

Join our Big Botanical Birthday Challenge and help support the future of plant education in London

Will you help us celebrate 110 years of the SLBI and keep us going through the COVID-19 crisis? This summer we're inviting members, supporters, volunteers, local families, and anyone else to take on our fun, botany-inspired challenge!



Keep a nature journal
for a month



Identify the pavement plants
growing on your street



Celebrating 110 years



Learn your lichens

Join our
**BIG BOTANICAL
BIRTHDAY
CHALLENGE
2020**



Create a piece of
botanical art



Identify the trees in
your local park



Write a plant inspired poem
every day for a week



Record as many plants as
you can within half an hour!

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Do get in touch if you'd like to chat through your challenge idea, if you have any questions, or if you'd like to receive a sponsorship form in the post.

Please email our Individual Giving Coordinator, Julia Minnear, julia@slbi.org.uk

There's no doubt that this has been a tough time for the SLBI. With the Institute closed due to COVID-19, almost all of our activities and school visits have been postponed or cancelled. As a result, our income from events and room hire has drastically reduced, meaning less funding available to support our important education work. This year also marks 110 years since the South London Botanical Institute first opened its doors. We're proud to continue the legacy of our founder, Allan Octavian Hume, who believed that people of all backgrounds should enjoy the opportunity to learn about plants. At this time of ecological crisis Hume's original mission feels more important than ever.

Since this is our 110th year, instead of holding a big birthday party, we're inviting everyone to join our **Big Botanical Birthday Challenge**. Your participation will help support the SLBI garden, collections and education work during this difficult time and will help secure our future. We also hope it will offer the opportunity to learn more about the world of plants! Here's how it works:

1. Choose your challenge

Your challenge could be anything from **identifying all the trees in your neighbourhood**, to **drawing a flower or plant a day**, or **keeping a nature journal for a month**. Get inspired by our list of ideas, or come up with your own. There are no rules except to follow government guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the code of conduct for enjoying wild plants.

2. Get sponsored

Set up a secure JustGiving page and let your friends and family know about your challenge so that they can sponsor you. Find out more and set up your page here: www.justgiving.com/campaign/SLBIBotanicalChallenge. You can also download a sponsorship form from our website, or get in touch and we'll post one to you.

3. Complete your challenge

Take photos or a video if you can. Join our Facebook group, tweet us on Twitter (#SLBIBotanicalChallenge) and share the outcome of your challenge with other SLBI plant lovers.

4. Celebrate!

The money you raise will go directly to our core work – inspiring more people to study and care about plants. As a small local charity, any donation, large or small, will make an enormous difference to our work.

Your challenge can take place anytime between June and September 2020. Join now by visiting:
www.justgiving.com/campaign/SLBIBotanicalChallenge

Challenge ideas:

Sketch or paint a different plant every day for a month

Learn to identify 5 species of grass

Create your own moss trail

Keep a nature journal for a month

Learn your lichens

Make your own plant press

Make a botanical timeline of when different plants emerged on the planet

Make bark rubbings of 15 trees

Learn to tell a plant-inspired story or folktale

Sow a wildflower patch

Find 10 different species of fungi within 1/2 mile of your house

Memorise the scientific names of 30 plants

Design a forest garden

Create a piece of botanical art

Sarah's challenge to identify the trees on Wandsworth Common

Our new Education Officer, Sarah Webley, was the first to set up her challenge.

"My local green space is Wandsworth Common and there are many interesting and beautiful trees there. I have decided to identify 30 or more trees found on the common and create a little map to show where they are located"



The SLBI's response to COVID-19

Like everyone else, we at the SLBI suddenly had to make big changes this year due to COVID-19. As a small, independent organisation, we were able to adapt quite quickly and flexibly. Our current grants have meant that we've kept all four part-time staff employed, all working from home, though like many other small organisations, we're concerned about the long-term impact of the crisis on our income. We are grateful to members for your ongoing support, and hope that you will help us celebrate our 110th birthday this year!

Since closing the doors of the Institute, we've moved some of our activities online. We've held evening talks, which have proved popular. Catherine Cowling started us off with Medicinal Herbs, followed by

Roy Vickery with Plant Folklore (he is also doing a sterling job of 'Plant of the Day' on Facebook). Others include Bats, Container Food Growing, and Forensic Botany, which can all be booked via our website.

As school visits had to stop, Sarah Webley has been busy developing resources for parents to use with their children at home. These link to specific ages and topics of the National Curriculum, and are on the Schools & Families page of our website.

Sarah Davey has been keeping on top of essential garden maintenance, and has put two garden tours online, which people have said are 'a joy'. The garden is at its best at this time of year, so we want to share it with as many people as possible.

