

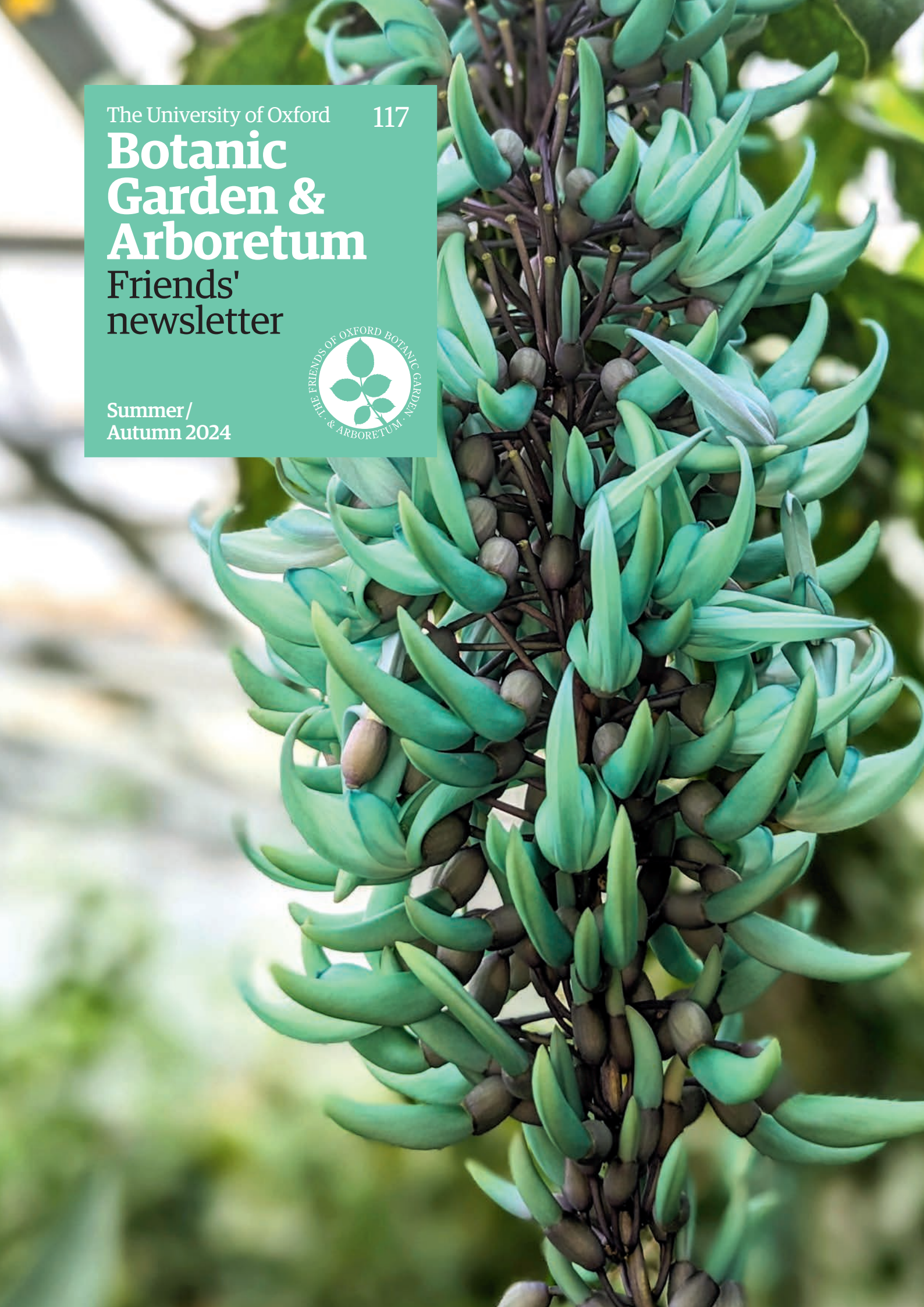
The University of Oxford

117

# Botanic Garden & Arboretum

Friends'  
newsletter

Summer /  
Autumn 2024



# From the Editor

By Chris Thorogood



Left to right: *Iberis semperflorens* growing from a vertical cliff-face in Sicily; *Onosma echioides* subsp. *canescens*; A wild orchid (*Orchis brancifortii*) in the hills of Sicily

The Botanic Garden is blossoming. For the first time in nearly a decade, our jade vine put on an exceptional display of turquoise blossom, exciting us and our visitors. As our talented new Glasshouse Supervisor Jess describes on p. 5, prolific flowering is contingent on judicious pruning. She and the team are now turning their attention to the challenge of coaxing a long-awaited inflorescence from our titan arum. When they achieve this - and have no doubt they will - we are sure to create a national media sensation.

At the Arboretum, the Education team has been busy planning a family-focussed programme of activity to build on the success of last year's community

engagement work. This work identified a local need for research and nature-based therapy and barriers to access at the Arboretum, which Wellbeing Officer Rodger Caseby has been addressing via a rich programme of activity encompassing brain health research, green social prescribing, and community wellbeing. We were delighted that the Education team were in the group of winners for the Community Partnership Award under the Vice-Chancellor's Awards for 2024 in May. This award recognises the team's continued commitment to developing an inclusive programme for Adults with Learning Difficulties (ALD).

