

The Horticulturist



Percy Thrower Travel Bursary report

PLUS Rochfords International Rose Trials | Plants at Work | Volunteers in Botanic Gardens | YHoY Grand Final

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Cover The climbing Canary bellflower (*Canarina canariensis*) grows in transitional woodland that develops in the cloud forests of the Canary Islands, reaching up to 3.5m at brighter forest edges (© Jonathan Zerr).

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sustainability in all its senses features prominently in horticulture. Many of us find ourselves struggling in our working and professional lives about how best to plan for the future. It is good to see articles that reflect this. Lloyd Snellgrove's well-researched article about the use of volunteers and also his own experience of volunteering and the potential for this essential and mutually beneficial group to enrich, is an example. Thinking of my own working life and the possibilities for the future I hope that when I'm not a full-time employee I will continue to volunteer to safeguard my own well-being and also to share my knowledge and skills but also to be challenged and to continue to develop as I truly believe that within horticulture learning has to be lifelong to continue to be relevant.

I've had the opportunity to be at several events recently which have been looking at the survivability of trees within urban landscapes and the strategic planning of future landscape for the changing climate. Conversations, debates, broad consultation and collaboration are effective ways to include the wealth of experience within horticulture. There is a broad need for conversations and active listening as we plan for the future of the profession.

Thinking about the talent of the under 30's I had the pleasure of being Quizmaster at the South East Regional Final of the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition. When I think about the CIH skills summit planned for Autumn 2026 and the talent we need to encourage, nurture and celebrate at this event I feel hopeful that there are horticulturists coming into the industry with great knowledge and skill. You can see this in the shift in the questions that we're asking which are leaning more towards an industry that is forward thinking with a much greater sense of the environment and the use of resources. One of the most striking things was the near-absence of any questions to do with horticultural chemicals and a real focus on a much more integrated approach to plant production in all areas.

It is satisfying to read Jonathan Zerr's report on the visit which he made to the Canary Islands after winning the YHoY competition in 2024. I hope many of you will be able to make this year's Grand Final on 16 May in Rochdale. It will be a great opportunity to meet fellow horticulturists and to be inspired by the knowledge and excellent buzzer work that will make this another compelling event.



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Exploring island ecosystems on Tenerife and La Gomera

PERCY THROWER TRAVEL BURSARY Jonathan Zerr describes how receiving the YHoY Bursary gave him the opportunity to pursue his fascination with island ecology. Inspired by the unique evolutionary pathways shaped by isolation and climate, he travelled to the Canary Islands to study their extraordinary plant life. Focusing on Tenerife and La Gomera, he explores how contrasting habitats have produced remarkable patterns of adaptation and endemism.

When I was awarded the YHoY Bursary in 2024, I initially found it surprisingly difficult to decide how best to use it. I knew that I wanted to explore one of my long-standing interests: island ecosystems. Islands offer a unique lens through which to observe plant and animal evolution at a relatively accessible scale. Isolated from continental influences, plant lineages often develop a distinct morphology in response to environmental pressures. In many cases, these evolutionary responses converge, resulting in remarkably similar adaptations (eg insular gigantism, secondary woodiness, pollinator generalism) across otherwise unrelated island ecosystems. Observing how plants respond to these forces has always fascinated me.

Among the world's island systems, the Canary Islands stood out as exceptionally diverse, yet accessible. I had long hoped to explore them seriously, ever since aiding in the cultivation of *Echium wildpretii* and other members of the genus during my apprenticeship at the Loki Schmidt Garten, the botanic garden of my home city, Hamburg. In northern Germany, these plants required carefully controlled greenhouse conditions, protected from

winter cold and excess moisture. This experience sparked my curiosity about the natural environments in which such specialised plants thrive. As I began to read more, I quickly realised that the ecological diversity of the Canary Islands far exceeded anything I had imagined.

Tenerife and La Gomera

Located off the west coast of Morocco, the Canary Islands span a geological age range of roughly 1 to over 20 million years, a gradient that underpins major differences in plant diversity from west to east. They are exceptional for botanising due to the clear stratification of their habitats. In the historic absence of grazing pressure from large herbivores associated with later human settlement, the islands' vegetation zones have been shaped primarily by altitude and precipitation patterns. This is most evident on Tenerife, where the topography, dominated by the active volcano Mount Teide (3,718m), supports the highest botanical diversity in the archipelago.

From sea level to summit, Tenerife's habitats progress from coastal desert and succulent scrub

through thermophilous scrub, laurel cloud forest (*laurisilva*), Canary pine forest, crater plateau vegetation, and finally the sparse alpine flora of Teide's upper slopes. Particularly biodiverse are the *barrancos* – deep ravines whose microclimates blend the defining characteristics of otherwise segregated habitats and support specialist species far beyond their expected ecological ranges.

Beyond elevation, vegetation patterns in the Canary Islands are strongly shaped by the trade winds (*alisios*). These prevailing easterly winds transport cool, moisture-laden air from the subtropical high-pressure systems toward equatorial low-pressure zones. As this air mass rises against the islands' steep volcanic slopes, it condenses, creating contrasts in temperature and rainfall between north- and south-facing aspects. As a result, the northern slopes support cooler, more humid ecosystems, while the southern slopes experience a markedly drier, continental climate.

This contrast is particularly striking on walks such as the Cumbre de Baracán ridge in the Teno Massif of Tenerife. Here, moss-laden tree heaths (*Erica arborea*), *Aeonium* species, and Canary