

ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Custodian holding trustees Professor J E Good, OBE
Dr L Joyce
Mrs J Ryan

Trustees	Mr R Amos	(Appointed 12 November 2016)
	Mr C Bailes	(Appointed 11 November 2017 - Officer)
	Dr A Cooper	(Appointed 12 November 2016)
	Professor J W Galloway	(Appointed 12 November 2011 - Officer)
	Mr D Morris	(Appointed 11 November 2017)
	Mr M Rogerson	(Appointed 12 November 2016 - Officer)
	Mr J Webster	(Appointed 17 November 2018)
	Mr D Haselgrove	(Appointed 27 April 2019)
	Mr D Mountfort	(Appointed 16 November 2019)
	Mrs G Devries	(Appointed 16 November 2019)
Mrs C Sawyer	(Appointed 16 November 2019)	

President Mr C Bailes

Treasurer Professor J W Galloway

Director Mr A M Bryan (Appointed 20/01/2020)
Mrs C McGregor (Retired 29/02/2020)

Charity number 207478

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Avon Bank
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ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY

TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

The trustees present their report and financial statements for the year ended 31 August 2020.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the Society's Constitution, the Charities Act 2011 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019)".

Objectives and activities

The objects are set out in Clause 3 of the Constitution, namely to:

Educate the public and its members about the cultivation and conservation of alpine plants.

This will include:

- To gather and disseminate details of their cultivation and conditions under which they grow in nature by means of a Journal - presently entitled *The Alpine Gardener* - and by other special publications
- To hold shows of alpine plants
- To give advice on any matters concerning these plants
- To organise scientific, botanical and horticultural expeditions to study alpinists in native habitats
- To promote research into alpinists and their cultivation
- To arrange tours and visits
- To organise meetings and Conferences
- To promote the formation of Local and Special Interest Groups of the Society
- To award grants for travel, study or scientific/educational purposes and also relevant conservation initiatives
- To undertake any activities that shall be consistent with the purpose for which the Society is constituted.

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TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

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Activities that provide a Public Benefit

In 2018 the Society awarded a grant of £30,000 for a conservation project concerned with montane flora in the English Lake District. The aim of the project which is still running is to preserve and rejuvenate existing habitat within a specific area as well as re-colonization of the area with native plants. Work has continued throughout this year and the site is producing good results. Society members are actively involved in the propagation and re-planting of native species. Further work will include creation of pathways and information boards for visitors. All such activities are aimed at raising awareness of alpine plants and highlighting the importance of conservation of habitats and threatened plant populations.

The charity had planned to hold 22 alpine plant shows at venues around the UK and one in Ireland. These shows are open to the public and in addition to a large competitive display of alpine plants some shows also feature practical demonstrations and lectures. The aim is to raise public awareness of alpine garden plants and to provide free information on how to cultivate these plants. A number of other smaller demonstrations and talks were to be given at venues around the UK. Unfortunately, the lockdown due to COVID 19 happened after only 5 shows had taken place, the remaining 17 shows were all cancelled. This was not only a loss of income of the local groups and the Society but also a big loss of social engagement between members.

The Society produces a set of 12 'Easy Leaflets' with information on alpine plants and how to grow them. These are freely available at our public events and are also distributed through local groups and some alpine nurseries.

The now updated and improved Society website is a repository for approximately 54,000 plant images and also contains information on plants at shows, as well as a series of gardening diaries/blogs. This information is openly accessible, together with access to the on-line 'Encyclopaedia of Alpines'. The Society's 'on-line flower show' initiative continues to be a popular feature on our website and again is open to public viewing as is our Photographic competition.

AGS Expeditions Ltd runs a number of tours to different locations around the world. Each tour is accompanied by an expert botanist to help identify plants. These tours have an educational aspect and a number of subsidised places/travel grants are made available to those working in horticulture/trainees/students etc, to help them improve their knowledge of alpine plants and habitats. Our tours are open to the public but they are required to become a member of the Society before joining a trip. The number of tours operated each year varies depending on demand and destinations offered. Only two tours were able to leave this year due to the pandemic, this resulted in students who had applied for a grant to travel being put on hold or cancelled until the situation improves.

