

The University of Oxford

119

Botanic Garden & Arboretum

Friends'
newsletter



Spring 2025



From the Editor

By Chris Thorogood



Yansen Yansen with the new Southeast Asian display

The last edition of the Newsletter began with news that the River Cherwell had just breached its banks for the second time in 2024, underlining the need for OBGAs to plan for an uncertain future. Not long after that, we braced ourselves for strong winds which forced us to close our sites in early December, as Simon explains on the facing page. Meanwhile, last November,

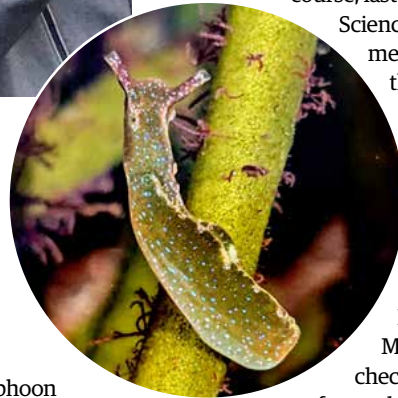
Jess Snowball, Lewis Barrett and I were confronted by a 'super typhoon' during our expedition to the Philippines (see p. 12). Fortunately Los Baños, where we were staying, was largely unaffected; but the damage from another super typhoon that had hit the area just weeks before was horrifying. At least the snow we experienced in Oxford in January was gentle. Unexpected turns in the weather seem to feature prominently in our world now.

In October we were delighted to welcome Yansen Yansen ('Yan') as a Visiting Professor from the University of Bengkulu in Sumatra. Yan was delighted to see our Southeast Asian plants-themed display in the Rainforest House that Jess, Laurie and Ross had just completed. This display is a living celebration of our collaborative programme of research and conservation in the region - and it looks terrific. Also in October, I had the pleasure of visiting the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth with Oxford's leading cancer biologist, Professor Richard (Rich) White. Our aim was to examine a rare and curious sea slug that 'steals' chloroplasts from algae and sequesters them to use as its own: it is,

in essence, photosynthetic. Rich believes that studying the sunlight-driven process by which chloroplasts migrate to the slug's skin may shed light on the fundamental biological processes involved in skin cancer. This is another exciting example of an interdisciplinary research project in OBGAs growing portfolio.

Regular readers will know that Education and engagement make up one of OBGAs core strategic aims, and we strive to achieve this in many ways. Last autumn Tegan Bennett, a trained Forest School leader, led weekly Forest School sessions at the Arboretum for children from Abbey Woods School in Berinsfield - one of our target schools. These sessions were funded by the Friends and enabled children to learn about the environment and their impact on it, overcome challenges, and build confidence in a natural setting; as you will see on p.11, they were a success. Meanwhile, Rodger Caseby has been busy devising nature-based craft activities and creative ways to alleviate stress for Oxford's students.

We also engage audiences online of course; last year's Autumn Science Lectures had a medicinal theme, and they were as popular as ever. Now we look forward to an exciting series of Winter Lectures that will be held in-person at the Museum of Natural History, running until March 20th. As ever, do check What's On. We look forward to seeing you.



The habitat of Elysia
Above: Elysia, the photosynthetic sea slug

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From the Director

By Simon Hiscock

2024 began with floods to the Lower Garden and ended when further floods came to the Garden in late November for an unprecedented third time in one year. Then after the rains of Storms Burt and Conall came the prospect of gale-force winds from the next named storm, Storm Darragh, around the time of the Christmas Fair - December 6th and 7th. With the marquees in place for our largest Christmas Fair yet, over 50 stallholders, food and drink vendors, and entertainers, were due to set up on Friday 5th December but forecasts from the Met Office were bleak predicting gusts of over 50mph for that weekend. With these 'damaging winds' forecast, we were forced to cancel the Fair. We were not alone as Christmas events across the country were cancelled, including at Kew, Bedebury and Westonbirt. Cancellation of the Fair was a huge disappointment to everyone and the low point of 2024.

Cancellation of the Christmas Fair also meant that there was no longer a platform for the launch of OBGAs exciting new perfume, *Metaphysic*. After over a year in development this delightful fragrance was created by English perfumier Sarah McCartney of 4160Tuesdays with the aim of taking the wearer on a journey through the changing seasonal scents of the Botanic Garden. The 'journey' begins with opening top notes of spring-scented kumquat, citrus and

bergamot blossom that give way to middle notes of rose, lily and magnolia evoking summer, finally ending with the warm rich and woody base notes of frankincense, amber and musk representing autumn merging with winter. *Metaphysic* joins our unique and highly successful 'Physic' range of OBGAs products that includes the Oxford Physic Rose. A second 'launch' for *Metaphysic* is being planned for Spring 2025.

