

# Botanic Gardens Education Network

## Annual Report 2019-20



### Botanic Gardens Education Network

c/o Museum No.1  
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew  
Richmond  
TW9 3AB

[info@bgen.org.uk](mailto:info@bgen.org.uk)

[www.bgen.org.uk](http://www.bgen.org.uk)

bgen is a Registered Charity no: 1103482  
Botanic Gardens Education Network is a  
Company Limited by Guarantee no: 5002731

This Annual Report summarises bgen activity since the last bgen AGM on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

## 1. bgen Annual Conference

Our Annual Conference is an important strand of bgen’s offer and in November 2019 we were very grateful to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew for hosting our Conference, with an additional pre-Conference study visit to Wakehurst.

The theme for the Conference was ‘Securing our Future’ and centred around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals developed in 2015 as a call to action to improve the health of our planet and to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The programme included a rich variety of talks, workshops and tours to help delegates:

- Develop your knowledge about the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Consider what they are already doing to deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Discover practical tried-and-tested examples of how to incorporate the UN Sustainable Development Goals within your work
- Network with plant scientists, public engagement specialists and other plant educators
- Reflect on your own programmes and gain new skills to improve them.

The Conference attracted a lot of interest from bgen members and the wider heritage education community with 129 delegates, host garden staff, speakers and workshop leaders joining us over the 4 days to meet like-minded people, share ideas, learn skills and develop new ways of thinking.

This year bgen received support from the RHS Coke Trust Bursary Fund, enabling us to award 10 bursaries of £200 to early career plant educators, plant educators and horticulturalists working in small teams or as sole educators and those who have limited access to support and training. We were also pleased to offer 2 further bursaries of £200 from the money raised in the Conference 2018 Silent Auction. The Conference was also supported by Adam, Rouilly – the Board are very grateful for their sponsorship.

We received very positive feedback from delegates including:

*“The venue doesn't get much better than RBG Kew! Fantastic facilities and resources, lovely day out at Wakehurst Place as well, thoroughly enjoyable!”*

*“I really appreciated the Communicating Climate Change session in terms of seeing it all through plants in varying parts of the globe and beginning to understand that they can have inherent resilience ...”*

*"Thank you for a superb conference. A huge amount was covered in the 3 days, and I feel more inspired than ever, excited to get on with following up. It can feel a bit isolated at times as a freelancer, so it was really valuable to talk to so many colleagues again, and to do some networking."*

*"Loved it ... keep up the good work we are a community that is very important for plant science ... and the planet!!"*

*"I was impressed by how friendly everyone was, and how well the organisation of the conference facilitated conversations."*

*"I'm thinking to go back to college and study Science/Botany...hadn't thought of that before!"*

The bgen Board would like to thank the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Wakehurst teams for their generous support of time and energy to make this such as worthwhile Conference.

**Celebrating 30 Years:** The Conference marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Botanic Gardens Education Network and the anniversary was celebrated on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November with a gin tasting (thanks to Cambridge, Edinburgh and Kew for their contributions), a celebratory cake (thanks to Amanda le Poer Trench, RBG Kew) and an outstanding Conference Dinner in the Orangery, with after-dinner speaker James Wong.

**Conference 2020 / 2021:** Plans were underway for the bgen Annual Conference 2020 to be held at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Unfortunately, this has been postponed due to Covid-19 but we are hopeful to resume our face-to-face Annual Conference in November 2021.

## 2. Training and Events

**'Engaging Teenagers and Young Adults in the Outdoors'** was scheduled to run at University of Bristol Botanic Garden on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The event was full and with a waiting list and the programme included speakers from University of Bristol, the Greats Science Share for Schools, Gatsby Plant Science Education Programme, London Wildlife Trust and the RHS. Unfortunately the event was postponed due to Covid-19 and although we had originally hoped to run the event face-to-face later in the year, we are now looking to run it online in December 2020 or January 2021.