Of course, none of this is like being able to visit the Institute in person,

for workshops, plant sales or just a walk and a chat in the garden.

We're all frustrated at how long we have to stay closed. We are, however, monitoring the situation very closely and I discuss it every fortnight with a 'crisis group' from the Board of Trustees. We are developing a comprehensive 'Re-opening Risk Register & Plan', taking guidance from official sources and other organisations similar to ourselves. We want to be completely confident that everyone working and visiting the Institute will be safe when we re-open.

Until then, please enjoy reading this 'Lockdown' issue of the Gazette, which we hope will not only be a cheerful diversion but also a welcome break from looking at a screen!

Caroline Pankhurst

Learning from other environmental projects, gardens and eco attractions *(updated from an original article for February 2020 Gazette)*

I spend a lot of time at my desk and running around the SLBI (or I did, before COVID-19 took over our lives...now I'm busy working from home!), but I feel it's important to get out and about to tell others about our good work and to learn from them. Over the last six months I've met people from botanic gardens across the country, London environmental educators and nationwide eco attractions, all of which will greatly benefit the SLBI.

Last November I was delighted to be awarded an RHS bursary to attend the **Bgen (Botanic Gardens Education Network)** 'Securing our Future' conference at Kew Gardens.

Not only did I gain significant new knowledge there about topics such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Science Cap-

ital, Food Security and the State of the World's Fungi, I participated in practical sessions helping me to apply this knowledge. I feel in a position now to be able to help deliver the SDGs through the SLBI's activities (eg by arranging relevant talks, workshops and school visits) and thereby share my knowledge and sustainable development messages with a wider audience.

As well as the more formal talks and workshops, I was fortunate enough to take part in tours of Kew's Palm House, Temperate House, Princess of Wales Conservatory and Herbarium, which gave me greater insight into the wealth of plant material at Kew. A visit to the hidden community allotments was also valuable, to discover how Kew is working with local community groups there.

The 'Food Security' elements of the conference were particularly useful. You are probably aware that the SLBI was awarded a funding extension, in January, for its 'Botany on Your Plate' project, all about education related to food plants. I have managed this project over the last three years and as we start on the two-year extension the conference gave me lots of information and ideas about how we can develop the school sessions and adult talks/workshops on the theme. For example, The SDG 2, 'Zero Hunger', will provide a useful framework for us. A workshop about ways to diversify our food and showing some practical ideas from chefs, was also very engaging.

The broader topics of climate change similarly felt very relevant to my work, and encouraged me to

develop the Climate Emergency Declaration which was made by the SLBI Trustees on 6 February this year.

I used information I learnt about the SDGs in a presentation I gave to the **London Environmental Educators' Forum (LEEF)** the following week, when I was honoured to become a LEEF fellow. LEEF is another very useful network for all those involved in education at organisations such as the SLBI, and it has recently celebrated its 30th anniversary with a conference at the Natural History Museum.

A third network we joined at the start of 2020, as part of our new 'BEST' project (Botanical Education: Sustainable & Thriving), is the **Eco Attractions Group (EAG)**, made up of a small number of organisations providing a 'great green day out' – including the Centre for Alternative Technology,

Eden Project, National Botanic Garden of Wales, Pensthorpe and Living Rainforest. I attended a meeting with the group in January, at the beautiful Marks Hall in Essex, feeling honoured to be learning from such great organisations. It was very useful, with everyone keen to help us as the newest, smallest member, offering us advice on everything from education programmes to merchandise.

Since COVID-19 struck, I've appreciated sharing information and ideas with the Eco Attractions Group (meeting them via Zoom), as we all adapt to providing more online learning and plan for when we can re-open.

With all these groups and meetings, I've been able to network and spend quality time with like-minded people in similar roles, some known to me already and some new. I am very grateful for

the Bgen bursary and the National Lottery Heritage Fund 'BEST' grant for making my participation on behalf of the SLBI affordable. I've managed to tell a lot of new people about our work to encourage them to get involved with us. I hope to be able to put my new knowledge, skills and contacts to good use for the SLBI over the coming months, with various projects for the benefit of other staff, volunteers and visitors. In terms of wider impact, I hope that our organisation will play a role in tackling vital issues such as the climate emergency and food security. When we can finally open our doors after the COVID-19 crisis, I hope that people's increased interest in nature, and their sudden need to lead a less carbon-heavy lifestyle, will give rise to an increased interest in both the SLBI and in saving our precious planet.

Caroline Pankhurst

Botany in lockdown

1. South London

As I get older I become more and more convinced of the need to connect people more closely, or reconnect people, with the natural world. Although I enjoy all aspects of nature, plants appeal to me most, they are everywhere, easy to find and enjoy. During normal times I lead walks and give talks discussing plants; with lockdown this was no longer possible, what could I do?