As you will know from former newsletters, we work with botanists around

the world to understand and protect the world's flora. In April, Simon Hiscock and I were delighted to join botanists at the University of Catania to take forward our plans to write a flora (wild flower guide) of Sicily. This follows a similar guide we have just completed with other collaborators, to the wild flowers of the Canary Islands, currently in production with Kew Publishing. These field guides aim to connect wide readerships with some of the world's richest floristic regions. Dedicated living displays in the Botanic Garden featuring rare plants from both these regions are now under development; they are sure to fascinate and engage our growing population of visitors.

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A bee orchid (*Ophrys fusca* group) in Sicily



*Iris pseudopumila* in Sicily

# From the Director

By Simon Hiscock



Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey planting the Wollemi pine at the Arboretum with the OBG team

I'll begin with some really good news received from Buckingham Palace on May 6. Following a review of Royal Patronages covering over 1000 organisations, His Majesty the King is 'delighted to retain the Patronage of The Oxford Botanic Garden'. It is indeed a great honour to be selected and it is testimony to how highly His Majesty regards the work of OBG and The Friends. Let this be motivation for us to strive to deliver our shared ambitions for the future of the Garden and Arboretum.

I am also delighted to report that a ceremonial planting of six critically endangered Wollemi pines took place at the Arboretum on April 5, where the first tree was planted by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey to mark the founding of the Vice-Chancellor's Guild last June (see Autumn 2023 Newsletter). The Wollemi pine is a so-called 'fossil tree' because until 1994 it was only known from fossils dating from around 90 million years ago. Then a small population was discovered by abseilers in a deep gorge just 150 miles from Sydney, Australia. Since its discovery scientists and conservation biologists have been raising seeds collected from the wild trees (around 80 in total) to capture its genetic variation in a conservation collection for distribution to botanic gardens, arboreta and major public gardens around the world - six different individual trees for each institution

(see: <https://www.forestryengland.uk/news/dinosaur-trees-australia-begin-new-life-uk>). OBG's Harcourt Arboretum was selected as one of 13 institutions in the UK to receive a 'six-pack' of Wollemis - an honour indeed in the company of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew and Edinburgh, RHS Wisley, the National Arboretum (Westonbirt) and National Pinetum (Bedgebury).

Staying with the Arboretum, later in April to coincide with the flowering of the bluebells, we hosted our annual Spring Fair. A chilly and overcast day saw just over 850 visitors attend the event where they were delighted with the hot food and drinks on offer amid the artisan craft stalls and entertainment - as usual the lambs and pygmy goats were a favourite with the children. Well done to the Friends who raised over £2000 towards the Paths Appeal with their ever-popular cake stall (£1444) and tombola (£606).

Not forgetting the Botanic Garden, we were delighted to launch our Literary Garden in time for the Oxford Literary Festival in March. The garden takes its inspiration from plants featured in English and world literature and features creative interpretation designed by Pia Östlund with text by Fiona Stafford, Professor of English Language and Literature here at Oxford. This new addition to the Walled Garden aims to engage with a new

demographic of visitors and was created with funding from the Friends.

Finally, I would like to thank the many volunteers who contribute so much to the successes of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum, through for instance: weeding the beds at the Botanic Garden, helping with scrub clearance and general site maintenance at the Arboretum, leading tours (especially the highly popular Garden tours), or helping at events like the seasonal fairs. Your help, along with that of the many Friends, is greatly appreciated and valued.



Vice-Chancellor Professor Irene Tracey planting the Wollemi pine at the Arboretum

# News from the Garden

By Mark Brent

It seems almost traditional that I begin with a complaint about the weather which has seemed intolerable this spring. I would like to thank both our horticulturists and magnificent band of volunteers who have steadfastly overcome the wet conditions, and worked hard to maintain the Botanic Garden to a high standard. The horticultural team has been adaptable and those who are new to the Garden have taken the quirks of the University and climate in their stride. I was pleased to see so many of them assisting the Friends on May Morning; the event certainly helped introduce them to Oxford's unique traditions.

If there is an aspect of my role that brings me particular joy, it is watching our young horticulturists flourish and seize the opportunity to work with, and enhance, our extensive plant collection. Many of you who visit the Botanic Garden will have encountered our horticulturists and I hope their energy and enthusiasm has been equally inspiring to our visitors.

The climate has certainly influenced the flowering time across our displays, in some instances, stirring a mild panic when plants such as snowdrops and hellebores are needed for undergraduate teaching. Luckily, we had

just enough of both when we needed them; other decorative displays, such as the tulips, went over remarkably quickly. We will need to take the ever-increasing vagaries of the climate into consideration when planning our displays to provide colour throughout the year. We are currently introducing a range of permanent exotic species to the beds between the Glasshouses.

Our two Horticultural Apprentices, George Wickson and George Harwood-Edwards, recently accompanied Senior Botanical Horticulturist H el ene Tronc to Villa Racalia in Sicily to gain experience of working in a historic Mediterranean garden. At this stage in their careers, to be able to work in a completely different working environment such as this broadens their experience and career prospects considerably. I would like to thank both Alison Richards and Robert Hazell for their wonderful hospitality by hosting all three of our horticulturists.

Conservation of local native species continues to be an important part of our horticultural work. Following our efforts to re-introduce to Shotover Park *Orobancherapum-genistae*, previously extinct in Oxfordshire, we have extended this project to



*Magnolia 'Genie'* flowering in early spring in the Walled Garden

Christ Church Meadow, working with Head Gardener, John James.

