



## The Magic of Life Butterfly House

### Conservation and Research

#### The Buddleja Collection

The Magic of Life keeps over 800 plants financed by visitors coming to look at the butterflies. Compared with animals and especially butterflies, species conservation of plants is easier and can amount to simply keeping rare specimens alive in a pots. These are then distributed to interested parties.

The aims of the Buddleja collection are listed below.

- I) To develop and maintain a diverse collection of rare species and hybrids of Buddleja.
- ii) To provide a plentiful supply of Buddleja flowers for feeding the tropical butterflies inside from Spring through to Autumn.
- iii) To promote the cultivation of Buddlejas in gardens and towns as a counter weight to the paucity of nectar plants in the wild.
- iv) To develop new varieties that have more appeal to gardeners through a hybridisation program selecting for plants that have the following traits:-
  - a) New flower forms and colour or improved foliage to widen their appeal to gardeners
  - b) Longer flowering periods or flower outside the main summer period.
  - c) Less vigorous and not so invasive as *B. davidii*.

A collection of over 80 species and varieties of Buddleja has now been established since starting this project around 2005. These were sourced from Botanic Gardens, National Collections, specialist plant nurseries, and some were grown from seed.



i) Rare species and groups at the Magic of Life e.g. *Buddleja colvilei* of which we have five forms of this species complex. *B. cordobensis* is found only in the mountains around Cordoba in Argentina. *B. aff. paniculata* (below left) is a Spring flowerer and a useful nectar plant for that time of year. *B. speciosissima* (below Right) is from one mountain in Brazil and *B. sterniana* is cultivated in just a few specialist collections.



ii) Spring-flowering Buddlejas are *B. paniculata*, *B. salviifolia*, *B. farreri*. Autumn-flowering Buddlejas are *B. macrostachys* and *B. x Weyeriana*. We need to propagate all these species up to have an abundant source of flowers especially in the Spring.

iii) promoting more widespread planting. Buddlejas have started off with a bad name due to the one invasive species. There are plenty of species that are good for insects that do not spread such as the hybrid *B. x Weyeriana* as well its sterile relatives such as *B. Pink Pagoda*. The main reason behind the decline in biodiversity in the UK is the lack of space and food/nectar for insects. Buddlejas are a first-class solution to one part of this problem;



the lack of flowers and nectar. While they have an issue as being an invasive non-native plant, they can equal any UK flower for producing nectar in the high summer.

We promote their use by selling a wide-range of them in our shop and by bringing the Collection into our talks and tours in the daily running of the butterfly house.

#### iv) Developing New Buddlejias

Since 2007, a lot of work has gone into developing new hybrids of Buddlejias and these are then tested on the land for performance. Several garden-worthy hybrids have been raised.

Our first cross in 2007 produced two sister cultivars, B. Blueberry and B. Blackcurrant. Blueberry produces pastel blue flowers, a cross between a B. *forrestii* x B. Black Night.

We have a trio of slow-growing smaller Buddlejias named after the valley here. Rheidol Red, Rheidol Pink and Rheidol Purple which prove popular with the visitors.

We have some B. *colvilei* hybrids with luminous pink dense flowerheads.. A set of *nivea* hybrids have very long flowerheads but still need further work to produce bigger flowers. Rheidol Red (top right) and an B. Blueberry crossed in 2007 (left).





Buddleja Rocket (Left) with two foot inflorescences and its F2 (Right) with improved colour.



A chunky flower with deep colour – an un-named hybrid in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year 2018