

Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar Year Report 2014



Arboretum Wespelaar holds a specialized collection of trees and shrubs from around the world, hardy in Belgium. The Arboretum is well known for its extensive collections of Acer, Magnolia and Rhododendron as well as some less familiar genera such as Clethra, Franklinia, Lindera, Malus, Stewartia, etcetera. These collections have been planted throughout the 20 hectare of the Arboretum. 2014 was another year of progress and growth for the Arboretum. Plants, visitors, labels, publications, botanical studies, lectures and activities: all have seen a considerable increase in numbers and/or quality.

The collections

The **living collection of woody plants** in the Arboretum currently (as of February 24th 2015) contains 4.580 specimens representing 2.185 different taxa (versus 15.121 specimens and 4.654 taxa on the whole of the estate). These numbers include the 554 new accessions on the estate during 2014 of which 228 (or 41%) are of documented wild origin. Around 70 plants were removed from the collection as part of an ongoing effort to improve the public perception, aesthetic value and health of the living collection.

Having a perfectly labelled collection is one of the main objectives of the Foundation. Last year has therefore seen a thorough re-start of the **major inventory round** at the Arboretum and the dendrological collections of the surrounding private estates of *Herkenrode* and the *Potager de Wespelaar*. This important and valuable work continued in 2014 and a total of 119 beds have been thoroughly inventoried. During this inventory each plant in a certain bed is localized, its health status is assessed, the identity is verified if possible and/or needed, and the label is placed on a healthy branch clearly visible for our collaborators and visitors.

Display labels

Ever since the inception of the Arboretum, all woody plant specimens were provided with a small plastic label which shows the scientific name of the plant, the unique accession number, the source of the plant and, if available and relevant, wild provenance data. Soon we discovered that these labels are sometimes

difficult to locate for the general public, especially in evergreen shrubs such as *Rhododendron* or hollies (*Ilex*). We therefore started in 2003 with a **display label** system. This display label is placed at the base of the plant specimen; it is clearly visible and legible from a distance and helps the visitor with information on the plant: its scientific name, the botanical family and the natural distribution. At first, these display labels were no major priority and they were engraved (in-house) and placed at a rather low pace. However, since the opening of the Arboretum to the general public in 2011 we have much increased our efforts and we are pleased to announce that all woody plants now have their own display label!



1. *Magnolia* 'Purple Star', a cross of 'Purple Breeze' with 'Bjuv', was registered in 2014. It is an upright, floriferous tree with attractive dark purple flowers

Only exceptions are when plants are too young (just planted), in very bad condition (health status 1) or when there is a problem with identity or nomenclature that first needs to be addressed.

Our selections

One of the objectives of the Arboretum is to evaluate and provide useful information on newly discovered or introduced species or cultivated varieties. This horticultural role of the Arboretum regularly results in the selection, naming, registering and propagating of **new cultivars**.



2. *Nyssa sinensis* 'Jim Russell', with its outstanding fall colour and upright habit, was also registered in 2014

This year we have registered following new cultivars: *Magnolia* 'Purple Star', 'Hot Pants', 'Sara Koe', *Nyssa sinensis* 'Jim Russell' and *Rhododendron dauricum* 'Hemelrijk' and some of those are already readily available in the specialized nursery trade. Information on these selections is published in specialized journals but is also made available on our website under the heading "our selections". Novelties like this are of course also posted on our **Facebook page** which was launched in March 2014 and now has about 380 followers (see: www.facebook.com/arboretumwespelaar)

Databases

All Arboretum collections (woody and perennial plants, herbarium, bonsai collection, wood samples, cones and fruit, books and journals) are kept in a database management system and updated on a daily basis. It is easy to extract and distribute information from this comprehensive database. The Catalogue of woody and perennial plants can be downloaded from the Arboretum Wespelaar website and the woody plants information is at the same time available on-line as a searchable database. This information is also shared – by means of a yearly upload of our data – with two other on-line searchable databases. The first one, www.plantcol.be, is a user-friendly interface allowing the visitor to simultaneously search data from nine Belgian living plant collections, including thus those of Arboretum Wespelaar. The second one is the PlantSearch database of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (www.bgci.org/plant_search.php) which is a global database of living plants at more than

1.000 contributing institutions, including Arboretum Wespelaar. Sharing information on our collections within a global network fits well with the mission statement of the Foundation.

