

## Fagus

On 14 October, a small group of members met to study the genus *Fagus* at Arboretum Trompenburg before travelling to Arboretum Kalmthout the following day. PIOTR KRASIŃSKI writes about some of the highlights and GERT FORTGENS reports on Professor Goetghebeur's presentation on the genus.

These study days fell at a rather unfortunate time in that they immediately followed two tours to Scotland, southern France and Spain, also coinciding with the hastily organised tour to Croatia. This explains why the attendance was so surprisingly low, despite it being one of the first opportunities for members to meet after such a long time without dendrological gatherings. However, for those who were able to come these two days were a real treat in every respect, and the choice of these two arboreta was ideal.

**Trompenburg** was an obvious choice being a ca. 200-year-old arboretum with many mature beech trees, but in particular as it has been involved in the selection of several well-known cultivars, namely *Fagus sylvatica* 'Dawyck Gold', *F. sylvatica* 'Dawyck Purple' and *F. sylvatica* 'Rohan Gold'. These were all raised by Dick van Hoey Smith, the former owner of Trompenburg and one of the select group of dendrologists to be an early member of our society, a further reason for this study day to be held here. We were privileged to be joined on the study day by Dick's son, Wim. The other most known cultivar selected at the arboretum is *F. sylvatica* 'Rohan Trompenburg' a 'Dawyck' seedling pollinated by 'Rohanii' and felt to be an improvement on the latter.

For those not lucky enough to have visited the arboretum, it is situated very centrally in Rotterdam, lying 4 m below sea level, perhaps less surprising being in Holland. It is one of only 21 arboreta to have been awarded a 'Distinguished for Merit' plaque by the IDS over the 43 years since plaques were presented. It was presented at a time when the city was considering taking over Trompenburg for development, surely this presentation will have helped save the arboretum and is very much in the spirit of the gesture and of the Society itself.

The study day was held under a beautiful canopy in the heart of the arboretum and we were given heated cushions with three settings (number three being intolerably warm even for the least sensitive). Nothing but the best for the IDS! A heron was seen from our comfortable vantage point.

The formal part of the study days began with a lecture given by Dr Paul Goetghebeur, retired director Plantentuin Gent, Belgium and emeritus professor from the University of Gent. He gave an overview of the genus *Fagus* in a presentation entitled Morphology and Phytogeny of *Fagus*. We heard about the systematics of the genus *Fagus* geographically as well as botanically. The genus *Fagus* differs from all other Fagaceae in germination, and in the



Gert Fortgens showing samples of *Fagus* during the study day at Trompenburg.

staminate and pistillate inflorescences, it has its distribution over the northern hemisphere with two species in North America (*F. grandifolia*, *F. mexicana*), two species in Europe (*F. sylvatica*, *F. orientalis*), five (–6) species in China and Korea (*F. chienii*, *F. engleriana*, *F. multinervis*, *F. longipetiolata* (= *F. sinensis*!), *F. lucida*) and two (–3) species in Japan (*F. crenata*, *F. japonica*). The name *F. sinensis* seems to have priority over the better known name *F. longipetiolata* due to that its year of publication (1890) lies seven years before that of *F. longipetiolata* (1897). The genus *Nothofagus*, until recently belonging to the Fagaceae, deserves its own family Nothofagaceae based on morphological, chromosome number counts and pollen morphology differences. The genus *Fagus* has two subgenera (subgenus *Fagus* with sessile buds and subgenus *Englerianae* with stipitate buds). The speaker gave an overview of the morphology of the inflorescences, cupulas and winterbuds, and gave the characteristics of the leaves and cupulas of each species. The professor also presented a research report on the important role for foliar water uptake via the trichomes.

We then had two walks through the arboretum concentrating on *Fagus* species and its cultivars. We were guided by our host, Director of the arboretum, Gert Fortgens. Gert talked us through many of the cultivars, their attributes and differences between them and similar cultivars. These two walks were punctuated by lunch and two lectures. The first was from David Bömer from Nursery Bömer on *Fagus* propagation and selection. He showed us a huge number of cultivars, again discussing their strengths as well as weaknesses where appropriate. He was followed by his wife Chantal who





A drainage channel at Arboretum Trompenburg.

talked us through grafting in general and more specifically of *Fagus* cultivars. She then gave us a demonstration which to her was so straightforward, but for a lady who averages 50 grafts per hour, not surprisingly she made it look easy!

