

# Collections and research at Kew on UKOT species

The Economic Botany Collections (EBC) at Kew, some 77,500 specimens strong, comprise a great array of economically significant plants or plant products gathered over the last 150 years, mainly from what are now countries of the Commonwealth. Still growing, and partly on permanent exhibition in Kew's *Plants+People* exhibition, they provide a good insight into Kew's imperial role as a global botanical entrepôt: collecting plants and information about them, distributing them, cultivating them, and all the while training or employing armies of botanists, horticulturalists and agriculturalists to display or develop them.

A current curatorial aim is to improve access to the EBC, and to stimulate research and use. To this end here we describe, in brief, material from the UK Overseas Territories, with an emphasis on their richest source, St Helena. We also include a summary of recent research on the genus *Phylica*. We welcome enquiries and visitors.

## St Helena

Over 60 items come from species endemic to St Helena. Most were collected by J.C. Melliss (author of *St Helena – A Physical, Historical and*

*Topographical Description of the Island*, published in 1875) in the second half of the nineteenth century, and were in the British Museum until 1983. Among them are small pieces of wood from species such as the extinct green ebony *Trochetiopsis melanoxylo*n and the tree of bastard gumwood *Commidendrum rotundifolium* which was blown down at Longwood in 1897. There is also a small piece of wood collected in 1997 from the last wild specimen of St Helena's olive *Nesiota elliptica*.



*Spirit collection of leaves and flowers of Commidendrum rugosum (Economic Botany Collection (EBC) no. 51476) from St Helena*

The collection also contains a dried plant of *Pelargonium cotyledonis* and spirit preserved parts of *Hydrodea cryptantha* and *Hypertelis acida*, as well as fruits of *Wahlenbergia linifolia* and a stem of the tree fern *Dicksonia arborescens*.

There are also artefacts from about 25 introduced species, ranging from a piece of wood from the weeping willow *Salix babylonica* planted over Napoleon's grave, to a table mat made from seeds of an *Erythrina* species, as well as plants with aspirations to economic importance such as coffee *Coffea arabica*, cotton bolls *Gossypium* sp. and two fibre species, *Phormium tenax* (for whose introduction to St Helena Kew was responsible!) and *Alpinia zerumbet*.

## Other UK Overseas Territories

From Tristan da Cunha, there is a stem of the fern *Blechnum boryana* (donated by "Milne, HMS Herald") and from Nightingale Island a small piece of wood of *Phylica arborea*. From the Falkland Islands there is a large dried plant – 90 cm across - of the native *Azorella caespitosa* and also one of *Myrtus nummularia* (once used as a tea substitute by sealers) and gum resin

**Table 1. List of specimens of St Helenan endemics in the Economic Botany Collections, listed by family in alphabetical order. Nomenclature follows Cronk (2000).**

IUCN categories: LR-nt, lower risk – near threatened; VU, vulnerable; EN, endangered; CR, critically endangered; EW, extinct in the wild; E, extinct.

Family	Species	Date collected	IUCN category	No of Specimens		
				Wood	Stems, leaves, etc.	
Aizoaceae	<i>*Hydrodea cryptantha</i>	1868	R		2	
	<i>*Hypertelis acida</i>	1868	VU		1	
Campanulaceae	<i>*Wahlenbergia linifolia</i>	1868	CR		1	
Compositae	<i>*Commidendrum robustum</i>	1868	EN	7	1	
	<i>C. rotundifolium</i>	1898	EW	3		
	<i>*C. rugosum</i>	1868	VU		1	
	<i>*C. spurium</i>	1868	CR	3	2	
	<i>*Lachanodes arborea</i>	1868	CR	3		
	<i>*Melanodendron integrifolium</i>	1868	VU	2	1	
	<i>*Petrobium arboreum</i>	1868	EN	4		
	<i>Pladaroxylon leucadendron</i>	1868	CR	4	1	
	Dicksoniaceae	<i>Dicksonia arborescens</i>	?	LR-nt		1
	Frankeniaceae	<i>*Frankenia portulacaefolia</i>	1868	R	5	1
Geraniaceae	<i>Pelargonium cotyledonis</i>	?	VU		1	
Rhamnaceae	<i>Nesiota elliptica</i>	1997	EW	1		
	<i>Phylica polifolia</i>	1862	CR	1		
Rubiaceae	<i>*Nesohedyotis arborea</i>	?	EN	2	1	
Solanaceae	<i>*Mellissia begoniifolia</i>	1868	CR	3	1	
Sterculiaceae	<i>Trochetiopsis erythroxylo</i> n	1892	EW	3		
	<i>T. melanoxylo</i> n	1862–1932	E	8		

