

Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar Year Report 2013



Prunus 'Okame' (P. campanulata x incisa) AW#92737

2013 was another year of growth and botanical adventures. Progress was made on all fronts. The collections have fared well. Most investments in plant and equipment have been completed leaving room for other conservation activities within the framework of the Foundation's objectives. One addition to staff has raised our capacity for collection monitoring and educational activities: Mrs Joke Ossaer has joined us coming from a job as environmental officer in Schoten (northern Belgium). Progress has also been noted on visitor numbers, publications, botanical studies and the welcome arrival of a Bonsai collection. The help of volunteers has contributed in a significant and growing proportion to the achievement of our educational goals.

The collections

The living **collection of woody plants** in the Arboretum currently (as of February 7th 2014) contains 4.393 specimens representing 2.093 different taxa (versus 14.350 specimens and 4.522 taxa on the whole of the estate). These numbers include the 837 new accessions on the estate during 2013 of which 151 are of documented wild origin. Almost 70 plants were removed from the collection as part of an on-going effort to improve the health and aesthetic value of the living collection.

This year has seen a re-start of a **major inventory round** at the Arboretum and the dendrological collections of the surrounding private estates of Herkenrode and Potager de Wespelaar. For the Potager's woodland garden this has been in part a first ever inventory and labelling. Having a perfectly labelled collection is one of the main objectives of the Arboretum and this is an on-going task. Thanks to our new collaborator, Joke Ossaer, assistant curator, this work received a major boost in 2013, with the help of the founder, Philippe de Spoelberch and Director, Koen Camelbeke. During this inventory each plant in a certain bed is localized, its health status is assessed, the identity is verified if possible and needed, and the label is placed on a healthy lateral branch clearly visible for our collaborators and visitors. A total of 160 beds have been inventoried in 2013 and this work will continue in the years to come on a very regular basis.

For our two main genera, *Rhododendron* and *Magnolia*, a thorough **update of the classification** was completed. This update is

based on the most recent available classifications as published in international scientific journals. Our database is now reflecting these recent understandings of the relationships between species. Our collection of *Rhododendron* species was further enlarged with missing taxa, especially in the *Lapponica* and related subsections, and many specimens have been planted in their final location under the protection of the large Corsican Pine trees of the Verlat Wood.



1. Map showing the major subsection within the genus *Rhododendron* and their location in the Verlat wood of the Arboretum

In 2013 a comprehensive **assessment of the hardiness of our *Rhododendron*** collection was carried out. This evidently resulted in a wealth of data with per evaluated specimen a rating going from A+, totally hardy (including flower buds) to E, killed outright. An article based on the results of this assessment is being prepared for the yearbook of the Belgian Dendrology Society.

Pest management

Since a few years our white oaks, especially the native common oak (*Quercus robur*) are suffering from severe infestations by the **oak processionary caterpillar**. These caterpillars are not only a problem for the trees, they also pose a human threat because of their poisonous hairs which may cause skin irritation and asthma. This year we have tried to reduce this pest through biological control. This has proven to be successful and we are planning a new treatment in the spring of 2014 to help the oak trees to recover and get them healthy again and also to substantially reduce the risk to the public.



2. *Magnolia* 'Butterbowl' was registered in 2013. A good yellow flowering *Magnolia* with bowl shaped flowers

Our selections

Over the years we have **raised and selected several plants** which we thought worthy of propagating and naming. Most of these selections are the result of our own sowing or from our own crosses or from crossings performed by other enthusiast colleagues. It can also concern interesting plants bought at nurseries or received as a gift. These plants have been named after several years of careful observation and comparison; and they only received a name if we believed them to be superior to other existing cultivars and thus worthy of commercialization. A shortened description per cultivar and some pictures illustrating the plant and its more important traits is now available on the Arboretum Wespelaar website (http://www.arboretumwespelaar.be/EN/Our_selections/). This list will continue to grow as new cultivars are being described and registered. The two plants named and registered in 2013 are the yellow flowering *Magnolia* 'Butterbowl' and the upright, floriferous *Magnolia* 'Wim Rutten'



3. *Magnolia* 'Wim Rutten'. An upright, floriferous selection named by Arboretum Wespelaar in memory of *Magnolia* breeder Wim Rutten

