Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh’s

Mission: “Explore, conserve, explain...”

# Herbarium: A tool for research and education

A herbarium is a collection of preserved plants (known as specimens) stored, catalogued and arranged systematically. The specimens that are stored in the herbarium are a working reference collection used in the identification of plants, the writing of Floras (a description of all the plants in a country or region), Monographs (a description of plants within a plant group, such as a family) and the study of plant evolutionary relationships. This fundamental research provides an essential baseline for other plant research. We need to know what species exist, how many individuals of each there are, and where they are distributed before we can conserve them.

# Systematic Arrangement of the Collections

Herbaria organise their collections into floristic geographical regions from which they were collected. RBGE has split the globe into 19 regions (within which some of these have further subdivisions).

## Region 5: South Asia

Traditionally at RBGE region 5 has included Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. At present this area contains over 400,000 specimens. Creating subdivisions within region 5 will result in the specimens being easier for researchers to access.

We are looking to split this region into 5 subdivisions which are as follows:

5a           India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Assam

5b           Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

5c           Myanmar (Burma)

5d           Bhutan, Sikkim and Darjeeling

5e           Nepal

These divisions will facilitate our research on the Floras of Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. It will also enable digitisation proposals and projects to be undertaken more easily.

Moreover, this change will improve the preservation of specimens for future generations.

# Volunteer Role Description

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| **Role Title** | **Herbarium South Asia curation volunteer** |
| **What does the role involve?** | * Sub-dividing the physical collections of region 5 into 5 subdivisions. * Region 5 specimens will be placed into 5 sub-regional folders * The development of a gazetteer for region 5 to assist with the split |
| **What qualities and experience should volunteers have for this role?** | **Essential:**   * Ability to use the internet to search for information * Ability to pick up new tasks quickly and effectively * Ability to handle delicate objects with due care and attention * A working geographical knowledge * A methodical approach to tasks * Effective problem solving skills utilising all available resources * Ability to work in a team   **Desirable:**   * A basic understanding of taxonomy i.e. a basic knowledge of what a genus and species are and binomial nomenclature. |
| **Benefits to Volunteer** | * Learn how a research collection is organised and curated * Develop a good grasp of Southern Asian geography * By creating an accessible environment for researchers you will be helping RBGE Explore, Conserve and Explain plants. |
| **What commitment is preferred?** | * Tuesdays from 11:00 * We would like volunteers to commit to at least 6 months as a considerable amount of training is required from members of staff. |
| **Supervision/Support person(s)** | Sally King (supervisor), Robyn Drinkwater, Elspeth Haston. |
| **Support and Training** | Volunteers will be given regular one to one guidance and support. Any relevant training that may be required will be identified, and the volunteer will be offered suitable training to meet their needs. |
| **Expectations of RBGE Volunteers** | Volunteers are expected to conform to the RBGE Volunteer’s Code of Conduct – available in full on the volunteer agreement form. |
| **Location of Volunteering** | Volunteering will take place in the Herbarium at:  Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh,  20A Inverleith Row,  Edinburgh, EH3 5LR. |
| **Any Questions?** | Please contact: s.king@rbge.org.uk |