



Kew

Royal Botanic Gardens


Kew Annual Review 2023/2024

Progress towards meeting our
manifesto for change commitments

2,028,000 visitors to Kew Gardens  3%

418,000 visitors to Wakehurst  13%

 **100** global partnerships **87** horticulture and MSc graduates

256 science projects  10% **668** scientific publications  10%

33,652 new living and preserved collections  45%

3,430,000 plant and fungal specimens digitised

104,000 school visits

£369,000,000
economic value to the UK economy

Forging a global institution for all

During the 2023/2024 financial year, we made good progress towards delivering on 'Our manifesto for change 2021–2030'. We worked in partnership with 100 countries to understand and protect threatened species, undertaking world-class research and conservation projects, and feeding into a global network of experts who share our commitment to tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.

We published the fifth report in our State of the World's Plants and Fungi series, a comprehensive digest of knowledge on plants and fungi and the threats they face – news coverage from which reached three-quarters of UK adults. We kept the importance of biodiversity at the heart of conversations on climate change at the United Nations COP28 Climate Change Conference in Dubai. And we reached the halfway point of digitising our eight million herbarium and fungarium specimens, an effort that is making our collections accessible to anyone, anywhere.

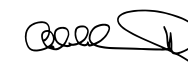
Some 2.45 million visitors came through our gardens' gates, including 47,000 people from underrepresented socio-economic backgrounds who made use of the £1 ticket scheme launched in January 2022. Our Community Access Scheme brought in a further 25,800 people who might otherwise have faced barriers to visiting. We are helping a wider-than-ever cross-section of society to learn about the wonder of plants and how they underpin our existence.

We are also formally educating the next generation of biodiversity experts who will support the much-needed expansion of the green and sustainability sectors in the future. The number of PhD students rose to 110 by the end of 2023, and the total number of students graduating from our MSc degrees, Diploma in Horticulture and Apprenticeship programme was 87, compared to 37 last year.

Our overall income for the year was £130 million, an 8% increase on 2022/2023, of which £66 million was self-generated and £55.5 million came from Defra. We are extremely grateful for

the continuing financial support provided to RBG Kew by Defra. This funding enabled us to press ahead with plans for important capital projects, including a new carbon-themed garden at Kew and a conservation and research nursery at Wakehurst, and to further our plans to renovate our iconic Palm House. This encouraging situation is testament to our recovery from the pandemic years, and we look forward to reporting further achievements in the years to come.

We were honoured that our Patron, His Majesty King Charles III, confirmed in April 2024 his continued patronage of Kew. On behalf of the Executive Board and the Board of Trustees, we would like to thank His Majesty for his unwavering commitment to our cause. We would also like to thank our talented and committed staff, students and volunteers for their hard work and passion, along with Defra, our members, visitors, donors, ambassadors, champions and partners for their valuable ongoing support in helping us to achieve our mission.



Dame Amelia Fawcett
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



Richard Deverell
Director
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Contents

Forging a global institution for all	1
Meeting our manifesto for change commitments	3
1. Delivering science-based knowledge and solutions to protect biodiversity and use natural resources sustainably	4
2. Inspiring people to protect the natural world	10
3. Training the next generation of experts	14
4. Extending our reach	18
5. Shaping national and international opinion, policy and practice	24
Achieving our manifesto for change priorities	28

Meeting our manifesto for change commitments

‘Our manifesto for change 2021–2030’ highlighted the age of extinction and climate emergency we are currently living through. Natural resources are being degraded at a rate unprecedented in human history, and actions such as burning fossil fuels and clearing wild lands have released greenhouse gases, disrupting natural climate patterns. In a vicious cycle, damaged ecosystems are less able to absorb emissions and mitigate the worst consequences of climate change.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew’s mission (hereafter Kew) is to understand and protect plants and fungi for the wellbeing

of people and the future of all life on Earth. The manifesto recognised that immediate action was needed to end biodiversity loss and repair our world. In response, we laid out five priorities for achieving our mission, based on how we felt we could best deploy our expertise and other assets to make a distinctive and substantial contribution to tackling these global challenges.

This ‘Kew Annual Review 2023/2024’ showcases some key areas in which we have made progress during the 2023/2024 financial year towards delivering on the aforementioned five priorities.



1. Delivering science-based knowledge and solutions to protect biodiversity and use natural resources sustainably



Highlights:

- Participating in 256 science projects, an increase of 17% on last year.
- Adding 33,652 plant, fungal and seed accessions to Kew's living and preserved collections, up 45% on last year.
- Publishing 668 new scientific publications, 10% more than last year.

Nomentsoa Randriamamonjy, botanist, Kew Madagascar Conservation Centre, collects plant specimens in Madagascar, one of more than 100 countries Kew works with.

Naming and classifying species, striving to protect threatened species, identifying useful plants and fungi, and sharing knowledge in high-profile reports are key ways in which Kew's 300 scientists are delivering groundbreaking science. Our experts do not work alone, however, but collaborate with partners in more than 100 countries. As part of this thriving global network of scientists, practitioners, policymakers and environmental advocates, we are helping to safeguard biodiversity, harness the power of nature to tackle pressing environmental challenges, and promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

Identifying critical gaps in biodiversity data

If we are to protect biodiversity and use it sustainably, we must first know what species exist, whether they are widespread or rare, and in which countries they grow. Critically, we must also understand what we do not know, so we can address any gaps in our knowledge. Published in October 2023, *Tackling the nature emergency: Evidence, gaps and priorities*, the fifth report of our flagship State of the World's Plants and Fungi series, funded by the Sfumato Foundation, sought to do just that.

The authors reported that more than 18,000 new plant and fungal species had been named as new to science since 2020, but that three out of four undescribed plant species were already likely to be at risk of extinction. They provided the most robust estimate to date that around 2.5 million species of fungi existed globally, meaning at least 90% of them remained as-yet unknown to science. And they uncovered more than 30 'biodiversity darkspots' – locations where data on species and their distributions were lacking.

Based on findings from robust, open-access scientific papers, this work drew on the expertise of 200 scientists from more than



100 institutions in 30 countries. The report, which was covered in more than 1,000 news stories worldwide, was accompanied by an international symposium at Kew Gardens. During this event, in-person and online participants used the report's findings to shape a global declaration for helping scientific institutions to fill key knowledge gaps, through inclusive, fair and equitable collecting activities.

