

# Impact report

April 2019 - March 2020



Discovering plants  
Enriching lives  
Sustaining the future



# Foreword

As I read this report about the SLBI's impact during 2019/20, I realise how much things have changed for us during 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This time last year, I hadn't heard of Zoom and wouldn't have dreamt that in a few months' time we'd be running talks online, reaching people around the world. The Institute was full of people, young and old, enjoying the quiriness of our building and eating cake without worrying about being too close to each other. One year on, it's just our garden that is still being enjoyed, alongside our walks and online activities. And yet, we're surviving the crisis, and adapting to it, largely thanks to the ongoing support of so many committed people. Thank you to everyone who has been part of the SLBI, both this year and 'pre-Covid'. Last year we welcomed more than 4,000 visitors to

SLBI activities, including over 1,500 children. This wouldn't have been possible without the support of our members, volunteers, donors, trustees, event leaders, community partners and grant funders.

I hope you enjoy reading about the difference that we've been making. Whilst our doors have been closed, we've been working hard on planning our future. Sustaining the SLBI's income remains our key challenge, as we continue to tackle global challenges such as Covid-19 and the Climate Emergency. We plan to welcome people to our activities in increased numbers and from wider sectors of our community, so that more people can learn about the importance of the plant world in sustaining future human life. Thank you for staying with us and inspiring others to become part of the SLBI community.

**Caroline Pankhurst**  
**Education & Project Manager**  
**South London Botanical Institute**



# Our year in numbers

With thanks to your support...



**38**

Volunteers  
contributed  
3,296 hours  
or 411 days  
to the SLBI

**15**

walks  
or plant  
surveys

**36**

workshops, courses  
and lectures

**870**

school children

**29**

schools

**10**

Special open  
events & two  
longer trips

We welcomed



**300 members received  
our twice-yearly Gazette.**



**“Excellent facilities, space and knowledgeable speaker on very practical topic. Wonderful.”**

## Adult learning

Our programme appeals to people at all stages of interest and levels of learning, and ranges from general plant based activities to specialist scientific ones. The science of botany underlies and informs everything we do.

This year, as well as popular tutors returning, we welcomed several new leaders, thus extending and diversifying audiences and events. Activities were free, donation-based or with fees kept as low as possible given the need to recover some costs while also keeping our events accessible.

Our events, talks and workshops included:

- Local plant recording and ID surveys, including New Year's Day Wildflower Hunt
- Plant Recording for Beginners
- Fungi Foray
- Herbarium Skills
- Plant drawing evenings
- Intro to Forensic Botany & Ecology
- Magic Mushroom Mondays
- Terrariums, Botanical Cyanotypes & Christmas Wreath-making
- Fascinating Uses of Pollens
- Overseas Botany – Flora of India
- Documenting Karst Flora in Asia & Latin America
- Field trip to Wales



**“Hands on looking at plants – can't be beaten. Great tutor!!”**

# Schools programme

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



Student teacher, Anna Maria, from University of Bari Aldo Moro in Italy, assisted with school sessions as part of her SLBI research placement.



**“There is always so much to see at the SLBI - its creativity inspires.”**



Our former Education & Outreach Coordinator, Helga Krauss, and a team of sessional and volunteer educators continued our popular Botany on Your Plate project, delivering 25 school sessions and holding 11 follow-up visits within the academic year, Sept 2018-July 2019. Children learnt about food plants through activities such as using microscopes, exploring the garden and drawing.

From April to March a total of 29 schools visited, bringing around 870 children. The gardeners, Sarah Davey and Cath Pearson, grew a selection of food plants and created a ‘Food Trail’ to complement the project. In February we welcomed Sarah Webley, our new Education & Outreach Co-ordinator, to the team.

## School holidays

Four activities took place during school holidays including printing with fruit and veg, making clay flowers, botanical advent calendars and dyeing with food plants.



We received and answered, without charge, enquiries from the public concerning plants, the history of botany and plant identification.



Our garden, library and herbarium continued to open without charge 10am-4pm every Thursday to members and the general public.



Our gardeners and volunteers in the botanic garden, library and herbarium welcomed visitors, gave guided tours, set out displays and answered many questions about plants and the SLBI.



We have a good collection of microscopes, used on as many occasions as practical with all age groups. Microscopes are a resource not easily available to most adults or children.



Historic books recently conserved thanks to Idlewild Trust, Leche Trust and donations, were displayed in the library on several open days – a rare opportunity to appreciate these gems at close quarters. Our library is open-access to the public for reference, and is regularly updated with relevant books and journals.



Members benefitted from our annual seed offer through which seeds collected from the SLBI garden are made available for members to grow at home.





A total of 9 organisations or individuals rented low-cost space in the SLBI, benefitting about 495 members of the community. Users included a yoga class, a birthday party, supper club and various national and local charity meetings.



The garden was selected to receive a cutting of the rose 'Atom Bomb' as part of artist Gabriella Hirst's durational gardening art project, and features on Hirst's website.



Our long-term survey of St Leonard's Churchyard, Streatham, continued to monitor and record changes, hoping to identify any related to air quality and climate change.



Open garden evenings were held throughout the summer, with eco-poets performing at one event and the South East London Folk Orchestra performing at our Glowing Garden Party in December.



