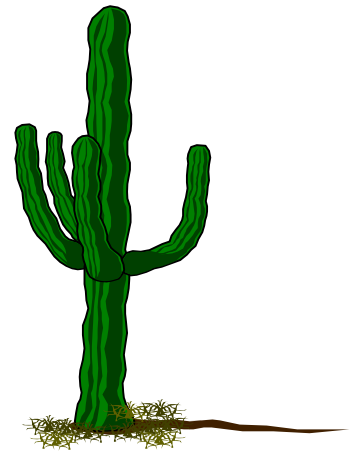


Oxotica

The Newsletter of the Oxford Branch of the
British Cactus and Succulent Society

December 2003

Volume 8, Number 2



FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

What a year it has been! We started by changing our meeting venue, and I'm sure you will all agree that it has been successful - isn't it nice to be able to park your car safely!

Our next operation was to help John make room in his greenhouse to prick out his seedlings. The Auction held at Freeland Village Hall was a great success, but I hear there's not a lot of space available now.

Before the Auction had come and gone preparations were already underway (indeed, almost complete) for our Annual Show and the Blenheim Display. The display, held over four days during the second week of June, was again a useful experience, but would have been made better if the public hadn't thought that the Society's Marquee was the First Aid Tent! The Show was again held in conjunction with the International Asclepiad Society, and as you will see from the Judges' comments later in the newsletter, it was a great success. Our thanks go to Gerhard Lauch for giving the lecture. Those of you who did not stay don't know what you missed and I urge you to come to next year's, being held in conjunction with the Mammillaria Society - Wilhelm Plein, who is the Secretary of the German Mammillaria Society, will give the lecture. The schedule for this show, to be held on 18 July, is almost complete

and the judges have been appointed. The Autumn Show is yet to be finalised but the date is 10 October so please put both dates in your diary.

Another venture held last year was the Zone open day; five members opened their greenhouses not only to branch members, but also to members of the Zone and surrounding branches. This was again considered to be a great success by those attending, although the downpour at lunchtime tried to upset the situation. John will have news of another, not in this branch, for 2004, but the details are not quite complete at this stage.

The branch has been fortunate in that over this year we have been able to welcome several new members to branch meetings; we hope that they enjoy the programme, but I would say to all of you, new-comers included, if there is any aspect of the hobby that you would like included then do let John know, it's never easy to get it together with an even balance, believe me - I've had the problem.

So, next year we have two branch shows, Blenheim Display and also the National Show in Spalding on 21 August, but before then I'd like to take the opportunity, on behalf of the whole committee, of wishing you all a Very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Cathy Darbon

BRANCH SHOW 2003

Our Branch Show this year featured a special section of classes for members of the International Asclepiad Society. This was the second occasion that we had invited them to join our show, and I am afraid that the support that we had from members was somewhat disappointing.

The quality and standard of the exhibits in the Open Section was extremely high, and many thanks go to all those members who came from far and wide to support our show with such exceptional plants. A comment made by one judge was that it was the best provincial show that he had seen.

Congratulations go to Doug Willis (Best Cactus- *Astrophytum ornatum*), Dr Gillian Evison (Best Succulent – *Dorstenia gigas*) and to John Warwick who was awarded the Ginns medal.

Our speaker this year was Gerhard Lauchs. He enthralled those who stayed on with his Journey into Oman, such a contrast of landscapes in which it is surprising that plants of such variety manage to survive the extreme conditions. We were treated to some new discoveries, one of which had been named after our speaker. Unfortunately he had to dash off to catch his plane (which sadly he missed despite it being delayed), but has promised to return to our area again.

Bill Darbon

The Succulent classes were well-supported with excellent Mesembs even out of their normal growing season. Outstanding succulents were *Dorstenia gigas* and *Aloe erinacea* with good sections in *Haworthia* classes, the *Haworthia truncatas* were all outstanding.

The Cactus classes were all well-supported, the large Mamms being very strong with the small Mamms attracting a large entry. The *Astrophytum* class was dominated by the large *Astrophytum ornatums*, one being the Best Cactus in the show. Strong *Rebutias* and *Sulcorebutias* were evident with many small quality plants in the classes.

Overall the standard was very high and some plants were of National Show standard.

David Hutchinson

Asclepiad Section

Although only 12 classes the quality of plants was excellent, a blaze of colour in the flowers (and a few smells) truly demonstrated the great variety and difficulty of many plants.

