

## Conservation Horticulture Working Group

### Minutes of the Meeting/Workshop – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Name	Location	Organisation
Neil Anderson	UK	RBG, Kew
Keith Bensusan	Gibraltar	Gibraltar Botanic Garden
Creightanya Brewley	BVI	National Parks Trust for the Virgin Islands
Kimberley Burch	Bermuda	Government of Bermuda
Torika Christian	Pitcairn	Pitkern Botanic Garden
Nicholas Coelho	Bermuda	BZA (Bermuda Zoological Association)
Alison Copeland	Bermuda	Durham University
Omari Dill	Bermuda	Government of Bermuda
Emily Ferguson	Bermuda	Bermuda Botanical Gardens
Naqqi Manco	TCI	DECR
Leigh Morris (Chair)	UK	The Wildlife Trusts / UKOTCF Council
Martina Peters	St Helena	St Helena National Trust
Jodey Peyton (Minutes)	UK	UKOTCF
Mike Pienkowski	UK	UKOTCF Council Chair
Jim Reid	IoM	Isle of Man Wildlife Trust
Chris Sealys	Montserrat	Montserrat National Trust
Catherine Wensink	UK	UKOTCF

#### Agenda:

1. Adoption of the Conservation Horticulture Working Group (UKOTCF Chair) – 5 mins
2. Welcome and introductions (Chair and all) – 10 mins
3. Aims of the CHWG and today's meeting (Chair) – 5 mins
4. Considerations for designing a plant nursery (Chair) – 20 mins
5. Designing a native plant nursery – A Turks and Caicos case study (B Naqqi) – 20 mins
6. Q&A and discussion session (all) – 25+ minutes
7. Updates from UKOTCF: EcoMatch, Regional Working Groups, etc. (Leigh and Jodey) – 15 mins
8. Topic for the next CHWG (Chair/all) – 5 mins
9. AOB (all) – 10 mins
10. Close and next workshop topic (Leigh) – 5 mins

## 1. Welcome and Group Purpose

- Leigh Morris welcomed participants and chaired the meeting, supported by Jodey Peyton. Attendees introduced themselves, showing a wide range of experience across the UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies, from botanic gardens, trusts, government agencies, and partner organisations.
- Mike Pienkowski formally welcomed the group on behalf of UKOTCF Council and confirmed Council support for the Working Group. The purpose of the group was reaffirmed as sharing knowledge, building practical skills, and strengthening native plant conservation through horticulture across the territories.

## 2. Presentation: Top Tips for designing a plant nursery (see slides)

- Leigh Morris outlined practical principles for nursery design. His main message was that nurseries should be designed around a clear purpose rather than built first and then plant production considered/planned later.
- Members were encouraged to define what species they need to grow, in what numbers, for what conservation purpose, and using which propagation methods before deciding on infrastructure. Leigh stressed the importance of a production list, realistic scale, efficient layout, safe access, reliable watering, suitable work and storage areas, and minimising unnecessary labour such as excessive weeding, carrying, and repeated potting-on.
- Examples from St Helena, Ascension, Montserrat, Gibraltar, the Isle of Man, Laos, and Oman illustrated that successful nurseries can range from very low-tech to highly resourced. The consistent lesson was that the principles remain the same: the nursery should match local conditions, available materials, staffing capacity, climate, and plant needs.
- Additional points included avoiding unnecessary complexity, designing for public engagement where relevant, and ensuring facilities support staff comfort and safe working.
- In response to questions, Leigh gave a brief explanation of mist propagation, describing it as a way of maintaining very high humidity around cuttings so they stay alive long enough to root. He noted this is helpful for some species but should only be installed where genuinely needed.