It is now four years since Storm Ciara damaged the English yew planted by Bobart in the 1600s. Mercifully the tree has recovered well. Recently a branch from the tree was used in a topping out ceremony for the University's new Steven A. Schwarzman Centre, to celebrate the building's completion, and to 'ward off evil spirits'.



*Ramonda myconi* flowering in the Rock Garden



OBGA Horticultural Apprentices George Harwood-Edwards and George Wickson at Villa Racalia, Sicily

## Propagation News

By Lewis Barrett

Last month, a contingent of horticulturists from the Botanic Garden visited the Tropical Nursery at Kew to collect donated plants and see Kew's extensive propagation facilities. They have an astounding array of different climate-controlled rooms for growing groups of plants as specific as cacti, aroids, and *Nepenthes*.

The main purpose of our trip was to learn more about aquatic plant propagation, and we were lucky enough to spend time with Carlos Magdalena - a horticulturist who is Kew's expert in this niche discipline. We were shown the nursery tanks that are kept running year-round. They were abounding with a diversity of aquatic flora and other lifeforms you would expect to find in a tropical pond. These miniature ecosystems create the perfect environment for propagating difficult-to-grow aquatic species such as *Victoria*. By keeping these nursery ponds running year-round, they reach a state of homeostasis, preventing algae blooms and enabling the germination of aquatic species.



Learning about aquatic plant propagation with Carlos Magdalena, Horticulturist at Kew Gardens

Back at Oxford Botanic Garden, our own *Victoria cruziana* is growing in the nursery greenhouses. As the plants develop they become ever more spiny, which in nature, protects them from herbivory. We have already potted on our specimen twice since picking it up from Kew a month ago due to its rapid growth, and we plan to transplant it into its permanent home in the Water Lily House by the beginning of June. The timing of this move is crucial because the *Victoria* needs to be large and spiny enough to protect itself from opportunistic fish before being submerged in the pond.

# News from the Glasshouses

By Jess Snowball



*Helicodicerus muscivorus*.  
Inset: A titan arum tuber

Greetings from the Glasshouses. The new team, comprising Ross Edwards, Laurie Thomson and me, has been getting to know the collections swiftly, and as spring has emerged, much is bursting into life. The showstopper so far this year has been the spectacular jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*). Its generic name '*Strongylodon*' means 'rounded tooth' and the specific '*macrobotrys*' means 'long cluster of grapes'. Endemic to the Philippines, it is one of nature's wonders and produces unique, minty-blue, claw-like flowers, which are believed to be pollinated

by bats: the bats feed upside down on the nectar and become covered in pollen during the process. This tropical vine blooms from two- to three-year-old wood, and will receive its annual prune in August, to enable another flurry of inflorescences next year.

A fun job for the team this spring was weighing our dormant titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) tubers. Our largest weighed in at 6.4 kg. We hope it won't be too long before the largest inflorescence in the world can stink out the Rainforest House from its new bespoke wooden planter! In

the meantime, to everyone's delight, the dead horse arum *Helicodicerus muscivorus* in the Plants from High Places collection emitted its own, rather pungent smell of rotting meat. This plant has certainly been attracting flies for pollination here in Oxford, much as it does in its native Corsica, Sardinia and Balearic Islands.

Routine glasshouse cleaning has also been on our agenda, to maximise light levels, and help reduce pest and disease build-up. Other jobs we are undertaking include: auditing the collections ready for new labels, sorting through the Nursery Houses and putting on display some more impressive specimens in the Conservatory. In the future, the Conservatory will house a more diverse dry tropical and temperate pot collection, to show off some of our botanical treasures that have not before been on public display.



The jade vine (*Strongylodon macrobotrys*) in full bloom



Chilli plants propagated for the Conservatory display



Repairing the Arid House



The team with the jade vine

# News from the Arboretum

By Ben Jones



Colleagues from the National Arboretum of Westonbirt, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the University of Oxford's Parks Department. Above: Mike Harvey, Arboricultural Supervisor, OBGA, watching Will Blake being rescued

The Arboretum has welcomed new staff over the last six months: Mike Harvey, Arboricultural Supervisor, joined us in October 2023. Mike started his career as an apprentice forester on the Blenheim Estate and has worked for the last twenty years in the commercial sector, successfully running his own tree surgery business. Mike brings a wealth of experience and knowledge with him, and has made a great start in his role as Arboricultural Supervisor.

Then in January 2024, Zak Goad, Arborist, joined the team having previously worked at Fort Belvedere, Great Windsor Park, and as a professional tree surgeon and arboricultural consultant. Zak has also worked as a volunteer assisting the Woodland Trust's Temperate Rainforest Advisor, near the Isle of Mull.



Arboretum Team May 2024

**Jamie Slessor, Arborist,**  
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



teamwork, effective communication, and high safety standards.

It's important to keep up to date with technical guidance within the industry, and to continue training. There are several ways to achieve this, and sharing knowledge and experience amongst peers is an effective approach. Working alongside our colleagues from the National Arboretum of Westonbirt, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and the University of Oxford's Parks Department, we hosted the first joint aerial rescue training day at the Arboretum. We had 15 people on the day, including 12 climbing Arborists representing the four organisations. The day was spent reviewing aerial rescue techniques and latest industry guidance on tree climbing techniques, and performing aerial rescue simulations. This was the first time that tree teams from the institutions listed above have collaborated together in this way, and we hope to repeat this in the future.