Kew Science to guide reforestation in Madagascar

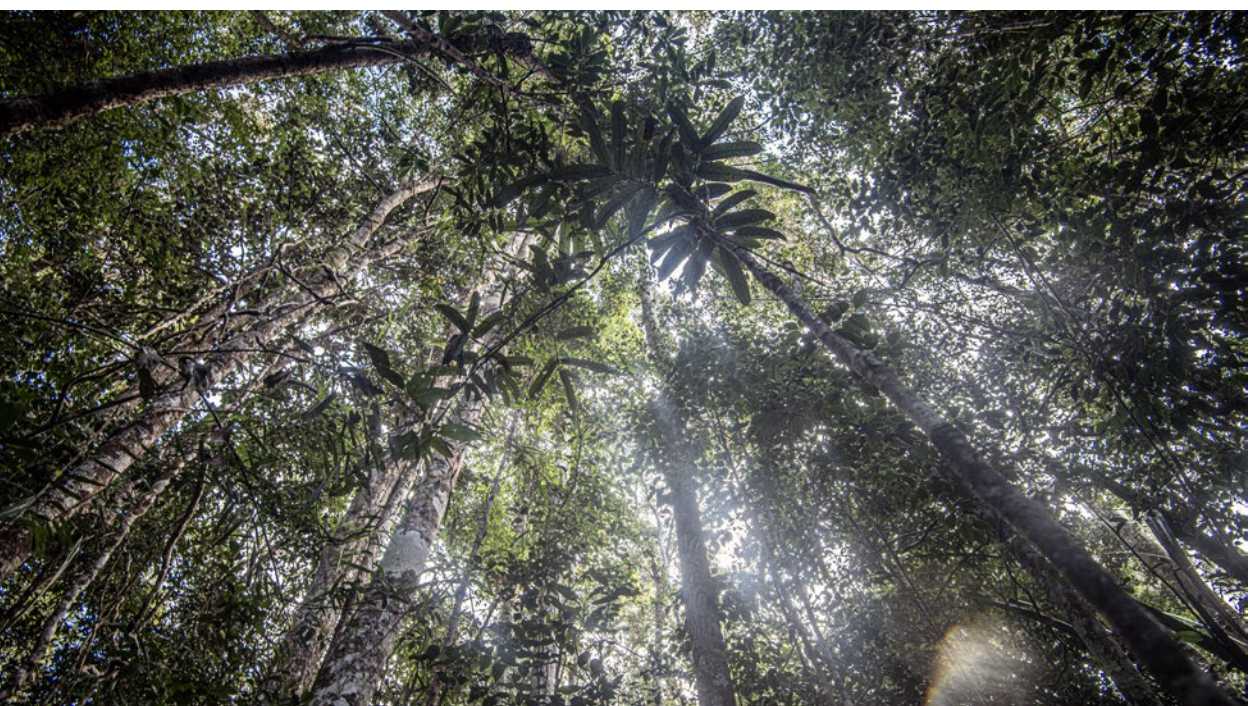
Madagascar is a frequent recipient of climate finance for tree-planting schemes to offset greenhouse gases emitted largely by Western nations. With the country having been extensively deforested, such initiatives are seen as providing benefits through both reforestation and the mitigation of climate change impacts. However, grasslands are often selected as reforestation sites, with little thought as to their suitability for growing trees or the negative impact of losing the grassland ecosystem.

In 2023, Kew scientists began mapping Madagascar's grasslands to help the authorities understand natural grassland ecosystems and identify the best locations for reforestation. Some are biodiverse habitats that harbour rare species, others have fire regimes unsuited to forestation, and there are those grasslands that are important for livestock farming. Being able to identify these differences will help decision-makers

plant appropriate trees in areas where they are most likely to reach their full carbon-sequestering potential with the least trade-offs. The project was funded with a £750,000 grant from the Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate, a UK Official Development Assistance programme.

Kew has worked in Madagascar to protect its critically threatened and highly biodiverse environment since 1986. Our third research site and only overseas office – the Kew Madagascar Conservation Centre – is located in the capital Antananarivo. In February 2024, Madagascar's Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development opened *Orchids*, our Madagascar-themed festival, which was supported by Cazenove Capital and attracted more than 80,700 visitors over four weeks. A concurrent series of Kew blogs exploring the science behind the festival reached over 5,800 people, and 15,000 people engaged with our science-based social media posts.

Kew has worked in Madagascar to protect its critically threatened and highly biodiverse environment since 1986.



First map of food plants used around the world

Kew scientists produced the first-ever global map of plants that people use, covering more than 35,000 species. It showed that the highest concentrations of utilised plants are in the tropics, and that regions where such plants are concentrated are largely unprotected and often include Indigenous lands. The researchers called for conservation planning to better encompass interactions between people and plants, to enable both humanity and biodiversity to thrive.

To date, few projects have sought to find out how many, and which, plant species are used by people and where they grow. However, global strategies such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework have called for interactions between plants and people to be better integrated in conservation strategies, for which such data is required.

Working with the UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre and a group of academic partners, the Kew researchers mapped more than 11 million observations of plant species with documented uses in ten categories – from human food and animal fodder, to materials, fuels and medicines – as the basis for the research.



Harvesting yams in Madagascar.



Learning how biodiversity benefits us all

Since 2021, we have been transforming Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden in West Sussex, into a living laboratory. Through our Nature Unlocked programme, we are studying the value that biodiversity brings through natural services such as cycling carbon, pollinating plants and enhancing people's wellbeing. This is increasing our understanding of habitats, and the services and benefits which biodiversity provides.

With funding from HM Treasury, Sky Zero, Mount Anvil and partners, working in eight habitats, we have been measuring the volume of greenhouse gases released from the soil and stored above ground, and examining the role that ectomycorrhizas – mutually beneficial associations of fungi and plant roots – play in cycling carbon.

This year, we began gas-flux monitoring in our new wet woodland, started calculating the carbon storage of our hedgerow and scrub habitat, and, as part of our efforts to gather baseline data on the diversity of fungi in different habitats, have discovered that there are over 200 species of fungi forming ectomycorrhizas across Wakehurst's woodland habitats.

Our research informed the Nature Investments Standards Programme, a framework to address barriers to investing in nature. And, through the umbrella initiative of Nature Returns led by Natural England and funded by the UK government Shared Outcomes Fund, it fed into Defra's Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment programme, which was set up to collect data on England's ecosystems and natural capital.

Guiding scientists to unlock secrets of plant DNA

Around the world, more than 3,000 institutions hold nearly 390 million preserved plant specimens. In the past, such material was of little use for genetic studies as only fresh or recently preserved DNA could reliably yield valuable data. But now new technologies are enabling scientists to unlock information held in herbarium specimens from centuries past. To help them do so, scientists from Kew and University College London published a paper in the journal *Science* outlining how ancient DNA could enhance understanding of plant life and inform conservation.

The paper's authors outlined five practical uses for DNA in preserved plant material. These included: to reveal evolutionary relationships between species; to identify crop-killing pathogens; and to highlight impacts of agricultural chemicals on plants. They reported that combining DNA with other data could provide additional insights, such as whether recent observed changes in plants were early evidence of an evolutionary response to climate change. The work will help to guide other researchers seeking to tap herbarium collections for novel insights into plants' evolutionary past.



Herbarium specimens, such as this one of *Coffea arabica*, contain a wealth of valuable scientific information.

Around the world, more than 3,000 institutions hold nearly 390 million preserved plant specimens.

Herbarium guide gets an update

A new edition of Kew Publishing's *The Herbarium Handbook* arrived on taxonomists' bookshelves in October 2023. The result of a three-year global collaboration with 70 contributors from 13 herbaria, the update includes coloured step-by-step illustrations on how to collect, press, curate and manage herbarium collections, as well as sections on public engagement and outreach, and digitisation. First published in 1989, the work remains an important resource for herbarium managers around the world.

2. Inspiring people to protect the natural world



Highlights:

- Welcoming over two million visitors to Kew Gardens, making it the second most visited outdoor attraction in the UK (up 3% from 2022/2023).
- Enticing more than 400,000 people to visit Wakehurst, making it the second most visited attraction in West Sussex (up 13% from 2022/2023).
- Producing our first films about Kew's collaborative global biodiversity work, which drew over two million viewers.

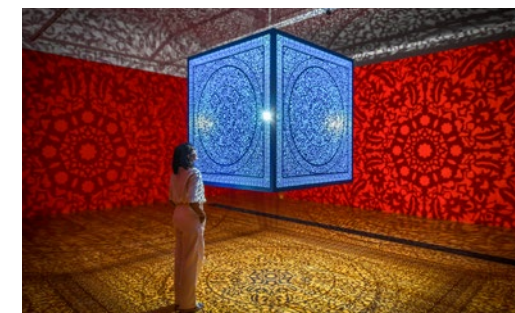
Exhibitions such as Mat Collishaw's *Petrichor* helped us attract new audiences.

If we are to encourage people to protect the environment, it is vital that we reach new audiences across all ages, genders, professions and locations. In doing so, we can motivate individuals to understand, value and proactively safeguard biodiversity, and foster a collective sense of environmental stewardship. Of course, inspiring diverse groups of people calls for us to communicate in many different ways. We have risen to this challenge by infusing our events – both well-established and new ones – with novel, challenging and contemporary narratives and experiences. Meanwhile, through our online outputs, including our website, educational portal, outreach work and social media channels, we are disseminating wide-ranging information about our global conservation work far beyond the boundaries of Kew Gardens and Wakehurst.