Despite the disappointing end to 2024, 2025 began well with news of good progress building the new propagation facility at the Arboretum. After numerous delays through 2024, the concrete foundation slabs were finally poured in November allowing work to begin on the structures at the end of December. In January the two polytunnels and two glasshouses were erected and by the time you read this newsletter, the project should have been completed. This facility will provide much-needed additional nursery capacity for propagating and storing plant material for both sites, which will be especially important for material eventually destined for new glasshouses at the Botanic Garden. Indeed, we are confident that 2025 will see significant progress with the glasshouse project as we refine the developed concept designs for new glasshouses with the architects Grimshaw. New plans and artist's visuals will also provide a valuable fundraising resource as



Yansen Yansen with Simon Hiscock and Chris Thorogood

we work with the University's new Principle Gifts Team to engage with potential donors.

There is much to look forward to in 2025 in terms of collections development at OBGAs, especially the prospect of new material from Japan and South-East Asia, arising from our highly productive collaborations with Toyama Botanical Gardens and the Universities of the Philippines and Bengkulu, Sumatra, respectively. We also look forward to the successful merger of the Friends operations with those of OBGAs to ensure the most efficient and effective service to the membership.



The Lower Garden flooded in December

News from the Garden

By H el ene Tronc

The Cherwell burst its banks and flooded half of the Lower Garden at the end of November. Five days earlier, we had sown the collection of heritage grains, that represent the history of cereal cultivation in Britain since the Neolithic. Fortunately, the soaking hastened germination, and the tamping and meshing kept the seeds in place. This display, established last year, shows the vital importance of genetic diversity in crop production for the future. In January, we thinned the seedlings and gave them a trim to help them grow stronger.

The Garden was briefly dusted with snow in November and again in January - a rare sight. Winter is a time when the Garden is pared down to the minimum, which brings out its classical beauty and turns our attention to detail - the lacy calices of *Moluccella laevis* for example; or the unsuspected scent of the tiny flowers of *Olearia solandri* - undistracted from the lushness of other seasons. I am struck this

year by the number of visitors who come to paint, sketch and photograph in the winter.

If winter invites contemplation, for horticulturists it is a time of multifarious activity. Apart from maintenance, tidying, mulching and pruning, we take stock of the past year and plan the next. What can we grow to test the limits of the climate? Last year, we planted out tea bushes (*Camelia sinensis*) and so far, they are faring well. Since the summer, we have been working with Sarah, our Plant Records Officer, to update records of the twenty-eight taxonomic beds so that we can improve their labelling, identify gaps in the collection, and update the list of endangered species we hold. This review will be finished in the spring.

In March, our two apprentices will complete their college assessments - an important landmark. I look forward to sharing a second growing season with them and seeing what they do next; we

are confident that they will thrive. Helen Belcher, who did her own apprenticeship at the University Parks, joined us in November as a Junior Botanical Horticulturist and she is already a valued member of the team.

The Medicinal Beds are the clearest link between the Garden's long history and cutting-edge research in the University today. Oxford is the world's leading university for medicine. Our striking interpretation panels, soon to be installed, will enhance and inform the experience of visitors from around the globe, and make clear the key but fragile role of flora in medical history and research.

As I am writing, our popular mandrakes have resurfaced after their annual retreat underground. Some of them have to be moved, within the Medicinal Beds, to better fit each bed's theme: a tricky task, given their deep roots and mythical powers. I dread their lethal shrieks but I hope to be able to tell the tale in the next newsletter.