One of the Arboretum's visiting peacocks

## The Spring Fair

By Jo Boyes

The annual Spring Fair at Harcourt Arboretum took place on a very cold Saturday in April. Despite the unseasonal weather 850 people enjoyed a day of bluebells, woodland crafts, local food and drink as well as tree climbing and aerial rescue demonstrations from our team of arborists.

The Sylva Wood School offered families the opportunity to try their hands at making coat hooks, and the Ministry of Straw's traditional love-knot weaving was very popular. Visitors were entertained as they browsed the craft stalls by the hammer dulcimer



and in the afternoon Café Reason Dance Threatre gave a thought-provoking promenade performance of their 'Fen Dance' by the pond.

The Friends' cake stall was, as ever, a tremendous success; together with the tombola, this raised additional funds for the Arboretum Paths Appeal.

Finally, I am pleased to write that Will Blake, Arborist, returned to the team in early April. Will originally joined OBG in October 2019 as our first Apprentice Arborist, and spent two years working towards his Level II Arboriculture Apprenticeship with Berkshire College of Agriculture (BCA). Will successfully completed his apprenticeship in early 2022, and was the first apprentice at BCA to achieve distinction on all aspects of assessments.

Looking to the year ahead, we will be recruiting two further positions: Junior Arborist and a two-year Level II Apprentice Arborist. Mike, Zak, and Will are involved with all aspects of arboriculture at OBG, which can involve working at height. Climbing trees to carry out tasks ranging from formative pruning to dismantling large trees is a highly skilled role, requiring good



Fen dancers at the Spring Fair. Inset: Damian Clarke performing

# Research News

By Chris Thorogood

Regular readers will know that OBG works closely with an international group of foresters and conservationists across Southeast Asia to examine, document and conserve *Rafflesia* - the genus containing the world's largest flowers. To date our work has reinstated new species, and shown that all of the 42 known species are under threat, and over two-thirds (67%) are completely unprotected. Our work seeks to establish a collaborative network that links governments, research centres, and conservation organisations across Southeast Asia.

In February I visited colleagues at the University of Bengkulu in Sumatra, with whom our institution has a Memorandum of Understanding. During this visit we met with a local community action group called 'KPPL Bengkulu' who monitor *Rafflesia* populations and identify areas

where deforestation is a particular risk. They told me an alarming number of *Rafflesia* populations has disappeared from central Bengkulu in the last decade; their commitment and dedication is a lifeline to the remaining habitats. During the trip we were lucky to see several botanical marvels including *Rafflesia arnoldii*, a rare *Rafflesia* relative called *Rhizanthus deceptor*, and the titan arum (*Amorphophallus titanum*) in full bloom - the very plant our horticulturalists are so keen to see flower in Oxford (see p. 5).

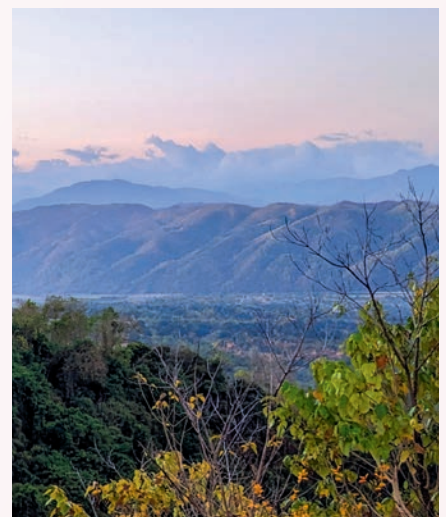
The second half of the trip was spent with colleagues at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). On Mount Banahaw we were extremely lucky to see the rare *Rafflesia banahawensis* in flower. During the expedition we were dismayed to encounter a farmer who had inadvertently destroyed a *Rafflesia* population to make way for a bean



*Rhizanthus deceptor* in a remote rainforest in Sumatra

field. With the local authorities, we offered the farmer a new, less precious area of forest to convert, so that the destroyed area can be restored. Without monitoring habitats and working closely with local communities, it is easy to see how populations can disappear without us even noticing.

At the end of the trip I was fortunate to be granted government permission to ascend Mount Kemalugong, a completely unbotanised mountain that no one from outside the Philippines had ever climbed. We climbed night and day in the punishing heat to reach a population of *Rafflesia consueloae* - however none were in bloom; we did however find a flower of *R. panchoana*. To find two *Rafflesia* species co-occurring in the same forest is unheard of, and something we plan to investigate further.



Sunrise over Mount Kemalugong, in the Philippines



*Rafflesia panchoana* on Mount Kemalugong, in the Philippines





The titan arum in bloom in central Bengkulu, Sumatra

# News from the Education Team

By Lauren Baker, Tegan Bennett and Catherine Vivian

Spring was a busy time for the Education team at both the Garden and Arboretum. In addition to our usual school and community visits, we ran a successful family day at the Arboretum which was well-attended. The Harcourt Arboretum family programme launched with our Super Spring Family Day on Wednesday 10 April 2024. Visitors were able to join us for a day of seasonal crafts and activities and find out about what the trees, plants and animals are doing in spring. The 'Eggs-plorer Trail', which gave families the chance to solve a bird-themed puzzle, ran throughout April and was completed by 109 children.

The Public Engagement Programme (PEP) has continued to prove popular. In February, the horticultural team ran a snowdrops and spring bulbs tour at the Botanic Garden. Winter tree identification, conifer identification and hedge-laying courses at the

Arboretum have also been extremely popular and all courses were fully booked.