Bonsai collection

In the spring of 2013 Mr Sylvère Huysentruyt donated an important **bonsai collection** to the Arboretum. We thankfully accepted this collection of 63 specimens and created a new access database where all possible information was assembled such as collection number, scientific name, age, bonsai style, plant source, abiotic requirements, treatments history and scheme, pictures, etc. In spring and autumn the most beautiful specimens are exhibited on the central courtyard where they can be admired by the visitors. We have indeed discovered that the visitors to the Arboretum admire the exhibited bonsai plants with a more than

average interest. In the summer months we keep the plants in a new shade hall where they are better protected from heat, drought and direct sunlight. The daily maintenance of the bonsai collection falls under the responsibility of our own staff but we benefit from the skills of a volunteer who is in charge of the more challenging jobs such as pruning and repotting of the plants. The bonsai collection is undoubtedly an important added value for our collections and it helps us in creating a first-class Arboretum. The official inauguration of the collection was held on a sunny autumn day in October and some 70 invitees participated in this event.



4. *Pinus parviflora* as a bonsai

Library

The collection of books in our **library** grew substantially in 2013 thanks to three important gifts: 83 books from Jacqueline Ghys, 212 books from Xavier Misonne and also 212 books from Michel Decalut (February 11th 2014). This last figure is increasing as we are still in the process of accessing this important acquisition. The most important gift of course with 579 titles

was by Philippe de Spoelberch. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the donors for their generous gift to our ever growing collection of books on trees, shrubs and related topics. The library now contains 1.697 books, 228 reprints and 137 journals.

Visitors and education

Arboretum Wespelaar is open two days a week, on Wednesday and Sunday, from April 1st to November 15th. Guided visits for groups are also possible on other days and outside this period. In 2013 we had a total of 3.991 visitors (versus 3.827 in 2012); almost half of these were visitors in guided tours for groups. We had many visits from specialized groups both national and international. Among those were the European Boxwood and Topiary Society, Dr. Gerard T. Donnelly, President and CEO of the Morton Arboretum, the Swedish Dendrological Society, Dutch Society of Botanic Gardens, Friends of the Botanic Garden Köln, the Professional Gardeners Guild, Union des Parcs et Jardins de Normandie, Arboretum Oudenbosch, The Hardy Plant Society, the



5. Winter image of the Arboretum

Maryland Garden Group, the International Camellia Society, etc.

In mid-January the Arboretum opened its doors for its members because of the enchanting thick blanket of snow. Around 50 members took this opportunity and paid us a visit and numerous pictures were taken on these two days.

Study days and symposia

In the weekend of 13 and 14 of April we organized a *Magnolia* study weekend for members of the Magnolia Society International, The RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group and the Belgian Dendrological Society. Almost 70 enthusiasts participated in this two-days event which included talks by *Magnolia* specialists Philippe de Spoelberch, John Grimshaw, Andrew Bunting, Jim Gardiner and Koen Camelbeke. Two important Belgian *Magnolia* collections were visited: Arboretum Wespelaar and Arboretum Bokrijk. Due to the extremely long winter, Magnolias were just starting to flower but notwithstanding this misfortune the weekend was a real success. Some of the presentations of that weekend are available at the Arboretum Wespelaar website (http://www.arboretumwespelaar.be/EN/Publications_and_Downloads/).

Publications

In addition to the papers posted on our website, Arboretum Wespelaar published in the Spring of 2013 a booklet (36 pages) on the Arboretum. This well-illustrated booklet is offered for sale at the Arboretum info desk. The booklet was published in three languages, Dutch, French and English and covers following

topics: the history and development of the Arboretum, the main parts of the Arboretum, the dendrological collections and our specialities and focus, plants collected in the wild and our contribution to conservation, propagation, labelling and catalogue, autumn colours and flora and fauna in the Arboretum.



A VISIT TO
WESPELAAR ARBORETUM
6. Cover image of the booklet that was published in 2013

Education

Obviously many local and/or general interest groups also visited the Arboretum. We now have a small group of dedicated volunteers who guide such groups. We are continuing our course in botany (and related topics) for our guides to ensure that the high standards of guided visits of the Arboretum are met. In 2013 ten lessons were organized on following topics : Gymnosperms, plant anatomy, trees flowering

with catkins, Park of Wespelaar, guided tour for pre-school children, perennials, *Fagus*, nomenclature of cultivars, fruits and bonsai.

