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A RARE RHODODENDRON PLANTED BEFORE WW1 REVEALED IN NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND'S PLANT DISCOVERY PROJECT

- **Discovery is part of three-year project to inventory the plants in the National Trust for Scotland's gardens**
- **Year two of the PLANTS project sees over 32,000 plantings audited across 17 gardens**

The National Trust for Scotland has capped off the second phase of its ambitious, three-year project to meticulously document the plants across its 39 major gardens. Auditing 32,420 plantings across Scotland this year, the National Trust for Scotland has made remarkable findings including a rare *Rhododendron arboretum subsp. zeylanicum* planted before World War One.

As Scotland's largest garden owner, estimated to be home to over 100,000 plants, the charity has made significant progress on its three-year PLANTS project, identifying over 60,000 plantings since the project began in 2022. Understanding each plant's unique traits, needs and vulnerabilities will enhance the charity's ability to manage the risks of plant disease, severe weather and storm damage as well as the growing impact of the climate and biodiversity crisis.

This second year of the project has focused predominantly on the west, north and east of Scotland which all yield an expansive variety of plant life across the country's unique microclimates.

Amongst this year's highlights were the team's findings at Arduaine, a 20-acre coastal garden in Argyll that was created in 1898 by tea planter James Arthur Campbell, overlooking the Sound of Jura. This year alone, the PLANTS team have audited over 5,000 plantings at Arduaine and given its renowned and extensive collections of rhododendrons, it is no surprise that the team made astonishing findings.

A *Rhododendron arboretum subsp. zeylanicum* dating from circa 1890 was recorded and is potentially one of the largest in the British Isles. James Arthur Campbell used his tea planting connections to secure this seed and it's rumoured to have come to Arduaine hidden in a chest of tea. Additionally, the team recorded a Wheel-Tree (*Trochodendron aralioides*), towering nearly 60ft high.

The north of Scotland's Leith Hall is home to an iconic rock garden designed by the last Laird of Leith Hall, Charles Leith-Hay in the 1920s. The team auditing the property found *Rhodohypoxis* 'Great Scot' in the gardens, a South African bulb which has intense deep red-pink flowers. Bred by horticulturist, Ruth McConnel who was probably one of the foremost growers of *Rhodohypoxi* in the world, it got its name when her husband saw the beautifully deep colour of the new seedling and exclaimed 'Great Scot!'.

Leith Hall's rock garden grants visitors a window into the past to see the garden as it was once imagined by Charles Leith-Hay. Thanks to the work of the National Trust for Scotland, the bold design of the rock garden, which was very different to most other designs of the time, remains the same today so that the beauty and heritage of Charles Leith-Hay's vision can be enjoyed by all.

For those in the central belt looking to know more about the richly biodiverse offerings of Inveresk Lodge Garden, near Edinburgh, the PLANTS team identified a slew of unusual plants from Chocolate Vines (*Akebia quinata*) to Ovens Wattle (*Acacia pravissima*), a plant common to New South Wales in Australia that thrives in hot and dry conditions but can now be found flourishing in this beautiful Musselburgh garden despite Scotland's colder climate.

The PLANTS project is led by Dr Anna Florence, National Trust for Scotland Curator of Plant Collections, and Dr Colin McDowall, PLANTS Project Manager, alongside a team of experts, and aims to identify and record the plants in the Trust's 39 major gardens. The array of microclimates across Scotland and the scale and breadth of the Trust's garden spaces have made the project an extensive task that entails a great deal of precision and detail.

Dr Anna Florence, Curator of Plant Collections for the National Trust for Scotland, said: "The PLANTS project has been a meticulous yet massively rewarding experience for the Trust as a whole. This year we have made some remarkable findings across our gardens that give a glimpse into the lives of those that originally designed them. Beyond finding plantings that were never on record before, the project enables us to gain a greater understanding of the original plantings and how we can best protect them and let them flourish for the future. We're excited as we look toward the final year of the project and the opportunity to share more data, learning and stories about Scotland's rich horticultural heritage."

Stuart Brooks, Director of Conservation & Policy at the National Trust for Scotland, said: "The PLANTS project marks another major milestone in our commitment to protecting the rich biodiversity, heritage and stories that make our charity's gardens and designed landscapes so important. This ambitious project is helping us understand better what is in our gardens, and therefore how we can keep them resilient, valued and accessible to more people, helping to secure their longer-term future and that of the plants that live in them."

“We are hugely grateful to our PLANTS team for making outstanding progress on such a large-scale project, and to our supporters and members who make these critically important projects possible.”

The PLANTS project is one of many initiatives led by the Trust as part of its ten-year strategy, *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, with a mission to conserve Scotland’s heritage and the stories that each of its gardens hold. For each of the thousands of plants examined thus far, the PLANTS team have recorded the genus, species or cultivar of the planting to match previous archived records. The teams will now spend the winter months inputting the recorded data.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland’s PLANTS project, please visit: www.nts.org.uk.

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Notes to editors

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland’s largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland’s magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland’s heritage which doesn’t have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland’s heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland’s largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.