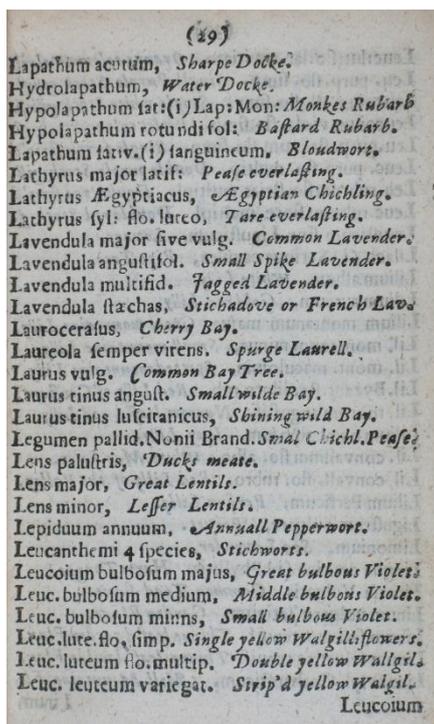


## Managing living collections at the Oxford Botanic Garden



As with other botanic gardens and arboreta, the Oxford Botanic Garden together with the related Harcourt Arboretum maintains detailed records about all its plants. These records are kept up to date and are easily accessible to those looking after the collection.

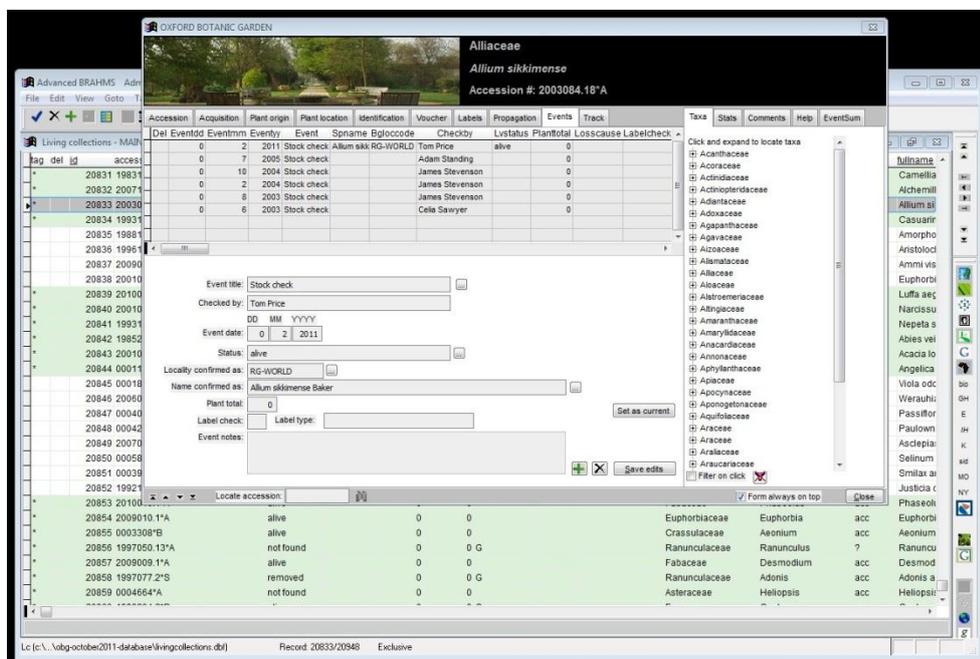
The Botanic Garden at Oxford has kept records in some form or another since it began, including a catalogue listing all plants at the Garden, published in 1648.



A sample page from Bobart the Elder's *Catalogue Plantarum* published in 1648.

As computers became common in the workplace, the record keeping system moved to an electronic format. The first such system in 1986 used a simple database filing system. In the mid-1990's, the records were moved to another system called BGBBase. This software was developed at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and is widely used.

Over the past few years, as the Botanic Garden has worked ever more closely with



the Oxford Herbaria (FHO and OXF), it seemed sensible to investigate whether the Oxford Botanic Garden and the Oxford Herbaria could use compatible data management systems, allowing closer integration of herbarium and botanic garden data, a key part of our future strategy. Given that Denis Filer had been working with Gerda van Uffelen at the Leiden Botanic Garden to develop a new Living Collections module for BRAHMS, it seemed a natural choice to make the move to BRAHMS to facilitate this integration.

In early 2011 we began the project to transfer the data from BGBBase to the BRAHMS Living Collections module and by mid-2011, BRAHMS was up and running at the Botanic Garden. Since then, we have been actively using and developing the module suggesting new functions as we go. In February 2012, we starting using BRAHMS as a multi-user system running over terminal services and I'm pleased to say we can now access the database from different locations using Mac and PC workstations.

In addition to being able to work closely with the Herbarium there are several other advantages that compelled us to make the change. Data searching is straightforward and powerful and all members of staff can easily interrogate the database to find out what they need to know. For example, we can easily interrogate our records to generate lists and statistics on how many different species and accessions we have in any taxonomic group. A typical query would be to list how many different species and accession we have of *Euphorbia*. We can also filter search results using multiple

parameters, for example 'last stock-check date' or 'growing in Family Bed SWC-5'.

Whilst these queries may seem trivial, they are a powerful source of data and statistics that enable us to analyse our collections and further develop their diversity and breadth of utility.

BRAHMS also allows us to record considerable additional data about the plants in our collection, for example, images, flowering times, propagation events and species texts. We can format these and other data into labels, stock-check lists, seed lists, species reports for garden visitors, students and schools, etc. or export the data to Excel, word processors or elsewhere to create more elaborate outputs.

It is not often that you can honestly say that a group of people get excited about a new work-related computer programme! But BRAHMS has genuinely generated that feeling amongst the staff at OBGHA. They feel empowered to look up the plant records and to update the database on a daily basis. The more data and the better data we add to the database the more we will be able to use its various tools.

The use of BRAHMS is really only just beginning at OBGHA. There are plans now to map the collections at Harcourt Arboretum, to add a comprehensive set of images of the flowering plants along with phenology details and to publish these data via BRAHMS online, providing useful data to all of those interested in our collections both within and beyond the scientific community.

<http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/>

Alison Foster