The final lecture of the day was given by Gert Fortgens on the beech trees of Trompenburg. He began by talking us through the history of many of the original Trompenburg cultivars, which he of course knows well having worked for and with Dick van Hoey Smith. He too gave his thoughts on the merits of the *Fagus* cultivars, particularly referring to colour and the upright cultivars and those which keep their shape best. Of those it seems to be one, *Fagus orientalis* 'Iskander' that is less known than some of the *Fagus* 'classics' but well worth seeking out and planting. It was a chance seedling from the Bömer nursery.

Our day was finished with drinks under the aforementioned canopy, followed by a delicious Indonesian rice buffet in the arboretum's visitor centre. Those who have not eaten Indonesian cuisine before might well be seeking

it out in the future! Trompenburg as a venue was perfect as was their hospitality. Our sincere thanks go to Gert in particular for organising such a wonderful day but also to all of his staff who made us feel so welcome.

On the following day we met at the **Lowgardens Nursery** at Wernhout where we were warmly greeted by the owners Peter Vanlaerhoven and his wife Pascale. The nursery is situated in a region packed full of nurseries all beautifully kept with not a neglected hedge for miles around. Lowgardens Nursery specialises in rare plants, mainly trees and shrubs, but also perennials and ferns too. There are some cultivars but they are mainly brought in from other nurseries. Peter is more responsible for the nursery itself while Pascale takes care of the propagation from seed or cuttings. All the cuttings are grown organically, they do not use commercial growth hormone but she makes her own willow water into which cuttings are dipped before planting and then watered with the same solution. On arrival we were greeted with tea and coffee and homemade vegan plant-based cakes, all in the spirit of the nursery.



'Tree of the week' namely *Cyclocarya paliurus* (wheel wingnut) at Lowgardens Nursery.

After a few words of introduction about the nursery from Peter, he showed us his collection which also serve as parent plants. There were some treasures, but the tree which probably earned the greatest interest from the group and perhaps our 'tree of the week' was *Cyclocarya paliurus*, the wheel wingnut, with a wonderful display of wheeled seed as its name suggests (see photo above); it hails from moist Chinese and Taiwanese mountain forests.

The group then had an opportunity for dendrological retail therapy and there was something there for anyone feeling the need. The selection was still impressive even though the vultures had been there the previous month at a plant fair. The majority of plants are sold in small pots and are consequently accessible for most pockets.

Now for the final leg and on to **Arboretum Kalmthout**, always a pleasure for IDS members as we returned to the wonderful garden from which the Society hails. On arrival lunch at the visitor centre followed by a short talk by way of introduction from Abraham Rammeloo, Director of the arboretum and IDS Council member and Trustee. He spoke about the history of the arboretum and its connection with the genus *Fagus*. The arboretum has many species and





Arboretum Kalmthout

**Above**, Abraham Rammeloo 'holding up' *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula'.

**Right**, the group of multi-stemmed beech most likely planted as a bunch planned for hedging but never moved?



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cultivars all of which we were shown. We even left the arboretum and onto the village street to see a fine specimen of *Fagus japonica* hanging over the street but neatly pruned by passing traffic. This species is a beautiful tree that is all too rarely planted. Abraham showed us the fine *Fagus* cultivars growing in the garden, but also many other plants of interest. He showed us many specimens of *Rubus*, some rare species which are to be the subject of the next IDS Study Day at Kalmthout provisionally planned for the first weekend of October 2022. As Abraham said himself, this is not a 'sexy' genus, but having seen some of the more unusual ones, it certainly deserves greater attention and this future study day should be one for the diary.

One point of interest was a pair of what, at first glance, were multi-stemmed beech trees remaining from the days when Kalmthout had been a nursery. They were presumably planted as a bundle of several, ready to be used as hedging plants, but never left the nursery. They made a wonderful effect.

There was an opportunity to peep into a canvas cocoon strung between four sturdy trees. This is rented by the arboretum for glamping and is booked every day throughout the summer months and brings in considerable income. The arboretum is of course locked at night so 'glampers' are left in peace. It had even been used for a fiftieth wedding anniversary!

The hospitality here too was clearly in evidence which stems from the de Belder days. Our thanks were extended to Abraham and his team for their preparation and the warm welcome that we received.