

# RHS gives bursary support to assist critical species recovery

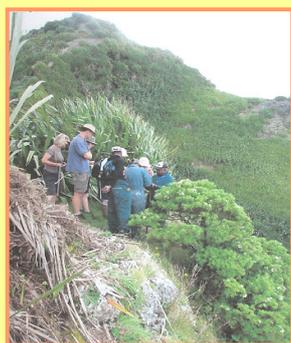


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## RHS Bursary awarded for one-year horticultural work placement on St Helena



In November 2008 Katrine Herian, a young horticulturist working at Spye Park, near Lacock, Wiltshire, was awarded a *Coke Trust bursary award* to assist her in undertaking a year's horticultural work placement on the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean. Her aim was to help provide horticultural support for the 2 year project funded by the Department for International Development through their Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) to aid island conservation efforts and reverse the decline in St Helena's unique flora. Offering her horticultural skills and experience would help to maximise the benefits of the project, based at the Environmental Conservation Section (ECS) nursery of the St Helena Government Agriculture and the Natural Resources Department (ANRD) at Scotland. The "Species Team" was based at the nursery in Scotland and the "Habitat Team" was based in Diana's National Park in the upland moist cloud forest on the island, along the central ridge of St Helena.



Lourens Malan

The "Habitat Team" collecting False Gumwood (*Commidendrum spurium*) seed at Mount Vesey—moist cloud-forest habitat.



Lourens Malan

Collecting seed of 'Old Father Live Forever' (*Pelargonium cotyledonis*) below Gregory's Battery in the north-east of the island.

Working closely with Lourens Malan, the Horticultural Support Officer (HSO), Marjorie Fowler the Conservation Officer and Vanessa Thomas the Nursery Officer, along with 13 Conservation Workers, Katrina's main objectives for her work placement were as follows:  
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- study what remained of the indigenous and endemic plant species in their native habitat;
- research into the practical propagation of St Helena's important plant species;
- write up propagation protocols and the revision of existing protocols;
- contribute to the commercialisation of horticulture on the island using indigenous species;
- promote the work of the project and good quality horticulture through the use of local newspapers and radio.

On arrival on St Helena, one of the first tasks was to get to know the endemic plants and begin to understand their ecology. The flora of the island currently comprises 31 endemic flowering plants and 14 ferns, which was a relatively limited palette to use in 'native gardening'. Familiarising herself with these endemics was done out in the field, with time spent looking at associated species, soil and habitat preferences, flowering/fruitletting times and responses to various pressures such as competition for light, nutrients, moisture and invasive insect effects on wild plants. Katrina saw plants such as 'Old Father Live Forever' (*Pelargonium cotyledonis*), St Helena Boxwood (*Melissia begoniifolia*), St Helena Redwood (*Trochetiopsis erythroxyton*) and St Helena Ebony (*Trochetiopsis ebenus*) growing in cultivation at Kew, but thought there was nothing quite like the learning experience of seeing plants growing in their natural environment. With the HSO, she undertook germination trials for all the flowering plant species to determine the best media to use, any special conditions for germinating difficult to grow species, and whether there were clear differences in the seed leaves of closely related species such as Bastard Gumwood (*Commidendrum rotundifolium*) and False Gumwood (*Commidendrum spurium*) which hybridise readily. Observations from these trials were documented and will be recorded in the "Endemics Growing Guide" to be produced by the HSO and published on the Island at the end of the project in September 2010.

Katrine considered her rich and varied work placement a wonderful opportunity to develop her understanding of growing not only St Helena's endemic plants, but also growing plants in general. It provided an opportunity to develop her understanding of effective nursery management and, perhaps most importantly, to work with the people of the island and learn from their knowledge and experience as well as pass on her own knowledge and skills.

## Introduction of new *Susan Pearson Bursary* for trainee horticulturists seeking practical work experience

This new bursary is intended to provide sponsorship of up to one year's practical work experience for a trainee horticulturist seeking practical work experience in a recognised garden open to the public.



Applicants must have found employment at a garden that has a high reputation e.g. such as those within the RHS Recommended Garden Scheme. The garden must be able to provide individuals with a comprehensive programme of training, practical skills in plantsmanship and all aspects of garden and estate management, under the mentoring guidance of experienced staff.

Any proposed candidates need to be submitted by the owner of a host garden where the trainee will undertake his/her placement. In addition, there should be an offer of a Contract of Employment for a period of up to 12 months at the host garden, with Terms and Conditions determined by the employer.

An outline programme of the work that will be undertaken needs to be provided and, where appropriate, details of any intended Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or training course. It is preferable that a candidate will be in possession of a certificate, diploma or graduate qualification in horticulture and be seeking practical experience and employment.

The ***Susan Pearson Bursary*** will be awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society on an annual basis (NB: up to a maximum of £10,000 per year per trainee), following consideration of all applications by the Bursaries Advisory Committee at its May meeting – closing date 31 March.

# A fascination for plant galls

*Neuroterus saliens* →



Brian Ecott

Penelope Fleming, a winner of the **Dawn Jolliffe Botanical Art Bursary 2009** developed an interest in plant galls whilst observing grazing giraffe in Africa in 2008! Here she witnessed what she believed to be symbiosis between plant and animal. In Penelope's own words:

"Giraffe were eating leaves from Whistling Thorn bushes (*Acacia drepanolobium*), covered with small golf-ball sized structures. I was told that these were plant galls and home to aggressive *Crematogaster* ants. Their behaviour is thought to be one of mutual benefit to the *Acacia*, offering 'housing' for them by way of the galls and the ants protect the *Acacia* by swarming over browsing animals to squirt formic acid or inflict unpleasant bites. This action causes intruders to move away, thereby preserving their habitat.

