

Corpse flower's final bloom

A rare and spectacular plant that produced one of the world's biggest and most pungent flowers in an Edinburgh glasshouse may have wilted for the last time, according to experts.

More than 2,700 people flocked to see and smell the *Amorphophallus titanum* (titan arum) after it shot up to 2.65m in height and burst into bloom at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE).

Known as a "corpse flower" because it mimics the smell of rotting flesh to attract insect pollinators once in bloom, the giant spike stands upright for only a few days before collapsing.

The endangered plant, nicknamed New Reekie by staff, has been nurtured in a glasshouse at the RBGE for 21 years and has now flowered a record-equaling five times.

The rare phenomenon may have emitted its famous eye watering whiff for the last time, however, as none of its kind is known to have flowered more often.

Sadie Barber, RBGE's research collections manager, said: "We are delighted to have been able to flower the *Amorphophallus titanum*, our 'New Reekie', for a record-equalling fifth time, and even happier to have been able to share the event with so many visitors.

"Never knowing exactly when the bloom will happen makes it

even more exciting. And it's over almost as soon as it has begun.

"Those who were able to enjoy this botanical spectacle in person got to see it looking its best. Now the inflorescence has collapsed, entering into dormancy, and we wait two years or more to see if New Reekie will return once again."

Native only to the Bukit Barisan range of mountains in West Sumatra, *Amorphophallus titanum* is famed for its size, smell, and the relative rarity of its bloom.

The "dead-meat" stench is caused by a mix of gases emitted by the heating up of parts of the central flower spike at night.

The RBGE's rare specimen was a corm the size of an orange when it was given to RBGE in 2003. In 2010 it weighed 153.9kg, making it the largest ever recorded.

It was nurtured in a tropical glasshouse for 12 years before finally flowering for the first time in 2015, in a first for Scotland, before repeating the feat in 2017, 2019 and 2022.

Staff dubbed it New Reekie as a tribute to Edinburgh's historic Auld Reekie nickname, and the smell it produces on flowering has been compared with everything from old bins and rotting fish to sweaty shoes and sewage.

The only other specimen known to have flowered five times was at Eastern Illinois University in the US.

The tropical glasshouse is currently closed to the public for renovations as part of Edinburgh Biomes, the Garden's multimillion pound restoration and construction project.

However, the RBGE issued free, timed tickets for two days only in response to enormous public demand. Visitors who got tickets donated more than £4,000 to the RBGE's palm houses appeal.



1/8/2024 The Amorphophallus Titanium, The Titan Arum. Flowers again after 2 yrs for the 5th time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens.

Picture Alan Simpson