## 3. Case study: designing and developing native plant nurseries in the Turks and Caicos Islands (see slides)

- B Naqqi Manco presented lessons from nearly two decades of nursery development in the Turks and Caicos Islands, including four nursery sites across two islands.
- The work began as part of Caicos pine recovery in response to severe impacts from an introduced scale insect, and later expanded to wider native plant propagation.
- Early nurseries relied heavily on salvaged materials, donated shade cloth, simple watering systems, and improvised benches. Although basic, these nurseries enabled substantial learning and practical conservation outputs.
- Key lessons included the importance of shelter from rain, avoiding trip hazards, providing safe and adequate water infrastructure, keeping materials off the ground, and understanding the biological needs of target species.
- Despite setbacks, the programme propagated 118 native species, developed propagation protocols for more than 60 species, produced over 1,000 Caicos pines, supported major outplanting work, and helped reduce harvesting pressure on some threatened plants by growing material for wider planting.
- B Naqqi Manco highlighted several major challenges: hurricanes, unreliable and sometimes brackish water supplies, pest pressure from surrounding farmland, weak security, contractor misunderstandings, limited local specialist infrastructure, and the reality that irrigation reduces labour but does not replace it.
- Hurricane Irma destroyed much of one nursery structure, although fortunately many larger Caicos pine plants survived due to emergency preparation. A central lesson was that nursery siting, drainage, biosecurity, and storm-readiness must be considered from the start.
- The new nursery now being completed on North Caicos reflects these lessons. Features include a closed shed, reinforced roof structure, provision for elevated water storage, covered areas to protect seedlings from heavy rain, improved benching, perimeter fencing, outdoor storage, and planned shade cloth that can be unclipped and secured ahead of storms.
- Brian also emphasised record-keeping, plant labelling, seed tracking, practical staff skills, and the need for realistic nursery management systems.

#### 4. Discussion and Q&A

- It was explained that flood benches are used for bottom watering, especially to reduce damping-off in seedlings, while noting the need to manage disease risks in recirculating water.
- Members compared views on nursery flooring, with strong caution expressed about gravel because of weeds, pests, noise, and difficulties moving equipment, although some wetter sites may still require adapted solutions.
- Record-keeping, seed storage, and species-level tracking were also discussed, with B Naqqi Manco outlining their use of a detailed Excel-based database for Caicos pine and simpler inventory systems for other nursery stock.
- There was strong interest in further exchange on species-specific propagation and potential plant or seed sharing, particularly in the wider Caribbean context, including Bermuda.
- Participants noted both the opportunities and the constraints, especially around provenance, phytosanitary requirements, biosecurity, and legal transfer processes.
- Kew was identified as a potentially useful partner in future discussions, alongside existing regional networks and seed bank relationships.

#### 5. UKOTCF updates

- Leigh provided a short update on [EcoMatch](#), UKOTCF's platform for showcasing conservation projects to potential funders. Members were encouraged to upload projects, including but not limited to conservation horticulture, as a way to increase project visibility and build momentum with funders over time.
- Jodey highlighted UKOTCF's wider regional and thematic working groups, including regional groups, the invasive ant working group, and early discussions around a youth network.

#### 6. Agreed next steps and future meetings

- The survey previously circulated to members identified nursery design as the highest-priority topic, followed by pest, disease, and weed control. During this meeting, members also expressed interest in a session on sourcing plant material, including seed collection, plant exchange, provenance, and practical constraints on moving material between territories. It was agreed that the next meeting should focus on **sourcing plants and plant material**, including exchange issues, with pest, disease, and weed control to follow in a later session.
- Members supported the proposal for CHWG to meet quarterly rather than more frequently.
- August and September were discussed as possible timings for the next meeting, with a preference to be confirmed after considering availability.
- Members invited to suggest case studies, volunteer speakers, and topics, particularly around regional plant sourcing, seed exchange, and territory-specific conservation horticulture practice.
- Leigh thanked all participants for joining and for the open, practical exchange of experience. A group photograph was taken before the meeting closed.

#### 7. Actions

- 7.1 Jodey to recirculate the member survey to anyone who has not yet completed it.
- 7.2 Members to contact Leigh or Jodey if they would like to present a case study or contribute to the next session (or any future sessions).
- 7.3 UKOTCF to scope the next meeting on sourcing plants and plant material, including seed exchange and provenance considerations.
- 7.4 Neil Alderson to explore whether relevant colleagues at Kew could contribute to next session.
- 7.5 Members to consider submitting suitable conservation projects to EcoMatch.
- 7.6 UKOTCF to confirm the date of the next quarterly meeting after reviewing availability. Confirmed as 26<sup>th</sup> August 2026 1600-1800 BST (calendar appt shared).