

40 years of the re-discovery of the St Helena Ebony and terrestrial conservation on St Helena Opening Address

A warm welcome is extended to you all today for taking time out to attend this small event to mark 40 years of the re-discovery of the St Helena Ebony and terrestrial conservation on the Island.

40 years ago today the late George Benjamin and Professor Quentin Cronk re-discovered the Ebony on the cliff off Blue Point. The Ebony re-discovery began a series of plant and habitat conservation activities on St Helena and resulted in SHG establishing a Conservation Section.

There has been other endemic plant discoveries that have contributed to conservation notably: in 1951 the Redwood was rediscovered by Norman Williams. In the 1970s George Benjamin also found the She Cabbage and the St Helena Olive (sadly the St Helena Olive became extinct in 2002). In more recent years, other endemic species such as the Bastard Gumwood and Boxwood were discovered by Stedson Stroud and a very small sedge call the Neglected Sedge was discovered by Phil Lambdon and Pat Joshua.

As a forestry and conservation apprentice under George Benjamin some 34 years ago, I was reminded in the latter years I worked with him that one day when we remembered his efforts it would not be just about his plant re-discoveries, but more importantly what would perhaps define his legacy was his sheer commitment and determination with the limited resources, information and tools at his disposal to ensure plants were propagated in numbers, released as far and wide in the wild as possible and cared for afterwards to ensure we never needed to re-discover species or encounter extinctions in future.

Today we also pause to pay tribute to and thank all of those involved in St Helena's terrestrial conservation efforts in some form, including existing staff, our former staff, our local and international partners and collaborators, and our volunteers. Your efforts are appreciated in helping St Helena to work towards one of our environmental strategic priorities of furthering our capacity to safeguard our natural habitats and save our critically endangered species.

I trust this celebratory and outreach event today for all of us who attend will serve to create an increased appreciation for and awareness of the importance of St Helena's plant and habitat conservation initiatives, both for the present community and the future generations to come. Finally, a big thank you to Vanessa and her team - Isabel, Rebecca, Karen, Georgie, Daryll, Shavon and Stefan and the Peaks teams for delivering this event today, and to our international sponsors who have assisted with activity and funding support for the day.

Thank You.

Darren Duncan

Director Environment, Natural Resources & Planning Directorate

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