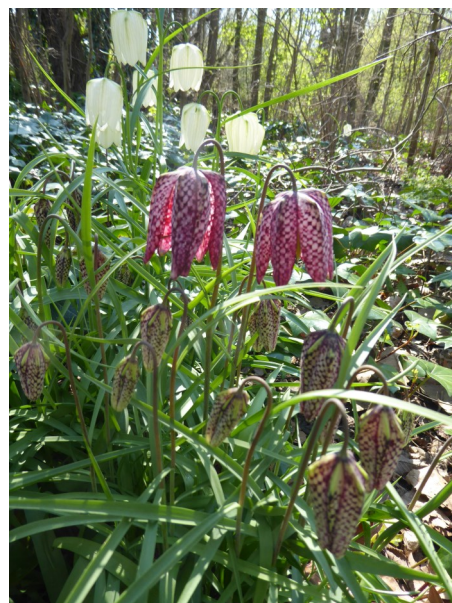
Perhaps at this stage I should confess that I haven't taken the lockdown too literally, and have been out and about far more than the Government would like; as I see it at 73 I probably have only a decade or so before decrepitude restricts my activities, so I don't feel I have sufficient time left to spend months in suspended animation.

One of my enthusiasms (possibly obsessions) in recent years has

been recording the flora on Tooting Common, about five minutes from where I live, and occasionally posting some of my more interesting findings on the Friends of Tooting Common Facebook (FoTC) page.

When the lockdown started I decided to post a plant-of-the-day and hope other people might come to share my enthusiasm. There were two rules: I would cover all areas of the Common, and all plants regardless of how common or rare they are. So, each day I have been out on the Common taking photographs and each day I have posted a photograph with an account of the species depicted. This usually consists of the plant's standard English and scientific names, when it was first recorded on the Common, and if introduced when it first arrived in Britain, as well as a few other things which I find interesting about it. I also de-

scribe where on the Common I photographed it, hoping that people might go and find it for themselves. But I was aware that some of my readers might be in self-isolation and unable to visit the Common. I thought a lot about the language: I want it to be accessible,



Fritillaria meleagris

but not over simplified.

So far some 50 plants have been discussed, leaving 590 taxa which have been recorded but not yet posted on Facebook. Of course, not all of these are currently present, but new ones are constantly being added to the list. What have I learned from this activity? First it seems to have been much appreciated, with posts attracting something between 6 (annual mercury, *Mercurialis annua*) and 76 (fritillary, *Fritillaria meleagris*) likes. Inevitably, to a certain extent the number of likes depends on how many other posts are made each day; if other people are busy posting, my early morning post will rapidly slip down the screen and remain unseen. Comments received include:

'Thanks for continuing to do these; I know next to nothing about plants, but find these really interesting.'

'Love it that you can spot something so small' [referring to early hair-grass, *Aira praecox*].

'Thank you for all these posts Roy; it's like having a little treasure hunt every time we come to the Common.'

'Loving your posts Roy, thank you.'

'Thanks for all these informative updates; I am learning a lot.'

I was told by a dog-owner that she planned her daily walk so that she could see the Facebook plants, thus

discovering parts of the Common she had never visited. At least two people considered my posts to be something of a challenge, and posted photographs – far better than mine – of plants which they had found, sometimes drawing attention to new locations for plants, and, in at least one case – pencilled crane's-bill, *Geranium versicolor* – a new species record for the Common. I think I have been successful in stimulating a greater appreciation of the area's flora, encouraging closer engagement with the natural world.

While writing posts for the FoTC, I also produced a daily post for the SLBI website. These were not restricted to a geographical area and consisted of my thoughts on plants which had recently attracted my attention, or of which I had taken photographs and never used. However, where possible, I tried to relate these to the Institute, its people, or south London. I felt I was delivering a mini-seminar each day, often not far ahead of my audience, and had to research my subject before posting. I have learnt a lot. These posts seem to have attracted less attention than the FoTC ones, but comments included: *'I have been enjoying Roy's daily photos and the stories behind them so much.'* Finally, each year I grow plants for the SLBI annual plant sale. This year I started enthusiastically as ever, but as the date of the sale receded ever further into the future, I found that I had more plants than I

could accommodate in my tiny, 40 sqm, garden, and many needed rehoming in larger pots. I needed to shift things.

