FOREWORD

It is a great pleasure to welcome readers to *Sibbaldia*, a new publication in the form of an occasional series of horticultural notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE). It has been conceived by David Rae as a vehicle for communicating interesting observations about plants and their cultivation that might otherwise never be written down.

Visitors to any of RBGE's four very different Botanic Gardens, whether at Benmore, Dawyck, Edinburgh or Logan, often remark on the quality of the well-maintained landscapes and the impressive diversity of the plant collections they contain. This is no accident! The Gardens are a living testament to the work of the generations of skilled people who have laboured to create them.

Botanic gardens, in contrast to other kinds of garden, set out to grow plants of wild origin, often focusing on particular geographical regions or taxonomic groups. The plants they grow serve a wide range of purposes including research, conservation and education as well as providing interest and enjoyment to visitors. The collection that is distributed across the four sites that comprise the National Botanic Gardens of Scotland is, in terms of wild origin material of plant species, the second richest in the world. Looking after such a collection, whilst continuing to develop and add to it with new material is an exciting challenge and, in itself, gives rise to much new knowledge.

All too often such knowledge, which arises whenever new plants are successfully brought into cultivation, goes unrecorded except in the mind of the grower. The gap this new publication fills is therefore an important one. With as many as a third of all plants threatened with extinction in the wild during the century ahead, what we know about how they grow is an increasingly important body of knowledge.

One recent response of the international community to the "biodiversity crisis" has been the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, which sets out to halt the loss of plant diversity within a decade. Botanic gardens will be key players in delivering the strategy and contributing to a more sustainable future. If we are to halt the decline and ultimately to restore habitats, where else will we find the know-how for growing plants of every kind except in botanic gardens? It is just such knowledge this new series will present to a wider audience.

Stephen Blackmore
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