AGS Publications Ltd trade was hampered considerably as a result of not being able to attend shows or other events this year, this impacted greatly on its financial performance. The Society publishes a number of its own titles through AGS Publications Ltd. These books are both educational and informative on subjects that may not otherwise be published by commercial booksellers. This helps to spread knowledge about a wide range of alpine plants and bulbs. The Society considers it part of its charitable objectives to make such information available to a wider audience and publication of such titles helps to achieve this.

Redevelopment of the Society's garden at Pershore is on-going and a replacement alpine house began construction during 2018. Further work has continued during 2019/20 concentrating on the interior construction and the planting of raised beds is now complete. A water collection tank was installed to collect run-off water from the alpine house and adjacent office buildings. This is for the irrigation of the gardens, thereby helping to reduce the demand on water supplies. The new alpine house will enhance the visitor experience by enabling a wider display of different types of alpine plants. The garden offers free access to visitors and is also used as a teaching resource for horticultural students.

The Society was unable to continue with our educational one-day events and conferences that are open to the public due to the continued pandemic. These events would include a weekend conference, and Bulb Day featuring a variety of guest speakers, both from home and overseas.

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The trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the Society should undertake and ensuring that it provides benefit to the public.

Achievements and performance

The charity has continued to produce its highly respected quarterly Journal and the Editor is constantly seeking new articles with a broad appeal that will be of interest to all members, both beginners and those with more in-depth plant knowledge. The Board believes that the Journal should aim to be accessible but at the same time retain its reputation as a prestigious publication.

The Society's seed exchange scheme, the largest of its kind in the world has continued during the pandemic to distribute seed to a large proportion of the membership, as well as making seed available at a very reasonable cost to the general public and includes a selection of 'Easy packs' aimed to appeal to the less experienced grower. The on-line seed ordering system provides an easy to use facility by which members at home unfortunately overseas members were excluded this year due to the uncertainty of seed being exchanged between the UK & EU and COVID 19. The on-line ordering system has been enhanced to allow greater ordering flexibility and is one of the best systems available.

The Society website now offers the facility for members to join and renew their membership on-line, make conference bookings and to purchase specialist books. Work has continued on the new website incorporating a total re-design, a new membership database, plus enhanced payment facilities and other new features. The Trustee Board see this as an important step to helping safeguard the future of the Society. The re-design of the site has been informed by appropriate qualitative and quantitative research, both with members and non-members interested in plants and gardening. Work on this project has been funded from the Society's investments and includes funds to expand and update plant information contained in the on-line Encyclopaedia of Alpines. This major resource is freely available to members and the general public. Expenditure on such developmental projects may be spread across more than one financial year.

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A series of travel awards and grants would normally be awarded to individuals for projects to further the study of alpine plants. Each year these enable a number of trainee horticulturists to travel to various parts of the world to extend their plant knowledge. Trophies and awards would also be presented to individuals in recognition of their contribution to the world of alpine plants. The pandemic greatly impacted on all of these, resulting in no travel awards or trophies being able to be presented this year.

A 2018 initiative was the funding by the Society of a full-time one-year horticultural training placement at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. It offered someone a unique opportunity to further their knowledge and pursue a horticultural career working with alpine plants. The scheme was funded for a second year in 2019 and another trainee appointment made. We planned to continue the scheme in 2020 and split the placement between Harlow Carr and the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh, this was cancelled as we were not confident that the placement could safely continue during the pandemic. However, we hope to be able to resume this placement in 2021.