Artists and storytellers reveal new sides to Kew

Artists unlocked new ways of inspiring diverse visitors to learn about and protect the natural world. Their work was presented in several major events, ranging from the concurrent art exhibitions *All the Flowers Are for Me* and *Plants of the Qur'an*, to the groundbreaking spectacle of *Petrichor* presenting evocative imagery from the natural world. These trailblazing events helped us to garner new audiences (see also page 19) and achieve critical acclaim, while expanding Kew's reach.

All the Flowers Are for Me by Pakistani-American artist Anila Quayyum Agha featured shadow artworks, combining ideas of cultural connectedness and peaceful co-existence with the evolution of botanical art forms. Meanwhile, *Plants of the Qur'an* was a world-first collaboration between botanical artist Sue Wickison and Kew scientist Dr Shahina Ghazanfar. It showcased 30 large-scale botanical paintings of plants from the Holy Qur'an, including pomegranates, ginger and garlic.



Petrichor ran between October 2023 and April 2024. In this exhibition, artist Mat Collishaw used innovative sculptural installations to explore links between nature and art history. Among the exhibits were 'Heterosis', a unique digital hybridisation experience that enabled participants to cultivate their own bespoke animated flowers. *The Sunday Times* described the exhibition as 'one of the shows of the year – visually miraculous', while a five-star review by *The Guardian* hailed it as putting 'the shock and sensation back into British modern art'.

Bite-sized documentaries showcase our conservation work

A series of short films we made showing Kew experts at work on international field trips were watched more than two million times. The videos, which shared insights of Kew's collaborations with experts in Brazil, Madagascar, the Arctic, Peru and the UK were seen and shared widely on social media and YouTube, as well as being picked up by major media outlets including *The Guardian* and *BBC World Service*.

Breathing new life into community spaces

Derelict and degraded land across the UK sprouted new life thanks to our dedicated Grow Wild volunteers. Grow Wild is Kew's nationwide outreach programme, which saw groups transform more than 3,500 square-metres of space in 2023. Around 400 people directly volunteered over 2,000 hours to plant trees, bulbs and wildflower areas, clear rubbish, and build bug hotels and hedgehog houses. Local people used the reinvigorated spaces to run nature walks, cooking sessions, art workshops and gardening sessions with children.

This effort grew from a community project partnership launched by Grow Wild in 2022. The partnership awarded seven grants of £2,000 to community groups in Cardiff, Leeds, Llanidloes, Merseyside, Morecambe, Peckham and Wrexham, with groups receiving a further £500 maintenance grant the following year to help sustain their work. At the same time, seven new groups in Bradford, Cardiff, Dover, Edinburgh, Leeds, Stockport and Tower Hamlets joined the scheme, each receiving £2,000. The success of the 2022 and 2023 projects enabled Kew to secure funding for 25 community and 20 youth grants in 2024.



Appreciating nature from a young age

If people understand that nature can benefit them personally, they are more likely to protect it. Ninety-five per cent of parents who took part in our early years programme with their children said the experience had enhanced their connection to nature, and 93% reported improved wellbeing. In 2023, 1,800 children and parents took part in activities as part of the programme. They attended science and art workshops and explored the Children's Garden at Kew Gardens, and participated through local outreach activities.

Many of the families came to these events as part of the 'Connecting Children with Science and Nature in the Early Years' programme. This had been launched the previous year in a partnership between Kew and ten Children's Centres in the London boroughs of Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Islington, Tower Hamlets and Southwark, with funding for four years from Mount Anvil and partners. In the autumn, we delivered five training and development days at Kew Gardens for staff working in these centres, providing them with vital skills for connecting their communities with nature.

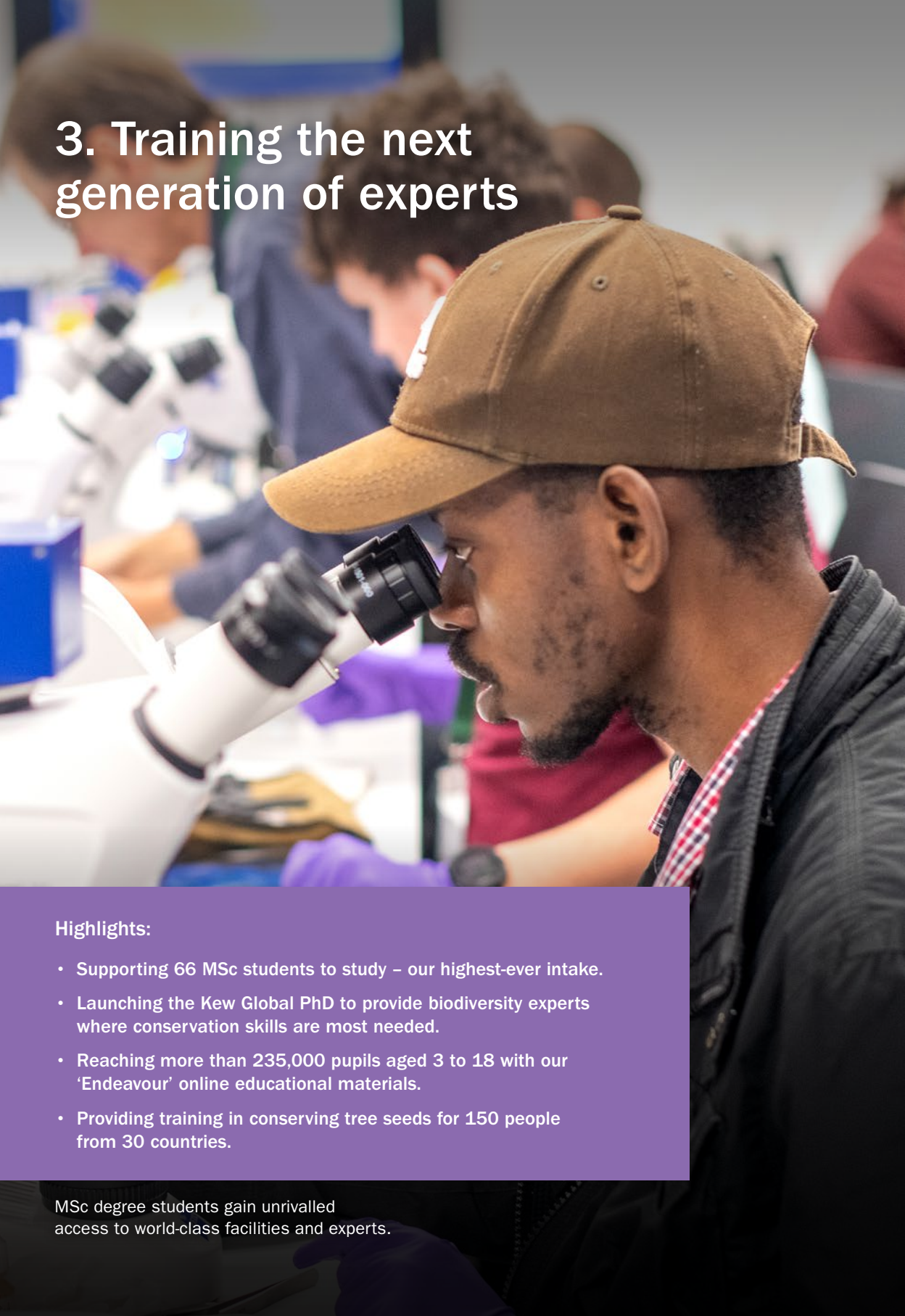
Nurturing young environmentalists

Children gained new practical skills to help them protect the planet, while: participating in activities based on the popular *Superworm* and *We're Going On A Bear Hunt* books; exploring trees through art in our *Rooted* exhibition; and completing missions to win badges and become 'Nature Heroes'. Captivating young minds with interactive stories, trails and hands-on activities helps to foster a deep connection to nature from an early age, ensuring that future generations are motivated and equipped to be environmental guardians.



