
WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW (UK) ID N° 1084

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, are nominated as a “Cultural Landscape” under the category of “designed landscape”. (check with ICOMOS)

1. **FIELD VISIT:** Dr Géza Hajós (ICOMOS) and Hugh Synge (IUCN), July 2002
2. **CONSULTATIONS:** In addition to the field mission during which national and local authorities were consulted, IUCN also consulted with 4 external reviewers.
3. **IUCN ASSESSMENT**

The value of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew to the heritage of the world goes far beyond an appreciation of its 18th and 19th Century garden landscapes and its historic buildings. Indeed, the 19th Century avenues at Kew that are at the heart of the present application have not been seen until now as one of Kew's most notable features. The renewed focus on the 19th Century landscape is valuable, but should not detract from Kew's fundamental mission of plant research and its historic and ongoing contribution to the conservation of the plant kingdom worldwide.

Contribution to *science* is not a criterion for a cultural landscape, but it is undeniable that Kew's scientific work has had a great *cultural* effect on the world, as knowledge and expertise on plants acquired at Kew has been dispersed around the globe. During the time of the British Empire, Kew took economic plants from one region to another, such as rubber from Brazil to SE Asia. Many botanic gardens around the world were constructed on the Kew model, such as at Calcutta and Peradeniya.

In recent years, Kew's work on conservation has continued to be internationally focused, notably in relation to the implementation of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). This involvement brings with it new opportunities but also responsibilities, especially with regard to genetic resource issues and obligations under the CBD. This has at times brought them controversy in terms of trade in genetic resources.

Then and now, students trained at Kew work in and manage botanic gardens around the world, creating a sort of Kew “botanical diaspora”. On any day, some 100 or so botanists from a great many countries may be found working in Kew, in the herbarium, library, laboratories and gardens. No other botanical institute has had such a marked role outside its own country - and Kew has never been focused on the flora of the United Kingdom - nor commands such respect and affection as a sort of “mother institute” for its subject.

It is worth noting that Kew has played a great role in the development of the conservation of wild plants around the world, a goal reflected in the inscription of many plant-rich natural sites on the World Heritage list. It was a retired botanist working at Kew who prepared the first plant Red Data Book of threatened species. His work led to a close partnership between Kew and IUCN from 1973 to the late 1980s, under which IUCN staff based at Kew created the database on the world's threatened plants, and developed the first global programme for plant conservation, funded by IUCN and WWF. Moreover in 1975, Kew called the first ever conference of botanic gardens to discuss how they could contribute to conservation and it is fitting that Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the global body that promotes the

conservation role of botanic gardens, is based at Kew. This is no ordinary botanic garden but one that has genuinely led the way in creating a global movement for conservation of the world's flora.

4. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

The nomination document makes a strong case for Kew being considered as the world's premier botanical garden. It is incontrovertible that Kew:

- has the largest and richest set of plant collections living and dead of any botanic garden or museum;
- has had a greater historical impact on the world than any other botanic garden; and
- has more resources for its staff and visitors than any other botanical establishment in the world at present.

Kew is not of course the oldest botanic garden in the world - that status goes to Padua in Italy, already a World Heritage Site - and other gardens may be larger or have larger areas of natural vegetation. But in terms of its contribution to botany and the comprehensiveness of its collections, it is hard to consider any other botanical institute matching Kew.

5. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

During the evaluation mission, the ICOMOS expert rightly drew attention to the need to balance conservation of the historic landscapes at Kew with the need to continue and develop further its scientific role and its contribution to plant conservation worldwide. Thus any changes to the garden landscape, and restoration of earlier garden features, need to be weighed carefully with their impact on Kew's other roles, notably in science, education and, not least, providing a place of quiet enjoyment for the public. Balancing these needs is best left to the discretion of the Director and his senior staff.

6. CONCLUSION

IUCN has advised ICOMOS that it considers this site to have potential merit as a Cultural Landscape, particularly taking into account its natural values and associations.