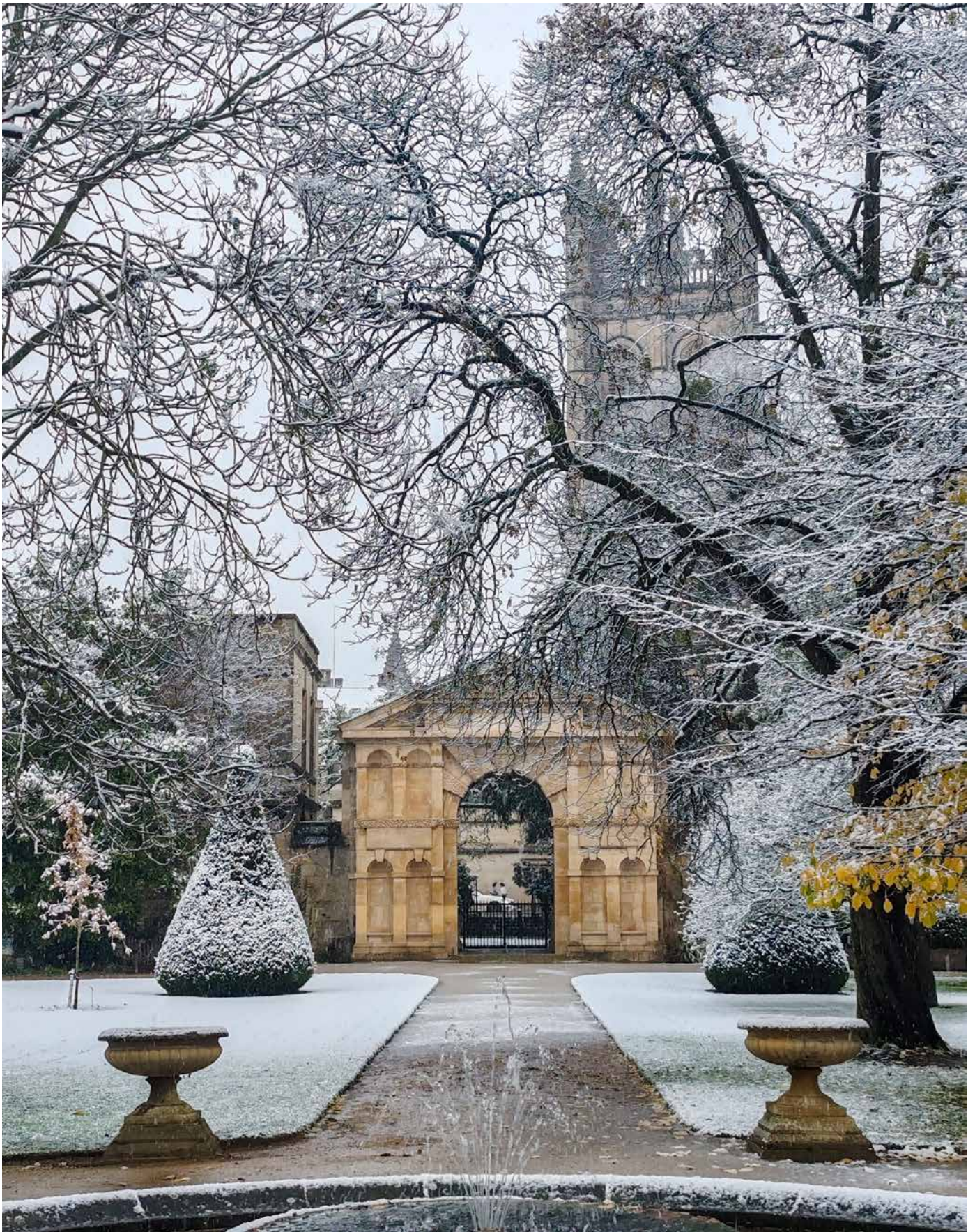
Autumn colour in the Botanic Garden



Mandrakes peeking out in January



Moluccella laevis



Snow in the Botanic Garden, January 2025

News from the Glasshouses

By Jess Snowball



Nepenthes merrilliana in the Waterlily House

It has been a fantastic start to the winter so far under glass. In the second half of 2024, we completed our new Southeast Asia display in the Rainforest House. Here you will be able to see examples of the region's incredible flora, including a life-size replica of *Rafflesia arnoldi* (made by Chris). We have also planted its host plant *Tetrastigma* for effect! Other plants in the display include some endemic begonias, *Aeschynanthus*, orchids, a durian tree and taro.

A significant job for the team to complete during the winter is our annual prune. As light levels diminish, it is crucial that we take the time to reshape and thin out the canopy before the flourish of new growth in the spring. This helps the flora lower down to receive sufficient light and aids the health of each plant by allowing air flow. It is a great way to get up close and personal with the collection. A few plants stood out and took centre stage this winter: the delightful *Coelogyne pulverula* in the Cloud Forest House (see front cover) had a flurry of inflorescences that lasted for several weeks. The unusual 'freaky flowers' of shrubby *Aristolochia arborea* clustered at the bottom of the plant's woody stem. A team favourite was the Filipino endemic pitcher plant, *Nepenthes merrilliana* which can be seen hanging in the Waterlily House. This species which is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN red list and produces one of the largest pitchers in the genus, almost rivalling its Bornean cousin, *N. rajah*. Glasshouse horticulturist Laurie has been busy adding lots of different tropical species to the pot display in the Waterlily House, so keep your eyes peeled for new additions.



The recently installed the Southeast Asian display



The team carrying out the waterlily pond clean



Ross Edwards in the Rainforest House



Coelogyne orchid blossom



The annual prune under glass

Propagation News

By Lewis Barrett

As part of our commitment to the conservation of native UK flora, and Oxfordshire in particular, we started a project at the end of last year to collect seeds of *Juniperus communis* (common juniper) from Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve to help augment and grow the population. Situated near Lewknor in the Chiltern hills, Aston Rowant plays host to extensive flower-rich chalk grassland and the largest population of *Juniperus communis* in Oxfordshire. This species is only one of three conifers native to the UK, and although it is rated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, populations have dwindled in recent years due to habitat loss and landscape change. This species is dioecious, meaning it has separate male and female individuals, which compounds the problem of natural regeneration once population levels fall.

What appear to be dark purple berries are in fact fleshy cones (akin to pinecones) - an adaptation that encourages birds and other animals to disperse its seeds. In cultivation, once the seeds have been extracted and processed, they require several months of alternating warm and cold stratification to emulate the seasons and break dormancy, before sowing in

the Autumn. We plan to grow the juniper in our new propagation facility at the Arboretum for a couple of years, before planting the seedlings out in Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve to help safeguard this regionally important population.



Juniperus communis seed collection



Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve

News from the Arboretum

By Ben Jones

As we step into the new year, the Arboretum continues to flourish. Winter is an active time for our team, filled with tree care, new plantings, and various projects that are shaping the Arboretum's future.

