

National Lottery Heritage Fund assures restoration of Botanic Garden glasshouses

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has awarded a grant of £4 million to Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) towards the restoration of the two A-listed Victorian Palm Houses.

The monies will be used to create what the RBGE describe as a “new visitor experience” with a wider programme of activities. These will teach people about caring for the natural environment and inspire actions to address climate change.

This will be the central part of the Edinburgh Biomes project which will have an area focusing on evolution of plants and how they continue to adapt. There will also be a new glasshouse at the entrance providing a tropical rainforest environment.



The glasshouses were closed at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh during the pandemic. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Caroline Clark, Director for Scotland, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We are delighted to be supporting this important project, which will see the historic heart of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh restored and revitalised for the benefit of generations to come. Thanks to National Lottery players, this significant grant will rescue these iconic buildings from catastrophic failure and enable a step-change in activity, engaging wider and more diverse audiences both locally and internationally."



The 350th anniversary of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh was marked one year late with the Floral Clock in Princes Street Gardens unveiled by The Rt Hon Lord Provost Frank Ross and Regius Keeper Simon Milne (above) PHOTO ©2021 The Edinburgh Reporter

Simon Milne, MBE, Regius Keeper, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh said: "The significance of this award of £4 million cannot be underestimated and we are hugely grateful to National Lottery players for making it possible. In committing this sum to the Edinburgh Biomes project, the Heritage Fund is providing unprecedented resources for public action in protecting our fragile world.

"In an era where 40 per cent of all known plants are under threat, we can inspire and empower people across the country and around the globe to join us in fighting back against the biodiversity crisis and climate emergency. This funding not only goes a considerable way to securing the care of a unique Living Collection of plants, but also supplies the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh with previously unattainable opportunities for public engagement.

“Now, we can reimagine our visitor experience. Visionary interpretation and activities will communicate the vulnerability of life on Earth, providing intellectual and physical access to plants, their applications in all our lives and the need for habitat conservation. By inspiring everyone to care about the environment and play their part, there is real opportunity to make tangible change.”

The two Palm Houses form the historic centre of the Garden and are outstanding examples of Victorian engineering. The octagonal Tropical Palm House, constructed in 1834, was soon considered too small, with palms sending their leaves through the roof. In 1855, a new Temperate Palm House was built to a grand design by Robert Matheson, with cast iron columns and vertical glazing that achieved exceptional height and transparency.

The Garden as a whole is a ‘safe-house’ for threatened species, conserving 154 of Scotland’s 181 rare plants and many others that are already extinct in the wild. The glasshouses contain some of the Garden’s most iconic and spectacular plants, including including the enigmatic *Amorphophallus titanum* from Sumatra, which spectacularly flowers at night and smells of rotting flesh. The project will ensure the safety of these globally significant living collections.