

## **“Tourism is not a Dirty Word” – the importance of tourism to the sustainability of Botanic Gardens**

**Alison Partridge**

Going Gardens, UK

### **Introduction**

The aim of this session was to examine the important and strategic role the tourist industry should be playing in the conservation and sustainability of botanic, and other, gardens.

To set the scene we looked at statistics coming out of Canada and the UK. In Canada, visiting a garden ranked 9<sup>th</sup> on the list of top 20 activities important to visitors. VisitBritain reported that 1/3 of the 31 million visitors in 2012, enjoyed a park or garden. Clearly there is a demand for this touristic product in both markets and yet “Garden Tourism” continues to be classified as a niche market and outside the mainstream marketing focus.

The development of the Vancouver Island Garden Trail, on Canada’s west coast, in 2002, was used as an example of how collectively gardens can promote a region, with more visits to each individual property being the result. The success of this project brought garden tourism to the attention of Canadian destination marketing organisations and companies, with the effect of including this product in more traditional marketing efforts, such as adventure tourism, outdoor tourism and eco-tourism.

Other examples internationally were held up as the way forward for gardens to increase visitor numbers, and therefore revenue; also, for those with no ticket price, after-gate spending, thereby sustaining their ability to maintain their garden and whatever important research and development they may be seeking to undertake. These examples included:

- The Scotland’s Gardens organisation – the innovative Snowdrop Festival which was a collaborative effort between c.50 gardens and the VisitScotland organisation during a lean period for tourism in Scotland;
- National Gardens Scheme (the Yellow Book) (UK) – a group of collaborating gardens which opens to the public to raise money for charity, but with a positive boost to tourism in specific areas when gardens were open;
- *Historic Gardens Review* – a biannual magazine published by the Historic Gardens Trust, which tells the story of gardens around the world and raises awareness of important parts of local culture so as to ensure their sustainability;
- The Garden of Morning Calm in South Korea – Korea’s first modern garden that is not attached to a palace or temple. It has seen a blossoming of tourism in the area, which is close to the Korean National Arboretum.

### **The “Cultivating Our Market” project in Canada**

**David Galbraith**

Royal Botanic Gardens, Hamilton and Burlington, Ontario, Canada

David Galbraith and Karen Rickers, Project Manager, are leading this exciting collaboration. The “Cultivating Our Market” project is a collaboration among 18 botanical gardens, arboreta, and zoos across Canada, with the support and partnership of the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association

and with financial support from the Department of Canadian Heritage's Canadian Cultural Investment Fund. These garden-based agencies have self-identified as botanical gardens, and are interested in increasing visitor numbers. They want to do this through a better understanding of visitor attitudes and public interest, and in working together with creative marketing professionals to develop a national brand strategy.

Following preliminary research phases in which visitors at gardens will have been polled, as well as polling of people who do not presently visit gardens via online panel surveys, collaborative marketing strategies and tools will be created for partner gardens, and implemented as the basis for joint local and national marketing campaigns. In conjunction with increased visitation and support, we want to stimulate visitor engagement in the unique mission of botanical gardens and arboreta in terms of environmental stewardship, conservation, science and public education.

Early research analysis reveals that the "brand identity" of Canadian botanical gardens – the half dozen core values which guide us and which we attempt to communicate – is actually quite close to our "brand image", meaning that even the non-visitors surveyed generally understand and value who we are and what we do. A national website and a related e-marketing campaign are scheduled for implementation for the 2014 summer season.

At the conclusion of the program in 2015, we should know a lot more about our market, and be better equipped to reach people with what we hope will be a "unique market proposition" – that which makes botanical gardens unique places. Planning has also begun for sustaining the collaboration and activities of this program after 2015, in order to ensure that participating institutions are able to use the tools being developed and to realize the benefits of enhanced marketing that is well-aligned to their missions as botanical gardens.

## **Atlanta Botanic Garden**

Mary Pat Matheson

Atlanta Botanical Garden, Georgia, USA

Mary Pat Matheson who has just led the Garden to the successful conclusion of a \$65 million capital campaign.