\*Cronk, Q.C.B. 2000. *The endemic flora of St Helena*. Anthony Nelson, Oswestry. \*Collected by J.C. Melliss.

from *Bolaz gummifera*. There is a limited collection of material from plants endemic to Bermuda, including plaits made from leaves of Palmetto palm *Sabal blackburnia* and several small pieces of wood of *Juniperus bermudiana*, including one given by a General Lefroy in 1873. Attached notes to this specimen state that the largest known sound tree on the island at the time had a diameter of 39". There is a brush and some rope made from *Coccothrinax proctorii* endemic to the Cayman Islands. The Liverpool Exhibition of 1907 is the source of many of the 42 items, mainly parts of crop plants, from Montserrat. The oldest from there is some fibre of plantain *Musa* sp., dated 1856. From Gibraltar there is a piece of wood from rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* which has been sawn and hinged and dates from the Great Exhibition of 1851. Predating even this, however, are

two small and undecorated pieces of tapa cloth made on Pitcairn from paper mulberry *Broussonetia papyrifera*. One of them was made in 1837 by mutineers' wives Mrs Christian and Mrs Young, by then the sole survivors of the original settlers after the mutiny on *HMS Bounty*, and the other was made by a daughter of a third mutineer, George Stewart. Both samples were given separately to crew members of visiting ships and were donated to Kew in 1858. Thus came to an end the tale that links Kew's first, and still most famous, botanical voyage – with its aim of bringing breadfruit from the South Pacific to the Caribbean – with an episode more notorious in Britain's naval history than any other.

**Pamela Taylor and Julia Steele**  
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## South Georgia Association

Notice of a conference on The future of South Georgia: a programme for the next 10 years Organised by the South Georgia Association To be held in Cambridge, UK 18-20 September 2003

This three-day event will bring together people who are interested in discussing sustainable and environmentally sound development of this very special island. A programme of presentations and discussion is being prepared.

Topic include the South Georgia Management Plan; the exploitation of marine resources in South Georgia waters and the establishment of a sustainable regime; heritage and information as well as sessions on tourism, governance and finance.

Submission of poster papers will be welcome To record your interest and receive further information, write to

**The secretary, The South Georgia Association, Scott Polar Research Institute, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB1 2ER, UK secretary@southgeorgiaassociation.org**

## St Helena represented at Eden Project

At Eden we have found islands to be valuable models with which to engage the public on global issues such as climate change and sustainability on a scale that people do not find overwhelming. Part of our Humid Tropics Biome at Eden focuses on Oceanic Islands. Here we showcase rare and interesting plants from some of the worlds most isolated regions. Island plants have provided us with a wealth of educational material derived from on their ecological and cultural value. Included in our display is a section featuring plants from St Helena such as *Trochetiopsis ebenus*, the St Helena Ebony. We use this display to tell our visitors about St Helena's pioneering community and non-governmental contributions to the conservation of local highly endangered species. The story of the Millennium Gumwood Forest in particular, provides an excellent example of what can be achieved through local participation in conservation. Eden has been an enthusiastic supporter of the St Helena National Trust and we were delighted to be able to meet up with its director Barbara George and show her the project.

