

## SEPTEMBER

September rolled around incredibly quickly, and with it, a lot of farewells and new beginnings. We waved off Naciim Benkreira and Ernie Weller (Will Larson had left a month earlier for Chanticleer), and the time of meadow cutting was upon us once again. I can't believe I've now spent a whole year at Dixter. I feel incredibly lucky to have had this year, and hugely privileged to be able to stay at Dixter a while longer -- thank you so much to everyone who has funded me to be here! Time flies so quickly in this place, and there's so much that will have slipped by me in my first year, so much still to learn.

At the start of the month, I took some annual leave to visit my family back in South Africa. While I grew up with an interest in plants, it's the first time since being at Dixter that I've been back, and I think my perspective has been revitalised by the encouragement we receive here to go see plants in the wild, and to observe how things grow in their natural habitat. I timed my visit to coincide with early spring in South Africa, and so was lucky enough to see the superbloom of spring flowers at Postberg Nature Reserve on the West Coast. It was unlike anything I've ever seen -- fields of orange, yellow, and purple as far as the eye could see; an occasional ostrich or bontebok grazing in the distance. But even outside of the superbloom, fascinating plants presented themselves at every turn, and the variety contained even in a single square metre was mind-blowing. You'd be drawn to some *Heliophila coronopifolia*, and then notice the dainty blooms of *Zaluzianskya villosa* among them, and then see the snakey stems of *Euphorbia caput-medusae* emerging from the sand among them. Everywhere, pelargoniums wound themselves through *Salvia aurea* and Honey thorn.

While in South Africa, I also visited Kirstenbosch and climbed up to the Table Mountain reservoirs from there. Kirstenbosch itself was fascinating, with some amazing plant specimens, including an avenue of cycads, and some huge *Schefflera umbelifera*. On Table Mountain, leucadendrons and ericas were in flower, as well as a few crassulas and anemones. It was a speedy visit, as I had to rejoin my family waiting down below in Kirstenbosch, but it was interesting to compare the fynbos on Table Mountain with the Langebaan fynbos I'd just seen in Postberg. It was with some reluctance that I turned my back on all this floral diversity and boarded my flight back to England.

Back in East Sussex, I returned to a wet and miserable week. Meadow work was in full swing, and the new students had arrived. The first few days back were a whirlwind of

meeting people and enthusiastically lugging bags of meadow clippings, but my reintegration was scuppered by some travel bug that caught up with me and laid me low for a few days.

I felt very sorry for myself for the duration of my illness, but convalescence brought with it a new exuberance, and the weather, while it remained volatile, cleared up from time to time to let peep through some beautiful autumn light. We piled the meadow clippings high onto the new compost heap, building it up into an impressive tower. The new chanticleer scholar, Michael McGowan, was entrusted with the task of keeping the sides square and straight as more and more clippings were added, and the fruits of his labour were admired by all.

In between the meadow work, we sorted through and tidied some of our standing out areas -- the Rhino Pen and the Car Park -- in preparation for our winter production. The Rhino Pen will soon host hundreds of seedlings of the hardy annuals for next spring, and the frames in the Car Park will be filled with splits from the perennials we'll dig up and divide this winter, and which we'll grow on for the nursery. This clearing of the decks is unglamorous work, but it also feels satisfying to pare things down and tidy up the clutter of the previous year, and to go into our new growing year with a clean slate.