Fascinated by this, I decided to investigate the type of plant galls that occur in Britain. Through the assistance of Allen Coombes, botanist at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Romsey, Hampshire and his generous sharing of plant gall data, I embarked on a captivating journey of discovery! It was also around this time that I'd had my work assessed by the *RHS Picture Advisory Committee* and was subsequently invited to exhibit at one of their shows. As a new artist, they informed me I was eligible to apply for a **Dawn Jolliffe Botanical Art Bursary**, which I did and was delighted to receive an award in 2009.

For my project, I thought plant galls might make an interesting subject, so I bought the book *British Plant Galls, Identification on plants and fungi* (considered to be the gall 'bible'), by Margaret Redfern, Peter Shirley and Michael Bloxham; joined the British Plant Gall Society and their on-line Forum (to enable me to have access to expert advice); went on several BPGS field trips; visited the Somerset Levels, the Romsey Gardens and also Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucester—and so began my project.....

After completing eight pictures in my much preferred medium of graphite pencils, I produced text to accompany each one, naming gall-causer and plant host, describing the gall, when and where found, plus results of my research. In five cases, there were new discoveries - one gall was new to Britain, one new to Hampshire and both found by Allen Coombes, two new to Somerset (illustrated on one picture); and the fifth was a known gall, but new to a particular plant host. Because of the research required to produce my pictures, I hoped my work would be judged in the scientific category, so was thrilled to be awarded a Silver Medal in the Lindley Range at the March 2010 **RHS Botanical Art Exhibition** held in the Lindley Hall, Westminster, London. (The 'Lindley' is awarded because work is judged to be 'of special scientific or educational merit').



Penelope Fleming

Penelope Fleming with her exhibits



Penelope Fleming

The RHS Botanical Art Exhibition, Lindley Hall, Westminster—March 2010

To have the chance to meet international botanical artists was inspiring. The exhibition gave us the opportunity to discuss our work with each other, make new friends and view all that had been specifically produced for the occasion. It was a truly wonderful experience, one I was honoured to have been part of and a weekend I shall never forget"

With thanks to **Penelope Fleming**

For details about the *Dawn Jolliffe Botanical Art Bursary*, please see the RHS website [www.rhs.org.uk/courses/bursaries](http://www.rhs.org.uk/courses/bursaries)



# The scope of RHS Bursaries



Four times each year a Committee of thirteen settles down at the Royal Horticultural Society's Headquarters at Vincent Square in London for a day's rewarding task of giving away money. The group, representing a wealth of scientific, plant expedition and practical horticulture experience, is the **RHS Bursaries Advisory Committee**. Charged with making financial awards from a fund of generous bequests and donations given into the Society's care over many years, the Committee can provide assistance towards the costs of a variety of initiatives closely related to horticulture. These opportunities deserve to be more widely known.

Proposals are welcomed from people of any nationality living in the United Kingdom for projects at home or abroad. One does not have to be a scientist or a horticulturist of long standing and proposals from students and professional gardeners, whether young or mature, are looked upon favourably by the Committee and it is not even necessary to be a member of the Society. Applicants from other countries may apply with proposals tenable within the UK. A wide range of ideas for improving horticultural knowledge and experience are eligible and the most usual type of projects receiving assistance are study visits and plant expeditions, horticultural placements, taxonomic studies, conference attendance and research projects. Grants may cover the majority of the costs, but most usually applicants are expected to show efforts in raising contributions from other sources. Foreign travel as a means of gaining experience of plants in their natural habitats and in growing techniques is regularly supported.

Tuition fees and living costs for college or university courses are expressly excluded from all RHS bursaries, as too are salary costs and the underwriting or other support of commercial enterprises. The route to a successful bursary application starts with early planning, with the aims and objectives of a proposal clearly stated, along with detailed itinerary/programme and full estimates of costs provided.

There are a number of bursary funds administered by the Society. The largest of these is the **Coke Trust Awards** fund, with terms endowed especially favourable to working gardeners and students such as voluntary practical work placements, horticultural conference attendance and study tours. Others include the **Blaxall Valentine Awards**, intended primarily for plant study and plant collecting in countries outside the UK; the **Osaka Travel Bursary** which is a cross cultural opportunity for either a Japanese or British applicant to undertake a horticultural project in the opposite country; the annual **Jimmy Smart Memorial Bursary** for a project centred on viewing plants growing in their natural habitat in Australia and/or New Zealand and the new **Susan Pearson Bursary** which provides sponsorship of up to one year's practical work experience for a trainee horticulturist in a recognised garden open to the general public (see page 2). There is a wide range of opportunities and information about the availability of these RHS awards is worth publicising. For more details, please see the website: [www.rhs.org.uk/courses/bursaries](http://www.rhs.org.uk/courses/bursaries).

## RECENT BURSARY AWARDS

47 applications were received for the May 2010 Bursaries Meeting, for which **23** awards were made totalling **£37,600**.

18 applications were received for the August 2010 Bursaries Meeting, for which **12** awards were made totalling **£15,721**.

### Bursary application closing dates 2010/2011

A bursary application should be submitted before one of the following closing dates, to ensure it is eligible for consideration by the RHS Bursaries Advisory Committee:

30 September 2010  
15 December 2010  
31 March 2011  
30 June 2011

The completed form should be submitted by e-mail to:  
[bursaries@rhs.org.uk](mailto:bursaries@rhs.org.uk)

or alternatively by post to:  
Secretary of the RHS Bursaries Advisory Committee,  
RHS Garden Wisley,  
Woking, Surrey, GU23 6QB

***"Flowers.....are a proud assertion that a ray of beauty outvalues all the utilities of the world."***

Ralph Waldo Emerson