As a result of a previous visit by Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, Eden and the National Trust are putting together a

range of St Helena products for sale in the Eden Shop. Currently we sell a limited edition print of the St Helena Ebony by artist Meriel Thurstan. All profits from the sale of the print go to the National Trust for the conservation of endemic plants. In the future we hope to include picture frames made from introduced species such as Wild Mango and Black Olive, St Helena coffee, and



*Barbara George (right) from St Helena National Trust visits the Eden Project with Juliet Rose (left)*

Aloe baskets and bags. Having seen the full range of Eden products Barbara has returned to the island with even more ideas to extend their conservation-based product range.

Barbara's new role encompasses all

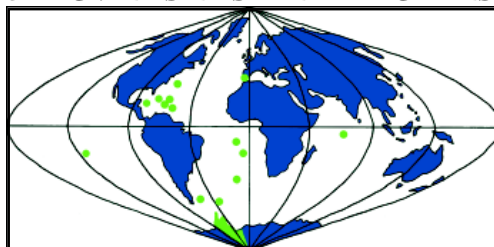
aspects of the island's heritage so we took time to visit some of Cornwall's heritage sites. The Lost Gardens of Heligan and Lanhydrock House are two of Cornwall's most successful tourist attractions. Both have managed to effectively conserve and restore their sites while maintaining a tourist interest and encouraging local involvement.

Eden, Heligan and Lanhydrock provided Barbara with useful insight into ways of presenting exhibits and interpretational frameworks for visitors.

At Eden we consider the St Helena National Trust to be an extremely important and worthwhile

initiative. We believe that St Helena will be better placed to meet its many future challenges if the Trust's potential and enthusiasm is fully supported.

**Juliet Rose [j.e.rose@reading.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.rose@reading.ac.uk)**



## A Sense of Direction

A conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities



Delegates representing 12 UK Overseas Territories, the 3 UK Crown Dependencies and other small island territories gathered together at the Elbow Beach Hotel in Bermuda from 22 to 27 March 2003 to attend *A Sense of Direction*, a conference on conservation.

On the first day delegates were treated to a very useful introduction to the island and conservation issues on a tour of Bermuda, which included Nonsuch Island. Plenary sessions included presentations related to Environmental Charters and strategic planning; the Foreign and Commonwealth office element to this section was particularly useful, even if some aspects were not encouraging. Delegates found presentations on managing conservation organisation and climate change challenging. The conference broke into smaller groups to visit actual sites to discuss implementing management plans.

A participatory session dealing with invasive species drew much discussion from the floor. The full summary of the conference is published on pages 2-7 and the proceedings of the conference will be available on the Forum website shortly: [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org).

News from Bermuda continuing after the conference has been very positive. TV, radio and newspaper items included Joseph Smith-Abbott, Executive Director of the BVI National Trust, commenting on the importance of Hungry Bay mangroves and the need for protection, Colin Clubbe from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew speaking on invasive plants and the need for local nurseries to promote native and endemic species, and Brendan Godley of Marine Turtle Conservation research group, amongst many others.

The Royal Gazette published several articles including *Government unveils biodiversity plan*, with comment from Bermuda Government's Dennis Lister, Annie Glasspool and Jack Ward from the Bermuda Zoological Society. A second article *A long way from Pitcairn* mentioned where some of the delegated had travelled from as well as a photo of the



*Bermuda Minister of Environment, Dennis Lister, Andrew Dobson (Bermuda Audubon Society for the conference organisers) and Valerie Caton (FCO)*

cheque presentation from Dennis Lister, Bermuda Minister of Environment, and Valerie Caton, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Andrew Dobson on behalf of conference organisers, and there was much further coverage.

Avon Carty, President of the Anguilla National Trust, told *Forum News* that, despite the cancellation of her scheduled flight from Anguilla to San Juan, Puerto Rico, the resulting confusion, dismay and decision to try any possible route and mode to get to Bermuda, via various ferries and flight connections, she eventually got to Bermuda in the originally scheduled time frame.

She said "And it has been worth every harried and frenetic moment of the journey. From the overcast breaking of Sunday morning perfect for a day island-tour to a rather sunnier Wednesday, the last day of *A Sense of Direction*, the conference