This year, our Winter Lecture series was held at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History (OUMNH). This proved to be the most successful series to date, with over 645 people attending the five lectures. We are grateful to all those who completed the event survey which helps inform our planning for future years. We look forward to returning to OUMNH for the Winter Lecture 2025 series. We have recently introduced a new secondary education session at Harcourt Arboretum called 'Biodiversity and Conservation.' Unlike our popular wildflower meadow session, which is limited to the short period when wildflowers are in bloom, this new session will take advantage of the Arboretum's extensive tree collection. It offers year-round exploration of biodiversity and conservation, focusing on trees that are often overlooked when not in flower.

In April, Secondary Education Officer Lauren Baker hosted the University of Oxford's PGCE students' annual visit. These students are training to become biology, chemistry, and physics teachers. They explored the Garden and discovered how venues such as ours can support them in their future careers. The session emphasised interdisciplinary learning and diverse teaching approaches. The students were particularly intrigued by seasonal highlights such as the jade vine in the Water Lily House, which added a unique aspect to their visit.

In late April, Rodger Caseby and Lauren welcomed the entire teaching staff from Iffley Academy to Harcourt Arboretum for a twilight CPD session. Iffley Academy is a



The drinks reception of the Winter Lectures in OUMNH

community special academy for children and young people up to the age of 18 with complex special educational needs. They hold significant importance as a partner of the Gardens, Libraries and Museums and regularly participate in educational sessions across all our sites. This session served two main purposes: firstly, to raise awareness and engagement among more teachers at Iffley Academy, demonstrating how the Arboretum can support both them and their students through guided and self-guided visits. Secondly, it aimed to provide a sociable and enjoyable conclusion to their training day, promoting their own mental health and wellbeing. Organised by Miranda Millward, Gardens, Libraries and Museums' Arts Engagement Officer, the event saw 30 teachers participate in woodland crafts and a guided tour, fostering a collaborative and enriching experience for all involved.

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

By Rodger Caseby

As part of our mental health and wellbeing programme, Mark Brent and I have been working with staff at the Warneford Hospital to refurbish the garden of the Clinical Research Facility. Initial planting included aromatic herbs such as lavender, rosemary and thyme, and two fruit trees: an apple and a greengage. In the future, we plan to include a medicinal bed including plants grown in the Botanic Garden's own medicinal beds. The rejuvenated garden now provides a green space for relaxation and reflection for hospital staff and patients participating in clinical trials.



Tree planting at the Warneford Hospital garden



A staff member from Iffley Academy learning how to willow weave as part of the Twilight CPD session



Work experience students assisting with data collection for an ongoing research project at Harcourt Arboretum

# Friends' Section News

By Simon Hiscock

I am sure you will all share my delight in the news that His Majesty the King will remain as our Patron. As I said in my opening piece, it is a great honour to be acknowledged in this way and a tribute to the work the Friends do in support of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. I would also like to thank those founding members of the Friends who successfully invited His Majesty, then Prince of Wales, to be our Patron.

The Black Pine (offspring of the famous 'Tolkien Pine'), planted in 2021 by the King when Prince of Wales to celebrate the Garden's 400th anniversary, continues to flourish and has more than doubled in size since then. Some time ago I sent the King some photographs of 'his' tree, wishing him a successful recovery from his illness and a speedy return to Royal duties. It was therefore heartening to see that he and the Queen were able to attend the Chelsea Flower Show on May 20 as part of the King's initial steps towards a resumption of Royal duties.

As in previous years, I was lucky to be invited by the RHS to attend press day (Monday May 20) at the Chelsea Flower Show. It was a glorious warm sunny day and I was delighted to meet a former Oxford student, Sophie Parmenter, who codesigned the National Autistic Society show garden, which went on to win Silver Gilt. Sophie studied biology at Jesus College over 20 years ago and said how fond she became of OBGA. I was also delighted to see our Oxford Physic Rose resplendent on the Peter Beales Roses Ltd stand. This elegant repeat flowering modern rose was created with Friends' support to celebrate the Garden's 400th anniversary.

As in my opening piece, I would like to take this opportunity to thank volunteers, and here specifically, Friends volunteers for all the work they do to support OBGA and to enhance and enrich the experience of being a Friend. A glance at the Friends' section of this magazine will reveal the rich offering of garden visits organised by the small team of six volunteers - congratulations on your amazing programme for 2024. Attending May Morning at the Botanic Garden is one of the unique benefits of being a Friend, so I would also like to extend a huge thank you to Seonaid Danziger and her events team for organising this year's event. As always it proved incredibly popular with around 200 Friends and staff enjoying the (very) early morning experience of breakfast while listening to Magdalen choir and bells welcoming May Morning. All money raised

went to the Arboretum Friends' Paths Appeal as did the £2000 raised by the Friends' events team at the Spring Fair. Thank you all for your sterling efforts.

Finally, I would like to alert everyone to the AGM of the Friends, which will take place on Tuesday September 24th at 6.30pm in the Riverside Pavilion at St Hilda's College. The agenda will include the annual finance report, a progress report

on the merger of the Friends and OBGA

operation, and the election of new Trustees/Directors. The formal meeting will be followed by a talk by Dr Chris Thorogood, OBGA Deputy Director and Head of Science. I look forward to seeing you there.