Visitors enjoy 'Nature Heroes' activities at Wakehurst.

3. Training the next generation of experts



Highlights:

- Supporting 66 MSc students to study – our highest-ever intake.
- Launching the Kew Global PhD to provide biodiversity experts where conservation skills are most needed.
- Reaching more than 235,000 pupils aged 3 to 18 with our 'Endeavour' online educational materials.
- Providing training in conserving tree seeds for 150 people from 30 countries.

MSc degree students gain unrivalled access to world-class facilities and experts.

In a world faced with climate change and biodiversity loss, green skills are increasingly essential at home and abroad. Kew is committed to building the skilled workforce needed in both science and horticulture, as well as in the green economy and sustainability sectors. By equipping individuals with a passion for plants and fungi, and expertise in conservation and sustainability, we are fostering a global network of professionals dedicated to protecting and preserving the natural world for future generations. We offer a range of degrees and training programmes, including instruction grounded in Kew's science on how horticulturists can best work in a warmer world. For school-aged children, we provide a wide range of site-based and online activities and educational materials.

A growing centre of excellence for MSc and PhD students

More people than ever are graduating through our system and going on to fulfil expert roles in biodiversity. In 2023/2024, we hosted 66 MSc students, up from 57 in 2022/2023. And, at the end of 2023, we were supporting 110 PhD students – a rise from 67 at the end of 2019. All students gain unrivalled access to our world-leading scientists, knowledge and collections, equipping them to become the biodiversity experts of the future.

Our MSc courses are 'Plant and Fungal Taxonomy, Diversity and Conservation' and 'Biodiversity and Conservation', which we deliver with Queen Mary University of London, and 'Global Health: Food Security, Sustainability and Biodiversity', which we run with Royal Holloway, University of London. Our PhD students work across all Kew's scientific priorities, supported by our co-supervising relationships with 33 UK universities and 25 international universities.

In November 2023, we launched the Kew Global PhD Programme to train researchers



in highly biodiverse parts of the world where conservation skills are much needed. From 2024/2025, up to five exceptional researchers will be recruited annually – primarily in Africa, Central and South America, and South-East Asia – in collaboration with in-country university partners. This follows the model of Kew Madagascar Conservation Centre's 'Today's Flora for Tomorrow' programme, funded by a private individual, where participants undergo training while supporting in-country conservation.

Sharing knowledge of banking tree seeds

Seed banking is a vital aspect of conservation, so it is important that scientists around the world have the necessary skills to establish and maintain such stores. In 2023/2024, Kew experts and partners held over 650 seed conservation training days with 150 people from 30 countries, to help enhance the capacity of local teams.

Much of this training was carried out as part of the Weston Global Tree Seed Bank (WGTSB) programme, which works around the world to gather seeds and conserve rare, threatened and useful trees. Funded by the Garfield Weston Foundation in four phases since its inception in 2015, the WGTSB programme is the largest such initiative at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank (MSB).

Up until the end of 2023 – when the third phase of the programme ended – the WGTSB programme had gathered seed from over 3,500 species in 40 countries and territories. At the start of 2024, a new phase of the programme began called the Weston Global Tree Seed Bank: Unlocked.

Funded by a further £5 million from the Garfield Weston Foundation for an additional three years of work, this will enable the programme to shift from collecting seeds primarily for conservation and research towards using the collections to restore degraded habitats, and expanding the supply of seed coming from project countries to have greater conservation impact. This effort will be focused in 16 countries.

Building capacity by training local botanists to bank seeds will continue to be a vital part of this work. As well as providing our flagship seed conservation techniques course at the MSB and in partner countries, Kew is piloting a trainer certification scheme for partner organisations around the world. This will enable us to expand our training programme, for which demand massively exceeds supply.



Supporting teachers to nurture young environmental advocates

Not all schools can readily visit Kew's sites, so we use our online learning platform Endeavour to ensure that teachers have everything they need to give inspiring lessons about plant science and the environment. Between November 2022 and January 2024, nearly a thousand new teachers signed up to the platform, bringing the number of users to 7,882. Assuming an average class size of 30, this means 236,460 pupils aged three to 18 can now benefit from our botanical resources. Endeavour is supported by The George Family Foundation.

Through the programme's regular 'competition challenges', pupils and teachers can take part in an in-depth project with a chance to win investment in science resources for their school. In July 2023, we launched four new challenges, covering all key stages of the national curriculum for the first time. These challenges build pupils' knowledge and enthusiasm for nature, with prize-winning schools able to enhance their science teaching and celebrate excellence among young environmental advocates.

Getting teenagers excited about biodiversity

If we are to have the best chance of halting and reversing biodiversity loss, we need to inspire young people from across society to interact with nature. In July and August 2023, groups of pupils aged 14 to 17 years from 29 schools in and around London took part in our free, week-long regular summer programme, Earthwise. The students conducted biodiversity research projects, undertook fieldwork and workshops in Kew's gardens and laboratories, and gained unique insights from our experts. These included a Kew PhD candidate and three MSc students who engaged participants in their own research projects and later wrote a paper detailing the impact of citizen science youth programmes.

As part of our efforts to engage under-represented sectors of society, 24 of the schools that sent pupils were state-funded, and 13 of those schools had not participated in the programme before. In a quarter of the state schools that took part, at least 28% of pupils were receiving free school meals. This is considerably higher than the London average of 17.6%. Earthwise is funded by a private individual.

Keeping professionals at the top of their game

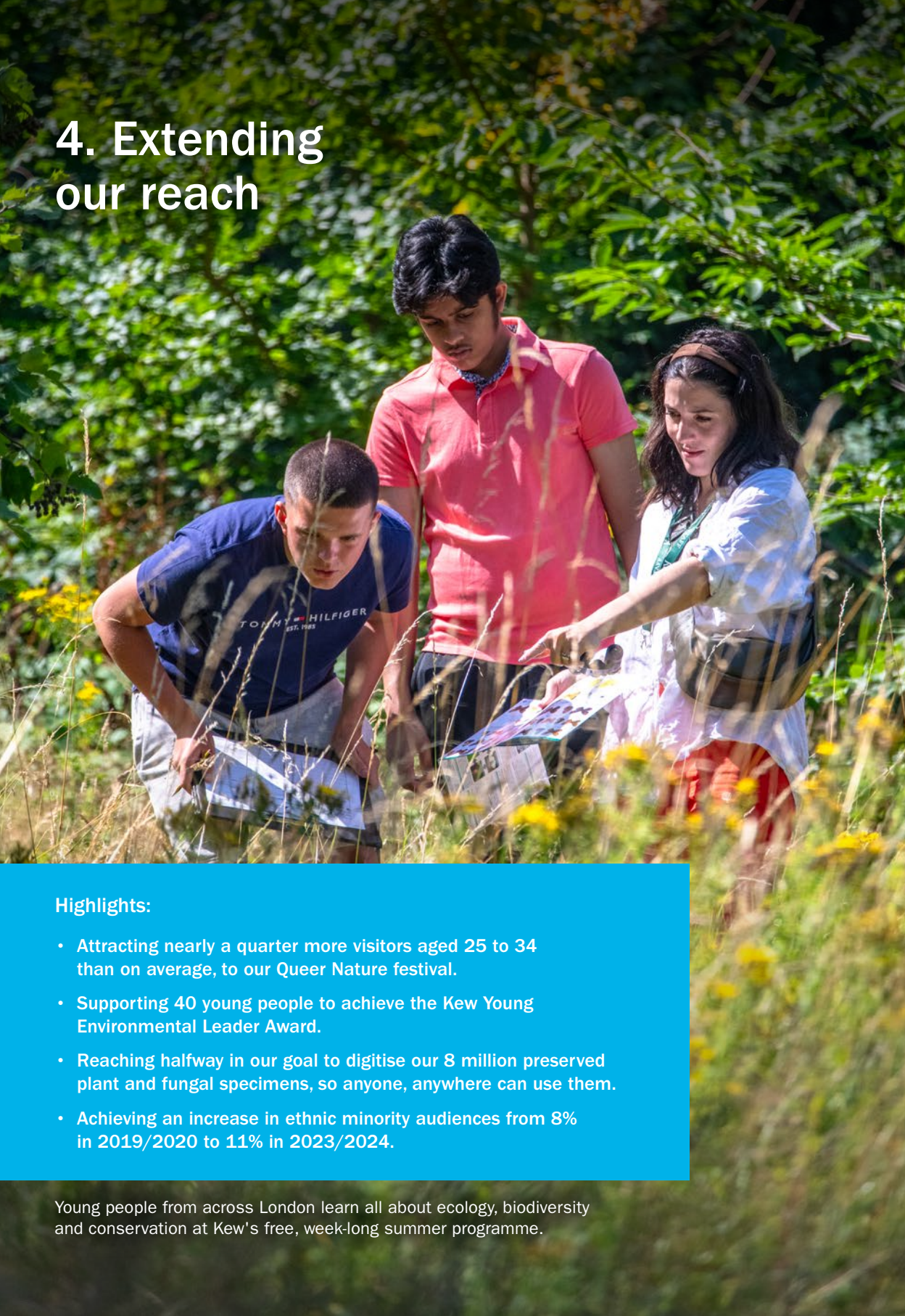
Identifying species is fundamental to plant science and vital to building the capacity of botanists overseas. In May 2023, 15 scientists attended our two-week course in 'Tropical Plant Identification' at Kew, while 15 professionals undertook our five-week blended-learning 'Plant Taxonomy Skills for Conservation' course online and at partner institutions in Bolivia. While led by Kew, this course is always executed in collaboration with partners in Africa, Central or South America, or Asia. The 2024 course will run in conjunction with Herbarium Bogoriense, Indonesia, the largest herbarium in South-East Asia. These courses build knowledge and skills where they are needed – in locations where biodiversity is high and skills are lacking to document, understand and protect it. The participants get to build new networks, exchange ideas and gain support in their future careers through mentorship and co-funded projects.



