

**Minutes of the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting  
(held via video conferencing)  
Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 18.30**

**1. Welcome**

The Chairman, Cecilia Bufton, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Trustees present. The chair went through the agenda for the online AGM. The AGM was preceded by an engaging talk for Members by Patrick Fairweather, National Collection Holder for *Agapanthus*.

The Chairman reminded those present that the Articles of Association require one third of the Trustees to stand for re-election. Members were notified in the Spring Journal of their right to vote and were given details of the Trustees standing for election and re-election. Members were offered three options for voting: postal votes, online voting prior to the meeting and a vote during the meeting using the 'poll' Zoom video conferencing function.

**2. Apologies for Absence & Appointment of Proxies**

Apologies from Trustees: Gareth Morgan (Treasurer), Catherine Penny and Sally Nex. Apologies also received from David Knott, Vice President. Appointment of Proxies – none recorded for this meeting.

**3. Minutes of the 38<sup>th</sup> AGM**

The minutes of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, held as a virtual meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023, were accepted as a true record. Jim Marshall proposed that the minutes be accepted, seconded by Emma Crawforth.

**4. Matters Arising**

None

**5. Chairman's Report**

Cecilia Bufton introduced the new Chief Executive for Plant Heritage, Gwen Hines, and Conservation Manager Enrico Mailli. The Chairman outlined key developments from the past year, as per the Annual Report, including:

- The 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, including a fantastic display at Hampton Court and an enjoyable Sapphire anniversary celebration event at RHS Wisley with Plant Heritage President Alan Titchmarsh. Members who attended the anniversary celebration also enjoyed talks by John Anderson (Keeper of the Garden at Windsor Great Park), Tim Upson (RHS and Chair of the Plant Heritage Plant Collections Committee), Martin Young of the Dorset group, Catrina Fenton on the Heritage Seed Library's new *Symphytum* Collection, Mercy Morris on her and Samantha Green's two *Chlorophytum* Collections and Josh Egan Wyer on the Pershore *Penstemon* Collection.
- 4 new Vice Presidents who have demonstrated outstanding dedication to horticulture and inspired us all: David Knott, Elizabeth Banks, Sarah Bray and Michael Marriot.

- A record number of National Plant Collections (706 as at November 2023), including the first collections in a pub and a prison. In addition, there are nearly 2,300 plants looked after under the Plant Guardian Scheme, of which nearly 700 are threatened in cultivation.
- Persephone, Plant Heritage's plant records database, won an award from the IT sector. Two-thirds of National Plant Collections are now in Persephone and all new Collections are added. It is also being used by some members and some open gardens including Hilliers on a subscription basis.
- Completion of the National Heritage Lottery Fund project which funded important digital improvements to the website and Persephone, including a searchable Plant Guardian catalogue, 10 years of Plant Exchange data and the online Seed Shop. It also supported recruitment and training for 22 digital volunteers, who have provided over 722 volunteer hours and added over 169 National Plant Collections to Persephone.
- Continued progress in raising the profile of the charity and its work, through a concerted push on public relations, especially with outlets with a wider reach.
- A successful office move to Stone Pine Cottage next to RHS Wisley Gardens, which will increase opportunities for collaboration, including with Hilltop garden science centre.
- Plant Heritage has joined the Future of National Gardens Group chaired by Keith Weed, President of the RHS, which is an important opportunity to work with a range of partners to tackle common issues, including sustainability, green skills, the importance of horticulture for the economy and heritage, and to influence the Government together.

## 6. Report from the Conservation Committee – Presented by Conservation Committee Vice Chair Emma Crawford

### National Plant Collections and Conservation Programmes – Highlights

As of the end of November 2023, there were 706 National Plant Collections representing around 95,000 plants, of which 338 National Plant Collections are Horticultural, 282 Reference and 85 Historic collections, with 19 having been awarded Scientific status. In 2023 we accredited 40 new collections (28 in 2022), including one new Dispersed Collection. Scientific status was awarded to the *Dryopteris* collection, held by Anthony Pigott. A successful Missing Genera campaign helped to secure new National Plant Collections for 12 genera, many of them great for pollinators: *Achillea*, *Arisaema*, *Aeonium*, *Ginkgo*, *Alcea*, *Eryngium*, *Tradescantia*, *Echinops*, *Verbena*, *Hoya*, *Cosmos* and *Thalictrum*.

By October 2023, a total of 2,293 plants were being looked after under the Plant Guardian Scheme, with 264 plants registered during the year. Two plant societies and three gardens with significant historic plants have registered plants that are unable to be scoped as a National Plant Collections, so recording these as Plant Guardians has helped focus propagation and recognition of rare plants. Through the Threatened Plants Programme, Plant Heritage has continued to advise Plant Guardians, National Plant Collection holders and partner organisations of plants at risk, so they can target their efforts.