Each day I've been placing a plant with a sheet giving some information about it on my front garden wall, offering it free to anyone who wanted it. Most of the plants have soon been taken, so although I've had no feedback, I assume they have been appreciated. Even if they haven't taken a plant, many people have looked at and read about them. An unexpected reaction was that of my partner, Carlos, who, despite my efforts to educate him, remains plant-blind. The community-building aspect of offering people free plants appealed to him; he takes interest in the project and which plants disappear most quickly; I live in hope ...

Roy Vickery



2. Coastal plants of Harwich beach: Mid-May 2020

I thought I'd pause briefly from sipping evaporated milk from a teaspoon and trundle the nine miles to Harwich beach for a bit of botanising, now it has been decreed legal by Boris.

Harwich beach is a rare example of an emerging dune system in Essex where the coast is predominantly salt marsh. It is only small and used as a 'working beach' by fishermen and sailors to launch, land and moor their boats.

The sea wall is low and set back, and in 1981 material (sand) was dredged up from the harbour and deposited here, creating a flat sandy area above the high tide mark where wild plants can grow. Jaywick is also like this but vast. In comparison, Frinton, Walton and Clacton have high sea walls to retain the sea at high tide, leaving no suitable habitat for plants. The species that grow have to be specially adapted to gain a foothold in this dry and hostile environment; as they colonise mature detritus collects at the base of the plants.

Nearest the sea I saw the spiny blue-green leaves of Sea Holly (*Eryngium maritimum*) sticking out of the sand, and the blue-grey spikes of Lyme Grass (*Leymus arenarius*), however it's too early to see much of either. The creeping root system of the Lyme Grass helps to bind the beach together. There were floppy, bushy clumps of Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) in flower; four petals of lilac and white to the flowers. There were the bright pink flowers of small *Rosa rugosa*, a native of NE China, now established on North European beaches. There were Sea Spurges (*Euphorbia paralias*), a short, unbranched perennial with grey fleshy leaves obscuring the midrib below. This was not yet flowering unlike the Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*) with many flowering groups. Also flowering in the sand was Sea Sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*), a distinct prostrate perennial with yellow-green thick pointed leaves in rows along the stem and tiny white flowers with five petals.

Higher up the beach but still within the sea wall were tall, narrow leafy spikes of Sea Beet (*Beta vulgaris ssp. maritima*); too early for their tiny green flowers. There was a crimson Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) growing with Field Pepperwort (*Lepidium campestre*), a grey leaved, white flowered plant often seen growing at the sides of motorways. Also seen was the tiny Common Whitlow Grass (*Erophila verna*), already a mass of seed pods, and Barren Brome (*Anisantha sterilis*). A small Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*) with seed head was growing out of the sand.

Growing, but not yet flowering, was Rough Sow-thistle (*Sonchus asper*), Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) and Tree Mallow (*Malva arborea*). Plants that were flowering included: Round-leaved Cranesbill (*Geranium rotundifolium*), White Ramping Fumitory (*Fumaria capreolata*), Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*), Alexanders (*Smyrniolus olusatrum*) and some yellow- and rust-coloured Wallflowers (*Erysimum cheiri*).

Cath Pearson

Climate Emergency Declaration, 6 February 2020

The South London Botanical Institute (SLBI) has joined organisations around London and the world in declaring a climate emergency. The announcement was made following a meeting of the SLBI's Board of Trustees on Thursday 6 February 2020.

In line with the SLBI's charitable objects, the organisation has always been committed to sustainable development (meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs) as a guiding principle within its work.

Concern for the environment at this time of climate emergency, including reducing the charity's carbon footprint and educating others in what they can do to help, is an integral and fundamental part of this commitment.

Like many other environmental and educational organisations (as well as health organisations and local authorities) who have already declared a climate emergency, the SLBI recognises that climate change is the critical issue of our time and needs urgent action. The science behind the issue has been well-documented, including the need to reverse carbon emissions drastically over the next 10 years.

As well as the aims in its 2019 Environmental Policy, the SLBI now aims to carry out a full assessment of its carbon footprint by the end of 2020, so that it can set meaningful targets to reduce its footprint over the next year and into the future.

However, the SLBI can have an even bigger positive impact through its educational work with other people. It is well-placed as an environmental, educational and community organisation to tell others the facts about the climate emergency and how humans can help. As a botanical institute, it can demonstrate to visitors of all ages that humans need plants in order to survive. Our collections, in our garden, herbarium and library, show the wide-ranging values of plants and also how nature has been changing in our local area.

The SLBI plans to hold a series of events over the next 3 years, based around the climate emergency. These will include lectures, workshops, walks and school visits highlighting different aspects of climate change and how these impact on the plant world and therefore on humans as a species. Events will also demonstrate the vital importance of plants in combatting climate change. All activities will aim to encourage behaviour change in visiting individuals, schools, families and other organisations. These events will be held in partnership with other local organisations, where appropriate, and will also provide a focus for the SLBI's future strategic planning, including its new 2020-2025 Business Plan.