A trio of top horticulturists

Kew Diploma graduate Lewis Barrett won the Chartered Institute of Horticulture's Young Horticulturist of the Year competition in May 2023 – the third young Kew horticulturist in a row to do so. Barrett received the £2,500 Percy Thrower travel bursary, courtesy of the Shropshire Horticultural Society and the Percy Thrower Trust. By developing excellence in our students, we are helping to ensure the next generation is equipped not just to excel at growing plants but also to tackle the challenges of adapting to climate change and conserving biodiversity.

4. Extending our reach



Highlights:

- Attracting nearly a quarter more visitors aged 25 to 34 than on average, to our Queer Nature festival.
- Supporting 40 young people to achieve the Kew Young Environmental Leader Award.
- Reaching halfway in our goal to digitise our 8 million preserved plant and fungal specimens, so anyone, anywhere can use them.
- Achieving an increase in ethnic minority audiences from 8% in 2019/2020 to 11% in 2023/2024.

Young people from across London learn all about ecology, biodiversity and conservation at Kew's free, week-long summer programme.

We want Kew to be the go-to place for anyone and everyone to learn about plants and fungi, so we can spark meaningful conversations about the biodiversity crisis and inspire action from all corners of society. To this end, we are offering groundbreaking programmes and pioneering an holistic approach to teaching visitors about botany and engaging them with nature. By inviting diverse artists, activists and storytellers to tell narratives about our history that chime with under-represented sectors of society, and continuing to digitise our collections, we are encouraging a broader range of people than ever to come through our gates and visit our online portals. This is helping us to succeed in our goal to shift the perception of Kew from a beloved garden to the world's leading scientific centre for research into plants and fungi – and a must-see arts and culture destination to boot.

Community-focused programme widens access to our gardens

This year, Wakehurst developed its first-ever participation programme, designed to enhance access for people who face physical, sensory, psychological or social barriers to visiting the site independently. This process generated a range of on- and off-site initiatives, including a 'Grow your mind' mental health project for young children, walk-and-talk meetings, gardening groups, craft clubs and dementia walks, as well as the translation of information, and work experience and employment opportunities for disadvantaged people. The programme was developed in collaboration with charities and community groups; more than 100 such organisations engaged with Wakehurst across the 2023/2024 year.

In January 2023, Wakehurst launched a Community Access Scheme (CAS), matching Kew Garden's long-standing CAS. This is a group annual membership for organisations serving under-represented people in the community. The membership provides a set number of free admissions annually, which groups can use to bring people to the site. Several CAS members

subsequently worked with Wakehurst staff to develop the participation programme further. Today, member groups can bring people to Wakehurst to explore independently or take part in one of the specially curated participation activities. During the year, 30 groups signed up for membership of Wakehurst's CAS, and 394 for the Kew Gardens scheme.

During the 2023/2024 year, the Wakehurst participation team also launched Kew's first work experience programme, with 16 children supported to complete a week-long placement with teams across the West Sussex site. Following the success of the programme, Wakehurst partnered with Brighton-based Team Domenica, which helps adults with learning disabilities and autism. This collaboration led to one person with Down's syndrome being employed at Wakehurst. Team Domenica supported the person to undertake a seven-week work experience placement and a seven-month work placement at Wakehurst, and helped the participation team to develop a bespoke role for them within Kew.

Forty new young environmental leaders trained

Forty young people from diverse backgrounds are better equipped to lead environmental programmes in future after undertaking Kew's Youth Explainers training and receiving the Kew Young Environmental Leader Award in August 2023. Developed for pupils aged 14 to 17, the award aims to stimulate participants' interest in the natural world and to develop their leadership skills. Those taking part were from groups less likely to have visited Kew Gardens before, thanks to our partnership with selected schools in the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

After attending a four-day induction to the Youth Explainers programme, the participants attended Saturday training sessions, where they created innovative materials that would be used to engage the public. They then put their new skills and resources to the test communicating with Kew visitors. In total, they volunteered more than 4,500 hours of their time. Eighty-two per cent of participants reported that their connection to nature was enhanced as a result of their experience, and 74% reported an improvement in wellbeing. Having 40 participants attending was a significant improvement on the previous cohort, which had 25 young people. The programme was supported by John Lyon's Charity.

'If plant life stops, all life stops. I finally understand the real meaning behind this. We simply cannot survive without plants.'

A Kew Young Environmental Leader



Innovative events help shift perceptions of Kew

Our groundbreaking events helped us to share our messages about conserving biodiversity far and wide. *Queer Nature*, a festival celebrating the connections between people, plants and fungi attracted younger visitors and a higher proportion of those who were LGBTQ+ than may otherwise have visited Kew Gardens. And 70% of people who enjoyed our summer art exhibitions exploring themes of faith and cultural exchange were first-time visitors to the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art.

The month-long festival was centred around four bespoke installations in the Temperate House, featuring stories by queer artists, gardeners and scientists. The *Queer Nature: After Hours* events offered visitors music, cabaret, comedy, drag performances and talks in the evening. Nineteen per cent of people who came to the festival in the daytime were from an ethnic minority background, and 45% of those who came to the After Hours events were aged 25 to 34, compared to a previous average of 25%.

The tandem exhibition of *All the Flowers Are for Me* and *Plants of the Qur'an* (see also page 11), showcasing the work of American-Pakistani artist Anila Quayyum Agha and New Zealand botanical illustrator Sue Wickison, respectively, attracted more than 93,000 visitors, almost half of whom were from an ethnic minority background, and 41% of whom were under the age of 25. This marks a significant step towards our priority goal of increasing tenfold the number of visitors from under-represented communities to the Gardens.

Making our collections freely available around the world

More than half of our eight million plant and fungal specimens have now been digitised, and will soon be freely accessible to researchers around the world. The digitisation programme, the most ambitious in our history, will be a boon to scientists and others seeking to combat the impacts of climate change, save species from extinction, and future-proof farming and food production.