## Threatened Plant of the Year

This competition, established in 2020, aims to highlight the message that cultivars can be lost if not actively grown. Our secondary aim is to attempt the reintroduction of plants that are shortlisted/winners where possible. In 2023, 12 entries were shortlisted and *Chaenomeles speciosa* 'Contorta', was the judges' winner. *Rhododendron* 'The Dowager' was the winner of the public vote.

## Digital recording

Working with National Collection Holders, members, partners and with the support of digital volunteers, Plant Heritage has continued to expand the amount of important information that is held in Persephone, Plant Heritage's digital plant records system. There are now 473 National Plant Collections in Persephone (two-thirds), plus 85 Proposed Collections and 62 Legacy Collections. In addition, 33 Members are using Persephone to record plants in their gardens, and there are 11 Subscribers who have chosen to use Persephone.

## Brickell Award

The Brickell award recognises the vital plant conservation work undertaken by Collection Holders to secure plants in cultivation and is awarded to those considered to have demonstrated excellence in this field. Adrian Young was this year's recipient of the Brickell award, for his extensive research into his *Saxifraga* National Plant Collections. The judges applauded Adrian's ongoing research and work with both of his reference collections of *Saxifraga* sect. *Ligulatae* and *Saxifraga* sect. *Porphyron* subsect. *Porophyllum*. The judging panel also recognised Adrian's wider contribution to horticulture, as both a National Plant Collection Holder since 2012 and the International Cultivar Registration Authorities' Registrar for *Saxifraga* since 2010. His published works were also celebrated, including his book 'The Complete Checklist for *Porophyllum* Cultivars' which is considered the definitive work on *Porophyllum. Saxifraga* and is now in its third edition.

## 7. Membership & Supporters – presented by Gill Groombridge, Business Manager, on behalf of the Membership and Supporters Committee

### Membership

Total membership stood at 3,205 at the end of the year, a reduction of 4.5% (253 new members were recruited, but 403 left). Plant Heritage groups and existing members play a key role in helping to attract new members, along with the central Plant Heritage team. Everyone was thanked for their support on this, which is vital to Plant Heritage's future. To encourage more members, it is important to have a strong programme of talks in person and online, for members and the public; regular group events, visits and plant fairs, as well as educational workshops; to raise awareness of the importance of our work via social and traditional media; and to widen our audience.

### RHS Hampton Court Show

- Plant Heritage put on a very successful display and raised significant funds. Daniel Myhill planted a border to celebrate Plant Heritage's 45<sup>th</sup> sapphire anniversary in the style he keeps his National Collection of *Rosa persica* hybrids in his own garden, with a pollinator friendly focus. Roses, dahlias, nepeta and agapanthus were featured. Many thanks to Squires Garden Centres, the Shanly Foundation and Melcourt Industries for their support. The Plant Heritage zone also

included educational displays of *Cosmos* by Jonathan Sheppard, Hosta (small and miniature) by Jonathan Hogarth, two displays by Barry Clarke on *Calycanthus* and *Asclepias & Gomphocarpus*, and Hilliers (plants raised by) by Sir Harold Hillier Gardens. Jonathan Hogarth was awarded a Gold medal and Best in the Plant Heritage zone. Thanks to volunteers who helped at the show, including the seed shop which raises much needed funds, and to members who donated seed. Thanks also to the RHS.

## 8. PR Report - presented by Gill Groombridge for the Communications Working Group

A key objective in Plant Heritage's strategy is to inform others about our work and to encourage them to join us. Our communications work secured coverage in horticultural and gardening press as well as general press and local radio. This included an article in The Guardian, and a five-page feature about Plant Heritage, the 45th anniversary and the National Plant Collections in The English Garden. The team prioritised outlets with larger audiences over the number of articles. Total coverage 2022/23: 158 items of media coverage (217 items last year), including 33 broadcast interviews, 3 national newspaper articles, 5 regional newspaper articles, 27 magazine features and 90 online articles.

## 9. Presentation of the Accounts

The Chairman presented the accounts as the Treasurer was unavailable for the meeting. An additional "Treasurers' Meeting" will be arranged, to provide an opportunity for Group Treasurers and Members to discuss any matters of the Charity's finances.

At the time of approving the financial statements, the trustees have a reasonable expectation that the charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. The auditors have expressed an unqualified report.

Total Income for the year 2022/23 was £639,115 and total expenditure was £452,244. Total Net Income for the charity was £186,871 for the year, which has been added to the General Fund. Income from donations and legacies continued to grow, reaching £349,050. Income from charitable activities also grew to £254,241 (Membership, Shows, Educational Meetings and Events). Legacy income is hard to predict, but the strong income over the last three years has helped Plant Heritage to reach an excellent financial position from which to invest strategically in our future and build future revenue. The Charity has a healthy reserves position and has met its target of 6 months operating costs in free reserves, with additional funds of £235,900 put aside for specific purposes, including designated funds to cover necessary technology improvements and to mitigate the risks of any similar sudden future change to the Charity's operating environment. The Charity also carefully manages its working capital position and maintains a healthy cash position.