Work on the Arboretum's new Plant Conservation Hub (PCH) is advancing steadily. This new facility is poised to strengthen our efforts to protect endangered plant species and will provide dedicated space for research, propagation, and education. Designed to support the cultivation of rare and endangered plants, the PCH will play a pivotal role in enhancing the living collections of both the Botanic Garden and Arboretum, and safeguard threatened plant species for generations to come. Groundworks for the facility are now complete, and by the end of February, we will finish installing two polytunnels, two greenhouses, and a potting shed. Jack Fenton, our Apprentice Arborist, recently achieved his National Proficiency Test Certificate (NPTC) in Tree Climbing and Aerial Rescue, supported closely by the wider team. Jack, a student at the Berkshire College of Agriculture, began his apprenticeship at the Arboretum last September and has made good progress.

Completing this rigorous course, Jack has demonstrated proficiency in climbing techniques, aerial rescue operations, and maintenance of climbing equipment. The training also emphasised critical health and safety practices, risk assessment, and tree anatomy, ensuring adherence to industry standards. This qualification underscores Jack's readiness for safe and effective tree work, and marks a significant milestone in his professional development.



Arborist Zach Goad, tree climbing



The Autumn Fair

For updates on our projects and events, visit <http://www.obga.ox.ac.uk>, and join us for one of our monthly Insight Tours to experience the latest developments first-hand.



The Oxford Border at the Botanical Gardens of Toyama

The Botanical Gardens of Toyama

This year marks a decade since the first seed exchange between the University of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum and the Botanical Gardens of Toyama, Japan – a partnership that has flourished ever since.

The 2015 exchange focused on the remarkable male-sterile variety of Japanese cedar or 'Sugi', (*Cryptomeria japonica* 'Tateyama Mori-no-Kagayaki'), developed in Toyama Prefecture. This tree is deeply entwined with the nation's traditions and is frequently used in the construction of shrines, temples, and historic buildings.

The widespread planting of cedar after World War II created a significant public health challenge because cedar pollen became a leading cause of seasonal allergies (kafunshō) that affected millions. The

development of the male-sterile variety addressed this issue, producing minimal pollen while preserving the cedar's ecological and aesthetic value.

In return for the cedar seed, Oxford gifted seeds of the European black pine (*Pinus nigra* ssp. *laricio*), reputed to be J.R.R. Tolkien's favourite tree at the Botanic Garden. This exchange symbolised more than friendship: it was a commitment to shared goals in research, conservation, education, and engagement. Over the past decade, the collaboration between Oxford and Toyama has deepened, yielding valuable research opportunities and mutual learning. Trees grown from Toyama's seeds now thrive at the Arboretum, showing visitors a living link to Japan's rich

botanical heritage. These trees demonstrate the adaptability of this unique variety, developed to mitigate pollen allergies while supporting sustainable forestry.

Meanwhile, the European black pine seeds sent to Toyama are legacy in themselves. This majestic tree, admired by Tolkien, serves as a reminder of how trees inspire both conservation and creativity. Today, black pines thrive in Toyama's botanic garden and stand proudly near the literary museum in Toyama City, embodying the spirit of this partnership. As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to many more years of collaboration, ensuring the seeds planted—both literally and figuratively—grow into a future rich with possibilities.

News from the Education Team

By Catherine Vivian, Lauren Baker and Tegan Bennett

Our last Autumn Science Lecture series had a medicinal theme. Professor Julie Hawkins, Dr Sue Burge OBE, Professor John Geddes, Professor Frances Platt and Dr Shahina Ghazanfar each gave excellent talks on a range of topics spanning dermatology, mental health and plants of the Qur'an. In total, 684 people attended the live lectures, and the recordings on our YouTube channel have been watched a further 728 times. We would like to thank all of the speakers for their time and expertise and we look forward to the this year's talks which will begin in October.

Three year 11 students from Woodgreen School in Witney joined the department for a week's work experience in November. Splitting their time between the Education and Horticultural teams, they helped with the delivery of school sessions, including a Forest School session at Harcourt Arboretum, and assisted with the planting of the ancient grain beds in the Lower Garden. We will be welcoming four more students for a work experience placement in the summer.

In the autumn, the Public Education Programme saw an Ethnobotanical Tour at the Garden led by Dr Sarah Edwards,



Work experience students working alongside the horticultural team and John Letts to plant the ancient grain beds in November 2024

Mental Health and Wellbeing

By Rodger Caseby



George Harwood-Edwards and George Wickson show visitors the Sichuan pepper

The Agile Sprint project delivers nature-based interventions for mental health and wellbeing. Last year this extended to the recruitment of a group of young people from local schools who visited the Arboretum for weekly sessions to connect with nature through the senses. We also developed our relationship with the Berinsfield community through monthly visits by older adults to explore the different habitats of the Arboretum.

We now work with many local groups across the county. In Autumn, we provided nature-based craft activities for families supported by Refugee Resource in Oxford and Sunrise Multicultural in Banbury. Meanwhile, we continued to support the mental health and wellbeing of university students through a collaboration with the Radcliffe Science Library. Students were able to post their worries and concerns in a 'worry box' at the library before shredding them ceremonially at a cathartic end-of-term event; we will compost the shredded worries at the Garden. Working with an Oxfordshire-based charity called the International Tree Foundation, we are also planning a series of visits to the Garden and Arboretum for later this year.