To make the visit of the individual visitors more useful and interesting we are now putting at their disposal a leaflet with 10 remarkable trees that are not-to-be-missed when going around the Arboretum. These leaflets are updated every two weeks and the 10 trees are marked on a map but also on site with a clearly visible red display label. The feedback from our visitors on this new initiative has been highly positive and we plan to continue with this initiative in 2014 possibly extended with a similar leaflet designed for children.

The labelling of trees and shrubs in the Arboretum is, as far as names are concerned, restricted to the scientific names. The two main reasons for this policy are 1) the fact that more than often no vernacular, Dutch names are available and 2) the scientific names are the only names that can be used in an international framework. These “Latin” names however are of course a hurdle or even obstacle for the local community who are interested but uninitiated in the topic of dendrology and nomenclature. For this reason we are now providing for the layman a list of scientific names of genera with a translation into French and Dutch.

One of our educational tasks lies in the training of students in horticulture. In 2013 we had Thomas Delporte as a trainee who made a graduate thesis entitled “Utilisation de bulbes pérennes en prairie de fauche sous climat sec et humide”. For this study a total of 820 bulbs were planted in the Arboretum belonging to the genera *Leucojum*, *Allium*, *Camassia* and *Narcissus*. Generally speaking this has been an

interesting and successful project with is further being evaluated by the head-gardener and his team.

Services to third parties

Acquiring, compiling and sharing dendrological knowledge and expertise is one of the main goals in the mission statement of Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar. One of our important partners in achieving this objective is the Belgian Dendrology Society (BDB) and following was realized in 2013: member of the reading committee of the BDB yearbook, organization of a dendrological study tour to the Southern Appalachian (USA), help with the organization of a study day on the genus *Fagus* (beeches), testing of identification keys mostly of the genera *Fagus* and *Picea* and the Hamamelidaceae representatives. Arboretum Wespelaar also remains the driving force behind the database of **Trees of Belgium (BELTREES)**. This databank contains now well over 27.000 living measured trees with 1.833 new accessions or updates in 2013. The rates of measurements of trees in the important dendrological collections of the country will receive a boost in the years to come as we are planning the publication of a book on the 50 most important dendrological collections in Belgium.

The Director remains secretary of the **Belgian Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta (V.B.T.A.)** and of the scientific committee of Foundation Franklinia. It is crucial that the Arboretum keeps good and solid contacts with the local community. It is therefore with pleasure that the Director advises the local

authority on the management and reconstruction of the public park in Haacht. Sharing knowledge and experiences is also possible through lectures and publications. The Director gave presentations for the Centre of Living Languages in Leuven, on yellow flowering *Magnolia* during the *Magnolia* study weekend at Wespelaar and also at the Yorkshire Arboretum in the UK. Several articles have been published in 2013: dendrological notes, excursion reports, on systematics of the family Theaceae and the position of *Stewartia* in that family, and an article on the genus *Stewartia* in Dendroflora, the Yearbook of the Dutch Dendrological Society.



7. An article on the genus *Stewartia* (here *S. malacodendron*) was published in the well-known Dutch journal *Dendroflora*



Press

There have been quite a few external publications about the Arboretum Wespelaar, ranging from articles by inhabitants in local magazines to articles by dendrological societies in their yearbooks. Some were specifically related to their visits: overview of the International Dendrology Society sixtieth anniversary held at Arboretum Wespelaar (in their yearbook), a program and description of the trip of the Professional Gardeners Guild (on their website), illustrations and review about John Grimshaw's participation at the Magnolia Study Weekend (on his blog), practical information about a trip of the Maple Society to Wespelaar in 2011 (in their newsletter), report about the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group trip to Wespelaar in 2013 (in

their bulletin), and an article by the European Boxwood & Topiary Society about their visit to Wespelaar in April 2013. The Botanical Garden of the University of Ghent refers the readers of their magazine to the identification keys available on our website. The website of the Yorkshire Arboretum announced an event where Koen Camelbeke gave a presentation about the Arboretum Wespelaar history and development. As already mentioned above, the Arboretum also published internal press, such as the new booklet in three languages, the flyers and the catalogue of living plants. An important source of information on dendrology is our website where under the heading "publications and downloads" all relevant publications and presentations by staff members are made available.