Recruitment of new members has been severely hindered by COVID 19, this is mainly as a result in not attending shows or events, where we would normally be able to promote the Society. Net membership has again fallen, but this year the loss is bigger than previous years. There are a number of reasons for this, the increasingly older age profile of the existing membership and the global pandemic. Redevelopment of the society website is regarded by the Trustee Board as a vital initiative to help attract new members. In this respect the Society has begun to implement a social media strategy and appointed a dedicated Social Media Editor who also has responsibility for developing and re-writing content on our new website. We are now very engaged on all social media channels we hold virtual lectures for our members, encourage local groups to hold virtual meetings and have dedicated members areas on Facebook. These incentives are proving very helpful in bringing members together and bring new member to the Society.

During the year the charity has benefited from the work and advice of many volunteers, without whom the charity could not meet its charitable objectives. The value of the work is unquantifiable and any attempt to estimate the numbers involved can only be an approximation. The Trustee Board wishes to recognise this valuable contribution and expresses their grateful thanks to all the volunteers who have given their time to assist the charity in its various activities during the previous twelve months.

Financial review

During the year the charitable group had incoming resources totalling £468,698 (2019 £612,196), of which £128,542 (2019 £141,809) was from membership subscriptions. Total resources expended for the year were £633,125 (2019 £790,690), giving net outgoing (2019 - outgoing) resources (before investment gains/(losses)) of £164,427 (2019 £178,494). There are realised gains of £18,031 (2019 - £25,869) and unrealised losses of £189,643 (2019 - losses £32,901) arising on the investment assets resulting in a decrease in funds of £336,039 (2019 £185,526 decrease), leaving total reserves at £2,489,693.

Of the total funds £196,986 (2019 - £212,405) is restricted in nature, details are provided in the notes to the financial statements, a further £317,704 (2019 - £346,238) has been designated by the trustees for specific purposes, again details are provided in the notes to the financial statements. This leaves, after allowing for intangible fixed assets and for funds that could only be realised upon the sale of tangible fixed assets £1,595,366 (2019 - £1,862,636) as free reserves for the purpose of undertaking the charitable activities.

It is the policy of the Society that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use (ie general funds) should be maintained at a level equivalent to between six and twelve month's expenditure. The trustees considers that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the Society's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserves has been maintained throughout the year, the excess funds are used to advance the cultivation and conservation of alpine plants as set out in the objectives of the charity.

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The committee have power, from time to time, after taking advice from a Member of the London Stock Exchange, to direct the holding trustees concerned to invest the funds of the Society or any part thereof in any way which, in its absolute discretion, thinks fit, in all respects as if it were a sole Beneficial Owner of such funds notwithstanding that such investments may not be investments authorised by law for the investment of funds, and the committee shall have power, from time to time, to direct the holding trustees to vary or transpose such investments.

The holding trustees may also enter into arrangements for the provision of investment management services by stockbrokers, merchant banks and/or suitably qualified investments managers (which may include power for such managers to make specific investment decisions under general policy guidelines laid down from time to time by the committee) to vary or change such arrangements and to pay reasonable charges for such services out of the Society's income.

The investments held by the AGS include UK Government Fixed Interest Bonds, UK Unit Trusts and shares in subsidiary companies.

The market value of the investments decreased this year by £189,643, and is included in (losses)/gains on investment assets. Since the year end a decision was taken to move the investments managed by Blackrock into a more diversified investment portfolio to hedge against any future adverse conditions to the market.

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the Society is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

Plans for the future

The charity will continue with its regular activities in pursuit of its Objectives. This will entail organising shows (particularly attempting to seek out venues that will attract new visitors), tours, travel awards and grants, educational exhibits (especially at major national and regional shows), workshops, the seed exchange scheme and publication of its quarterly journal 'The Alpine Gardener'. The Trustee Board recognises that the Society must concentrate its efforts on attracting new members as part of its exploration of new initiatives to ensure its long-term future. The appointment of a Social Media Editor in 2018 was one such important initiative. The Society will continue to publish information on alpine plants across various social media platforms, thereby reaching a wider and, it is hoped, younger audience. During the global pandemic the Society has needed to consider how we engage with members and the general public, the shift to a more on-line approach including on-line flower shows, virtual lectures and on-line members groups is proving extremely valuable in keeping members engaged and attracting a younger audience.

