures, particularly with the European Commission and European Parliament
- a basic survey of the numbers of European botanic gardens and their resources and staff
- a new European endangered plant conservation initiative was developed which was considered at "eurogard97"
- surveys of Bern Convention listed species in cultivation in botanic gardens and environmental education activities in botanic gardens

Future Structure for the Consortium

The following proposal was presented to "eurogard97" by Esteban Hernández Bermejo and Peter Wyse Jackson as a proposed future structure for the European Botanic Gardens Consortium. Copies of the proposal were circulated to delegates attending and comments and amendments were welcomed. When all submissions have been received by the authors, work will be undertaken as soon as possible to constitute the new membership of the Consortium.

The text of the proposal is as follows:

It is proposed to establish a democratic process for the joint IABG/BGCI European Botanic Gardens Consortium whereby the botanic gardens of each country will be requested to select and nominate a representative of their gardens to become a member. When a national network of botanic gardens exists this will be the body charged with arranging the selection of a representative.

It is considered that the group should not be expanded beyond its current size and will be expected to number 21-22 members.

It is proposed that the Consortium will consist of one member from each country in the European Union in which there are botanic gardens.

Where a botanic gardens network exists for any country it will be expected that the country representative will be chosen and ratified by that network organization following the wishes of their botanic garden members. For the purposes of the Consortium membership, the following networks will be currently recognized:

Jardins Botaniques de France (France)

The Dutch Botanic Gardens Foundation (The Netherlands)

Verband Botanischer Gärten e.V. (Germany)

PlantNet (UK and Ireland)

The Working Group for Botanic Gardens of the Italian Botanical Society (Italy)

The Ibero-Macaronesian Botanic Garden Association (Portugal and Spain)
The Network of Belgium Botanic Gardens and Arboreta (Belgium)

When the scope and remit of an association includes more than one country, one of the country representatives will be expected to represent the association at the same time.

The following countries will be represented in the membership of the Consortium:
Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

In addition to these members, an extra three to five members may be nominated jointly by the Secretaries General of BGCI and IABG who will themselves be full members of the group. These discretionary additional members will be:

- to help compensate for countries where there are many more botanic gardens than in others, and
- to include particular individuals in the Consortium who may be expected to contribute in an outstanding way to the operation of the Consortium and its activities who might not otherwise have been selected as a country representative.

Additional staff from BGCI and IABG may be included as required as non-voting ex-officio observers. These may include staff of regional offices or delegations of either organization. The term of office proposed for each member is two years, beginning from the date of the European Botanic Gardens Conference when the committee shall be appointed. A substitute member may be chosen for each country who may participate in meetings when the 1st representative is unavailable. If new botanic garden associations or networks are developed in countries where there are presently none functioning currently, consideration will be given by the Consortium to request them to link with the Consortium and provide a representative for the group. Observers from non European Union countries or other botanic gardens or other organizations may be included in Consortium meetings by invitation only, especially if agenda items of particular relevance to these observers are to be included. Observers will not be supported financially unless specific funds are found for that purpose (e.g. to support the participation of observers for particular meetings from eastern European countries). April, 1997

A Report on the Conference

During the Opening Session at the beginning of the conference, delegates were welcomed to Edinburgh by Professor David Ingram, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden. The conference was officially opened by Professor Malcolm Wilkins, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of RBG Edinburgh. Peter Wyse Jackson and Esteban Hernández Bermejo presented papers outlining the formation, work and possible future development and priority tasks for the European Botanic Gardens Consortium.

Professor Hernández Bermejo noted that "the botanic gardens of the European Union must enter the 21st century with their patrimonial, present and potential values duly recognized, and completely integrated in the policies and responsibilities inherent in them within the framework of the European Union".

Almost 200 delegates from 31 countries attended the meeting.

Following the opening of the conference a series of six plenary sessions were held spread over the three days on the following themes:

1. Botanic Gardens and Biodiversity Conservation in Europe
2. Spreading the Word: Botanic Gardens and Education
3. Defining a Shared Mission: Networking European Botanic Gardens
4. Botanic Gardens: a part of European Heritage
5. Botanic Gardens and Science: Defining Research Priorities for European Botanic Gardens
6. Building Capacity for Action.

Workshops were held on the following topics:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity
- Education in European Botanic Gardens
- Cooperation between European Union botanic gardens and those in central and eastern Europe
- Computer database systems for botanic gardens
- Developing a network of European conservation collections
- CITES issues for European botanic gardens
- Management of historical gardens
- A series of workshops on Managing Plant Collections

The conference ended with a Concluding Session when reports were presented from each of the workshops and plenary sessions. Following the conference an excursion was made to Dawyck Botanic Garden, one of the RBG Edinburgh satellite gardens.

During the conference a meeting was held of PlantNet, the UK and Irish plant collections network which focussed on the theme of Plant Records and Databases. The Annual General Meeting of PlantNet was also held there, on Friday 4th April. The conference was held in association with PlantNet and BGEN as well as the involvement of other national botanic garden networks.

Arrangements for the conference were made by a local committee led by David Rae, with Michelle Maclaren and George Anderson, who each did so much to make the conference the great success that it was. The grateful thanks of BGCI and IABG, as well as from all of the delegates, were awarded to them at the closing ceremony when they received hearty congratulations for the work they had undertaken in making the conference such a success.