

BGCI BLOG

Meet Dr Carly Cowell; leading the next phase of conservation at BGCI

BY REBECCA HANSELL
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In July 2023, BGCI welcomed a new member to the leadership team. Dr Carly Cowell joined us as the new Director of Conservation Policy & Practice. As BGCI's Communications Officer (Rebecca Hansell), I had the pleasure of getting to know a bit about her background, which I'd love to share with you as we head into this exciting new chapter of BGCI's conservation work.

Carly grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, and eventually moved to Cape Town to continue her studies. She was able to achieve a BSc in Horticulture, an MSc in Ecological Restoration, and a PhD in Environmental Conservation. All of which she did part-time whilst building her career within the sector. She has experience of working at the Millennium Seed Bank Project at, BGCI Member [Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens](#) and coordinating their project in the three Cape Provinces covering work in the Fynbos and Succulent Karoo Biomes.

After banking nearly 3000 species, she went onto work with South African National Parks where she set up the Cape Research Centre, offering scientific support to 6 National Parks. In 2018, she moved to the UK to continue her career as 'Head of CITES' at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, where she stayed to progress to head the Conservation Policy & Science Communications team. During her time at Kew, Carly attended CITES COP19 and CBD COP15 as part of the UK delegation and assisted with setting up Kew as a beacon for plant conservation policy advice.

The role of Director of Conservation Policy & Practice came up at BGCI, and, to quote Dr Cowell herself, 'the rest is history!'



DR CARLY COWELL; MEETING HM KING CHARLES AT THE MILLENNIUM SEED BANK.

With an impressive academic and professional history, we are excited to have Carly on board to help us continue and build upon the vital conservation work that BGCI is undertaking across the world. When asked about her work at BGCI, Dr Carly Cowell had this to say:

'I like to see research and science applied and in use, to see the learning cycle and adapting to the dynamics of the natural environment. BGCI is the epitome of this, working with passionate people and organisations to make a difference to biodiversity and particularly plant conservation.'

'I would like for BGCI Conservation to be the 'go-to' hub for guidance and expertise for all tree conservation prioritisation, implementation, and monitoring, working with and through our vast network of members and partners.'

A huge part of the BGCI Conservation Programme to date has been the success of the Global Tree Assessment, which has just entered its final phase. Dr Carly Cowell has expressed the need to focus on what the next phase will be as we move forward.

'... we need to look at the next phase of this [the Global Tree Assessment] foundational body of work and how we can inform conservation practice of tree species and their associated ecosystems. Similarly, the Global Trees Campaign ended in June 2023 and the focus here is also on looking at ways to continue this work.'

Carly continues, 'Drawing all the conservation work of BGCI, its members, and partners, sharing knowledge, and expertise under one umbrella, focused on increasing biodiversity is what I would like to see within my team. The most pressing issue for me, and I dare say everyone, is the rapid loss of natural habitats, and by default the trees and other species that call them home. We need to protect and conserve what remains, restore what we can, and increase biodiversity to improve the planet's resilience to a changing climate.'

These are impressive goals for an impressive addition to the BGCI team. With such important work to undertake in the coming years, it is important that we all find ways to unwind and reset, so we are ready to tackle the environmental issues around us. So, what does Carly do for fun?

'I'm a qualified rope-access mountain rescuer and a burn boss for prescribed wildfire management – also called a Fire Ecologist. I like being outdoors hiking, riding, or running, although a good book and some soulful music is also a firm favourite.'

It seems to me that Carly is going to be a good fit for the team here at BGCI! So, what else does Carly have to say about getting the most out of the work done at BGCI?

'I encourage botanical organisations to join BGCI as members, so that we can share our expertise and resources in the global fight for plant conservation. We have numerous projects around the world which could be scaled up and have a bigger positive impact for saving plants but require resources and funding to continue. Lastly, I believe that each of us can play a role in the conservation of plants by being aware of our actions and how they impact plant survival, and by choosing the right tree to plant in the right place.'

A big part of Dr Carly Cowell's work at BGCI will be to continue the publication of the BGJournal, which she is already diving into with a bumper issue planned for early 2024.

'I wanted to focus the next issue on the GSPC [The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation] and the amazing achievements botanic gardens and institutes made in the first 2 phases and how engaged they have been in developing the next 9-year period of actions. As such, it was decided to hold off on the August issue of BGJournal and wait for the SBSTTA [The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice] meeting in October, in order that we can share the new plant conservation actions for the GBF [Global Biodiversity Framework]. We will then have a bumper issue in 2024, showcasing the achievements of the plant conservation community and inspiring us all to embrace the new actions and achieve greater conservation outcomes by 2030.'

For this exciting bumper issue of BGJournal, we will be welcoming article contributions from members and partners, highlighting the conservation achievements since 2002, and what's in place to get us to 2030.

The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) was adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2002 and the first phase, up to 2010, consisted of three objectives covering 16 targets. During this period the GSPC formed the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation (GPPC) to help ensure plants were included in National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plans. In the second phase of the GSPC (2011-2020), 5 objectives were adopted with 16 updated targets.

BGCI is the Secretariat for the Global Partnership, supporting the GSPC through its first 2 phases and on to the next stage of its evolution.

GSPC III

A summary timeline for the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC).
Towards 2023-2030 action for plants

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2002 GSPC ADOPTED

- In 2002 the GSPC was adopted at the 6th Conference of the Parties (COP6) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

2002-2010 GSPC TARGETS

- The GSPC consisted of 3 objectives covering 16 targets.

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2004 GPPC FORMED

- To support national implementation of GSPC targets the Global Partnership for Plant Conservation (GPPC) was formed in 2004.

2010 GSPC TARGETS REVIEWED

- In 2010 the GSPC was renewed and revised, alongside the Aichi Targets.

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2011-2020 GSPC TARGETS

- The GSPC was renewed to 5 objectives covering 16 targets at COP10 in Nagoya.

2022 GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

- At COP15 in Montreal, the CBD agreed on a GBF with 23 targets to achieve by 2030.

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2021-2030 GSPC ACTIONS

- Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) will agree GSPC actions in October CBD meeting.



BOTANIC GARDENS
CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

In 2021, a draft set of GSPC targets were updated to align with the Global Biodiversity Framework. At COP15 in Montreal (2022) the CBD asked the GPPC to prepare a 'set of complementary actions related to plant conservation'. New actions have been written with the aim to provide the plant conservation community with a framework for plant conservation actions as they implement the Global Biodiversity Framework. These actions have been sent out by the CBD for peer review and will be discussed at the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the CBD in October 2023.

From new ideas, projects, and programmes, a bumper issue of BGJournal, a new phase of the Global Tree Assessment approaching, and a wealth of experience to lean on to help BGCI forge ahead with its global conservation initiatives, I am sure this is the start to an exciting new chapter for Dr Carly Cowell and the whole BGCI team. We can't wait to share our progress with you along the way.

Written by Rebecca Hansell (BGCI Communications Officer) and Dr Carly Cowell (BGCI Director of Conservation Policy & Practice). You can learn more about BGCI's conservation work by visiting our page on [tree conservation](#) or reading about our [Projects & Case Studies](#).

