

Putting plants at the centre: Collaboration and connectivity for a green future

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Keywords: collaboration, communities, botany, science, floristics, taxonomy, evolution

Plants are central to life on Earth. They provide the rest of nature with oxygen, a framework in which to live, as well as commodities such as food, fuel and beauty. Plants are of course central to botanic gardens too; they are the currency of institutions whose mission is the conserve and protect them. But neither plants nor the institutions nor the individuals that study and care for them can exist alone, today's science and conservation depend upon connectivity. Even more than that, such endeavour depends on collaboration, with partners each contributing to a greater whole. It might seem that collaboration and connectivity are characteristically human – to be sure, that is true – but plants too must be brought into the equation. We need plants, but they also need us in many ways. I will draw on my experiences working with plants and with other humans from a wide range of scientific communities to explore how as botanists dedicated to protecting and enhancing plant diversity, we can use today's opportunities for collaboration and connectivity to work better together. Working together will achieve more for plants, but also increase the diversity and inclusivity of our own communities. Our human relationship with plants is deep and complex – but what should it be in the future? Should we confine plant species to wild areas where we can see them, but not interact or use them? Or should we manage plant diversity strictly for human use and enjoyment by bringing more plants into cultivation and into close relationships with us? Or perhaps something in between? I will argue that to really put plants at the centre and to create a society in harmony with nature we must all must work together to maintain these relationships now and for future generations.