Large-scale work to digitise our Herbarium and Fungarium specimens began in March 2022. By March 2024, our 275-strong digitisation team had processed 3.43 million of them. Currently, over 70,000 specimens are being digitised each week. The initiative has unearthed some surprises, including two previously unknown specimens collected by Charles Darwin.

In 2023, in an initiative with institutions around the world, Kew committed to adding critical scientific data held within our collections to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, an international inventory of one billion specimens. As part of this work, our experts and partners created a framework to rapidly evaluate the size and composition of natural history collections across the world and outline their importance, publishing their findings in the journal *Science*.

The digitisation of our collections and the online portal has been funded by Defra, a Kew Fund appeal, private philanthropists, Fujifilm Electronic Imaging Europe GmbH, The HDH Wills 1965 Charitable Trust and the first Chairman of Kew's Board of Trustees, Lord John Eccles.

More than half of our eight million plant and fungal specimens have now been digitised.





Shifting the dial for women in arboriculture

Kew arborist Cecily Withall was awarded Young Professional Arborist of the Year by the Arboricultural Association (AA) in 2023. Withall, the first full-time, permanent female member of staff employed as a climbing arborist at Kew since the 1980s, also spoke at the AA's 2023 ARB Show, an industry and public-facing event at Westonbirt Arboretum attended by over 6,000 showgoers and 80 exhibitors.

Withall is a keen advocate of the AA's Women in Arboriculture (WIA) group, which was set up to promote the industry at entry level, support women already involved, and nurture a diverse and inclusive working environment for all. Kew Gardens hosted the first WIA networking day in 2023. It was attended by over 100 tree-care professionals, the majority of them women.

Investing in orchid conservation

More than half of orchid species are likely to be threatened with extinction, but conservation activities and new partnerships are helping to tackle this. The Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) at Wakehurst won a grant that will help to speed up the conservation of threatened orchids. The grant, from the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Digital Accelerator Programme, will enable researchers to use machine learning to improve the viability testing of orchid seeds, which present particular conservation challenges due to their microscopic size, short life and complex germination process. Staff at the MSB hope to develop low-cost orchid seed viability testing packages for partners across the Millennium Seed Bank Partnership.



The MSB and its partners have banked over 2.4 billion seeds of wild species since 2000.

New Ambassadors and Champions share their passion for Kew

By raising awareness of the power of plants and fungi, our Ambassadors and Champions help us to reach new audiences and inspire, challenge and empower people to protect nature. In late 2022, Advolly Richmond, independent researcher and historian of gardens, plants and social history, became our third Champion, and the actress Emilia Fox our latest Ambassador. And, in September 2023, master florist Henck Röling became Kew's latest Champion. Henck first came to Kew as a volunteer 13 years ago and is part of the team designing and installing Kew's annual orchid festival.

Kew Champion, master florist Henck Röling.



5. Shaping national and international opinion, policy and practice



Highlights:

- Calling for evidence-led, biodiversity-positive 'nature-based solutions' to climate change at the UN COP28 climate conference.
- Urging global leaders to include and recognise knowledge from Indigenous peoples and local communities in discussions around proposed solutions to environmental challenges.
- Helping to shape and promote biodiversity standards and credit developments.
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned around opportunities to use biodiversity sustainably for economic development.

Krishnan Guru-Murthy interviewing Professor Suzanne Simard for the 16th Kew International Medal award.

In our manifesto, we committed to delivering change by providing scientific evidence and convening debate to inform opinion and decision-making. Working with the UK Government, foreign administrations and other partners, we strive to use our voice, provide evidence and offer expert advice towards halting and reversing biodiversity loss, supporting the restoration of natural habitats and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. We convene international discussions with world-leading experts on how best to address current urgent challenges; provide submissions to government and parliamentary calls for scientific evidence; host VIPs, influencers and change-makers; and use evidence provided by our world-leading scientific and horticultural research to help shape debate, policy and practice domestically and on the world stage.

Championing biodiversity on the global stage

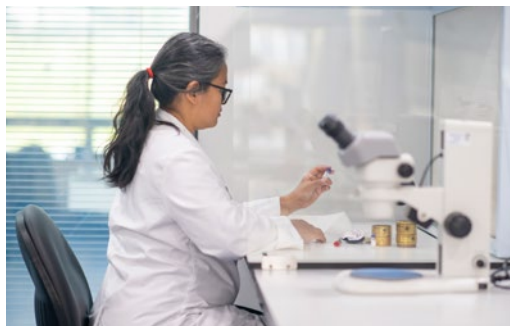
Kew highlighted the interconnected nature of the climate and biodiversity crises at events in 2023 before, during and after the United Nations (UN) COP28 Climate Conference in Dubai. Prior to COP28, we partnered with the international affairs think-tank Chatham House to showcase Wakehurst's Nature Unlocked work (see also page 7) and curate a round-table event on how science can meet the needs of policymakers and investors. We also worked with the Science Museum and National History Museum on a pre-COP28 event focused on sustainable cities, where Kew shared expertise on the role nature can play in making urban areas more resilient to climate change.

Then, at the UN conference, Kew experts called for methods and approaches for managing climate change to be grounded in scientific evidence and designed to protect nature. As a real-world example of our work at the boundary of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods, we provided sustainably produced coffee in the UK Pavilion. The coffee was grown in a collaboration between Kew, Ethiopian farmers and hand-roasted coffee producer Union.

With traditional coffee harvests deteriorating, the initiative encouraged farmers to grow local wild coffee as a high-income speciality product, conserving forests they would otherwise have cleared and supporting local biodiversity.

Kew, with the Crop Trust, Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) and Chef's Manifesto, hosted a 'Food Forever Experience'. Using forgotten and under-utilised foods, chefs created tasting dishes, enabling Kew to initiate discussions on issues around crop diversification and sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture. Finally, as a partner of the UK Government and a member of the recently formed Biodiversity Alliance with the Natural History Museum and the Zoological Society of London, we convened and participated in a range of additional panel discussions and interactive experiences at COP28.

To capitalise on the momentum generated by the UN conference, we invited 100 thought leaders to Kew Gardens in January 2024 – in our second such annual event – to consider progress towards, and challenges to, meeting the 2030 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



Kew scientists lend groups their expertise

Kew contributed expert advice via a number of channels during the year, with staff attending working group meetings for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) processes, and feeding into into CBD advisory panels. Kew scientists also sat on Defra plant-health and pollinator-strategy boards, supported the Defra-funded Centre for Forest Protection, and participated in International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) panels.

In the capacity of the CITES Scientific Authority for Flora, Kew advised on over 500 CITES permits, equating to 4,000 records of scientific advice, to ensure international trade of species was not detrimental to wild populations. To undertake these risk-based assessments, resources including Kew's Plants of the World Online portal were used to check species' names, assess extinction risk and understand plant distributions.

As part of the UK delegation at the CITES 26th Plants Committee Meeting (July 2023) and CITES 77th Standing Committee Meeting (November 2023), Kew expertise was visible across several agenda items on CITES and Red List checklists, helping to further understanding of species' conservation status and the threats they face.

Reminiscence project informs national dementia research

In 2023, the Kew Community Access and Learning Team developed a new 'reminiscence project' for immigrants to the UK with dementia. The project formed part of ENLIVEN, an initiative based at the University of Exeter that conducted research on healthy aging in the UK between 2021 and 2024. ENLIVEN aimed to make the wellbeing benefits of outdoor activities accessible to older people with cognitive impairment; our project findings fed into a report and a policy brief that provided recommendations on how to make nature-based attractions and experiences in the UK more dementia-inclusive.