Our popular seasonal mini-tours for wellbeing continued with *Autumn Attractions*. Eight colleagues from the education and Horticultural teams offered insights into a diversity of plants including the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) ginkgo, unusual fruits, mosses, cacti and succulents, and unexpected members of the citrus family. A highlight was visitors' reactions to the unusual taste of Sichuan pepper (*Zanthoxylum simulans*)!

Bushcraft and Green Woodworking Workshops for families, and an Ornamental Tree Planting Course at the Arboretum. The Botanic Garden Wreath Workshops proved to be particularly popular. H  l  ne Tronc and Lauren Baker ran these workshops collaboratively, collecting material from across the Garden and Arboretum and sharing botanical information alongside the instruction of wreath making. Attendees had the opportunity to learn about the plants traditionally used at Christmas including British natives and exotic spices, and created beautiful wreaths from foliage, dried flowers, seed pods and cones.



Participants enjoying the wreath making workshop in the Conservatory



Children toasting marshmallows at Forest School

Forest School at Harcourt Arboretum

By Tegan Bennett

From late October through to early winter, children from Abbey Woods School in Berinsfield attended weekly Forest School sessions at the Arboretum. Abbey Woods school is less than three miles from the Arboretum. It has over 40% students that are eligible for Deprivation Pupil Premium, the 3rd highest Primary school in Oxfordshire. Sessions were fully funded, including transport costs to and from school, by the Friends of Oxford Botanic Garden and Arboretum, allowing 30 children in two groups of 15 to attend 6 weekly sessions based at the Woodland Barn.

Forest School is not a lesson in the traditional sense. Instead it is a process. Through regular contact with a woodland environment and Forest School activities children learn about the environment and their impact on it, overcome challenges, build confidence and boost their wellbeing.

During the sessions, children were able to enjoy a variety of outdoor activities which included fire lighting, den building, tree identification and woodland themed crafts using tools such as hand drills and

saws. One of the most popular sessions involved making stick bread. The children built a fire, made dough and then wrapped it around a stick before cooking it.

The children looked forward to the sessions each week and said they were sad to finish.

It was such a success that we are hoping to be able to run the sessions again next Autumn.

Each week the children were invited to give feedback. Here are some of their comments:



'Do more sessions so I can come back after Christmas'

'I made the best bread I have EVER eaten'

'I thought it would be really boring but actually it was really fun every week. I don't want to leave.'

'I came to the Arboretum with my dad and showed him where we do Forest School'

Research News

By Chris Thorogood

OBGA staff return to the Philippines

In November I had the pleasure of returning to the Philippines to take forward our programme of conservation work with colleagues at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). This time I was accompanied by Glasshouse Supervisor Jess Snowball and Senior Propagator Lewis Barrett. During the trip we visited *Rafflesia* habitats and discussed the plants' conservation needs with local foresters and authorities. This trip was sponsored by the Helen Roll Charity, and we look forward to taking this exciting work forward with our colleagues at UPLB.



Above: The Sierra Madre UPLB Land Grant team. Below: Jess Snowball admiring epiphytic orchids and Lewis Barrett on the expedition to the Philippines. Inset: The OBGA team with our colleagues at UPLB



The new species, *Aeschynanthus pentatrichomatus*

A new species of lipstick vine

Just before Christmas, our work describing a new species of lipstick vine from the Philippines carried out in collaboration with botanists Jayson Mansibang, Adriane Tobias, Pastor Malabrigo Jr (University of the Philippines Los Baños), was published. We found the plant during an expedition to the remote Barangay Balbalasang rainforest on the island of Luzon in 2022 - one of the world's so-called 'botanical darkspots'. This almost impenetrable wilderness takes days to reach and has to be hacked through by a machete. We stayed with the Banao Tribe, an indigenous community who protect their local forest. We were trekking through dense vegetation when suddenly we spotted a luminous white, purple-spotted flower dangling above our heads. We suspected immediately that it was new to science



The Barangay Balbalasang rainforest in the Philippines

because of the flowers' distinct pattern of delicate purple mottling, similar to that of a European foxglove. We named the plant *Aeschynanthus pentatrichomatus* from the Latin 'penta' meaning five and 'trichomatus' referring to the trichomes - hair-like outgrowths deep in the throats of the flowers.

Lipstick vines (genus *Aeschynanthus*) comprise some 180 tropical and subtropical species which are named for the red, tubular appearance of the developing buds as they emerge. They typically grow as vines on other plants and trees and are pollinated by birds. We have assessed our new species as Critically Endangered, since the population is at high risk of total forest destruction due to the growing intensity of typhoons caused by climate change (an event we have experienced in the field). The Barangay Balbalasang rainforest is remarkably intact and hosts a high number of species not found anywhere else in the world. We hope that the new discovery will help support conservation efforts to protect the region.



