



Botanical Bridges

Conference summary

Introduction

The Caribbean and Central American Botanic Garden Network (CCABGN)¹ and Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) hosted the Botanical Bridges conference in Panama from 19-23 September 2016.

Support for the conference was provided by Missouri Botanical Garden, Naples Botanical Garden, the Montgomery Botanical Centre, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Summit Municipal Park and Biomuseo.

Over 64 botanical professionals representing 18 countries from across the region attended the conference to discuss the core issues affecting botanic gardens. All sessions were simultaneously translated for English and Spanish speakers to ensure inclusion and understanding from all those attending.

Conference programme

The first day was hosted by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), Tupper Centre and opened by Dr. Matthew Larsen, STRI and José I. Blandón the Mayor of Panama. The keynote speaker Dr. Peter Wyse Jackson, President of Missouri Botanical Garden, highlighted the challenges facing botanical institutions in the 21st century.

Case studies from botanic gardens of Cuba, St. Vincent, Honduras and Panama reinforced Dr. Wyse Jackson's opening words. The remainder of the day focused on native plant conservation and the role of horticulture with a succession of unique, stimulating and valuable approaches and examples to conservation of native plants. The evening was concluded with a Welcome dinner sponsored by Naples botanic garden.

The remaining days of the conference were held at the Country Inn and Suites overlooking the world famous Panama Canal.

Tuesday's sessions comprised of presentations on *Funding for Botanic Gardens* and breakout sessions that allowed for discussion and dissemination of ideas and experiences in small groups, which were then shared with all attendees.

In the afternoon Alanna Slack from Missouri botanic gardens delivered an excellent training session on collection management and databases. This was followed by two other presentations on databases from Ghini and BGCI.

¹ The CCABGN was established in 2013 continuing 20 years of networking across the Caribbean and Central American with ambition to assist the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC).

Delegates took an excursion on Wednesday to Summit Municipal Park and learned about the historic gardens and the future direction for conservation and education. In the afternoon a visit to Miraflores Locks on the canal was an opportunity to see one of the country most iconic and important landmarks. To finish the day a visit to the inspiring Biomuseum designed by Frank Gehry. The fabulous interactive displays promoted the importance and beauty of Panama's biodiversity.

Thursday sessions focused on *Education, Interpretation and Community Outreach in Botanic Gardens* and *Training and Development of Staff and Volunteers* and with breakout sessions after the introductory presentations. There was a general consensus that the combination of short presentations and group discussion resulted in engaging and meaningful outcomes.

Developing the network

In many ways the final session on Friday morning titled *Developing a Sustainable Network* was one of the most important. It has been 8 years since the botanic gardens of the Caribbean and Central American had had a meeting of this sort. An introduction to the network at present and input from BGCI and Dr Peter Wyse Jackson laid the foundations for serious discussions about the role and direction of the region's network for the next two years. After much deliberation and debate a steering committee was formed of 6 individuals to guide the network for the next 2 years leading up to the next meeting in 2018. The conference welcomed and accepted the offer by Cuba to host this meeting.

The Committee will consist of:

- Network coordinator (Neville Evans)
- BGCI representative
- Representative from existing conference host country (Panama)
- Representative from next conference host country (Cuba)
- Representative from the Caribbean islands (St Vincent)
- Representative from French-speaking Caribbean (Haiti)

The Network coordinator will be assisted by numerous individuals and institutions who have generously committed time and resources to help and support the work of the network to ensure its success. These include Naples Botanic Garden (newsletter and communications, Mario Blanco (Spanish translation) William Cinea (French translation) Leon Levy Plant Preserve (Resource Survey) Gordon Shallow (social media) and many others.

In addition, all conference attendees committed to promoting the CCABGN to gardens that are not currently involved and actively networking in the region, including the Caribbean areas of South America. Where possible, countries will identify a national focal point to coordinate network activities.



Members of the Steering Committee, (from left to right): Gordon Shallow- St. Vincent Botanic Garden, St. Vincent Edgar Arauz-Parque, Municipal Summit, Panama, Nora Hernandez Monterrey, Jardin Botanico Nacional de Cuba, Cuba, Neville Evans- CCABGN, William Cinea- Cayes Botanic Garden, Haiti

The session highlighted 5 key achievable and quantifiable objectives for the network to focus on,
The CCABGN will promote the:

Objective 1. Updating of [Plant Search](#) for regional botanic gardens.

Objective 2. Updating of [Garden Search](#) across the Caribbean and Central America
(Both objectives 1 and 2 assist with measuring progress towards Target 8 of the GSPC– ex situ conservation)

Objective 3. Participation in a published biannual newsletters for the facilitation of news, events, exchanges, index seminum, training and funding opportunities

Objective 4. Participation in the Resource Survey to set capacity benchmarks to identify gaps and opportunities for capacity building. This survey will be the foundation for the development of a programme for the Cuba conference 2018.

Objective 5. Compilation of a comprehensive list of relevant and current grants and funders to assist gardens to achieve the [GSPC](#) targets.

The Caribbean and Central American Botanic Garden Network would like to thank the institutions that supported Botanical Bridges 2016 and all those who attended and contributed making the conference a great success.

Kind regards

Neville Evans

(Coordinator)Caribbean and Central American Botanic Garden Network

