

Sharing skills, building capacity

For over two centuries, staff at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew have been actively committed to sharing information and expertise with colleagues from other botanical institutions around the world. As the need for specialist skills in botany, horticulture and conservation increased during the latter years of the twentieth century, RBG Kew responded by establishing a series of international diploma courses to provide training in identifying and conserving biodiversity and in using it sustainably. The continuing need to build capacity for the conservation of plant diversity is emphasised in Article 12 of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Target 15 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. As part of its contribution to reaching these goals, RBG Kew offers specialised international diplomas in herbarium techniques, botanic garden management, botanic garden education and plant conservation strategies.

Each international diploma course gives participants the opportunity to:

- gain a wide range of skills in their chosen discipline and the confidence to develop plans and implement actions
- participate in discussions with recognised authorities in the discipline, both from RBG Kew and other international organisations
- focus on issues of particular concern to themselves, either through specialised options or project work
- visit other botanical, horticultural and conservation organisations within the UK, to gain experience of other practices and protocols
- exchange ideas, problems and solutions with participants from other countries, both during the course and afterwards as members of an international network working towards the conservation of plant biodiversity

International Diploma in Herbarium Techniques

With their carefully preserved collections of plant material, herbaria provide information fundamental to the identification and classification of plants. This is crucial to the understanding of natural resources and to their conservation and sustainable use.



Designed for staff with responsibility for the technical aspects of managing a herbarium, the Herbarium Techniques course covers the collection, preservation and curation of botanical specimens. The course also gives a broader context to the diverse roles of herbaria, emphasising the value of their collections as sources of data for many research disciplines.

Since 1987, RBG Kew has organised 11 Herbarium Techniques courses on site at Kew with over 120 participants from 65 countries. These have been complemented by five overseas courses – in Brazil, Cameroon, China, Malaysia, Russia and Turkey.

International Diploma in Botanic Garden Management

Botanic gardens collectively hold the world's most diverse collections of plant genetic resources. This eight-week course explores their changing roles and examines how they are establishing themselves as integral components of national and local environmental strategies. Participants come from a variety of backgrounds, but all are actively involved in the management of botanic gardens or arboreta, with operational and strategic responsibilities as well as supervising horticultural work.



Nine Botanic Garden Management courses have run since 1993 and some 103 students from 63 countries have received the International Diploma. The course curriculum covers the wide-ranging activities of botanic gardens from the curation of living plant collections and their role in conservation to the development of education and visitor services. It also emphasises management skills, team-building and communication tools. A research project allows each participant to focus on a specific area of interest.

International Diploma in Botanic Garden Education

Botanic gardens, with their diverse collections of living plants, are superb centres for biodiversity education and education for sustainability. They can reach wide-ranging audiences. Among the millions of visitors each year are members of the general public, interested amateur gardeners and botanists, and school groups to name but a few. Through them, botanic gardens can influence public attitudes towards plant conservation and the environment.



The Botanic Gardens Education Course meets the needs of staff responsible for educational activities in botanic gardens and similar conservation and environmental organisations. Forty-four

participants from 34 countries have attended the four four-week courses run since 1995. The course provides an overview of biodiversity education and education for sustainability and of the role of educators in botanic gardens. Topics range from the identification of target groups to the planning and design of education materials, from outreach programmes to interpretation techniques, and from fund-raising to monitoring and evaluation.

International Diploma in Plant Conservation Strategies

Wild plant resources face an ever-increasing array of threats. To counter these, plant conservationists must adopt approaches capable of conserving plant diversity at habitat, species, population and gene levels. The Plant Conservation Strategies course reviews the available options, from protected area management to botanic gardens, seed banking and cryopreservation. It places these in the context of global legislation and provides students with the skills necessary to plan and implement actions.



Course participants represent many different types of institution, but they are all actively involved in practical plant conservation. Since 1993, 84 participants from 42 countries have completed the Plant Conservation Techniques or Plant Conservation Strategies courses. RBG Kew staff have also developed modified versions of the Plant Conservation Techniques course to meet the specific needs of conservationists from the UK Overseas Territories and from East Africa.

A growing network

The network of botanists, horticulturists and plant conservationists who have attended RBG Kew's international diploma courses continues to expand. Course participants are keen to share their experiences and discussions during the courses are always lively. The strong connections that they forge during their stay at Kew are long-lasting and effective.

The *On Course* newsletter is published regularly to build and maintain links between participants on different courses. It focuses on news from past participants, giving updates on their latest projects and career moves. An outline of the most recent courses introduces the latest groups of students. Details of regional training activities emphasize the continuing links between RBG Kew and its alumni.



Spreading the word

To complement and reinforce the training courses run at RBG Kew, some of the supporting course materials have been brought out in book form.



• **The Herbarium Handbook** (edited by Diane Bridson and Leonard Forman, 3rd edition, 1992) has been published in Chinese and Russian as well as English. It has become the standard reference volume for all botanists, herbarium managers and technicians involved with making and maintaining herbarium collections. A new edition is in preparation.



• **The Manual of Horticultural Techniques for the Conservationist** (edited by Colin Clubbe and Stewart Henchie, 1999) is designed to be of practical use at the nursery workbench as well as in the office. It shows the practical horticultural skills covered in three courses run at RBG Kew between 1996 and 1999 for horticulturists and conservationists from UK Overseas Territories, funded by the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species.



• **Plant Conservation in the Tropics: perspectives and practice** (edited by Mike Maunder, Colin Clubbe, Clare Hankamer and Madeleine Groves, 2002) covers 22 diverse and detailed case studies of tropical biodiversity conservation in action. These case studies illustrate concepts ranging from biodiversity action planning to community participation, designing training courses and computerising botanical data.

These publications are available for sale from www.kewbooks.com or from Mail Order Retail Book Sales, RBG Kew Enterprises Ltd, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB.

Regional Training

To complement the Kew-based programme, RBG Kew works with in-country partners to support regional training initiatives. Running a course or workshop in-country ensures a sharp focus on regional and local issues and reaches more people within one specific area. Often such courses provide a forum for the



development of new regional networks, as in the 2006 Herbarium Techniques Course in Turkey, or for sharing ideas and experiences of implementing international agreements, as in the 2006 Caribbean GSPC workshop.

Funding for these activities comes from various sources. It can be built into a project (eg funding from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative for the Kew-National Museums of Kenya Plant Conservation Techniques course for East Africa) or sought for specific workshops (eg support from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs under the WSSD Implementation Fund for the Caribbean GSPC workshop). Alternatively, a corporate organisation may sponsor a particular course (eg British American Tobacco's funding for the Herbarium Techniques course in Yaoundé, Cameroon in 2002).

RBG Kew is pleased to receive invitations to help develop an in-country course or specific regional training programme.

Course programme

- 2007 **Plant Conservation Strategies** (2 July – 24 August)
- 2008 **Botanic Garden Management** (30 June – 22 August)
- Botanic Garden Education** (15 September – 24 October)
- 2009 **Plant Conservation Strategies** (to be confirmed)

Joining a course

For more information about the courses, including details of the course content and the assessment

- visit our website: www.kew.org/education/highered/index.html
- or write to: **courses@kew, Conservation and Higher Education, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB, UK**
- or fax: 020 8332 5640 (international +44 20 8332 5640)