The expedition team, led by a member of the Banao Indigenous Community in a remote rainforest in Kalinga, the Philippines



The explosive secret of the squirting cucumber

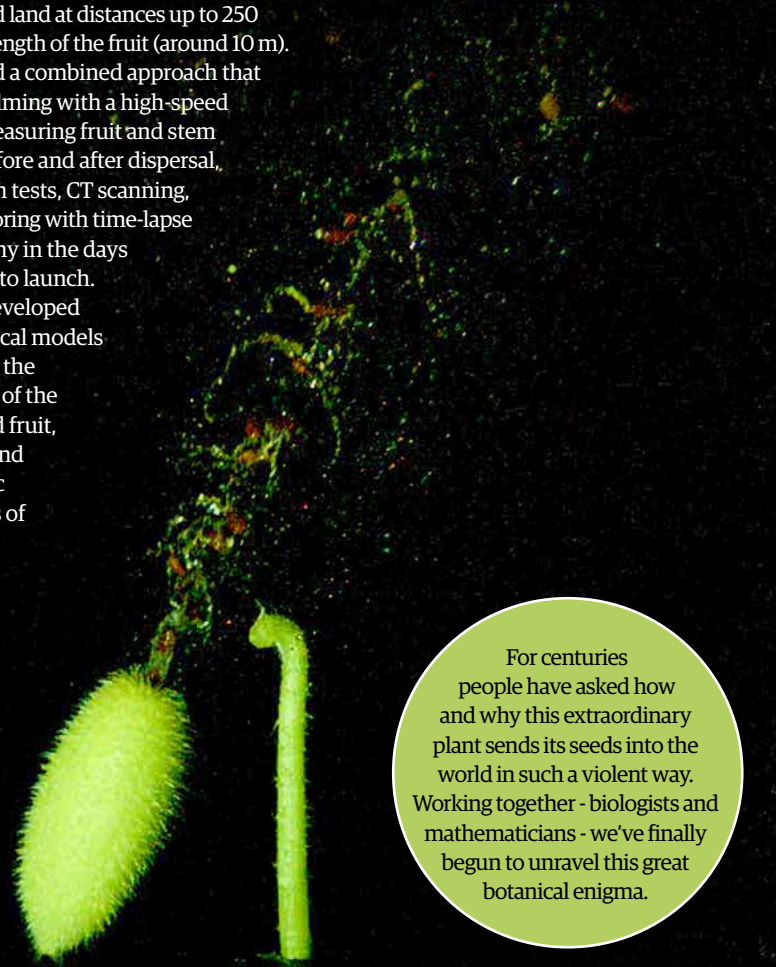
Our study 'Uncovering the mechanical secrets of the squirting cucumber' was published in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) at the end of 2024. This work was carried out with a team that included mathematicians Derek Moulton and Alain Goriely (Professors of Applied Mathematics at the Oxford Mathematical Institute) and physicist Finn Box, (Royal Society University Research Fellow, University of Manchester). The work received international media attention - including a feature on the USA's 'Saturday Night Live' TV show.

The squirting cucumber (*Ecballium elaterium*) is named for its ballistic seed dispersal. When ripe, the fruits detach from their stems and eject the seeds explosively in a high-pressure jet of mucilage. This projectile launch - lasting just 30 milliseconds - causes the seeds to reach speeds of around 20 metres per second, and land at distances up to 250 times the length of the fruit (around 10 m).

We used a combined approach that involved filming with a high-speed camera, measuring fruit and stem volume before and after dispersal, indentation tests, CT scanning, and monitoring with time-lapse photography in the days leading up to launch. We then developed mathematical models to describe the mechanics of the pressurised fruit, the stem, and the ballistic trajectories of the seeds.

Using this combined approach, we elucidated the key components that make up a sophisticated seed dispersal system. This included a pressurised system due to a build-up of mucilaginous fluid and a movement of fluid from fruit to stem, making the stem longer, thicker, and stiffer. This causes the fruit to rotate from being nearly vertical to an angle close to 45°, a key element needed for successful seed launch. We also discovered a rapid recoil causing the fruit to counter-rotate in the opposite direction, and a variable launch: seeds are ejected with an exit speed and launch angle that depend on their sequence. In particular, the redistribution of fluid from the fruit back into the stem appears to be unique within the plant kingdom. We suggest this mechanism ensures that seeds land far enough from the parent plant to avoid competition for resources, but not so far that conditions are likely to be unfavourable.

The squirting cucumber



For centuries people have asked how and why this extraordinary plant sends its seeds into the world in such a violent way. Working together - biologists and mathematicians - we've finally begun to unravel this great botanical enigma.

Friends' Section

News

By Simon Hiscock

I am sure you will all have shared in the disappointment of the cancellation of the Christmas Fair as a consequence of Storm Darragh. The 2024 Christmas Fair would have been the largest yet and, as ever, Friends' volunteers played a key role in the preparations and set-up and were poised with their hugely popular tombola overseen by Seonaid Danziger and her team. Sally Orris coordinated a group of OBGA staff and volunteers who decorated the main marquee beautifully. The marquee is always the centrepiece of the Fair and it looked magnificent as Sally and Garden team supervisor, Helene Tronc, created delightful floral chandeliers, that unfortunately were not to be seen by the public. The entrance to the marquee was also a picture and the conservatory was bedecked with botanical decorations around the traditional Christmas tree and wall wreath. Thank you volunteers for all your efforts and support and let's hope this year's Christmas Fair will be a success and make up for the disappointment of 2024.