Signed on behalf of the SLBI Trustees: Roy Vickery, President

Date: 6 February 2020



***Ficus macrophylla* – an iconic tree of Lisbon**

Lisbon is widely known for its food and wine, hilltop views, Manueline architecture, picturesque trams and traditional Fado music.

However, less known are its century-old trees, gigantic inhabitants of not only the botanical gardens but also the public parks spread throughout the city, mainly due to the city's mild weather all year round and plenty of natural sunlight. Many have been classified 'Monumental Tree of Public Interest' and constitute an echo of the age of Portuguese exploration, when many botanical species were brought from all over the world.

One of these is *Ficus macrophylla*, more commonly known as Moreton Bay fig or Australian banyan, which is a large evergreen tree native to Australia where it grows naturally in coastal New South Wales and southern Queensland, and is

known as the 'strangler fig'. Its seeds usually germinate in the canopy of host trees and the seedlings live as epiphytes until their roots reach the ground.

As an adult tree, *Ficus macrophylla* is easily identified by its wide umbrella-shaped canopy, imposing buttress and aerial roots, sometimes twisted, which give the tree an impressive and unusual (bizarre) shape. This is why each specimen looks like a massive natural sculpture and makes them the perfect display for a botanical illustration project. More practically, the aerial roots provide support and offer the tree an additional way to obtain nutrients from the soil.

In Lisbon many old specimens of this tree, which reach nearly 20 metres high, can be admired not only in botanical gardens – such as the Botanical Garden of the University of Lisbon, Ajuda Botanical Garden and Tropical Botanical Garden

– but also in public parks like Príncipe Real square, Jardim da Estrela and Jardim Constantino.

Sometimes, one may even find a lonely old specimen of this tree in the centre of an outdoor carpark! On the other hand, in Príncipe Real square, for example, a garden tucked away from the main street, gigantic specimens of *Ficus macrophylla* offer shade to small outdoor kiosks serving refreshments to tourists, local elderly people playing games in the park, children playing hide-and-seek among their buttress roots and anyone who enjoys the trees and spending time outside.

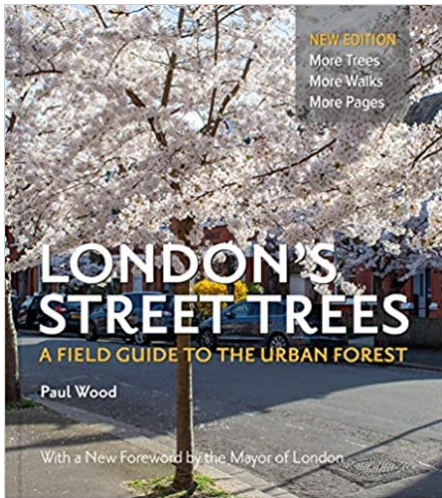
Ficus macrophylla trees are an outdoor treasure of the city and can be appreciated in many ways – maybe while eating a *pastel de nata* and drinking a *café*!

Márcia Rato



London Street Trees

Book Review: *London's Street Trees: A Field Guide to the Urban Forest*; Paul Wood, Safe Haven, Expanded edition 2020



If you have a friend who has bark under their fingernails, pockets full of wingnuts, and shoe leather worn from exploring London's leafy streets, please buy them this book on their next birthday.

This revised edition of *London's Street Trees* from the idiosyncratic Safe Haven publishers gives a snapshot of around seventy tree species found on London's streets, has a range of discussions and includes six suggested tree walks. One of these is around the familiar territory of Herne Hill, where locals will be delighted to find that Fawnbrake Avenue has Peanut butter trees (*Clerodendrum trichotomum*). In pursuit of accurate

cy, I checked: west from the junction with Poplar Walk, there are three trees, and the leaves really do smell of slightly musty peanut butter when crushed. By the time this article is published, the glorious and fragrant flowers will have emerged too.

The book is an intelligent companion and a pleasure to browse, being particularly helpful for those wishing to expand their knowledge. It is anecdotal, and discursive; more a friendly guide than a field guide. The trees are arranged in alphabetical order by scientific name, so the Index is rather important for navigation. Complete beginners wanting to know ash from alder will still enjoy it, but may need another book or website alongside this. However if, like me, you end up one day looking at an ash tree and wondering why it has white feathery flowers, then page 92 on *Fraxinus* spp. will guide you quickly to the manna ash, and offer a photograph of one, on a street in Crouch Hill.

The specific geographic references in the book are great for context, particularly those on the photographs. Moreover, the photo-

graphs show how the tree will grow on a street, rather than in a garden. This is most definitely a book about our London trees, and one for us Londoners to be proud of.