**'Invigorating Interpretation'** was planned for 23<sup>rd</sup> April at Paignton Zoo and also had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. The programme was very 'hands-on' using demos from the Zoo and story-telling sessions from the Eden Project and the bgen Board felt this wouldn't easily translate to an online format.

**‘Joint Networking Event’** with LEEF was planned for August 2020 and again this has been cancelled but we look forward to developing joint events with them in the future.

**‘Virtual Coffee Mornings’** In the absence of face-to-face events, we have been running monthly events on Zoom to connect members together, share thoughts and experiences and get a feel for what future support bgen can provide. To date 5 events have taken place, each focussing on a particular theme:

- Experiences of lockdown
- Responding to Black Lives Matter and developing more inclusive ways of working
- Digital solutions for plant education
- Experiences of re-opening and outreach

The bgen Board are very grateful to the contributors to these sessions - especially Judy Ling Wong, Honorary President of the Black Environment Network, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh and BGCI – and to those of you who have been able to join in, it’s been great to see so many new and old faces!

The bgen Board have used the Coffee Mornings and the time away from events to take stock of our training offer and plan for both online and face-to-face training in the future, more details to be announced at the AGM.

### 3. bgen Board

**3.1 bgen Board Meetings:** The bgen Board has continued its programme of meetings, taking them online once the pandemic took hold:

- December 5<sup>th</sup> 2019 at Kew – reviewing 2019 training and looking ahead to 2019/20 training events
- February 13<sup>th</sup> 2020 at Hyde Park – reviewing 2019 conference and initial planning for 2020 conference, developing financial controls and progressing governance
- May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020 on Zoom – review of impact of Covid-19 on the sector and bgen; strategy planning for the future
- September 16<sup>th</sup> 2020 on Zoom – governance updates, policy review, board membership, brand refresh and new website

Each Board member serves on one specialised workstream group: Training, Conference, Fundraising, Communication & Membership and Governance and regular meetings of each of these workstreams have been held. The focus of activity for these workstreams have been:

- **Communications & Membership:** Development of new bgen website to facilitate sharing of resources, advertising of job opportunities and promotion of events.
- **Governance:** Continued groundwork for conversion of Botanic Gardens Education Network to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (progress to be presented to AGM); development of Trustee Handbook; recruitment of Trustees.

- **Fundraising & Sponsorship:** Application for funding to The Edge (pending); development of 5 Year Strategy for bgen (to be presented at AGM).
- **Conference & Training:** Joined forces to plan online events and future face-to-face. Hosted a Heads of Education meeting with BGCI to ascertain areas of activity, concern and support needed.
- The **Treasury Group** have continued to oversee the bgen finances and make recommendations to the bgen Board.

**3.2 bgen Board Members:** The bgen Board has continued working through the pandemic though some of the members have been furloughed. Here are details of bgen Board members and the workstreams they are involved in.

- Catherine Addison -Communication & Membership Lead
- Jill Baker, RHS Garden Hyde Hall -Training Workstream
- Gail Bromley, BGCI – Treasurer and Fundraising and Sponsorship Lead
- Jane Challenor, RBG, Kew – Conference
- Felicity Gaffney, National Botanic Garden Ireland – Conference Workstream
- Rachel Godfrey, RHS – Training Lead
- Susie Kelpie, RBG, Edinburgh - Conference Lead
- Ledy Leyssen, The Royal Parks, Governance Lead
- Chris Meakin, Forestry England, Westonbirt Arboretum – Governance Workstream
- Helen Miller, BGCI – Training Workstream
- Asimina Vergou, Fundraising and Sponsorship Workstream

Rose Froud, Ness Botanic Gardens and Judy Ling Wong, Black Environment Network, have also attended bgen Board meetings as observers and hope to be appointed to the Board at the AGM.

The bgen Board is supported by Sue Dampney (bgen Coordinator), Sarah Dixon (website) and Sandy Openshaw (bookkeeper) and would like to thank Kirstin Corrie for supporting the Conference and ongoing Board meetings.

### **3.3 bgen Board Member changes:**

**Re-election:** Ledy Leyssen, Chris Meakin and Asimina Vergou have all come to the end of their 3 year term of office. Ledy and Chris would like to stay on and seek re-election at the AGM in November 2020.