The importance of tourists whether they be local, national or international to Atlanta Botanical Garden is played out in the exciting programme run every year, to keep them coming back. The Garden presents a series of fun and educational events that appeal to every age group.

Festivals are very important to the Garden and draw the local community. The awareness of what is going on in the gardens, widens the donor base which in turn allows the research and development team more latitude for the important work they are doing. The Garden places an emphasis on the importance of horticulture to every aspect of life on this planet and to the planet itself.

The key word to survival and sustainability is partnerships – on a local and broader base. Partnerships and collaboration. By promoting non-traditional partnerships, the visitation data base widens, more come through the gate and the future of Atlanta Botanical is on a stronger footing.

## South African national Biodiversity Institute

### Christopher Willis

South African National Biodiversity Institute, South Africa.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) is a parastatal organisation responsible for managing South Africa's nine national botanical gardens (NBGs). SANBI's flagship garden, the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, was established 100 years ago in 1913 and has been supported by the Botanical Society of South Africa (an NGO serving as the 'Friends' of SANBI's gardens) since 1913. Early on, there was a realisation that a single garden was not sufficient, and new national botanical gardens have expanded to new towns/cities in South Africa since 1913. Currently the nine NBGs now serve as important nature-based tourist destinations in South Africa, managed by the Conservation Gardens & Tourism Division of SANBI. NBGs are to be expanded to two new South African provinces (Eastern Cape and the Limpopo provinces) in the next 5 years.

Core functions of botanical gardens include research, conservation, display, education and recreation. Whilst the focus of SANBI's NBGs is on promoting the conservation, awareness and display of South Africa's indigenous plants, guided tours are offered to visitors, and SANBI participates annually in local/international flower shows e.g. Chelsea Flower Show. Visitors, both local and international, are an important source of income to SANBI. It is important to regularly improve visitor facilities. Sponsored outdoor concerts provide an important source of income to South Africa's NBGs. A Trip advisor link ([www.tripadvisor.co.uk](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk)) is included on all NBG web sites. Trip advisor is a valuable web-based monitoring tool completed by visitors to tourist destinations globally. It includes the following: visitors' photos, visitors' reviews, ranks the tourist destination in popularity compared with other competing tourist destinations in the same town/city/suburb, and provides a visitor rating for the garden.

Kirstenbosch NBG, probably Africa's only self-sustaining botanical garden, is part of, and actively participates in, Cape Town's Big 6 partnership ([www.capetownbig6.co.za](http://www.capetownbig6.co.za)), which includes six tourism icons of Cape Town including Kirstenbosch, the V&A Waterfront, Robben Island, Table Mountain Cableway, Cape Point and the Constantia Valley Vineyards. The partnership has a dedicated web site and partners benefit from joint advertising, marketing collaboration, promotions, training of front-line personnel and joint exhibit at the annual Indaba – Africa's largest travel and tourism trade show. It includes initiatives such as a winter Kids R King Campaign.

Tourism offerings in Kirstenbosch that help to sustain and improve visitor numbers include the following:

- Guided club car tours
- Hiking trails
- Audio guides
- Links with local tour group organisers
- City Sightseeing "Red" Bus (double decker, open-top hop-on and hop-off bus)
- Links to the local tour route(s)
- Market-related gate admission fees
- Range of outsourced tenants and income sources (restaurants, shops, plant sales nursery, sculpture sales)

- Outsourced non-core functions (security, cleaning, gate administration, cashiers)
- Use of garden for recreation, private functions and events
- Use of social media (facebook)
- Summer sunset concerts
- Annual New Year's Eve concert

Tourism plays an important part of SANBI's NBGs role in being relevant to their multiple users. SANBI's NBGs embrace tourism and try to position and promote themselves as valuable tourist destinations, for both local and international tourists. For SANBI and its NBGs, tourism is definitely not a dirty word.

## Conclusion

Alison Partridge thanked the panellists and, in her summary of the presentations, concluded that botanic gardens are important to the cultural, historic and scientific fabric of a region or nation. To maintain them and see them grow, it is important to inspire interest in horticulture and botany as part of all our lives. To enable this, it is important to encourage visitation and embrace the world of tourism – "Tourism is not a Dirty Word".

A lively Q&A session followed.