

THE PRACTICAL ROLE OF BOTANIC GARDENS IN CONSERVATION OF RARE AND THREATENED PLANTS

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England : 12th-17th September, 1978

This Conference was a follow-up action of the "Conservation Conference" held at Kew in September, 1975. About 100 delegates from more than 30 countries participated. Prof. J. P. M. Brenan, Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, welcomed the delegates and emphasized that the Conference should decide priorities and evolve immediate and long term plans, and that the importance of tropical floras should be constantly kept in view.

In all 30 papers were read on Background information, National Policies, Information for the public, Regional Conservation Schemes, Cultivation and Support Services and Reports from countries.

Most of the papers dealt with programmes on Survey and Conservation of rare plants, government policies on the subject, involvement of international funding agencies and experiments on cultivation of rare species. Some authors described the work of their botanic gardens as public amenity. In many papers, references to conservation were only marginal.

Though the main concern was said to be conservation of tropical floras, neither the number of participants nor the time allotted to the reports from tropical regions seemed to support this.

Many papers were illustrated with excellent pictures of threatened and endemic species; almost all papers were followed by discussions.

Four Working Groups for preparing guidelines on (a) Codes of practice for collectors, (b) Responsibilities for holding non-European endangered endemics, (c) Communications and (d) Guidelines for Governments with regard to conservation, were suggested. After some discussion, these were reduced to two groups which met separately and submitted their suggestions for discussion.

The Threatened Plants Committee of the IUCN circulated a note suggesting a Coordinating Agency (a Commission or Sub-Commission) for conservation of plants in collections and reserves. The Organisers of this 2nd Conference also circulated a paper on the subject.

An exhibition of posters, leaflets and pictures on conservation of threatened plants was also organised. About 20 countries participated in it.

The Conference was followed by excursions to the botanic gardens at Wakehurst and Cambridge and to Sissinghurst, Bede-bury, Thursley Common Nature Reserve, Kingley Vale Nature Reserve and Queen Elizabeth Country Park, Butser Hill where local scientists gave conducted tours.

RESOLUTIONS

The Conference unanimously agreed to the following Resolution—

1. "Conscious that the rich tropical floras of the world are now in great hazard, this conference firstly *urges* that a strong network of nature reserves and conservation-oriented gardens should be established throughout the tropics and subtropics, both through the strengthening and development of existing foundations and through the creation of new ones where the need exists; secondly *stresses* how essential it is that all countries where applicable should have a suitable network of national regional botanic gardens to fulfil their fundamental part in the management and conservation of natural resources, while recognising that reserves are the basis focus for such schemes; and thirdly *urges* Institutions throughout the world who are in a position to do so, to offer all possible help in this programme through technical aid, training and the

secondment of personnel. To this third aid this Conference urges the setting up of Fellowships to provide a reciprocal interchange between botanic gardens for horticulturists and scientific staff in both the developed and developing regions with an emphasis on conservation activities, this to be funded by the major multi-national and national corporations".

The Conference also agreed to*—

2. Call upon the International Association of Botanic Gardens (IABG) to enlarge its activities wherever possible.

- (i) To promote educational programmes
- (ii) To encourage the propagation of rare and threatened species
- (iii) To promote, and if possible organise, exchange of personnel between gardens
- (iv) To co-ordinate on a continuing basis information on specialist holdings in botanic gardens
- (v) To provide information about relevant scientific and technical developments
- (vi) To stimulate the formation of regional groups for the interchange of ideas and pooling of resources, e.g. seed banks

- (vii) To establish a system of awards relating to success in achieving these targets

3. Call upon UNEP, IUCN & WWF to clarify their role on the conservation of what is a fundamental part of the world's natural resources: the plant kingdom, and in particular to declare their active and financial support for botanic gardens who require aid in their conservation programmes.

4. The Conference therefore identifies the urgent need for an organisation to promote co-operation between botanic gardens on conservation matters. It invites the Threatened Plants Committee of IUCN to take on an additional commitment, to facilitate communication through an enlarged TPC Newsletter and to circulate lists of threatened plants among gardens to find out which species are in cultivation and where, and to publish the results. The Conference suggests that this programme be funded by small annual subscriptions from botanic gardens and promises full support to a group to be set by the TPC entitled the 'Botanic Gardens Conservation Co-ordinating Body'.

5. Requests that both guidelines for collectors and leaflets to discourage casual collecting at home and abroad be formulated, agreed and distributed.

* Reported briefly

** Official delegate of Government of India at the conference.

S. K. JAIN**

Botanical Survey of India, Howrah