

Coach trip to the National Botanic Garden of Wales  
11th August 2014

The tail end of a hurricane was forecast for Monday 11th August, but a “mega moon” the previous night seemed to bode well, and although there were downpours on the way to Llanarthne, we were “blessed again” as our late President, Mr Wyndham Evans, would have said, for the weather brightened wonderfully for our visit to the National Botanic Garden of Wales.

A couple of heavy showers on our arrival posed no problem, for members were able to explore the Tropical House, Apothecaries’ Hall, and greenhouse made of plastic bottles.

With the Prince of Wales as Patron, this 568 acre site is the first botanical garden to be built in Europe for 100 years. In addition to having an extensive and ordered collection of plants, this garden is used for the study of plants, working alongside universities and commerce.

Wales was the first country to DNA barcode their native flowering plants through work led by the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Now, they are DNA barcoding the rest of the U. K. flora, as well as extending overseas. They can DNA barcode fragments of pollen from the bodies of pollinating insects to see what plants they visit - is there a link between the health of bees and the plants visited - does honey produced from different plants have different medicinal properties? Genetic techniques are used to answer vital conservation questions, and monitor the impact of rare species hybridising with more common relations.

After lunch in the restaurant, Sylvia, Lizzie, and I spent an age in the Great Glasshouse - the largest single-span glasshouse in the world - marvelling at the wonders of nature, my favourite being the Australian Protea Grevillea “Red Hooks”. We then did a tour of Waun Las National Nature Reserve where the Whorled Caraway (*Carum verticillatum*) was abundant and must indeed, have looked like snow in summer the previous month when in full bloom. Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) graces the front of the Waun Las flyer, and a lovely patch of it greeted us at the first gateway, but as we were “out of County” we made no lists. However, it should be noted that some members spotted two otters.

The sunshine journey home along roads bordered by Rosebay Willowherb (*Chamericum angustifolium*), through heath-clad mountains and Rowans just ripening emphasised just how beautiful is our country, and how very blessed we are.

Maureen Preen