

THE FIRST MEETING IN EUROPE

by Hugh Angus

On October 28, 1995, some 40 International Oak Society members and guests gathered at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens and Arboretum in Great Britain for what promised to be a fascinating day. The Gardens hold one of the National Collections of *Quercus* in Britain (there are three altogether) and currently grows more than 250 different species and cultivars. This was the first event to be organized in Great Britain for our Society members and the fact that participants came from as far as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany bodes well for future events on this side of the Atlantic. We were certainly not disappointed. The day was organized and led by Allen Coombes, botanist at the Gardens and serves as vice-president on the Interim Board of the International Oak Society.

After meeting up with old friends and getting to know new ones, the tour started with a visit to the Gardens' Propagation Unit, where Duncan Goodwin showed the group where numerous oaks, some brought back from the First Conference of our Society in 1994, were being raised from seed. A tour of the collection followed starting with some of the large-leaved oaks such as *Q.* 'Pondaim' and *Q. pontica* as well as what all agreed was a very handsome form of *Q. x bushii*. Later in the day, the hybrid of *Q. pontica* with *Q. robur* (*Q. x hickelii*) was also seen fruiting heavily. Acorns were a particular feature of the tour, as it had been an exceptional year, and the unusually large fruits of *Q. libani* proved quite an attraction. Perhaps one of the most striking sights of the day was the specimen of the bold-leaved, evergreen *Q. rysophylla* from Mexico.

After the tours and a very fine lunch, members were able to help themselves to seed, which several had provided, as well as swap plants and stories about oaks. As the day drew to a close, our thoughts turned to the 1996 event. In the end, it was decided that Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire would host the event on Sunday, October 5, 1996. ☛