

Impact report 2018-2019



Discovering plants
Enriching lives
Sustaining the future





“

**We aim to inspire people of
all ages & backgrounds to
share our passion for plants
and our environment**

”



Foreword

Thank you to everyone who has been part of the South London Botanical Institute this year. It's been another busy year, during which we've welcomed more than 4,000 visitors to SLBI activities, including over 1,500 children. It's been wonderful to see so many new faces joining more familiar ones at our events as we continue to inspire people to share our passion for plants.

I hope you enjoy reading our new impact report and seeing the differences that we've made through our educational activities and the resources that make the SLBI so special.

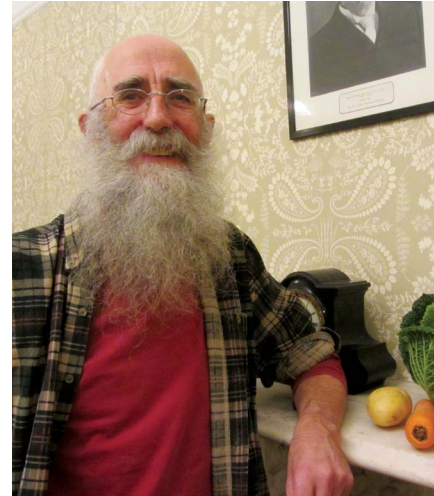
We pride ourselves on being community-based and 'open to all' and we've had more than 60 volunteers help us achieve this over the last year

– I'd like to thank them all, as well as our few hard-working, part-time staff, freelance gardeners and wardens.

Diversifying and increasing our income sources so that we can sustain our work remains a key challenge.

Plant science and issues such as biodiversity loss are becoming increasingly visible as we face the climate crisis. We are extremely grateful to all of our members, grant donors and other supporters as we tackle such challenges. I hope that you will continue to stay with us and also inspire others to become part of the SLBI community over the coming year.

Roy Vickery
SLBI President



Education

Founded in 1910 by a keen botanist, Allan Octavian Hume, the philosophy of the Institute remains unchanged: to provide a place where those interested in plants, be they young or old, amateur or professional, can meet and develop their knowledge.



**A highly organised
and a great learning
experience in a calm
and beautiful place**

Local teacher

**I really liked looking at
the microscopes to see all
the things ... it was really
fascinating and I really want
to do it again because it was
so exciting!**

Pupil, Kelvin Grove
Primary School, Sydenham

Schools programme

Our popular schools programme introduces children to the wonders of plants. We deliver a range of inspirational sessions to match the curriculum requirements for key stages 1 & 2.

This year, 22 schools benefited from our *Botany on your Plate* project which explores the science behind our food plants and introduces pupils to the use of microscopes. As part of our *Plant Recording for All* Ages project, children also learnt how to name and classify plants by making plant presses, through observational drawing and by exploring the garden and herbarium.

We now have a good selection of food plants growing in the garden thanks to a raised bed installed by trainees from St Mungo's, the homelessness charity. This has brought to life our sessions on edible crops.

Through our popular 'Habitats' sessions, children discovered the diversity of plants and animals living in the SLBI garden. We also ran 10 sessions jointly with Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses, offering school children a whole day of local plant education.

Adult learning

We provide a wide range of free or low cost events to the public, including fungi identification sessions, plant walks, lectures, botanical surveys, courses and open days.

Our workshops this year included:

- Plant families
- Natural plant dyeing
- Basic botany
- Aromatherapy
- Seed saving
- Permaculture
- Plant drawing
- Botanical painting
- Wreath making
- Herb growing



“ **Really relaxed and info-packed walk.
There’s always more to learn!** ”

Foraging walk participant, Burgess Park

Our education work has
been funded by:



Scientific work

We refreshed the membership of our Scientific Advisory group this year, and we continued the long term survey of the flora of St Leonard's churchyard, Streatham. Two issues of the SLBI Gazette were published, containing reports and articles written by members.

Increasing use has been made of the collections for weekly public displays, talks and lectures, art and craft based workshops and other education work.

We continued to answer enquiries concerning plants, the history of botany, and plant ID. We provided free access to our facilities for people to learn, meet and study.

Volunteer learning

As well as helping to make our events and activities possible, our volunteers gained skills and experience in education, visitor engagement, herbarium conservation and gardening.

The garden

Our botanic garden, hidden behind the Institute, has an atmosphere of green profusion. It is approached through a small conservatory which shelters tender plants in winter and houses a collection of carnivorous plants.

