



## **Proposal to the Uplyme & Lyme Regis Horticultural Society, for the species adoption of *Erica ciliaris* (Dorset Heath) at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank**

The Millennium Seed Bank Partnership (MSBP) is the largest ex situ plant conservation project in the world. Our focus is on global plant life faced with the threat of extinction and plants of most use for the future. The seeds we save are conserved outside their native habitat.

Working with our network of partners across 80 countries, we have successfully banked over 11% of the world's wild plant species. With your help, we are going to save 25% of those species with bankable seeds by 2020 (nominally 75,000 species). We target plants and regions most at risk from climate change and the ever-increasing impact of human activities.

People do not usually think of the UK flora as being endangered but with ever-increasing threats from more intensive agriculture, urbanisation, road building, pollution and climate change, it has been estimated that over 300 UK species are threatened with extinction from the UK countryside.

In order to "practice what we preach" it was appropriate to tackle the conservation of our own flora before undertaking projects overseas. The first phase of Kew's Millennium Seed Bank Project commenced with the ambitious target to conserve all of the UK's native flowering plants that produce bankable seeds.

It was thought that there may be a number of species that present special storage difficulties, for example aquatic species which disperse their fruit or seeds under the water surface. Research at the Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) has found that, perhaps surprisingly, the majority of such species are easily stored under standard seed bank conditions.

To date, over 90% of the UK's native seed-bearing plants are represented by seed collections at the MSB. This is the first time that any country has underpinned conservation efforts of its wild flora in this way. Some of the remaining species either do not produce seed in the UK, cannot be stored conventionally, or are too rare for a collection to be made without compromising the species' survival. Efforts continue, however, to track down the last elusive species that do not fall into these categories.

In total, more than half of the seed collections have been harvested by the active and skilled volunteer botanical community in the UK. We are particularly indebted to the many seed collecting volunteers from our local Wildlife Trusts and the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI).



Image of the Millennium Seed Bank building which houses the largest wild plant seed bank in the world. Kew and its partners have collected and conserved seed from 10% of the world's wild flowering plant species (c.30,000 species) and aim to conserve 25% by 2020

**Thanks to the MSBP and the Adopt a Seed, Save a Species campaign there is also something that you can do to help us to ensure the survival of a plant species, so thank you for your interest in 'Saving the Species' *Erica ciliaris*.**

*Erica ciliaris* is a species of heather growing to 60 cm. Flowering during the summer months, the flowers are 8-12 mm and are formed on long stems. The leaves are 2–4 mm long, with glandular hairs.

In the British Isles, *Erica ciliaris* is only found natively in Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, and this has led to its common name 'Dorset Heath'.

This low shrub occurs on moist heathland, extending into relatively dry heath, and also into wet valley bogs, mainly on the drier hummocks. Seedlings establish on bare ground, but in closed habitats reproduction is usually vegetative.

Much of the Dorset heathland where *Erica ciliaris* can be found naturally has been lost to forestry, agriculture and other human interference leading to a decline in this species. Recently this trend has been stabilised and there is now some indication that the species may return to previous levels, although this has not been recorded.

Your donation will help the MSBP continue its vital work, and ensure that species such as *Erica ciliaris* may never become extinct in the wild.

To recognise your extraordinary contribution, we will send you a certificate and a photograph of the plant species that you are responsible for safeguarding. You'll also receive an invitation to go behind the scenes on a tour of Kew's Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst, West Sussex.

You will also know that you are taking part in the most important practical conservation project taking place on the planet.

We will also keep you updated on the work that the MSBP is doing and tell you more about the species that you have helped to save.

I do hope that you will enjoy learning more about the project and will decide to become an advocate of the work that we do.

**If you would like any further information regarding the work of the MSBP, please do not hesitate to contact Jill Taylor by email [j.taylor@kew.org](mailto:j.taylor@kew.org), by telephone – 020 8332 3248 or look at our website [www.kew.org](http://www.kew.org)**