I am delighted to report that after a temporary pause, planning for all Friends and Patrons events and garden visits have resumed for 2025. This was approved by the Directors (Trustees) following audit of the Friends accounts and their submission to Companies House and the Charity Commission, meaning that all 'due diligence' checks ahead of the merger with OBGA had

been completed. We thank the organisers for their patience during this necessary process and are confident that Members will enjoy a full range of membership benefits this year, including May Morning.

Returning to preparations for the merger, many of you will have attended the AGM on September 24th 2024 at St Hilda's College. At the meeting four new Directors were elected who are not employees of the University. The appointment of these 'external' Directors was advised by FOBGA lawyers Broadfield Law UK LLP (formerly BDB Pitmans LLP) to avoid the possibility of a conflict of interest arising from having three University employees as Directors. The new 'external' Directors are: Richard Deverell CBE, Director of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Professor Sally Shuttleworth CBE FBA, Senior Research Fellow at St Anne's College; John Leighfield CBE, British IT industry businessman and member of the Danby Patrons Group; and Dr Janita Good FRSB, a transactional lawyer and co-head of Fieldfisher's International Life Sciences and healthcare group who is also a Danby Patron. All have extensive experience as Trustees of a variety of charitable Trusts and Foundations so are well-placed to represent the interests of the Friends leading to agreement of the merger agreement and transfer of assets. Since their election. The FOBGA board constituted a board committee whose members comprise the new Directors

to formally manage conflicts and work with the FOBGA lawyer to negotiate the asset transfer agreement and in turn with the University Directors, Professor John Geddes, Marius Apetrei, and me, agree the terms of the merger with the University (OBGA).

Once the terms of for the merger and transfer of Friends assets to OBGA are agreed, an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) will be called to seek the approval of the Friends Membership. At time of writing (mid-January) a date for the EGM has yet to be set, but we expect to announce a date for the meeting in early February. Once the date is set, Friends will be notified by email or letter.

With the agreement of Friends Directors, OBGA is currently recruiting two posts to manage, administer and support the operations of the Friends post-merger. These will be a Friends Membership Manager and a Friends Membership Administrative Assistant who will support all operations of the Friends using University systems (including notably databases and finance). Completion of the merger will allow the harmonisation of the administrative frameworks of OBGA and the Friends to ensure the smooth and effective operation of the Friends' membership alongside those of OBGA in support of the strategic objectives of the Botanic Garden and Arboretum.

Danby Group

In September members of the Danby Group were given a tour of the new Life and Mind Building (LaMB) ahead of its completion by Anna Strongman, CEO of Oxford University Development. The LaMB will be home to the new Department of Biology (formed by the merger of the departments of Plant Sciences and Zoology) and Department of Experimental Psychology. Issued with hard hats, steel toe-capped boots, gloves and high-vis jackets, the group was taken to the top floor of the building to look down through the atrium at the floors below where the laboratories will be situated. Descending to the ground floor and basement, the group then viewed the nascent teaching labs and lecture theatre before ending with a tour of rooms that will become the Herbaria. It was a fascinating behind the scenes look at the University's largest capital project.

In late October the group was treated to wonderfully graphic lecture by Dr Chris Thorogood, Deputy Director and Head of Science at OBGA, on his work in South East Asia, to create the first ever *Rafflesia* conservation working group to understand and conserve species of the genus *Rafflesia*, the world's largest flowers. Chris spoke of his engagement with collaborators in the Philippines, Java and Sumatra and introduced the group to one of them Professor Yansen Yansen who was visiting OBGA from the University of Bengkulu, Sumatra. Chris illustrated his talk with beautiful images and videos of the ten species of *Rafflesia* (there are 35 in the genus) he had seen in remote and difficult to reach rainforest locations, all of which are critically endangered. He explained how they were focusing on conserving some of the rarest species of *Rafflesia* in the Philippines through cultivation in a protected zone of primary rainforest designated a 'Land Grant' by the Government. This protected area will be a centre for community conservation efforts and will eventually be developed for ecotourism to generate income to support *Rafflesia* conservation.

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@obg.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, Diana Naumann, Jane Thrift, Megan Parry

We would like to thank all garden owners and Botanic Garden Friends for their support.

We recently received approval from the OBG Trustees that garden visits can be resumed. We are therefore in the process of creating a summer visits programme. However, as it wasn't possible to meet the

deadline for this newsletter, we will let you know details of the May - July visits programme by E-Bulletin and the OBG website. Therefore, around the time you receive this Newsletter, please keep an eye on your in-box, your junk mailbox and the Botanic Garden Friends' Visits webpage. We look forward to seeing you later in the year.

Some photographic highlights from 2024

Clockwise from top left to centre: The Japanese Tea Garden, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons; Owlpen Manor and Garden; Chenies Manor House and gardens; Hanwell Castle; St Hilda's South Riverside; Colebrook House Garden; Daffodils at Shotover House; West Woodhay Garden; St Timothee.