Thanks to a grant from the Finnis Scott Foundation, we were able to produce new signage for the garden. This is now displayed in each main bed, giving plant names and information about the plants in 16 areas - including the pond, the monocots, dye plants, scented plants and the weed garden. There is also a new Tree Trail which can be carried around to identify trees in both the front and back gardens. The new information has been greatly welcomed by the general public, visiting botanists and gardeners.

Our garden is tended and enhanced by our gardeners and enthusiastic volunteers. The team continued to propagate plants for our annual plant sale, Open Garden Squares Weekend, and other events throughout the year, generating crucial income. In 2018 our gardeners also visited the Botanical Garden of Rome as part of a learning exchange scheme funded by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI).



“...A complete treat,
a hidden oasis here in South London”

The library & herbarium

Our library is a comprehensive collection of around 2,000 botanical books which have been lovingly collected over the last hundred years. Our historic herbarium contains over 100,000 dried, pressed specimens of flowering and non-flowering plants. The library, herbarium and garden are open to visitors free of charge every Thursday.

Future generations will be able to enjoy some of our oldest and most fragile books, thanks to grants from the Idlewild Trust, the Leche Trust, and some generous donations, which have enabled them to be professionally conserved.

We have continued to add to our library, and we are grateful to people who have made donations of books this year. A specialist in book conservation continued to advise on appropriate storage and maintenance.

A key addition to the library has been a copy of our President Roy Vickery's new volume, *Vickery's Folk Flora: An A-Z of the Folklore and Uses of British and Irish Plants*.

We remain indebted to our library team for their ongoing work, not just in the library, but also welcoming our Thursday visitors.

We completed the refurbishment of the herbarium, herbarium cabinets and the installation of new toilets with thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and a generous private donation.

More visitors than ever have been able to engage with our herbarium thanks to new digital displays and an improved catalogue. Our new technology allows visitors to learn about the specimens and the herbarium's history, and to make an interactive poppy specimen. It explains the importance and history of plant collecting and identification, and helps users to identify some key common and wild plants.

Images of our herbarium specimens online have enabled the wider botanical community to use our collections more easily. This and other activities have stimulated interest in the herbarium, leading to more enquiries and visitors, and the citing of SLBI specimens in publications.

Our year in numbers

With thanks to your support...



60
volunteers

1,589

children took part in
our school sessions &
holiday activities

We held **80**

events including talks,
walks, workshops,
courses & open days

3,667

volunteer hours were
contributed to the SLBI

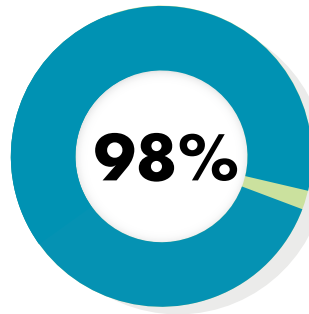




“ One of our young participants said:
I’m a scientist! ”

4,078 people visited the SLBI or took part in our activities

At least **24**
books were added
to the library



of people said they
gained new skills &
knowledge by taking
part in our activities

We completed the
refurbishment of

112
herbarium
cabinets

Securing the future of plant education in South London

Looking ahead

In April 2019 we learnt that our application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for our 'BEST' project, *'Botanical Education: Sustainable & Thriving'*, had been successful. We have been awarded £86,000 over eighteen months to focus on the SLBI's financial sustainability and preserve the last 10 years' investment in our heritage. The grant will enable us to increase our fundraising activity and trial new methods of bringing in income so that we can continue our important range of plant-related educational work into the future.

The grant will also support our trustees to ensure best practice governance, help us to reach new audiences, and will also allow new opportunities for volunteering.

We have now begun working on a new five-year business plan and strategy which will be completed in 2020.



Thank you

We would like to thank our funders: National Lottery Heritage Fund, City Bridge Trust, Finnis Scott Foundation, The Leche Trust, The Idlewild Trust, BGCI, and all of our generous donors and supporters.

We are grateful to all those who have led events, delivered lectures, taught courses and workshops and guided field meetings.

We remain indebted to many volunteers who have baked cakes for open days, provided plants for sale and undertaken a wide range of tasks in the office, library, herbarium and garden and at school visits and other events.

We have appreciated the benefits of working in partnership with other organisations and as part of wider networks. As well as partnerships with St Mungo's and Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses, we have held joint events with groups such as Incredible Edible Lambeth, Thrive, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Urban Growth, the Friends of Tooting Common, London Permaculture Network and London Natural History Society.



Can you help more people to fall in love with plants and the natural world?

Here are some ways that you can support us:

- Make a donation
- Become a member
- Hire the Institute or garden for your event
- Buy a gift membership for a friend or loved one
- Leave a gift in your will

To find out more visit www.slbi.org.uk, pick up a leaflet, or call us on 020 8674 5787 (Monday–Thursday).



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