

INFORMING THE PUBLIC!

Ex situ conservation of endangered species

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All at the National Botanic Garden of Belgium

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INTRODUCTION

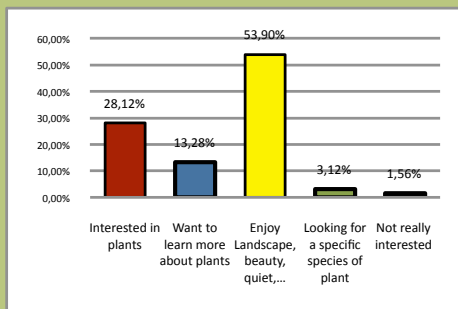
Botanic gardens have been championing plant conservation for decades. Congresses focus on the threats to plant life from habitat change and destruction, but how often do we translate this information to the millions of people visiting our institutes? Unfortunately, the answer is seldom.

One of the threatened species, the newly discovered *Nepenthes bokorensis* MEY (2009) has a fascinating, yet tragic story. It was first discovered as a new species in 2007 on a remote Cambodian hill, but months later its habitat was sold to commercial developers wishing to construct a casino and two international hotels. Fortunately seeds were collected and have been commercially available, which may secure this species survival beyond nature but will it ever return to the wild. Garden visitors were interviewed to determine their thoughts surrounding the example in question, but also on the wider issue of threats to plant species.

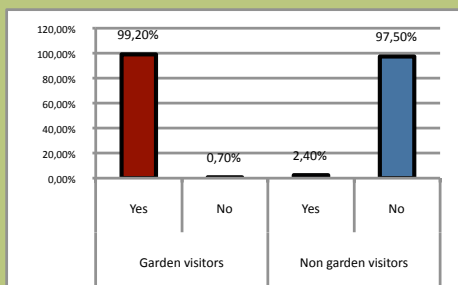
In total 128 visitors were interviewed during the second and third week of May.

RESULTS

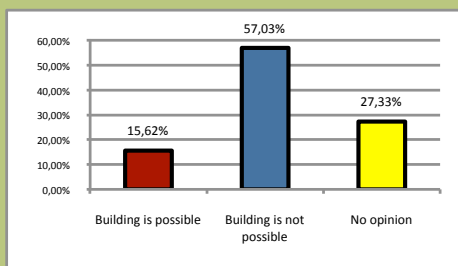
Why do people visit a Botanic Garden?



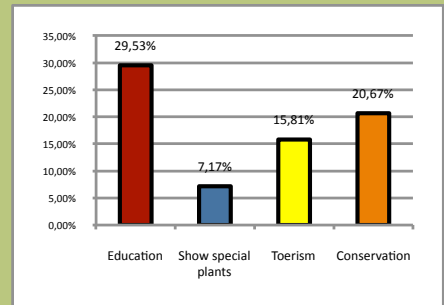
Do people think there are any threatened plant species at the moment?



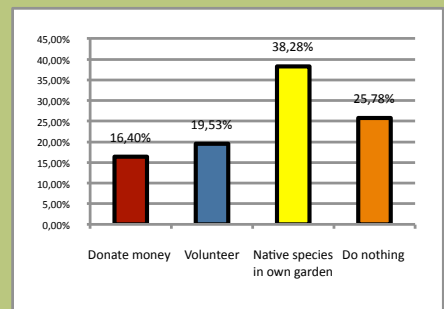
Is it justified to build a casino and hotel on a hill, which is the only know habitat of a newly discovered plant species?



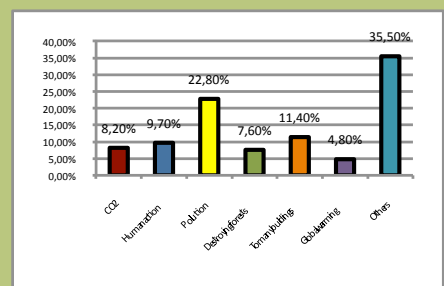
What are, according to our visitors, the main goals of a Botanic Garden?



What would you do to help species from extinction?



What do you think, are to most important reasons to habitat destinction?



OTHER RESULTS

- 96% of our visitors agree with the importance of conserving endangered species, but less than 1 out of 4 can name one: orchids and Edelweiss are the most famous examples of threatened species;

- 13% of the visitors do not know why conservation could be important for themselves. 12% thinks that enjoying nature is the main reason and 15% thinks it's important protecting plants to maintain the circle of life.

CONCLUSION

More education and information about threatened species and habitat threats are vital. Only a small part of our visitors shows a real interest in plants, although awareness of plant threats seems to be significantly higher with Garden visitors, compared to non Garden visitors. We have a receptive audience. Using concrete examples, for instance one threatened species of carnivorous plants, triggers a more direct response than talking in general terms about conservation and threats to plant species. This is something Botanic Gardens should take into account.