ENLIVEN fitted into Kew's wider agenda of addressing equality, diversity and inclusivity by reaching out to more ethnically diverse communities in London. The reminiscence project ran glasshouse tours and art workshops, during which plants and fungi from Kew's collections were used as stimuli to help participants explore their memories of the natural world. Kew worked with Nubian Life, a day centre in Shepherd's Bush, London, which supports people with dementia of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Ghanaian artist Seiwa Cunningham and several volunteers facilitated the sessions, which were held over six weeks.



Providing regular support to policymakers

Kew continued in its position as Strategic Science Lead for the UK Government's flagship Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate, which aims to fill crucial research gaps on nature-based solutions to climate change.

We submitted evidence to parliamentary inquiries on horticulture skills, fungi, insect decline and food security, as well as to the call for views from the International Advisory Panel of Biodiversity Credits. Plus, we fed into the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's International Development White Paper process.

Our director, Richard Deverell, travelled to Chennai, India, to support the then Defra Secretary of State on the sidelines of the G20 environment ministers' meeting and to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the botanic garden in Chennai. This MoU commits to Kew providing advice and expertise around landscape planning, developing plant collections, and botanic garden management. Kew will also help to conserve and propagate native plant species of Tamil Nadu, including rare, threatened and endangered species.

We also leveraged our convening power over the year by hosting international delegations, ambassadors, ministers, members of the House of Lords Peers for the Planet Group, cross-party committees of MPs and corporate actors. These meetings sought to influence dialogue and to highlight data and resources available at Kew to support and inform decision-makers.

Biodiversity champion wins Kew award

Kew awarded Canadian scientist and author Professor Suzanne Simard the prestigious Kew International Medal in 2023 for her invaluable work and devotion championing biodiversity in forests. Simard's bestselling memoir, *Finding the Mother Tree*, had inspired thousands with its call for people to protect, understand and connect with the natural world, while Simard's TED talks had attracted 10 million viewers worldwide. Professor Simard received the medal in a ceremony at the Royal Society in London. In the keynote lecture she gave at the event, Simard stressed the urgent need for community-led decision-making in the stewardship of threatened landscapes.



The nature of conversation

We continued to collaborate with event organiser 5x15 to deliver a series of inspirational talks. Almost 2,000 people joined us live in-person or online, with another 14,500 people watching and listening to the talks later online. The series helped to extend our presence far beyond our garden sites and bring discussions on nature into forums that Kew has not traditionally been associated with.

The first talk, in October, was inspired by the *Queer Nature* festival. It featured Colombian biologist Brigitte Baptiste, writer Luke Turner, former Kew Trustee Jonathan Drori and Kew scientist Bat Vorontsova. Another talk covered perspectives around young people and the environment, involving thought leaders such as Kew Champions and adventurers Phoebe Smith and Dwayne Field, Kew's Youth Programme Coordinator Claire Howard and climate activist Tori Tsui. Other talk themes included 'Nature and Health', 'History and Future of Botanic Gardens' and 'Arts and Nature'.

Achieving our manifesto for change priorities

Achieving the five priorities we set out in 'Our manifesto for change 2021–2030' demands that we have the people, financial health and infrastructure we need to succeed. Our 2023 annual staff survey results show that staff engagement is high at 72%, and 91% of our staff are proud to tell others they are part of Kew. This year, we raised £66 million through fundraising, research grants, admissions, memberships, events, retail and licensing, which is a 18% increase on the previous year.

This included £16.4 million raised by Kew Development, the directorate responsible for generating funds through philanthropy, including individuals, trusts, corporate partnerships, legacies, commemorative giving and our Patrons programme.

We invested in renovations to several buildings, as well as technology to underpin our ambitious digitisation project and our visitor operations, retail and marketing processes.

Promoting the sustainable use of species

Our long-term objectives include promoting the sustainable use of plants and fungi. To this end, the innovative Kew spinout company, Kew REACH, entered its set-up phase in December 2023. Powered by Kew's scientific expertise, reputation and integrity, its mission is to be a world-leading, science-led, trusted firm consulting on habitat issues. This is the first commercial spinout arising from a joint-venture agreement signed by Kew in 2022 with Gaia Sciences Innovation (GSI). GSI was set up by Greensphere Capital LLP to evaluate outputs from Kew's scientific work that could form the basis of commercial enterprises. Accessing green finance is a key government priority. The investments made by GSI will serve to develop the UK as an international scientific and entrepreneurial hub for protecting and restoring biodiversity.

We also renewed our trademark licence and science partnership with Procter & Gamble (P&G) for a further ten years. The aim of this long-term partnership is to study plant health, apply research findings to improve hair and skin health, and promote the sustainable use of plants and fungi in a way that supports local communities. Currently, Kew identifies and authenticates botanical ingredients in P&G's Herbal Essences haircare range, identifies active ingredients in plants that could form the basis of new products, and provides expert advice on sustainably sourcing botanical ingredients. Kew has worked with the commercial sector since the 1980s, with partnerships supporting our efforts to grow long-term, sustainable income.

A scientist authenticates eucalyptus as part of Kew's partnership with Procter & Gamble.



Revitalising our Kew Gardens and Wakehurst sites

This year saw us renovate the Orangery, extend the Great Broad Walk Borders and expand the Mediterranean Garden at Kew Gardens, among many other smaller-scale projects. The Orangery reopened in June 2023 following an extensive Defra-funded refurbishment programme that highlighted the statues, repaired the ceilings, improved the acoustics and provided new toilets.

Summer 2023 saw the extension of the Great Broad Walk Borders, the world's longest double herbaceous borders, with funding from The Davis Foundation. The extension introduced drought-tolerant plants, such as red-hot pokers (*Kniphofia* species), blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*) and catmint (*Nepeta* species). Meanwhile, work continued to expand Kew's Mediterranean Garden to highlight the diversity of life that Mediterranean climates support.

Fully funded by Defra, the refurbishment of the roof on Wakehurst's central Elizabethan Mansion is on course to be completed by late 2024. The £6 million programme, the largest of its kind ever undertaken by Kew, began on the 1590 Grade I listed building in late 2022.

The value of Kew

The economic value of Kew to the UK economy rose from £245 million in 2019 to £369 million in 2023. For every £1 spent operating Kew, £3.81 of benefits were generated for the UK in 2023, up from £3.30 in 2019. These were the headline findings of *The Economic Value of Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew*, an economic evaluation covering 2022/2023, commissioned by Kew from Oxford Economics.

Taking strides towards our climate-positive goals

We continued our efforts towards making Kew climate positive by 2030 with some major works to decarbonise our operations. We undertook substantial work on our multi-million-pound project to decarbonise the Jodrell Laboratory at Kew Gardens, for example. With funding from Defra, we have replaced the gas and oil boilers with water- and air-source heat pumps. These changes should achieve a 49% decrease in overall energy use. We also began overhauling the energy system of the Palm House towards achieving net-zero carbon targets. And we secured funding to replace a significant number of Kew's hydrocarbon-fuelled vehicles with electric replacements.

Kew Science attracts diverse funding

External funding is critical to Kew's delivery of collaborative world-class scientific research at home and abroad. Kew Science was awarded more than £8 million in funding from international and national grants to support its work this year, of which £3 million was generously donated by philanthropic funders. International bodies, including the European Commission, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, provided 12 of the grants awarded this year. Five of these projects involved international partners or fieldwork (or both) in Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Denmark, USA, Indonesia and Vietnam. UK-based funders including Defra, the Darwin Initiative, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Royal Society funded the remaining new Kew Science projects during this period. Twenty-one of these projects involved international partners or fieldwork (or both) in China, Ethiopia, Guinea, Greece, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Saint Helena, and Turks and Caicos Islands.



Embracing equality, diversity and inclusion

Kew continued to deliver on its 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020–24', which identified actions to: broaden the diversity of the people we employ; increase the number of visitors to Kew Gardens and Wakehurst from under-represented communities; and to embed diversity and inclusion into Kew's culture. With these goals in mind, we signed the Race at Work Charter, an initiative led by Business in the Community, in which we publicly pledged to take seven actions to improve equality of opportunity in the workplace.