London's Street Trees is all the more relevant for its publication date, which has coincided not just with the peak of tree flowering time, but also with the time when this year so many of us are exploring our local locked-down streets. If your appetite to explore is whetted by this book you can also check out Paul Wood's blog at www.thestreettree.com.

Helen Firminger



Clerodendrum trichotomum

How to explore your urban forest

If you are a tree expert or a tree neophyte (treeophyte?), you may have been exploring and enjoying your local London streets throughout this glorious locked-down Spring. Those almost traffic-free, expectant weeks in March and April saw many of us take to the streets. Moreover, favourable weather with little heavy wind or rain to blow petals away allowed a great bloom of tree flowers in our

streets and parks. I am sure I'm not the only one who has stood open mouthed before a manna ash in flower. Or for that matter a hawthorn, or horse chestnut ablaze in bridal white. For those of you who are impatient to find out just what the leafy dryad you have encountered is, and to look for other new pleasures, there are two helpful online geographic aids:

First, the source material is the London tree map (<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/>

environment/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/trees-and-woodlands/london-tree-map) mapped by the Greater London Authority (GLA), from data provided by London borough tree officers. The trees are colour coded by species group, with, for example all oaks shown as a green triangle and all cherries as a red square. The effect is a pleasing candy box of clickable dots overlaid on Google's plain or satellite map. The different species can be switched on and off so this map is particularly useful if

you want to find where for example all the willows are in your local on 'Other' and then click on each one to find the species. You can also, helpfully, overlay the Google satellite map to get an idea of size and any changes since mapping.

To plan walks and find more specific information about tree species from the same data, we turn to the newly released Treetalk website (www.treetalk.co.uk), produced through a collaborative effort including Paul Wood, author of *London's Street Trees*. The green dots on the simple map here enable the explorer to choose a dot of curiosity, perhaps one outside their house or encountered on a daily walk. Clicking on the dot generates a pop-up panel with species information, and Paul's photos. So simple, yet so useful.

Treetalk goes beyond the mapping: It holds a built-in tour guide and walk planner. Click on 'projects' and add your postcode, and this clever algorithm will produce an hour-long stroll around your streets, highlighting the fascinating trees along the way. You can then click on them to get that useful pop-

up information panel. I experimented by generating some walks from the South London Botanical Institute. My curiosity was aroused immediately to follow a loop walking past the almond tree (*Prunus dulcis*) outside Elm Green school and down to the narrow Tulsemere Road where there are seven graceful Chitalpa trees (*Chitalpa tashkentensis*). This is 10 per cent of the 75 Chitalpa street trees known across the whole of London, so I will definitely be watching out when these are in flower, in June. Treetalk offers several of Paul Wood's photos for the almond, but only one for the extremely rare Chitalpa. Fortunately, the internet is a rich and helpful thing and I soon found what was needed to identify the tree from an image search.

To avoid disappointment please bear in mind the inevitable limitations of these maps: the tree lists are not magic, they are based on the latest survey from the borough tree officers with three potential disadvantages:

- ◆ The maps only show trees in areas managed by the Local Authority, and predominantly street trees, so our beauti-

ful *Ginkgo biloba* at the front of the SLBI for example, will not show up on the maps or walks.

- ◆ Some of these survey lists are more than ten years old. You face the possibility of tracking down a tree to find it is long gone. To double check: on the GLA map it is possible to turn on the satellite underlay, which is more recent and will help show where trees are missing: have a look at Rush Common in Brixton for example.
- ◆ There are large areas of mystery: several boroughs, including Wandsworth have not provided any survey data at all, so in these areas you will have to go out with a good book instead.

So, in summary, the TreeTalk map excels for walk planning, and for finding photos and information about each tree. The GLA map is more approachable if you are looking for a particular species group, or would like the satellite underlay. Both of these are wonderful websites if you like maps.

Helen Firminger

Not on the Map: Trees encircling the South London Botanical Institute

Maidenhair tree *Ginkgo biloba*. Our male flagpole tree is spectacular in golden leaf in autumn; we believe it was planted around the 1940s. Now it is so significant it features on our logo.

Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. This tree, by the garden gate, is alive with birds eating the berries and looking for insects in the bark in autumn and winter and with bees and other insects in its spectacular flowering season.

Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*. Adds a certain Victorian grace to our Victorian house, and a little bit more evergreen cover to support the birds. Watch out for the poisonous cherry-like fruits in autumn.

Holly *Ilex aquifolium*. Next to the garden gate is a female holly, look for the style in the middle of the flowers and wait for the berries. If you examine the base you will see this holly is a fairly old coppice, quite possibly self-seeded or planted when the house was built in 1864.

