

Board of Trustees report 2021

Steve Walters – Chairman of the Board of Trustees, on behalf of the Board

This year continued to be a challenging time for everyone with the global Covid pandemic still overshadowing our daily lives. As I write towards the end of the year, there is cause for optimism with travel restrictions being eased, more social interactions taking place and countries slowly starting to open up. We all owe a debt of gratitude to our overstretched health and care services and to the astonishing efforts of those international teams of scientists and the effective vaccines they developed in such a short timescale.

Core activities

Unsurprisingly, some of the Society's activities have therefore been limited although core activities such as the journal and seed distribution were relatively unaffected.

The former is a wonderful advertisement for the Society: in the quality and range of the articles, in the photographs and illustrations, and in its high production values. The editorial team does a first-rate job. We are always interested in new content and members are encouraged to contact the editor if they have ideas for (and are willing to write!) journal articles.

As for seeds, you won't find a more extensive cyclamen species seed list than the one the Cyclamen Society produces for the annual seed distribution. This is a much appreciated benefit for many members. The team responsible for collecting, processing and despatching seeds seems to get busier every year. Technology and online ordering will help of course when introduced in 2022, but it is worth bearing in mind that - although ordering can be as fast as clicking a button - surface mail, customs procedures and phytosanitary requirements can slow the process down considerably. We continue to make improvements to the process year on year and the Board would like to thank all those volunteers and donors who make it such a success.

Research

As was the case in 2020, our programme of field studies is on hold and it is difficult to predict when it can resume. However, Society-supported research at the University of Reading continues. The December 2020 journal included an article on the ongoing research into the *Cyclamen hederifolium* complex (the two subspecies *hederifolium* and *crassifolium*) and the Cretan *C. confusum*, for which the Society provided leaf samples and measurements. While the data so far show some pattern it is still not clear that the boundaries of any of these three taxa are clearly defined. So the question remains whether there are one, two or three distinct entities. New data are being added, and the work continues. Hopefully the update due in this journal will add clarity.

The Society has been part-funding a cyclamen PhD at the University of Reading which is nearing completion and in due course it is anticipated that there will be a series of articles about this research for the Journal including one on *C. africanum* and another on *C. somalense*.

In late 2020 the Board agreed to part-fund a second PhD focusing on two specific taxonomic areas: the *Cyclamen graecum* group (including *C. graecum* subsp. *graecum*, subsp. *candicum*, and *C. maritimum*) and the *Cyclamen repandum* aggregate.

For the former the research will shed light on whether the DNA sequences for each of the three genomes resolve into three distinct groups matching the current taxa; how much variation can be accounted for through geography rather than taxonomy; and whether there is evidence of continuing gene flow (hybridization) between the three taxa.

The second part of the research will focus on the likely hybridization among the various species in what is loosely described as the *Cyclamen repandum* group. The research will examine how and when the species complex spread around the Mediterranean; how many of the taxa are distinct based on DNA sequence data; and to what extent there is gene flow (hybridization) across the range and whether this has any discernible pattern.

These various collaborations with the University of Reading - Dr Alastair Culham is a steadfast supporter and the Board is grateful for his scientific advice and enthusiasm - also highlight the importance and value of accurately curating and caring for living-plant collections, something we have been committed to since the Society was established. All the cyclamen plant material used in the research has come from the collections of known-provenance plants held by Cyclamen Society members.

Shows

Our editor ruefully noted in the June 2021 journal that there was a slight imbalance in the contents mainly due to the absence of show reports as a result of the pandemic. Fortunately, with crowd restrictions now easing, the Society's two autumn shows were able to go ahead.

Fittingly, the early autumn show - our first for 18 months - was held at the impressive RHS Hilltop, the Royal Horticultural Society's new centre for gardening science at Wisley. During the day we also held a meeting for Cyclamen Society members visiting the show to get to know and talk to the Board of Trustees. The Board will continue to hold these members' meetings twice a year.

One result of the interregnum between shows was that the RHS Banksian Medal for 2020 could not be awarded to the exhibitor gaining the most prize points over the four shows held each year. It was therefore agreed to award the 2020 medal 'to someone who had gone the extra mile', during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Board was pleased to choose one of our members in Germany, Dimitrij Trofimov. Congratulations! Dimitrij arranged the first

virtual European Cyclamen Show as reported in the June 2021 journal. He has also agreed to act as the distributor of Cyclamen Society seeds to individuals in Europe, one of the changes to the annual seed distribution that had to be made following the UK's exit from the EU.

New concise guide

The highlight of the Society's publications year was the launch at the early autumn show of Cyclamen: A Concise Guide. At just over 100 pages it is a beautifully produced, high quality, informative booklet. Martyn Denney really has done an excellent job for which the Board is most grateful. The feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive. A friend of mine, a noted Alpine Garden Society exhibitor and judge, was moved to exclaim it was the best £5 he'd spent for many a long year.

Website

Work slowly continues to update and improve the Society website. In particular, the cultivars' list has been extensively revised with many new images of plants added. Our thanks go to Vince Cordell and Paul Whitlock for the work they do to improve the Society's online profile.

There has been a gradual but steady increase in new members over the course of the year. The current membership is approximately 1,245. The Cyclamen Society's Facebook Group has become increasingly important in extending our international reach and now has more than 2,750 members. If you use Facebook it is worth joining the Group. It is a really useful resource; a virtual meeting place where cyclamen enthusiasts can share, view and comment on photos of their favourite plants.

Board meetings

It is clear that we are moving increasingly to an online world and Covid-19 accelerated that process. Our Board and Committee meetings are now held through Zoom although we feel it is important to have at least one physical Board meeting every year. With restrictions easing we were able to hold our first face-to-face Board meeting for quite some time in August and while we all appreciate the convenience of online meetings, gathering together in the same room to discuss Society business was particularly welcomed by all the trustees.

Finally, none of the above would be possible without the hard work and commitment of all those members who work behind the scenes to make our Society such a success. Whether it's donating or distributing seeds, contributing to the journal, working on the website, supporting the plant shows, or ensuring our finances are on a sound footing. The Board of Trustees thanks you all.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE 2021				
	2021		2020	
RECEIPTS from	£	£	£	£
Donations	65.42		1,094	
Subscriptions	12,176.64		19,015	
Journal	160.00		80	
Publications	907.08		1,901	
Seeds	3,266.20		2,206	
Shows, Meetings and Events	0.00		2,073	
Total		16,575.34		26,369
PAYMENTS for				
Administration	2,761.44		6,256	
Publicity	2,352.97		3,480	
Journal	15,289.94		13,661	
Publications	1,094.60		694	
Research	71.87		12,138	
Seeds	1,032.91		1,130	
Shows, Meetings and Events	0.00		6,748	
Total		22,603.73		44,107
INVESTMENTS				
Capital gains/losses	43,051.28	43,051.28	-28,604	
Excess income/expenditure		37,022.89		-46,342
BALANCE SHEET YEAR ENDING 30TH JUNE 2021				
ASSETS				
Current account	1,854.76		7,883	
Investments	209,314.18		166,263	
Total		211,168.94		174,146
REPRESENTED BY				
Brought forward	174,146.05		220,489	
Surplus/(deficit)	37,022.89		-46,343	
Carried forward		211,168.94		174,146