We also took steps to deliver on recommendations in our 2022 history, equity and inclusion action plan, which range from developing understanding of Kew's history and heritage, to broadening public engagement and strengthening our organisational culture. For example, we hosted a series of talks by speakers including writer Amitav Ghosh, journalist Sathnam Sanghera and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer to explore diverse perspectives and elevate new narratives around Kew's history.



New nature-based activities help us raise funds

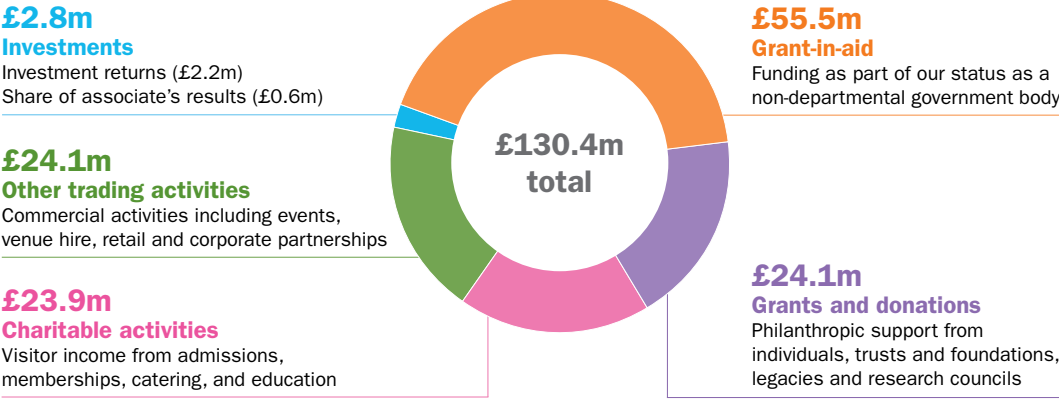
Commercial income from ticketed events increased 5% year on year, in part thanks to new activities we introduced. With nature having a positive impact on physical and mental health, we focused on expanding our programme of wellbeing activities. Nearly 2,000 people bought a ticket to take part in new therapeutic sound baths and tai chi classes, alongside old favourites such as forest bathing, sunrise yoga in the Temperate House and our regular Summer Cycle. We also launched the Nash Sessions, two sell-out candlelit concerts held in Kew's iconic Nash Conservatory.

Transforming Wakehurst's nursery

Work began to replace Wakehurst's nursery, which is now over 40 years old. The new facility will enable Wakehurst's experts to unlock the natural capital of the Millennium Seed Bank and to build upon decades of experience at Wakehurst in growing plants for research and seed banking. It will also act as a bridge between the vast seed collections in the Millennium Seed Bank and Kew's Herbarium and Living Collections. Having the state-of-the-art nursery will help us to pioneer new solutions to UK tree health, establish definitive methods to cultivate the world's most endangered plant species and develop climate-resilient crops through genomic research. The project was made possible by funding from Stephen Lansdown CBE and Margaret Lansdown, the Wolfson Foundation and other philanthropic sources.

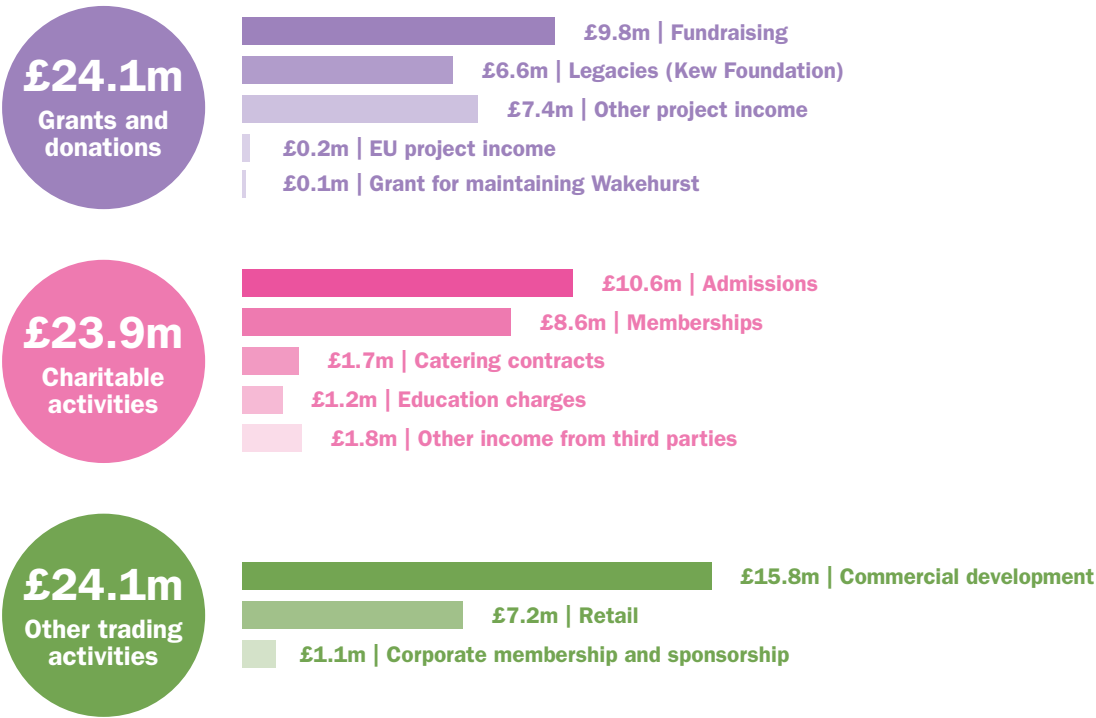
Finances

Kew income 2023/2024

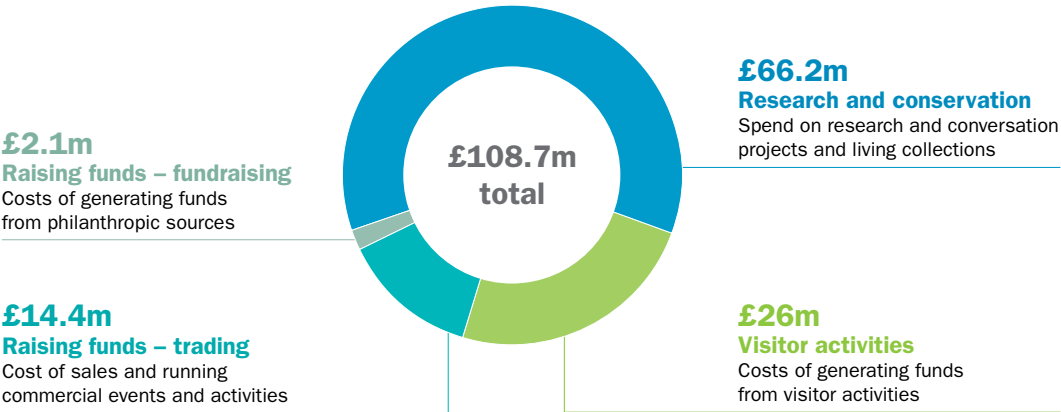


The surplus for the year is attributed to restricted funding given to Kew for specific purposes by donors and does not relate to operating activities.

Breakdown of Kew-generated income



Kew expenditure 2023/2024



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who have chosen to remain anonymous.**

All life depends on plants and fungi for water, food, clean air and medicine, yet 1 million species are facing extinction as a result of climate change and biodiversity loss. At Kew, we are using our world-class scientific expertise and vast collections to identify nature-based solutions to the climate emergency, but we can't do this alone, we are seeking global philanthropic partners to join us as we commit to creating a step-change in the way we understand and protect the natural world. Our ambitions will set us on a path to delivering transformational change by 2030 – together we can create a new future for nature.

For more information, contact the Kew Development Office
via development@kew.org

The green elfcup (*Chlorociboria aeruginascens*) is
commonly seen in the UK on decomposing wood.





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