Apple *Malus domestica*. The apple, near the road, showers the drive every year with unidentified, fairly tasteless, green apples. Enjoy the blossom in spring as the insects do, and please help yourself to the fruit.

Indian Horse Chestnut *Aesculus indica*. You have to walk round the corner to St Faith's Road to see this one. For about 20 years in the mid twentieth century the Botanical Institute owned the adjoining patch of land, and with a dream of expanding the botanical garden, trustees planted several interesting trees here. The Indian Chestnut is immediately identifiable as related to the Horse Chestnut, yet subtly different. Pinkish flowers, and jet black 'conker' seeds both emerge a little later in the year.

BEST - Botanical Education: Sustainable and Thriving

As the world seems to be stuck on hold, and even the SLBI has closed for an extended and unplanned period for the first time in 110 years, a lot is happening. We are just coming to the end of the first 12 months of the 18-month BEST project. Standing for Botanical Education: Sustainable and Thriving, BEST aims to make the SLBI stronger over the coming years, so the charity can offer even more activities to a wider spectrum of people and audiences. BEST enables us to define and plan our strategic direction for the next five or six years, as well as currently considering the changes we might have to make in a Covid-19 world.

There are 2 main strands to BEST:

- ♦ how well the charity works behind the scenes, and
- ♦ how it gets its money

A new business and strategic plan for the financial years 2021–2026 will bring these strands together, along with priorities and targets. It will enable us to track our progress and adapt to changing circumstances as necessary.

Together with Alix Slater, a professional mentor, trustees have been working to make the inner workings of the charity more robust, transparent, durable and efficient, while BEST-funded members of staff, Caroline Pankhurst and Julia Minnear, have tackled making grant applications and increasing donations and other gifts respectively. Nell Gatehouse has investigated and implemented new and easier ways for supporters to donate and make other payments.

Four additional trustees: Gabriela Avendano, Paul Bodley, Olly Parsons and Susan Simmons were recruited just before the Covid-19 lockdown. They bring much-

needed specialist skills in marketing, communications, architecture and governance to the Board. A further trustee, Maria Vorontsova, a professional botanist at Kew, joins us this month, reinforcing the key reason the SLBI exists.

During lockdown, Trustees have continued to meet virtually, adapting to Zooming, and working hard on BEST (as well as working with staff, wardens, gardeners and volunteers to manage the impact of Covid-19 on the charity). Our incoming Trustees have responded energetically and wholeheartedly to their baptism by fire, in spite of having met only a few or even none of the staff, wardens or fellow Trustees in person. In particular, we are working towards producing the business plan by September 2020.

Encouraged by Alix, fortified by the energy and skills of the incoming Trustees and drawing on our team of staff and wardens, we've set up five sub-groups to research and make recommendations to the Trustees about strategic direction and organisational practicalities, such as requirements for staffing, volunteers and other resources, as well as finances and timescales. All the groups will keep SLBI policies on diversity, inclusivity, safeguarding and our Climate Emergency Declaration, together with our overall aim to further enlarge and widen our audiences in mind. Sub-groups report back to full Trustee meetings, which are held every two months. The work of the sub-groups will feed into the business plan but also respond to the challenges presented by Covid-19 in the current financial year.

The five sub-groups (in alphabetical order) are:

Building Management, Maintenance and Adaptations (BMMA)

Consisting of Gabriela Avendano, Michael Clark, Emmanuel Asamoah, Nell Gatehouse (staff) and Helen Firminger (warden). Their brief is

devising a rolling programme to maintain the SLBI building and looking at possible improvements to it, including making it more accessible.

Governance, Leadership and Organisational Management (GLOM)

Susan Simmonds, Marlowe Russell, Cherry Simpkin, Emmanuel Asamoah and Caroline Pankhurst (staff) are looking at issues such as staffing, legal compliance, induction & succession planning (staff & Trustees), and the roles of President and Chair. Their first action is to draw together various risk mitigation policies and procedures into a formal Risk Register.

Income Generation (IG)

Jerry Stevens, Olly Parsons, Marlowe Russell, Caroline Pankhurst (staff) and Julia Minnear (staff) are gathering base data from the past three years about different income streams and profit levels. Drawing on these data and on recent BEST commercial and major donor consultancies, this sub-group aims to identify the best and most rewarding areas on which to focus our income-generating efforts.

Marketing and Communications (M&C)

This sub-group consists of Olly Parsons, Paul Bodley, Mel Harakis, Caroline Pankhurst (staff) and Julia Minnear (staff). They are looking at how we handle publicity at the moment. This includes ensuring the SLBI message is consistent, exciting and appealing to our visitors, funders, supporters and donors, and that it appears across different media. They will look at how to approach and attract new audiences.

