

Oman Botanic Gardens

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INTRODUCTION

The Oman Botanic Gardens is in the Sultanate of Oman near the country's capital Muscat. The reason for the visit began at the 2013 IPPS conference in Melbourne Australia when two staff members from OBG Bhuthainia and Hunan attended. They both work in the nursery at OBG and were very keen to learn about all new propagation methods. David Hancock met them at the conference and asked if they would like to visit his nursery Natural Area Nursery in Perth. After the visit David sent out an invitation to all Australian and New Zealand IPPS members to help OBG with difficult species propagation. David and I visited in November 2015.

Upon arrival David and I had a couple of free days to get to know the beautiful city of Muscat. We attended the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Mutrah Souk and the Corniche in the port of Muscat.

The late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said did a wonderful job of modernising his country over the last 50 years. The Sultan decreed that he wanted a Royal Grand mosque, a Royal Opera House and a Royal

Botanic Garden for Oman. The mosque and the opera house are completed, and construction is underway at OBG. The Oman Botanic Garden will be a world class facility to conserve, display and research the plants and ethnobotany of Oman. The gardens are led by Scientific Director Dr. Annette Patzelt and the nursery manager Ian Oliver who has since moved back to South Africa. Dr Khalid Al Farsi now manages the nursery.

Dr Darach Lupton is a Horticultural Botanist at OBG, and he and his team collect plants and seeds from the field to then be grown at OBG, Darach is also a member of IPPS. Bhuthainia and Hunan lead the propagation team in the nursery. The garden currently has 80 staff that work in the field and the nursery.

The vision of OBG is to inspire people, to cherish and conserve the biodiversity and botanical heritage of Oman for a sustainable future. The gardens mission is to discover, cultivate and protect Oman's unique plant diversity and ethnobotany through innovative research, exciting displays and engaging communication.

OBG is being constructed on a site that is 420 Hectares and will contain two glasshouses called the Northern Biome and the Southern Biome. The Northern Biome will display flora from the mountainous regions of Oman where the temperature is a lot cooler.

The Southern Biome will showcase plant species and habitats prevalent in the Dhofar region of the Sultanate. There will also be a visitor centre with interpretive exhibits, cable car, café and gift shop.



Figure 1. Overview of Oman Botanic Gardens. Photo credit: OBG Landscape Designers.

The first day of our visit we had a tour around the large nursery which has the largest documented collection of Arabian plants in the world. The number of plants in cultivation is 70000 with 14000 in propagation and 46000 in the living collection. The total taxa (seed bank and living collections) is 927 of 1407 and plant families 101 of 117.

We then went on a field trip to Jebel al Akhdhar or green mountain to visit OBG's

Northern Biome nursery. The temperature on the day was 24C while in Muscat it was 44°C. In the afternoon we did some seed and cuttings collection of species like *Berberis*, *Lonicera* and *Daphne*. We stored our seed and cuttings back at the main nursery for the night before processing the following day. The next day begun by running workshops on seed and cutting processing as well as formulation of new propagation mixes and treatments for the material we had collected.

David and I thoroughly enjoyed our time at Oman Botanic Gardens. The people were very friendly and welcoming, and we believe they learnt a lot from our experience. David and I have since visited Oman on other projects including Nimr Wastewater Treatment Plant.

I would recommend visiting this wonderful country and its people to anyone wanting a unique Omani experience.



Figure 2. Pomegranate terraces Jebel Al Akhdar, Oman. Our field trip visited these mountains.