ArbNet

In December 2014 the Arboretum Wespelaar was honoured as a level III Arboretum within the ArbNet worldwide interactive community of Arboreta (www.arbnet.org). Through ArbNet arboreta from all over the world work together for the preservation of trees and tree collections. The ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Program uses four levels of recognition and level III is characterized by following criteria: a comprehensive tree collection of at least 500 species, a well-developed database, a professional operation and organisation with a clear vision, cooperation with other arboreta, the sharing of knowledge as well as educational aims. We were extremely pleased by this accreditation and it is now our intention to achieve the highest level IV in the foreseeable future.



3. Training course for our guides; here studying the plantings in the mixed borders near the entrance building

Visitors and Education

Spring of 2014 was warm, dry and sunny; in one word: beautiful. We therefore decided to open our doors to the public almost two weeks earlier than usual. Together with the extra but still limited publicity in mostly specialized magazines, 2014 has seen a **substantial increase in visitor numbers** from 3.991 in 2013 to 5.767 this year! This increase was of course also observed in number of individual visitors (3.208), number of groups (84), number of annual tickets for families (171), etcetera. This rise in numbers was very inspiring to our staff and ever growing group of volunteers as all visitors, with no exception, are enthusiastic and highly supportive of our work. We do hope to be able to continue this success next year although weather conditions remain one of the most prominent factors for success in this business.

We had, as every year, many visits from **specialized groups** both national and international which reflects the importance and impact of the Arboretum Wespelaar in the world of woody ornamental plant collections and plant connoisseurs. Amongst those were Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones of Crûg Farm Plants, Andrew Jackson (Head of Wakehurst Place), European Landowner Organisation, Finnish Dendrological Society, Hartwig Schepker (Director of *Rhododendron* Park in Bremen), Tony Aiello (Director of Horticulture of the Morris Arboretum), Sara Oldfield (Secretary-General of BGCI), the outdoor gardeners of the Belgian National Botanic Garden, the gardeners of the Botanic Garden of Ghent University, and so on.

To make the visit to the Arboretum of non-dendrologists more interesting and informative we now provide a **leaflet with 10 highlights** not to be missed during a visit. This list, with accompanying map indicating the trees, is updated very regularly, at least every fortnight. The 10 eye-catchers are chosen for their specific interest in that time of year (flower, scent, bark, fall colour, habit, rarity, botanical interest, conservation status, and so forth) and their position in the collection. A similar leaflet is provided for our younger visitors to make the visit of both parents and children successful and agreeable. Although the preparation of these leaflets is time-consuming, we believe that they make the Arboretum and its collections more accessible for lay people and we will surely continue with providing these visitors this information in this or a similar form.



4. One of our trainees showing his colleagues around the Arboretum explaining his work and achievements

Another great success this year was the number of **students and trainees** working at, with or for the Arboretum for a short or longer period of time. Nine students and trainees have been very active in 2014 and we wish to thank them for their help and assistance and for bringing new ideas and youthful vivacity to the Arboretum. It is equally good to send out some of our own people to other places in order to learn and to acquire experience and to bring back home new ideas, techniques and better practices. The Arboretum gardener, Sam Lismont, worked for one week at the renown RHS garden Wisley where he had the opportunity to operate along the best people in several different departments.



5. The genus *Picea* was subject of a study weekend organized by the Belgian Dendrology Society. Here *P. abies* 'Lucky Strike' as a bonsai specimen

Study days, lectures and activities

On March 16th the **Belgian Dendrology Society** organized a series of lectures at the Arboretum Wespelaar followed by a guided walk through

the collections where already many magnolias were in full flower. Koen Camelbeke gave a presentation on gymnosperms and Christophe Crock talked about plant communities in the southern Appalachian.

On May 3rd the Arboretum hosted two lectures; one from Andrew Bunting (President of the Magnolia Society International and curator of the Scott Arboretum in Pennsylvania) about the importance of wild seed collecting for developing ex-situ collections in botanical gardens and arboreta. Dan Hinckley (plantsman, garden writer, horticulturalist and nursery man from Washington) lectured about noteworthy, recent collections in Vietnam, Taiwan, western China and northern Myanmar.