**Resignations:** Jane Challenor, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew resigned in March 2020, having served on the bgen Board since 2014. Jane has brought an energetic and open approach to the Board, hosting several Networking events, organising a Curriculum focussed training day and hosting bgen Board meetings at Kew. The Board are extremely grateful to Jane's time and commitment to hosting the 2019 Conference, making it both an educational and extremely enjoyable occasion and a fitting celebration of bgen's 30 years. Jane's experience as a teacher and plant educator and her strong networking ethos have made her a very effective Board member.

Asimina Vergou has decided to stand down due to work and family commitments. The Board would like to thank Asimina for her outstanding commitment to bgen since she was appointed in 2014. Asimina has organised several successful training events (including 2 with a fundraising focus) and has worked alongside Gail Bromley to prepare funding bids and develop strategic direction. During her time on the bgen Board she has worked in senior positions for BGCI, National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Wellcome Trust and we look forward to seeing how her career develops.

**Election:** An open call to bgen members was made in October 2020 and we look forward to welcoming the following to the Board, subject to member agree at the AGM:

- **Judy Ling Wong**, Honorary President, Black Environment Network
- **Rose Froud**, Education Supervisor at Ness Botanic Gardens

## 4. bgen Membership

bgen currently has 311 members, this includes members from 27 Organisations and 21 individual members.

Bgen provides:

- Networking for members
- Promotion for members' events, training and job / volunteering opportunities
- Reciprocal membership across participants
- Training events across the UK (though not during pandemic)
- An annual conference to reflect on current sector trends and themes

## 5. Reference and administrative information

The current information for bgen is as follows:

- Charity name: Botanic Gardens Education Network (bgen)
- Charity Registration Number: 1103482
- Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales Number: 5002731
- Registered Office: 47 Kew Green, Richmond upon Thames, Surrey TW9 3AB

## 6. Accounts for financial year 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial aspects

The Financial year 2019/2020 started well but ended during the current crisis that is Covid 19, a crisis which unfortunately impacted on our ability to raise funds for the last 2 months. We had several changes during the last financial year including a full year of our newly appointed bookkeeper. It had been hoped that the appointment of the bookkeeper would offset any accountancy costs once bgen became a CIO, but as that was delayed due to changes required

for the Charity Commission reporting procedures, we again employed the previously appointed accountants Cheesmans, who prepared the attached accounts. Another change made was in resetting the Membership year (previously January to December) to come into line with the accountancy year (April to March). Members paid for 15 months from January 2019 to March 2020. We hope that this will help in the assessment of our membership income going forward, and we thank all our members for agreeing to this one off change. Our membership fee will now revert to an annual cost from April to March each year. In addition we renewed the Service Contract with our bgen Co-ordinator Sue Dampney and were delighted to be able to meet the new contact requirements to maintain Sue's excellent services.

We made a slight loss over the accountancy period of £2,438. This was largely due to not having received any new grants over the period, whilst having the extra costs as noted previously. We were also not able to run any training offers in the run up to lockdown for the UK. Although the accounts show a loss, several membership payments due in January 2020 came in quite late – post the end March 2020 – and if these late payments are taken into account, bgen would have been in a break even situation. The accounts for this financial year were approved by the bgen Board at the September 2020 Board meeting and are being circulated with the AGM agenda.

With regard to 2020/21 financial year, members will be aware that Covid 19 has impacted hugely, with no income from training days, currently no advertisements for staff coming in and having to defer the conference for a year. Bgen has continued to support members through regular coffee morning and special on-line discussion sessions and have taken this 'down time' to revitalise the website which will enable us to better deliver on-line offers. We are also applying for grants where appropriate. We hope that these endeavours will ensure we are in a better financial position for 2021/22

*With thanks to bgen Board of Trustees for their work this past year and to our members for their continuing support in sharing ideas and advice, learning, skills and resources with their fellow members, to continue to instilling passion and knowledge for plant and nature education.*