**The AGM  
of the Friends**  
The AGM of the Friends  
will take place on Tuesday  
September 24th at  
6.30pm in the Riverside  
Pavilion at St Hilda's  
College



**The Black Pine**

# Friends' Events

By Seonaid Danziger



For those who are new to the Friends, I can sum up the first six months of 2024, full of activity for the Events Team, as follows:

The Friends' Cake Stall has become legendary at the spring and autumn Seasonal Fairs at the Arboretum. Where else will you find such a splendid variety of home-baked cakes? They are all donated by Friends, for which many thanks. This spring we had collected enough goods to run a Tombola as well. This is two in one, a children's Tombola (a prize with every ticket), and the separate adults' Tombola, more of a gamble with some wonderful prizes. We have you, the Friends, to thank for your generous contribution of prizes. We hope to be able to run another Tombola at the Christmas Fair.

May Morning was next on the agenda. What a wonderful opportunity it gives Friends to enjoy this unique Oxford custom when the Magdalen College choir welcomes the spring at 6.00am from the top of Magdalen Tower. The experience is

considerably enhanced by being so well placed within the Garden with a warm drink and a croissant.

Twice a year, in spring and autumn, the regular first Friday of the month Coffee Mornings are held at the Arboretum. This Spring happened to be a day when it poured! Undaunted, a hardy group of Friends set off to enjoy the bluebells at their best. They were also told a few details about the new paths.

By the time you read this you may also have attended the regular Friends' Summer Party, held alternately in the Garden and Arboretum, and the New College Opera, another uniquely Oxford Experience.

All of these events are made possible by hugely appreciated Volunteers. The profits go to the Friends' Paths Appeal.

What next you might ask? We are planning our own Gardeners' Question Time! It is too early to publish any details but watch this space in the next Newsletter.

## Friends' Coffee Mornings

Coffee, tea and biscuits are served from 10.30am in the Conservatory of the Botanic Garden, or at Harcourt Arboretum. Please remember to bring your Friends' card and to check the website for any changes.

### 2024

5th July - Botanic Garden

No meeting in August

6th September - Botanic Garden

4th October - Botanic Garden

1st November - Harcourt Arboretum

13th December - Botanic Garden

### 2025

No meeting in January

Please check the Friends' website for up-to-date information

<https://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/friends>

## Don't forget your membership card

when you come to visit the Garden or Arboretum. Our ticket office staff do not have access to the membership database (for data protection reasons) and can't let you in free of charge if you don't have your membership card!

## Message to all email users

If you are not receiving regular e-bulletins with news of Friends' events by email, it will be because you have not signed up to receive them. If you wish to sign up, please send an email with your name, to the Friends' Administrator at [friends.administrator@obga.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obga.ox.ac.uk).

## Dates for the Newsletter

The newsletter is published and sent out three times a year, in mid-March, early July, and early November

# Friends' Garden Visits

By Jane Annett, Pauline Coombes, Megan Parry, Jane Thrift and Diana Naumann



Our 2024 programme closes with five garden visits. Two are new, one is an old friend at a different season, the fourth is full of flavour and the fifth, a college garden not previously visited. We look forward to you joining us.

The end of 2024 finds us saying farewell and thank you to Harriet Bretherton, an invaluable garden visits team member who has helped plan, organise and attend your visits over the past 15 years. Harriet was also a Trustee, a member of the National Forum of Botanic Gardens and helped with the Friends' events. Harriet's contributions towards the garden visits programme will be sorely missed as she steps down from volunteering for the Friends.

## Booking Garden Visit Tickets:

**1) By Post with Cheque:** A Postal Booking Form is enclosed.

**Please Note:** As from January 2025, all garden visit bookings will be online, thereby bringing them into line with all FOBGA activities. Please could we therefore encourage you to make arrangements, as soon as possible, so that you are able to book online for the Winter 2025, and all future, visits. Please remember to advise the Friends' Administrator of any new contact details e.g. your email.

**2) Online:** To book and pay for garden visits online - please visit [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/friends-visits](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/friends-visits)

## Any online problems?

Contact our Friends Administrator. [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk) / 01865 610303

**Before booking a visit:** Please be aware that, should anyone have mobility or health issues, some gardens may be a bit challenging

**Dogs:** Following Botanic Gardens policy, dogs only permitted if they are assistance dogs.

Saturday 31st August, 5.30pm

## Hanwell Castle

Hanwell Castle, Hanwell, Oxon OX17 1HN

By kind permission of Mr Christopher Taylor and Rowena Archer

The Coach House grounds at Hanwell Castle, is a beautiful varied site of 18 acres incorporating extensive remains of medieval fishponds and a once-great landscape garden dating from the 1660s or earlier, sadly neglected and overgrown when the present owners arrived in 1984. Since then, about a third of the area has been brought back under active care, with extensive new planting of Asiatic maples, catalpas, cercidiphyllums, magnolias, American oaks and many other ornamental trees and the re-opening of a network of paths with bridges over springs and streams. The whole is maintained by the owners with only occasional paid help. Unsuitable for those with walking difficulties owing to uneven paths & slopes. The visit ends with drinks and nibbles.