On May 25th we again hosted two lectures of international calibre. William A. McNamarra (Executive Director of Quarryhill Botanical Garden in California) talked about plant hunting in the wilds of Asia and its role for plant conservation. Peter Raven (President Emeritus of Missouri Botanical Garden) talked about plant conservation in a rapidly changing world.

On November 3rd the Arboretum hosted a workshop for part of the members of the **International Oak Society** Taxonomy Committee in order to re-design the requirements of the excellent oak names database (www.oaknames.org).

Joke Ossaer, assistant curator at the Arboretum, co-organized with Dirk De Meyere, outdoor collections manager at the National Botanic Garden of Belgium, a study weekend on spruces (genus *Picea*) for the Belgian Dendrology Society. The organisation of such an activity

always has a beneficial effect on the Arboretum. It gives us the opportunity and incentive to enlarge our collection of cones and dried herbarium specimens and to update our nomenclatural database. Moreover, we take this opportunity to measure our trees for the BELTREES database (remarkable trees of Belgium) and the Arboretum staff and guides are involved in testing the identification key made by Jan De Langhe, dendrologist at the Ghent University Botanical Garden. As a matter of fact, Jan's keys are available for free consultation and download at the Arboretum Wespelaar website under the heading "identification keys".



6. The genus *Stewartia*, here *S. pseudocamellia*, was subject of an article published in 2014 for the Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft

Publications

Several members of the Arboretum team have published in 2014 on specific topics within our groups of interest. Papers were published on *Stewartia* for the Deutsche Rhododendron Gesellschaft, yellow flowering *Magnolia* for the RHS Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group and for Dendroflora, the Journal of the Dutch Dendrological Society, the article was

even translated to Swedish by Lennarth Jonsson, on *Fraxinus* and *Rhododendron* hardiness for the BDB Yearbook, on Hamamelidaceae for the International Dendrological Society Yearbook, and so forth. If possible, we make these publications available in pdf format on the Arboretum Wespelaar website under the heading “Publications and Downloads”.



7. One of the yellow flowering magnolias which featured in several publications this year is *Magnolia* ‘Petit Chicon’

In January the Director gave a lecture on the genus *Stewartia* for the members of the Dutch Dendrological Society and the Royal Society of Nurseries at Boskoop, The Netherlands following the publication of an article on the subject in Dendroflora of last year.

Forest Management & the Arboretum

Part of the Arboretum, but mostly the grounds surrounding the Arboretum, are subject to a so-called **forest management plan** which describes the do’s and don’ts regarding the management

(especially thinning, cutting and planting of trees) of the grounds over a period of 20 years. This year was important in that respect as a new management plan was due and this was therefore an excellent opportunity to definitively organise the future management and legal framework for the Arboretum. About 2/3 of the Arboretum was already legally assigned, classified and managed as a park landscape but the remaining 1/3 needed regularisation through this new management plan. The authorities have now agreed that also this part can effectively be managed as an arboretum and this will finally give us the legal certainty for the total Arboretum. This means a major step forward and we will further finalize the formalities in 2015. This also means that the Foundation Arboretum Wespelaar can become proprietor of this final 1/3 of the Arboretum and that the future is finally ensured for the total surface of what is already since 2011 open to the public.

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 Dendrological Society** (BDB) and following was realized in 2014: member of the reading committee of the BDB Yearbook, help with the organisation of the study weekend on the genus *Picea* and secretariat of the BDB.



Arboretum Wespelaar also remains the driving force behind the database of **Trees of Belgium** (BELTREES). This database contains now well over 27.500 living measured trees with 875 new accessions or updates in 2014. This year we organized three meetings (region of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) with several of the most important contributors to the database in order to encourage and increase the number of yearly measurements. This will be necessary as plans are being made for the publication of a book on the 50 most important dendrological collections in Belgium.

Another database which is managed and maintained by the Arboretum Wespelaar team is that of the dendrological collections of the private estate **Hemelrijk** at Essen, the property of the de Belder family. In 2014 we have started, with the kind assistance of volunteer Gerlinde Vanderauwera, with a new inventory

round of the Hemelrijk collection of woody plants in order to have the main trees and shrubs, if possible, accessed in the database and labelled in the field. This effort will continue in the years to come and we feel privileged to help keep this most important and valuable collection up-to-date and well labelled for the future generations.

The Director of the Arboretum 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 we continue to advice the local authority on the management, reconstruction and plantings of the public park in Haacht.