© BelmontLeManoir

© Wendy Adliss Photography: top middle © Owlpen Manor Estate

© West Woodhay Garden

© Hanwell Castle: centre © Sarah Pajwani

© Shotover House

© St Hilda's College: bottom middle © Jason Ingram

The Bobarts Patrons' Group

By Bebe Speed, Rebecca Mather, Claire McGlashan (Bobarts events organisers)

22nd April, 2.15pm

Worcester College - spring bulbs

The tour will start at 2.15pm and finishing at 3.30pm

Simon Bagnall head gardener will personally lead a garden tour around the beautiful and tranquil 26 acres of award winning gardens featuring a lake, an historic orchard and natural landscaping with an arboretum featuring majestic plane trees. At this time of year the borders are filled with gorgeous displays of tulips, the main feature of this visit.

- £22 per member, £27 guests
- To include tea, coffee, and cakes served in the Cloister at the end of the visit
- Contact: Rebecca Mather 07954810270

22nd May, 10.30am

Waltham Place, Slough

Coffee, tea and cake 10.30am in the Barn, private guided tour 11.15-12.45 then lunch

Waltham Place offers visitors a series of walled gardens, the oldest dating from the 17th century, an English landscape garden with splendid specimen trees planted in the early 19th century, and a huge double border enclosed by yew hedges. Larger trees and shrubs, some of great age, coexist with a natural planting system implemented in 2000 when the gardens were redesigned by the Dutch garden designer Henk Gerritsen. The vision was to create a garden that the visitor would experience as a nature area, without the need for artificial inputs, fertilisers or pesticides, a garden free of the endless battle against weeds and insects. Over twenty years later the result is a garden of great beauty in all four seasons, described by some as cultivated wilderness. By maintaining wild plantings within firm boundaries, the gardeners care for the gardens with a light touch.

- £32 members, £37 guests
- www.walthamplace.com
- Contact: Bebe Speed 07890496308

4th June, 7.00pm

Summer drinks and canapes

29 Northmoor Road, Oxford OX2 6UR

You are invited to a Summer Drinks Party, a social occasion to chat with fellow Bobarts in the North Oxford garden of Claire and Scott McGlashan.

- £10 members, £15 guests
- Ample street parking available
- Contact: Claire McGlashan 07715410025

25th June, 2.00pm

Rectory Farmhouse

Church Enstone Chipping Norton OX7 4NN

By kind invitation of Mr and Mrs Andrew Hornung

A large and very varied garden with a rich mix of formal and informal planting including fruit trees, soft fruit and vegetable garden. About 100 varieties of rose, particularly climbers; many unusual and some rare plants. The garden has many different settings including gravel areas, pondside planting and orchard Lead Rebecca.

- £15 members, £20 guests including tea and cake
- A maximum of 25 people
- There is a local pub, The Crown, Church Enstone, open 12.00-2.30pm, if people would like to have lunch nearby
- Contact: Rebecca Mather 07954810270

9th July

British Library Garden exhibition

Meet at 11.15 for visit with the Curator, followed by lunch very kindly provided by Helen Potts in her flat in Regent's Park, followed by a short walk to the Royal College of Physicians' Garden for a guided walk at 3.00pm.

Unearthed: The Power of Gardening is a forthcoming (2 May to 10 August) exhibition at the British Library exploring the transformative, enriching and sometimes radical power of

gardening in Britain and how it impacts people, communities and the environment.

Presenting items ranging from the only surviving illustrated collection of herbal remedies from Anglo-Saxon England and the first gardening manual printed in 1564 alongside paintings, pamphlets and richly illustrated botanical works, this major exhibition reveals how gardening has contributed to social and political change throughout history.

From rural and urban gardens and allotments to indoor gardens and windowsills, the exhibition delves into how the act of gardening heals and sustains people in a multitude of ways. It explores how gardening brings people together, empowers communities and shapes our relationship with the natural world. It also considers gardening as a form of activism, as a means of challenging land ownership and highlighting social disparities, as well as the consequences of the international movement of plants for the environment and human societies.

The Royal College of Physicians' garden contains over 1,100 plants, a unique and bespoke collection, living examples of the history of medicine from the era of the Pyramids to today's prescription drugs. A member of the RCP will lead a guided tour lasting 1 hour.

- £25 members, £30 guests
- A maximum of 24 people
- Contact: Bebe Speed 07890496308

Calendar

Please check on the website: 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

A full programme of short courses, talks and tours at OBGA can be found at www.obga.ox.ac.uk/whats-on

March

Friday 7 March 2025

Coffee Morning, Oxford Botanic Garden

April

Friday 4 April 2025

Coffee Morning, Oxford Botanic Garden

May

Thursday 1 May 2025, 5.00am-7.00am

May Morning, Botanic Garden with pre-booked ticket

Friday 2 May 2025

Coffee Morning, Harcourt Arboretum

August

Thursday 14 August 2025, 5.30-7.30pm

Friends Summer Party with pre-booked ticket

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.

Tel: 01865 610303

E-mail: friends.administrator@obg.ox.ac.uk

Web: 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.