

AIMS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF THE DUTCH BOTANIC GARDEN

Introduction

Botanic gardens have been established in The Netherlands for a variety of reasons. The older gardens such as Leiden, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Groningen were established in connection with the universities. Some others such as the Von Gimborn Arboretum at Doorn and the Bleydenstein Pinetum at Hilversum were established privately by interested individuals and others such as the Kerkrade Botanic Garden were established by local councils or other bodies.

Although the university botanic gardens were established for research and education, the last ten to twenty years has seen plant taxonomy playing a less important role in the biology curriculum. As a result, the number of scientists working in plant taxonomy in Dutch universities has decreased and consequently university botanic gardens have turned their interests towards serving the general public.

Dutch Botanic Garden Foundation

This change in direction brought about a closer relationship between the university botanic gardens and the other botanic gardens in the Netherlands. As a result of this relationship, a Decentralized National Plant Collection was developed and, in 1988, the Dutch Botanic Gardens Foundation was established.

The aims of the Dutch Botanic Gardens Foundation can be summarized as follows:

1. To coordinate, stimulate and control the Decentralized National Plant Collection.
2. To support and coordinate activities related to the various functions of the Decentralized National Plant Collection. In particular educational activities directed towards the general public.
3. To support all activities related to the funding of the collection and their functions.

All collections of the Decentralized National Plant Collection are subject to scientific management. For each plant represented in the collection, a full description must be written of it, its origin known and its name correct and presented on a label. All information about the plants is made available to other gardens in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Educational material for use by all participating gardens is developed by the Foundation, in co-operation with educational staff members of the botanic gardens. The material is produced with the aim of educating the public about nature management and environmental problems.

An example of an exhibition was "Mother Earth's Coat". The exhibition consisted of eight separate boards. Each one with text, diagrammes, photographs and data on the biodiversity and physical characteristics of a different habitat, eg. rainforest, desert, wetland. Attention was given to the use and threats for specific plants in each habitat. The beauty of the exhibition was that each garden could select one or more boards to use with their own plant collections. For example, an alpine garden chose, among others, the "mountain" part of the exhibition, where as a garden specialising in succulents chose the "desert" part. A booklet describing all the habitats was produced to accompany the exhibition. The Foundation co-ordinated the project and produced the exhibition and accompanying booklet. Data and illustrations came from the gardens and the production costs for the exhibition were shared.

The Foundation also looks for funding to produce educational material (booklets, guides) for the gardens. For example, funds have been found to produce and distribute, on a large scale, a joint leaflet which gives general information about all gardens participating in the Dutch Botanic Gardens Foundation.

Conclusion

Encouraging exchange of knowledge and inspiration is an important task of the Dutch Botanic Garden Foundations and the Dutch gardens, although diverse in their educational aims, have already experienced the benefit of this exchange. As chairman of the Dutch Botanic Garden Foundation, I believe that, with the involvement of the Foundation in helping to organise this congress, the gardens will benefit even more. On an international level such a positive effect can only be greater.

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