

## Project Update: November 2017

Throughout 2017 our Georgian botanist Arsena Bakhia has been running classes in Chkorotskhu School in the Samegrelo region of Georgia. This is a large school close to the area where *Betula megrelica* is found. In early summer 2017 he organised a coach trip for students, with some staff and parents, to visit the National Botanic Garden and Institute of Botany in Tbilisi. This is a 6 hour journey by coach. Many students had never been to the capital Tbilisi before. This proved to be very popular and has raised the profile of our project in the local area.

Chkorotskhu School has also undertaken a video conferencing call with Chagford School, near to Stone Lane Gardens. This was a great success, despite the language difficulties. More calls are planned.

Arsena Bakhia and the Institute of Botany have been communicating with the Georgian Ministry of Education and Science and also the Agency of Protected Areas, keeping them updated on our work.

In September 2017 Paul Bartlett (our Garden Manager) organised an expedition to Askhi Mountain in collaboration with the Institute of Botany, to carry out more fieldwork on that mountain. He was joined by Joachim Gratzfeld (Director of Regional Programmes) of BGCI. This was completed successfully. During their time in Georgia, Paul and Joachim had a very useful meeting with the Agency for Protected Areas. This meeting established a framework for progressing the intention of creating a protected area for this endangered habitat in Samegrelo. The agency staff were very enthusiastic about the project -we hope to profit from that enthusiasm as we push the project forward.

Seed of *Betula megrelica* was collected for propagation and inclusion within our conservation collection. Rock samples were also collected for later analysis. In addition, we inspected the ex-situ collection plants at Bakuriani Botanic Garden.

The next phase of the project is to formally request that the Georgian authorities create a Protected Area in Samegrelo. This will be controlled by the Institute of Botany, with ourselves and BGCI acting as advisors.

