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Guest editorial

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Editor's comments

Layout by Alice Vanden Bon

Guest editorial

Botanic gardens have always held a fascination for me ever since I became interested in succulents 50 years ago. As a school boy I was treated to my first visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew by my parents en route to our summer holiday in Sussex. Over the years I have made many subsequent trips to Kew, both as a visitor and professionally to access the world famous collections, notably the vast botanical library. Such botanic gardens house invaluable living and preserved plant collections, and concomitantly are at the forefront of plant conservation and educational projects.

Having recently moved to Scotland visits to Kew will be less frequent. However in compensation Scotland has significant plant collections, foremost of which and second only to Kew is the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The establishment of a botanic garden in Edinburgh in 1670 significantly predates the foundation of Kew, officially taken as 1759, although unlike Kew, Edinburgh's botanic garden is no longer on its original site. I along with my wife have been reacquainting ourselves with this stunning garden.

Edinburgh's garden is on a hill site a modest walk from the city centre, so is readily accessible for visitors to the city, but in contrast to Kew has more varied topography. It has, amongst many features, a splendid old palm house (Fig. 1), an extensive range of glasshouses, library, herbarium and attractive outdoor plantings including a large alpine rockery. Like Kew,



Fig. 1 Palm House at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, opened in 1858 (Photo: Colin Walker)



Fig. 2 *Agave vilmoriniana*, the so-called 'Octopus Agave' at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (Photo: Colin Walker)

Edinburgh is a centre of research excellence in the plant sciences, supported by its extensive collections. I am hoping, over time, to build my contacts at Edinburgh and help promote the succulent collections.

Succulent plant displays are on show in several locations, featuring a large bedded-out planting in the main greenhouses. Here I will mention just two succulent highlights. Firstly a large plant of *Agave vilmoriniana* (Fig. 2) caught my attention because this cliff-dwelling species with its large spreading leaves is difficult to accommodate in a pot in an average greenhouse. Secondly I observed a large clump of *Aloe springatei-neumannii*, a Kenyan species first described by Len Newton in *Bradleya* 29, 2011.

As readers will be aware, other UK cities notably Birmingham, Cambridge, Glasgow, Liverpool (Ness) and Oxford have equally enticing botanic gardens, along with the National Botanic Garden of Wales. I know that Branches organise outings to these and can sometimes gain access to 'behind the scenes' collections, which can be mutually beneficial to enthusiasts and gardens alike. I would highly recommend visits to any or all of these gardens.

Colin C Walker