The Chairman formally recognised the commitment and hard work put in by members of local groups who fundraise throughout the year and generously pass these contributions on to support the work of the charity. Local groups made a substantial contribution to the work of the charity, raising £116,517 of which £62,395 was transferred to the central office to fund the charity's work. Plant Heritage is also grateful to its affiliated groups in Guernsey and Manx, and the Wiltshire Gardens Trust who provide financial support.

## 10. Questions

No Questions were raised.

**11. Approval of Accounts 2020/21**

The accounts were approved with the following votes recorded (combined via post, online and via a poll during the meeting).

Vote 1: 44 votes cast: 42 For; 2 Abstentions.

**12. Appointment of Independent Examiner**

The proposal to re-appoint Warner Wilde as Auditors was approved with the following votes recorded (combined via post, online and via a poll during the meeting).

Vote 2: 43 votes cast: 42 For; 1 Abstentions.

The proposal to authorise the charity Trustees to set the level of Auditors fees was approved with the following votes recorded (via post, online and via a poll during the meeting).

Vote 3: 43 votes cast: 42 For; 1 Abstentions.

**13. Appointment of Trustees**

The Chair reminded members that the Board of Trustees are responsible for the overall governance of the Charity. The Trustees are also the Directors of the Limited Company. Trustees are appointed by the membership at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). At each AGM, one third of directors must retire from office. The directors to retire by rotation must be those who have been longest in office since their last appointment. A director must retire after serving a total of eight years consecutive or otherwise.

Thanks to Trustees who have served and resigned in financial year 2022/23:

- Adrian Stones (resigned Dec 2022)
- Mandy Lloyd (resigned Dec 2022)
- Helen Triggs (resigned Feb 2023)

Thanks to one Trustee who has resigned in the current year:

- Jonathan Sheppard (resigned Jan 2024)

As required in the Charity's Articles of Association, two other trustees (Emma Crawforth and Gareth Morgan) retired by rotation. Both were re-appointed by vote.

Vote 4. Emma Crawforth: 43 votes cast; 43 For, 0 Abstentions

Vote 5. Gareth Morgan: 43 votes cast; 41 For, 2 Abstentions

This means the current Board and their terms of office are:

- Cecilia Bufton – Chair (*October 2025*)
- Jim Marshall - Vice Chair, Conservation Committee Chair, Governance Committee (*April 2026*)
- Gareth Morgan – Hon Treasurer (*July 2028*)
- Catherine Penny – Membership & Supporters Committee Chair (*October 2025*)

- Sally Nex – Communications WG Chair (*July 2026*)
- Emma Crawforth - Vice Chair Conservation Committee (*July 2026*)
- Kavita Kapoor (*September 2030*)

The Chair highlighted the important role played by trustees and encouraged members to consider coming forward for vacant roles.

#### 14. **Special Mentions**

The Chairman thanked Plant Heritage's Partners, sponsors and advertisers, as well as those who have provided grant funds for the charity's work, and corporate supporters for their generous donations. These are all listed in the Annual Report. She also thanked those who have provided legacy donations (Mary Rawitzer, Dr Alison Ross and S Roberts) and to those who gave donations in memoriam.

The Chairman offered special thanks to members who have volunteered their time and skills in so many different ways, and to the small team of Plant Heritage staff.

#### 15. **Member's Resolutions**

None.

#### 16. **Plans for the future**

Gill Groombridge, Business Manager, updated members on plans for the 2024 Threatened Plant of the Year competition and the Missing Collections campaign (formerly called Missing Genera). There will be a conference for National Plant Collection holders at Kew in November on the theme of sustainability, including succession of National Plant Collections.

Gwen Hines, Chief Executive, and Enrico Mailli, Conservation Manager, outlined plans to refresh the charity's strategy and business plan. As part of this, the team will be looking at ways to diversify the charity's income and to attract new members, as well as how to engage members living in areas where groups are less active. It will also look at how to embed sustainability more in Plant Heritage's work, and how to make the most of the charity's diverse partnerships. Members were encouraged to share views and ideas to help inform this work.

#### 17. **Questions**

- Indy Rana queried the reasons why people leave Plant Heritage. Gill Groombridge explained that on average a similar number of people resign/lapse their membership. For those who give reasons of why they left the key reasons are being unable to attend events, or to use the benefits of the membership, elderly/ill health and deceased. The number of new members joining Plant Heritage has been less than previous years, hence the slight decrease in membership numbers. Plant Heritage will work to enhance its membership offer in the next year.
- Clare Hogan – suggested Plant Heritage should have a working group to explore the possibilities to reach a younger audience, noting that on her worldwide travels how she found instances where audiences were young and engaged, albeit in different sectors. The Membership and Supporters Committee will take this suggestion forward.

- Hilary Morgan – said a heartfelt ‘thank you to all in Plant Heritage’.

**18. Close of Meeting**

Cecilia Bufton closed the meeting at 20.00