Class 68 was spectacular with Dr Gillian Evison's *Pseudolithos cuberformis* winning a highly contested class with some magnificent plants, and being awarded the Diploma for the Best Plant in this section of the show.

Class 70 for a group of three plants was again highly competitive with John Betteley's winning by a short head and gaining an Award of Merit. For a floral tribute which would have graced any show the *Adenium mutiflorum* exhibited by Doug Willis in Class 71 blazed its way to victory for another Award of Merit. Finally Chris Moors deserves a special mention for his consistent quality of cultivation in so many classes.

Mal Weobley

STOP PRESS

Anthony Mitchell has agreed to give a lecture – South African Miscellany - at our October Show next year.

BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2004

January 22 Bill Keen - "Magnificent Mammillarias".

Bill is well known to many of us as the National Vice-Chairman and as a former Editor of the BCSS Journal. Tonight he will be reminding us what we can look forward to in Spring, and will be showing us some of the range of plants which will be exhibited at our big Show on July 18th, which will be held in conjunction with the Mammillaria Society.

February 26 Peter Down - "South American Cacti for Flowers".

Peter has not spoken to the Branch before. He is a keen member of Southampton Branch. His talk will not be about the rarer Brazilian cacti, but will concentrate on those better known and (hopefully) floriferous plants such as Matucana and Rebutia which are perhaps more rewarding to the less specialised grower.

March 25 Malcolm Pym - "A Trip Round My Greenhouse".

Since Malcolm lives near Exeter it is easier for us to bring him here than for us all to go there to see his collection. He is a very genial and entertaining man and his talk is sure to be good fun. Malcolm is also the man in charge of BEF pots, so if anybody wants to place an order with him, he will bring them to the meeting and save postage.

April 22 Bill Morris - "A to Z of Succulents".

Bill is one of the most enthusiastic propagators of plants in the hobby, and one of the best speakers into the bargain. His talk covers all aspects of the hobby, including cacti, and if you have any questions about growing plants Bill is sure to know. If it can be grown, Bill is pretty certain to have grown it. (Ask him about *Cnidoscolus* seedlings!)

May 27 Alan Phipps - "Anza Navajo".

Alan is a nurseryman from Bristol, and well known to many Branch members because of that. He regularly visits the American South-West in order to look at the wild plants and to stock up his own nursery from specialist nurseries in the US. He will be bringing some

fine plants for sale. The talk illustrates his visit to Navajo country in 2003.

(Alan will also be visiting Oxford on Sunday 16th May for the Rare Plant Fair at the Botanical Gardens.)

June 24 Barry Reid - "Reminiscences of a Nurseryman".

Barry runs Somerset Branch and is also a nurseryman. However, he finds our plants unprofitable, so specialises in shrubs. He has an extensive succulent collection, and he has a tremendous fund of stories about all aspects of the horticultural trade. This should be a really fun evening, so long as nobody asks him about how his potting shed was flattened by a Dutch juggernaut.

ALSO June 10th - 13th - BLENHEIM HORTICULTURAL SHOW.

We shall need volunteers to man the BCSS stall during this four-day event. It is a good opportunity to meet old friends and perhaps to attract some new members.

John Watmough, Secretary

Oxotica

Copyright: Oxford Branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society.

The Branch meets at 7.30 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

President	Alan Ilott	01865 730924
Chairman:	Cathy Darbon	01993 881926
Vice-Chairman:	Brian Conway	01865 765800
Secretary:	John Watmough	01865 772709
Treasurer:	Steve Williams	01367 718944
Show Secretary:	Bill Darbon	01993 881926
Committee:	Brian Conway	01865 765800
	David Greenaway	01235 762761
	Curt Lamberth	01865 247609
	Mary Stone	01865 774268
	John Warwick	01235 848399

Editor: David Greenaway
(e-mail: david@phonecoop.coop)

<http://www.communicate.co.uk/oxford/bcssoxfordbranch/>

CSSA CONVENTION 2003

(the bits that interested me)

by David Greenaway



Jean and I gave the American Convention in 2001 (Las Vegas) a miss, but decided to go to this one in St Louis MO, partly because the programme looked so good and partly because it was in a part of the USA that we had not explored before. The first ever CSSA Convention was held in St Louis in 1941, and this one was the 30th. One person attending this year was also at the first Convention, a Mr James Gerdermann from Oregon; we caught up with him just before he left, and had a few words. We stayed throughout in the semi-luxury of the Convention hotel – the Airport Marriott. After three days sight-seeing, we registered for the Convention on Saturday afternoon, and then attended a liquid reception where the wine flowed free (and was free). We did our best but there were bottles left.