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Structure, governance and management

The Alpine Garden Society (AGS) was founded in 1929, with the aim of promoting an interest in all aspects of alpine plants, their cultivation in rock gardens and plant conservation in natural habitats. It is a membership organisation, registered with the Charity Commission and is governed by its constitution and rules adopted 4 November 1966, as amended November 2011.

The trustees who currently serve are listed on the Legal and Administrative Information page.

The Charity's present governing body consists of 11 Trustees; 4 of these are Officers who are elected annually, serving for a potential maximum of ten years under the new Constitution adopted at the AGM in November 2011 and later amended in November 2013. Under this Constitution changes were made to the number of trustees elected annually to create a smaller governing body. The aim of this change was to enable the Society to manage its affairs more effectively. Currently there are two trustees elected each year to serve for a period of four years (8 in total), plus a President, Treasurer and up to four other officers who will also be trustees, giving a maximum number of 14 trustees. Trustee vacancies are advertised in the Society's Newsletter that is circulated to all members, both home and overseas. Nominations are invited and the names of nominated candidates, together with supporting statements, are published in the Society Newsletter. If there are more nominations than vacancies, a vote is taken by secret ballot at the AGM. Casual vacancies that arise may be filled by co-option if it is felt to be necessary. An annual Induction Day is organized for all newly elected Trustees and Officers (they are provided with a list of Trustees' duties and responsibilities, the Charity Commission 'Good Trustee Guide', Declaration of Eligibility, together with the Society's 'Code of Conduct' for Trustees).

The governing body is known as the 'Trustee Board' upon which all Trustees (excluding Custodian Trustees) serve. The Board is chaired by the Society's President; policy and strategy are set by the Board. The number of standing committees reporting to the Board has been reduced and the majority of Society business and that of its subsidiary trading companies is now dealt with directly by the Board. This ensures that every Trustee is fully involved in financial, decisions, budget setting and Society activities as a whole. The only remaining committee deals with the operation of the Society's competitive shows. In addition, the Trustee Board may, from time to time, establish working parties to pursue special initiatives such as marketing, website development, educational conferences, displays and specific plant related projects.

The Society has 44 Affiliated Local Groups spread around the UK. Support is offered to the Groups in the form of insurance cover, stationery, publicity material, programme printing, mail shots and free hosting for their own website area. Grants may be given to assist with the cost of speakers or to help with the purchase of equipment.

Specialist Groups - at the beginning of the year the *Fritillaria Group* separated from the Society at the beginning of 2020, and became an independent group. The History of Rock and Alpine gardening Group (HORAG) is open to all members of the Society.

The Charity employs two full-time staff who deal with the administration of the Charity as well as its Limited Companies. The Society employs a professional Editor who has specific responsibility for publication of the Society journal and other society publications. The Society Editor is an ex-officio member of the Trustee Board and other relevant working parties. The newly created post of web and Social Media Editor also carries ex officio membership. The Society Director also serves as an ex-officio member of the Trustee Board and any other relevant committees or working groups. The Society Director is responsible for the implementation of the policies laid down by the Board. In addition to overseeing the administration of the Charity and its subsidiary companies, he gives guidance, advice and support to Officers and Trustees on governance issues. He is also Company Secretary to the limited companies.

The Society Director (Christine McGregor) retired at the end of February 2020 after 18 years of exceptional service to the Society.

The new Director (Tony Bryan) joined the Society in January 2020, Tony brings over 30 years of Senior Management experience in Horticulture Retail.

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Related parties

The Society conducts the majority of its trading activities through two wholly owned subsidiary companies – A.G.S. Publications Limited and AGS Expeditions Limited. The management of these companies is controlled by directors, namely the President, Treasurer and any relevant officer, together with the three Society Custodian Holding Trustees who hold the shares in trust on behalf of the charity.

The trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.

Mr C P Bailes

Trustee

Dated: 24 October 2020