Science, Education and Programming (SEP)

Roy Vickery, Michael Clarke, Cherry Simpkin, Maria Vorontsova, Sarah Webley (staff) and Caroline Pankhurst (staff) will set our priorities for our educational and en-

agement activities, and ensure that we celebrate and safeguard SLBI's scientific core as we promote a wide public interest in plants and fungi. The sub-group also research and identify new activities to appeal to people who don't currently visit the SLBI.

If you would like to know more about the work of any of the groups or have comments to make on the issues they are considering,

please email our President, Roy Vickery, who will forward it to the appropriate person. Roy's email is: vickery330@btinternet.com.

So, in spite of the distress and uncertainty of the past few months and the coming period, we are actively looking to the future. None of us ever knows what it will hold, and presently the future looks exceptionally troubled for many people and charities. Doubtless SLBI

will have to change and adapt in ways we could not have anticipated six months ago, and still can't foresee. The work we had already begun now seems even more timely, as, during a time of contraction, we plan how to sustainably grow the SLBI.

Marlowe Russell; Trustee

The importance of children to nature

We may live in London – a built-up, concrete, overcrowded city with high levels of air pollution – but nature is still to be found all around us: we just need to learn to see it. It may not be as magnificent as an Amazonian jungle or as pretty as a wildflower meadow, but we have our street trees, weeds peeking from the tiniest cracks in walls and pavements, and of course our local parks and green spaces. Should these be any less appreciated than other more exciting places?

We face some pretty depressing environmental challenges – climate change, habitat and species loss, and pollution to name a few – in the immediate future. We need dedicated, enthusiastic and passionate children now who care about nature in all its formats if we want them to solve some of these

environmental problems as adults in the future.

It's not necessary to fly to the other side of the world or drive deep into the countryside to experience nature with our children. In my local cemetery I found beautiful flowers growing between the gravestones (see pictures below).

All nature, from the scrappiest weed to the biggest street tree in full blossom, deserves to be appreciated and nurtured. Each individual species contributes to the local ecosystem in some way, whether by providing a habitat, food and shelter for insects and birds, taking pollutants from our atmosphere or improving the structure of our soil. They also brighten our neighbourhoods and nurture both our mental and physical health. Who hasn't

taken comfort in the signs of Spring these past few weeks and been



grateful for the new life bursting out all over London?

If we want children to connect with and care about nature, they will need to be able to recognise, understand and have contact with it. If we can show them how interesting, innovative and wonderful nature can be, they will develop a respect and reverence for the natural



Aquilegia vulgaris



Veronica chamaedrys



Oxalis articulata



world going forward and help to create a better, more environmentally sound world. The SLBI vision is, after all, *'Discovering Plants, Enriching Lives, Sustaining the Fu-*

ture'.

These are strange and worrying times and we have been forced indoors for longer than we would normally like. At the SLBI we encourage children to interact and take an interest in nature, especially plants. We have our free online educational resources for parents and teachers, to which we will continue to add over the summer term and holidays. I will be making some short hands-on videos for children to follow, where they can explore plants further and learn some simple growing-at-home activities. In the longer term, we hope to start up a holiday Botany Club for younger children and regular walks, talks and activities for older children. If you are inter-

ested in getting involved or know of someone who would, please do get in contact at:

sarah.webley@slbi.org.uk.

Ideas are always gratefully received.

As soon as we are permitted, we will run activities for school groups and are thankful for the support provided from the City Bridge Trust and the Postcode Local Trust, and the flexibility they have offered during this exceptional time.

Sarah Webley
Education & Outreach Coordinator

People news

New Education and Outreach Coordinator:

Sarah Webley

Further to last Gazette's report of the sad departure of Helga Krauss, we welcome Sarah Webley as the new Education and Outreach Coordinator, and look forward to the contribution she will make to the SLBI based on her experience and skills gained in biology, teaching at primary level, RHS horticulture studies and several months' volunteering with school visits at the SLBI.

Please see her article on Pp. 11–12 on the importance of children to nature.

New Trustee:

Susan Simmonds

Susan Simmonds is thrilled to be a new Trustee of SLBI. A gardener since she was a small child, a career highlight was winning a medal at the Chelsea Flower Show for a charity garden to raise awareness of ageing.

Susan has spent most of her career in the charity sector as a CEO, Board Chair and international communications advisor; roles which have taken her to Asia, the US and the Middle East. When not growing plants, she is a keen diver, genealogist, jam maker and aspiring amateur archaeologist.



Susan Simmonds