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The Horticulturist



The Transition to Peat-Free Fellowship

PLUS Plant conservation | Landscape succession planning | Peat: from user to conservationist | Grow Careers 2024

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Cover Hatfield Moors, part of Humberhead Peatlands National Nature Reserve (Olivia Drake, RHS Science and Horticulture Editor, web).

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The future is in focus in this edition of *The Horticulturist* highlighting the vital role played by horticulturists in thinking about and taking the industry into the future. The management of plant collections and the landscapes in which trees, in particular, feature is showcased by Simon Toomer with the recent research at Kew. The threats of climate change and increasingly variable weather and the consequential movement of pests and diseases with catastrophic impact feature significantly in my working life.

Thinking about species survivability – I'm writing from Rome where the threat to *Pinus pinea* posed by tortoise scale (*Toumeyella parvicornis*) and pine shoot beetle (*Tomicus destruens*) are affecting the landscape of the city. The loss of the iconic spreading canopies of these pines despite treatment and the choice of a suitable species to replace them has been a challenge.

Chris Trimmer's account of the work at the National Trust also highlights the impact of humans – some perhaps more shocking but also a moment to think about the value of individual plants and the emotional connection we have to trees and the landscape.

It is also great to read about the move away from peat with the work of the RHS and also to follow the journey away from peat of CIH former president, Leigh Morris and his work in the Isle of Man – worth searching him out on social media to see his work both underwater and on and in the ground.

We are in the middle of the heats for the 2025 Young Horticulturist of the Year competition and I'm looking forward to the final in May to be held at Hillsborough Castle – 'home turf' for me.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Richard Barley for all of his work and support for the Institute as he heads back to Australia. I will miss his wise counsel and endless good humour and wish him and the family 'bon voyage' as they set off on the next adventure. Richard's successor at Kew is Raoul Curtis-Machin, a long time CIH stalwart and we look forward to working with him and his team.

We will be holding our AGM online by Zoom on 3 June at 6.30pm. This is an important meeting for all members of the Institute to hear about the activities in the past year and to also be presented with the Accounts – it's the 'business' end but a very important part of the CIH.

The meeting is also the opportunity to invite an important speaker and we are delighted to be welcoming Chris Thorogood from Oxford Botanic Gardens. Keep an eye on communications regarding this.

As ever I'll keep encouraging you to join in and sign up for the activities of the Institute and to celebrate our incredible profession.

David Richardson CHort FCIHort, President
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PLANT CONSERVATION Chris Trimmer, manager of the National Trust's Plant Conservation Centre (PCC) in Devon, always knew he wanted to work in horticulture. Here, the Sir Harold Hillier Award-winning horticulturist reflects on his career, the importance of the Trust's living collections, and the shocking event that thrust the PCC's work into the spotlight.

A lifelong passion for plant conservation

It was a typical Thursday morning in September 2023, until I had a call from our national press team to ask, 'have you seen the news?' It was then that I learnt the iconic tree at Sycamore Gap had been illegally felled overnight. Following a phone call with our then Head of Gardens, Andy Jasper, we decided to go ahead with a rescue attempt.

Getting material from the tree to the PCC was a countrywide team effort, involving the National Trust's (NT) Ranger team in Northumberland, the Trust's Gardens & Parklands Consultant for the Lakes & Northwest, and myself in rural Devon, issuing a Plant Passport for the legal movement of the material via post. Of course, the

team on site had to await permission from the police as it was a crime scene.

Twigs and buds were quickly collected, packaged up into 40-litre compost sacks and sent across the country to the PCC via 1st Class post. They arrived at 9.30am on the Saturday; the postie was pretty surprised when I told him what was inside.

Awaiting the packages, I did not know what the material would be like as a storm had been through the area a few weeks before. I sifted through the bags in our cleanroom, selecting material that was suitable for grafting and budding. Ideally, I would need pencil-thickness

stems to enable me to graft onto the young sycamores we use as rootstocks.

Assessing the material

The stems were not ideal as most were desiccated from the storm and the tree felling itself. But they seemed to revive once placed in water and were suitable to work with after a few hours.

Also in the bags were seeds, some loose, some still attached to the branches. The trouble was that being September, they weren't fully ripe. I split the seeds into two batches: the loose seeds were sown first; the others were left attached to the stems and placed in a bucket of water to hopefully carry on