

Congratulations to the Singapore Botanic Garden Sesquicentennial 2009

Throughout 2009, universities, museums and botanical gardens in countries across the world, have celebrated the bicentenary of the birth of Charles Darwin. Most recently, on November 24th 2009, the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's classic book "The Origin of Species ..." was the opportunity for further reflection on the impact of his work. Through his ideas and experiments Darwin established the foundation for our modern understanding of biological diversity and how it has come to be through the processes of evolution.

But in many celebrations of Darwin's life it is sometimes forgotten that his insights had as much meaning for those interested in the variety of plant life as those concerned with the origin of diversity in the animal kingdom. Indeed, Darwin devoted several books to different aspects of plant evolution, and the mid-nineteenth century scientific milieu in which he worked was a golden age of botanical exploration. This was a time when new plants were being discovered and brought into cultivation from the most remote corners of the globe.

The Singapore Botanic Gardens, founded in 1859 by a group of agriculturalists and horticulturalists in Tanglin, was borne in this era. Its origin lies in an era of fascination with plants and their potential economic importance, and at a time when the value of public parks, for leisure and beauty, was first being realized. Ever since, the Gardens has played a major role in the life of Singapore and the surrounding region. Its luxuriant planted landscapes are echoed throughout the city. Over 150 years, the Singapore Botanic Gardens has evolved into one of the great botanical gardens of the world. Both a major tourist destination and a national icon, it continues to enrich the lives of the people of Singapore. Open every day, free of charge, from early in the morning until late at night, the Singapore Botanic Garden is a well-loved national treasure.

Plants have been important in the history and development of Singapore since Sir Stamford Raffles founded the first "Botanical and Experimental Garden" on Government Hill in 1822 almost at the birth of the colony itself. Since then, and especially since the early scientific work of H. N. Ridley, the Singapore Botanic Gardens has been at the center of botanical research on the plant life of tropical South-east Asia. That leadership continues today, with even more urgency, as the Gardens coordinates with regional and global partners on the conservation and sustainable use of tropical plants.

In 1859, the same year that the Singapore Botanic Gardens was

founded, on the other side of the world, Henry Shaw established the Missouri Botanic Garden in St. Louis. A hundred years earlier, in 1759, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew began its transition from a Royal estate to a scientific collection of plants. The past year, 2009, has therefore been a time for celebration at all three of these great gardens. A celebration given greater significance by the recognition that all three now work ever more effectively as part of a global network of more than 2,000 botanical gardens - all dedicated to the cultivation and conservation of plant species, and increasing knowledge and public enjoyment of botanical diversity.

We send our congratulations to the Singapore Botanic Gardens on 150 years of remarkable achievements and outstanding accomplishments. We wish it well at its sesquicentennial, and in the coming decades, as it continues its important work of “Connecting People and Plants”.

Dr. Cristián Samper

Director, National Museum of Natural History, The Smithsonian Institution

Professor Peter H. Raven

President, Missouri Botanical Garden

Professor Steven Hopper

Director, The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Professor Sir Peter Crane

Carl W. Knobloch, Jr., Dean, School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences
Yale University