Sunday was a full day of talks, starting with that of Gideon Smith, whom we had met in South Africa at the 1998 IOS Congress. Did you know that there are 4500 species of succulent in S.A. (one of them a cactus), and 24000 plant species in all, 60% of them restricted to S.A.? 10% of the world's species restricted to 2% of the land area! The Succulent Karoo is the only arid hot-spot in the world. Did you also know that molecular studies suggest that

Haworthia, Gasteria, etc. should be subsumed into Aloe? Not Kniphophia, however, which is a sister group (to tell them apart – the cross-section of Aloe is boat-shaped whilst that of Kniphophia is keeled). Incidentally, you may like to note that the exudate from Aloe ferox can be used to cause *or* to cure diarrhoea, depending on the dose. Finally, a note for growers – the coastal region from Riverdale (near Cape Town) all the way to Durban has winter rainfall.

Next, John Lavranos gave two talks on Somalia, really an expansion of the talk he gave at Langdale Hall. It seems that Somalia is also very high in biodiversity, second only to S.A., and 40% of it is endemic. Here it is the north coast that gets the winter rainfall. Growers need to be geographers! Something about *Caralluma somalica* must have appealed to me, as it was the only plant name that I wrote down.

Sheila Collenette then spoke on Aloes of the Arabian peninsular. I noted solely that *A.yemenica* hangs down the cliffs, and that *A.dhofarensis* was very attractive, with a silvery-white leaf. Too big for us to grow though. *A.officinalis* (*A.vera*) is also from there. By the way, does 'vera' mean 'true' in Latin? It does in Italian. She finished her talk at the coastal cliffs at Shatt, a sheer drop of 3000 ft, and where some plant hunters known to Oxford Branch have risked their lives retrieving plant material, and then only from the very topmost section. She said that Lavranos, when he first saw them, wryly remarked that they were probably named after the past tense of sh*t.

After lunch, Alan Butler gave his *Sanseveria* talk. Not all of you will have been able to get to his talks at Oxford Branch, so here are a few notes. The rosette form is a juvenile form, as it (never?) flowers. Most variegated forms are green

inside the leaf, so cuttings revert to the green form. Some are variegated inside. Flowers (in brush spikes) are scented. Fruits should not be picked for their seeds until they go orange. The form 'Baseball Bat' has flowers that come straight out of the ground (*S.fischeri* too). Seedlings are quite different from the mature form; they have a curved leaf cross-section; later it becomes cylindrical, causing the straight leaf. *S.ethiophica* is the hardiest.

Next, Roger Brown gave a fascinating talk on *Pseudolithos*. Ever the grower, he first mentioned their propensity for mealy bugs and red spider. He deals with these with Marathon, which I don't think we can get over here. He is a great advocate of the use of wetting agents (Bio-88 in his case). Anyone here use them? *Pseudolithos caput-viperarum* forms clusters. It needs a free root run or shallow containers, and shade. It goes bright green when it wants to grow. He reckoned that *P.cubiformis* was very difficult to grow, living 2-3 years at the most. Any comments out there? Gillian? *P.horwoodii* is very rare (though Chuck Hanson may have it: he has everything!). *P.gigas* is a new variety. *P.dodsoniana* keeps changing its generic name - it was *Caralluma*, and is sometimes *Anomalluma*.

Last of the day, Bob Kent spoke on *Haworthias* from seed. On hand pollination, Bob said that it was usually necessary, if you want seed. Using a fine brush, take the pollen from the top flower of a spike and transfer to the bottom flower of a spike on another plant.

That evening we enjoyed the conference dinner. No wine this time and not even a bar in the room. Iced water and (weak) iced tea at the tables. Jim Solomon of the Missouri Botanical Garden spoke on succulent exploration.

I should mention at this point that the sales tables had been in full swing all day. Lucky winners of a raffle held at the reception the night before were allowed in the sales room one hour before any one else. We were not buying, being unwilling to face the export/import restrictions. The plants were drooly, though, particularly on Bob Smoley's (Garden World) and Chuck Hanson's (Arid Lands) stands. One stand (Real Rebutias, from Pittsburg), sold nothing but Rebutias.