Our May 2019 plant sale attracted returning and first-time purchasers and raised over £1,000. Our garden team and members propagated and grew plants for that occasion, Open Garden Squares Weekend and other events throughout the year.



Our fungi library is one of the best in London outside academia and is freely available to everyone, including those attending regular fungi drop-in evenings. It recently acquired Fungi of Temperate Europe (Laessle & Petersen), a gift in memory of Irene Palmer, the SLBI's former President.

# An unforgettable experience

In spring 2019 we were pleased to host Pavlos Voulgaris, a student intern from the Agricultural University of Athens.

“I always wanted to work with nature and visualized my work being as close to plants and animals as possible. I was chosen among the students of my university to attain a scholarship and program funding to come to the UK and experience work first hand. When I first emailed Nell Gatehouse, the Institute’s Administrator, I couldn’t imagine I would be accepted. The Institute offered a wide range of activities related to plants and I was so fascinated to experience each and every one of them. The activities the Institute offers exceeded my expectations! I was amazed when I was able to attend some nature walks with the exceptional guidance of Dr. Roy Vickery, the president of the Institute.

With the magnificent guidance I received from Cath Pearson and Sarah Davey I was able to learn as much as I could about garden maintenance, scientific plant names, medicinal uses of plants and experience the garden at its

most splendid time during April and May as it transformed from lush green to yellow, purple and orange ink dots.

I discovered about the delicate balance that is needed in order to have healthy plants that thrive and come back as seeds year after year. From simple weeding to the more elaborate pruning and compost container management I acquired the best possible practical knowledge.

Each and every day the motivation that I had was immense because I always ended up with new experiences. Educational programs are held during the school calendar with their main purpose to provide children with the opportunity to get in touch with nature and at the same time experience the important role plants play in our lives. Having the opportunity to interact with the younger generation and provide knowledge that may in the future provide an alternative approach in life is one of the amazing lessons I learned during my time in the Institute. In the end all my dreams for these two months came true, apart from the London weather...!”





# Sustaining the future

In May 2019 we began 'Botanical Education: Sustainable and Thriving' (BEST), an 18-month project to build our financial and governance resilience, thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project allowed us to investigate ways to reduce our reliance on project-based funding by developing a greater variety of unrestricted income streams.

Trustees benefitted from professional mentoring and learning visits with other charities to share ideas and best practice. Four trustees were recruited in March 2020 (and a fifth in April), bringing important skills in marketing, architecture, governance and botany to the team. Work began to develop a business plan for 2021-2026 with the creation of sub-groups to recommend on specific topics. Julia Minnear was recruited as Individual Giving Manager in July to help develop our work around membership and donations. We made several grant applications, including a successful application to Lambeth CLIPS to refurbish the SLBI kitchen, making it suitable for use by children, and increasing our potential for venue hire.

In February 2020 we joined organisations across London and the world in declaring a climate emergency. We put forward ambitious new commitments such as carrying out a full assessment of our carbon footprint, holding events based around the climate emergency, and encouraging environmental behaviour change in our visitors.



# Partnerships

We extended our reach to new audiences through continued and new partnerships with other organisations and as part of larger networks. About 387 people came on visits, walks and talks for or with external groups, or visited us at stalls.

Groups we worked with this year included:

**Incredible Edible Lambeth, Thrive, Burgess Park, Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Urban Growth, the Friends of Tooting Common, the London Permaculture Network, London Natural History Society, Chelsea Fringe, Open Garden Squares, Lambeth Heritage Festival, Wandsworth Heritage Festival, Rosendale Allotments, Chelsea Physic Garden, Loughborough Farm, Garden Organic, Botanic Gardens Education Network (Bgen), Natural History Museum, Clapham Rotary Club, Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses, Eco-Attractions Group, Wildlife Gardening Forum, West Norwood Cemetery, Station-to-Station, London Environmental Educators' Forum (LEEF).**

We continue to seek out and form new partnerships with groups and organisations, locally and across the UK, so that we can increase the diversity of our audience and programme.

# Thank you

**We would like to thank all our generous donors and supporters, as well as our funders: National Lottery Heritage Fund, City Bridge Trust, Postcode Local Trust, and Lambeth CLIPS.**

We remain indebted to our dedicated trustees and volunteers, many of whom have been involved in the SLBI for some or many years and others we welcomed for the first time during 2019-2020.

We are grateful to all those who have led events, delivered lectures, taught courses and workshops and guided field meetings. Thanks also to our few hard-working, part-time staff, freelance gardeners and wardens.

We thank all of our members and supporters for championing us over the year with donations, feedback and words of encouragement. With your on-going participation we can continue to grow our impact and do even more!



**We congratulated Judy Marshall, Head Librarian, on fifty years of committed volunteering at the SLBI. Her roles have also included being a trustee and Chair.**





# Support us

**Can you help support the future of botanical education in South London? Here are some ways that you can support us this year:**

- Become a member
- Tell a friend about us
- Make a donation
- Volunteer with us
- Fundraise for us
- Buy a gift membership for a friend or loved one
- Hire the Institute or garden for your event
- Consider leaving a gift in your Will

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



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