- Friends £20, guests £25
- Maximum 30



Hanwell Castle

Thursday 5th September,  
1.30pm for 2.00pm

### Owlpen Manor

Owlpen Manor, Uley, Glos GL11 5BZ

By kind permission of Sir Nicholas and Lady Mander

Owlpen Manor is a hidden gem in a Gloucestershire valley between Tetbury and Stroud. It is one of the most romantic Tudor manor houses in the south of England. A charming hillside garden is set on seven hanging terraces of the 16th/17th centuries, with magnificent yew topiary, old roses and box parterres. Re-ordered in the 1720s, the garden is today a historic survival of great interest and rarity. There is a circular walk around the early Georgian mill pond and lake and the walled kitchen garden is a delight. The house dates from 1450 to 1616 with Arts and Crafts repairs of 1926 when the house was saved from 80 years of dereliction. The interiors contain a series of unique painted textiles, as well as a famous collection of Cotswold Arts and Crafts furniture and fittings. On arrival the group will be split into two - one will have a guided tour of the house by a member of the Mander family while the other group can explore the gardens and Church on their own. After the second house tour, the visit ends with a cream tea served in the medieval Cyder Barn. Please note: The house has steep stairs with uneven floors which can be slippery in places and the gardens, located on a hillside, consist largely of terraces so there are many steps and some do not have handrails.

- Friends £32, guests £37
- Maximum 40



© The Charterhouse

The Charter-House Hospital, engraved by William Henry Toms, 18th century

Tuesday 17th September,  
2.00 to 4.30pm

### A tour of the London Charterhouse and gardens

The Charterhouse, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN

Led by The Charterhouse gardeners, this is a rare opportunity to enter the enchanting secret gardens of The Charterhouse. Hidden away for more than 650 years, The Charterhouse gardens are now revealed in all their glory. Enclosed by this historic former monastery and Tudor palace is an

oasis of calm and great beauty, where a collection of courtyard gardens gradually unfold, cleverly reflecting different moods and providing colour and interest throughout the seasons. As well as visiting the gardens there will be a professional guide-led tour to see the highlights of The Charterhouse, it will take in the evocative remnants of the medieval monastery and the courtyards of the Tudor mansion. Refreshments will be served after the tours. And, should you wish, you may visit the museum and chapel free of charge from 10.30am prior to our Friends' visit.

- Friends £37, guests £42
- Maximum 50

Tuesday 1st October, 10.00am

### Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

Church Road, Great Milton, Oxfordshire, OX44 7PD

By kind permission of Belmond le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

There are eleven gardens within the Le Manoir grounds; each with a story to tell. They are inspired from Raymond Blanc's travels, interests and connection with nature. Each one has a different and specific purpose which requires particular knowledge and expertise to create and maintain. Whilst you are here you will discover the organic gardens: the beating heart of Le Manoir, the canvas on which their gastronomy and their values are written. Over the past ten years, Raymond Blanc and the team have planted an orchard of 2500 trees. This is an English orchard and a French orchard but intertwined; each planted in different phases and for different reasons but unified in the spirit of rediscovery and celebration. Whilst visiting Japan for the first time, Raymond Blanc was overwhelmed by the sheer beauty



© Owlpen Manor Estate

Owlpen Manor and Garden



© Belmond Le Manoir

The Japanese Tea Garden, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons

and elegance of Japanese arts. Authentic in its design, the Japanese Tea Garden incorporates features that already existed in the garden - a grand oak and sycamore which have become focal points in the design.

- Friends £30, guests £37
- Maximum 40

Thursday 3rd October, 2.00pm

### Somerville College

Woodstock Road, Oxford

By kind permission of the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College

This visit is a first for our Friends. Somerville is a fairly modern (in Oxford College terms) and progressive college, founded in 1879. The gardens are open and expansive with small areas of interesting plantings around the central lawns. It is very

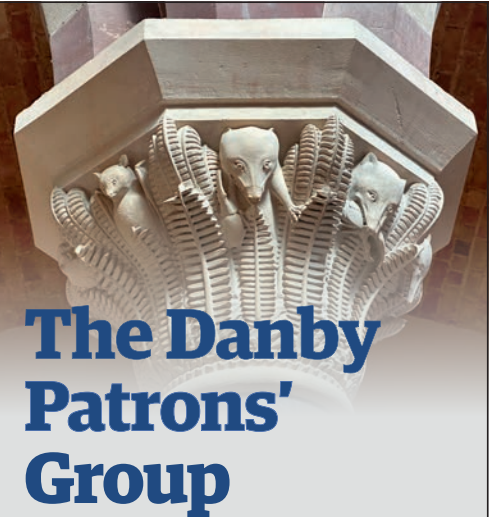
much a central and well-used part of the college by students, staff and visitors alike. Alastair Mallick has been Head Gardener for nearly 18 months and in that time, he has been working to bring a wider variety of plantings to the borders. The small team of two, plus a trainee, garden organically and each year are trying to develop new areas to increase plant and wildlife diversity. This has included developing the meadow area, building a rockery, succulent displays, and an exotic summer border. An introduction to the garden at the start of the visit will set these new developments in context. Friends will then have the opportunity to see the site independently and with a guided tour. Refreshments will be served at the end of the afternoon by the college.

- Friends £18, guests £25
- Maximum 40



© Alastair Mallick

Somerville College



## The Danby Patrons' Group

By Sarah Taylor

In February, the Danby group spent a fascinating evening in the Museum of Natural History. We were taken round by Professor John Holmes, expert on the history and construction of the museum and author of the excellent 'Temple of Science', as the Museum was originally posited. He explained that the idea for the Museum was born of the desire to encourage science education at Oxford, which greatly lagged behind that in the rest of the country. The campaign was led by Charles Daubeny, scientist and, amongst other things, *Horti Praefectus* of the Botanic Garden, and was a story of discussion, dissension, delay, financial shortfalls and eventual triumph which feels curiously familiar in today's world. It took eight years to come to fruition.

