

## **CACTUS EXPLORERS CLUB Weekend 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> August 2019**

I had not been to this event before, and as it was not held last year I decided that I would like to go, encouraged by a number of friends who had attended before. The weekend is organized by Graham Charles who also publishes the on-line magazine at the University of Leicester (Stamford Court), the same location where the BCSS held its last convention. Well, Friday came and despite the very inclement weather I set off to join the other 60 enthusiasts. The evening meal was served in the main dining room at 6.30 pm, following which we all gathered to be greeted by Graham who had previously sent out the programme. I was pleased that I was not the only newcomer amongst the audience. The first talk was given by Paul Hoxey, and was about one of his recent visits to Peru. This set the scene for the weekend, and as with all of Paul's talks it contained wonderful scenery and plants. A pleasant evening was spent meeting up with old friends and making new ones.

Saturday after breakfast we all assembled for a busy schedule of talks. Ken Preston-Mafham presented Melocactus from Columbia, Puerto Rica and Cuba, which included some wonderful pictures of the insects and birds; Ken produces a lot of wildlife U-tube videos which he recommended were worth looking at. This was followed by Zlatko Janebsa (Czech Republic) talking about Opuntias of Southwest USA; he had resided in this part of America for six years and had gathered lots of pictures in habitat - wonderful flowers even if you are not keen on the plants. Morning coffee was followed by two presentations, Hazel Taylor on highlights of North East Mexico, a compendium of a trip with the CSSA, and Thomas Guerry (France) about maihueniopsis localities that he had visited. It was nice to see a younger person so interested in plants. A good buffet lunch was shared by us and we gathered in the afternoon. The first presentation was from Peter Beresford, not someone I had seen before; he is well known for his echinocereus articles about his study (with the Wildlife and Nature organization of the US) into "Alice" the Black Lace Cactus *Echinocereus recichenbachii v alberti* which is an endangered species. This was followed by Martin Lowry's visit to the remote northern valleys of La Paz, Bolivia. Those of you who attended our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary will know the vast knowledge that Martin has of this country, having visited it many times. Following afternoon tea Elizabeth Sarnes presented details of her and her husband Norbert's study of the genus *Pterocactus*; this was a very well structured

breakdown of the various species and even got me hooked on this opuntoid. Following the evening meal we were entertained by Trevor Wray on his trips to Mexico entitled "it does rain in the desert". Any of you who have seen Trev's talks can imagine the wit and repartee, and always good photography. The evening was again spent socializing with old and new friends

Sunday was soon upon us, and following a good breakfast we began the day with a presentation from Chris Davies on *Turbinicarpus* in Habitat. As you will probably guess, Chris did manage to sneak in the odd mammillaria. Ken Preston-Mafham then took us to Uruguay (not an area that I had seen before) and showed us many very nice notocactus in flower. More coffee before Paul Hoxey took us on his Holiday to the Galapagos, but of course cacti featured as well as some of the endemic animals. We then visited northern Argentina with Thomas Guerry: some very nice *gymnocalycium* plants in habitat. Following the buffet lunch brought us to the last session of the weekend with Andrew Gdaniek from Gibraltar (he is based at the Botanic Gardens) on Cacti from the Lesser Antilles (Caribbean islands), then the last presentation - of Baja California - from Zlatko Janeba I had been waiting for this particular talk; it is an area I particularly would love to visit as it has many special plants (you may remember that Ian Woolnough gave us a talk at our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convention last October), so I was interested to see another person's view of this area and was not disappointed; the talk even had some succulents !!

Although some may say that the information over the weekend was a lot to take in and very full on, it was very instructive and enjoyable. As with all these types of events you get a lot of very useful information about a number of different plants and their habitats, which may help you grow them better.

You enjoy the company of like-minded folk and extend your cactus family wider than before. A very enjoyable weekend, so thanks to all the speakers and the organization.

Bill Darbon