The decision to build the museum in the Gothic style resulted partly from cooperation with the Pre-Raphaelites (artists motivated by the desire to depict the truth), led by Ruskin, and partly from the belief that science was 'the study of creation in order better to know the Creator': a Gothic building was a Christian building and, incidentally, ultimately adaptable and extendable as there was no requirement for symmetry in its design. The architecture would incorporate the aim of teaching science, with representations of nature and of great scientists an integral part of the building.

We were shown the exceptional carvings on the capitols, by the O'Shea brothers and their nephew Edward Whelan, based on plants obtained from the Botanic Garden and incorporating often playful images of animals. We saw the upper half of the Geology Lecture Room (now the Director's office) with paintings by Richard St John Tyrwhitt of the *Mer de Glace* and the *Bay of Naples*, and the beautifully restored Pre-Raphaelite Westwood Room, dedicated to entomology.

Many of us had visited the Museum often before but all of us learned much that was new and saw more of the beauty of the place than we had ever noticed: it was a most enjoyable and enlightening evening, rounded off by the usual refreshments. We are very grateful both to Professor Holmes and to Professor Paul Smith, Director of the Museum, for making the visit possible.

# The Bobarts Patrons' Group

By Claire McGlashan

**STOP PRESS**  
The Bobarts' group trip for 2025 will be to Essex and details of dates etc. will follow shortly.

Our year began on a gloomy day in February when we met at the Oxford University Herbaria to learn from Stephen Harris, Druce Curator, about the introduction of unusual plants to our gardens. This was, as always, a fascinating talk encompassing history, daring exploits and travel to exotic locations all enlivened by original specimens, glorious botanical illustrations and various artefacts.

Magdalen College made a great start to our garden visits this year. Head Gardener, David Craft, gave the group a very informative tour of the gardens and grounds of the college, telling us about the plants, the history of the gardens and future ambitions for their development. Whilst the carpets of fritillaries in the water meadow were a little disappointing, the exquisite spring flowers in the Fellows' Garden more than compensated. And the rain held off until we headed indoors for tea!

The rain also stayed away for our visit to Sarsden Glebe where our hostess, Amanda Ponsonby, was very generous with her time and hospitality. We began with a fascinating history of the house and grounds and she explained how her garden has developed organically over the years. During our tour we met the family's pet pigs and spent time in the walled garden, full of colourful spring bulbs, and Amanda told us

how she dealt with box blight. 'Cut the box down to the ground, don't be afraid, and it will grow back!' After our tour we enjoyed a splendid tea in Amanda and Rupert's beautiful home.

On 31 July the Bobarts Patrons' Group will for the first time spend the day in Birmingham. We will visit an exhibition at the Barber Institute and afterwards will have lunch and a guided tour of the University of Birmingham's Winterbourne Botanic Garden. On 21 August we will visit Chivel Farm, a beautiful garden with extensive views designed for continuous interest. There will be lots of agapanthus, phlox and salvias as well as other flowers. For our final visit of the year, which will be on 8 October, we have been invited to a private garden in Chalgrove, which has the Chalgrove brook running through it, and we will enjoy late summer planting.

Rebecca Mather, Bebe Speed and I, with very helpful input from Helen Potts, have enjoyed arranging this year's programme. If any of you know of any beautiful or interesting gardens, or indeed own a garden where they would be willing to welcome fellow Bobarts' members for a visit, please do let us know.

By the time this Newsletter is published we will have visited a range of gardens and celebrated our 20th Anniversary with

a dinner in the conservatory at the Botanic Gardens and we very much look forward to seeing you in the latter half of the year.

Do consider joining this group and sharing these visits. Our loyal patrons provide extra financial backing to support the valuable work of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum. Members, and the Danby Patrons' Group, enjoy all the benefits of the Friends plus our programme of small group visits to a range of gardens and to special collections in Oxford.

## Calendar

Please check on the website: [www.obga.ox.ac.uk](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk) for the latest news regarding forthcoming events.

For booking your ticket, please go to [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/book)

A full programme of short courses, talks and tours at OBGa can be found at [www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on)

### July

Friday 5th July, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning, Oxford Botanic Garden**

### August

Saturday 31st August, 5.30pm

**Hanwell Castle**

### September

Thursday 5th September, 1.30pm for 2.00pm

**Owipen Manor**

Friday 6th September, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning, Botanic Garden**

Tuesday 17th September 2.00pm to 4.30pm

**A tour of the London Charterhouse and gardens**

Tuesday 24th September, 6.30pm

**Friends' AGM at St Hilda's College**

### October

Tuesday 1st October, 10.00am

**Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons**

Thursday 3rd October, 2.00pm

**Somerville College**

Friday 4th October, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning, Botanic Garden**

### November

Friday 1st November, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning, Harcourt Arboretum**

### December

Friday 13th December, 10.30am

**Coffee Morning, Botanic Garden**



Chivel Farm

**The Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum,**  
Rose Lane, Oxford OX1 4AZ.

All Friends' enquiries, including those about Friends' events, should be made to the Friends' Administrator. The Friends' Office is staffed Monday-Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm.

Tel: **01865 610303**

E-mail: [friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk)

Web: [www.obga.ox.ac.uk](http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk)

This Newsletter was edited by Chris Thorogood and Carol Maxwell. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Board of the Friends or the Visitors of Oxford Botanic Garden.