Monday saw the second of the two days that were devoted to succulents other than cacti. We started with an excellent talk by Alan Butler, this time on Oman. He showed many slides of plants that I did not know and some that I did. I had not realised that so many taxa come from Oman. There were *Rhytidocaulon*, near Muscat - a grey asclepiad that is plentiful there, though rare in cultivation. Also plentiful there was *Euphorbia hadramautica*. And so it went on - *Caralluma edulis*, *brownii* and *hexagona*, *Aloe dhufarensis*, *Jatropha*, *Euphorbia cactus*, *Echidnopsis*, *Adeniums*, *Cissus quadrangularis*, *Portulaca*, *Pseudolithos mccoysi*. Fascinating.

Gideon Smith returned to talk on 'Plant Systematics in South Africa'. He said that care had to be taken with some observations: thousands of *Aloe marlothii* to be seen at burial sites were actually planted there, along with other plants. *Agave americana* is also planted at cemeteries "to keep the evil spirits away". The genus *Bulbine* is desperately in need of revision; they are 100% endemic to S.A. From one of them can be obtained a natural hand cream, also a sun screen. *Euphorbias* can be used as fodder if sliced up and left for a few days for the toxins to disperse. Their rooted cuttings are a perfect stabiliser of soil. Many *Euphorbias* still need description. He talked to us of overgrazing and of a hydrophytic *Crassula* of the ponds. Also,

the Hoodia in the news here recently, containing an appetite-suppressant (P57). He finished on a more serious note, to paint the wider picture of South Africa today, with a handful of quick slides about funding difficulties, crime, AIDS, etc.

Tim Jackson next, on growing winter-growing Mesembryanthemum from seed. He mentioned that they were trickle seeders, indicating a long-lifetime for the seeds. His seed mixture is two parts perlite, one part coir. This is microwaved for 1½ minutes. He sows into small drinking cups, and has a dome cover for a week. Weak fertiliser with every watering. He uses one layer of screen for shade, plus chicken wire to keep cats off! He pots up using a mixture of grit,

sand, pumice, top soil (equal parts). Give more shade to Mitrophyllum, and large pots, he said. Muiria is easy to grow, but hard to transplant.

Sheila Collette part two was on 'Travels in Djibouti'. This a small state on the Red Sea coast next to Somalia. Sheila showed her photographs of Euphorbia tuberculata, nigripina, and E. triaculeata v. triacantha. Also Aloe trichosantha, a Desmodorchis, a Plectranthus, Jatropha spinosa, Sarcostemma viminalis, and Echidnopsis planiflora. On Moucha island she found a Portulaca and Euphorbia faurottii (now triaculeata).

(to be concluded)

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

The Branch AGM

I should like to congratulate John Watmough on the success of his quiz, on the occasion of our AGM. The last meeting of the year with the AGM leaves too little time to justify a speaker, but last night we had a most enjoyable evening. We were able to socialise over the many and varied refreshments, and the quiz made a change from our usual arrangements, giving us the opportunity to discover hidden talents in our fellow members.

I hope we will be able to repeat something similar next year and that more members will be able to attend.

Mary Stone

Zone 8 Dinner

The annual Zone Dinner took place this year at the Spread Eagle Hotel in Thame. 14 people attended, but a further couple, Bill Geddes and his wife, had the bad luck to be prevented from getting to Thame because of a motorway blockage following an accident.

In contrast to last year's event, when the seating was rather cramped, this time the room was spacious. The menu was very varied and Jean and I thought that the food was excellently cooked and served. The inclusion of appetisers at the bar before we sat down was a very nice touch.

The tradition at these annual dinners is to have a talk afterwards on a topic completely unconnected to our hobby, and this year Ian Small gave us a fascinating account of the work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

All in all, a very pleasant way to spend a wet November afternoon!

David Greenaway

(In the occasional series from Brian Thompson's files, we this time print two summary articles. We hope to be able to reproduce the full texts from time to time.)

CANTE OVERVIEW

My initial ideas about Cante were somewhat coloured by the many stories that I had either heard or read over the years. Its aims and hopes, its practices and goals being coloured by rose tinted spectacles. When one arrives, the plants and hype augment these views somewhat. There is a superb collection of both rare and basic plants, some of which are on view to the public (in the conservatory) and some of which are out of sight of the public (in the propagation house) unless by special invitation. On the whole, the plants are in good condition. The aims of Cante are to reduce the need for habitat looting, by supplying Europe and North America with sufficient material to make the looting of habitat both uneconomical and a waste of time.

When there for any length of time, one begins to see it from a different perspective. The main thrust of the propagation thus far appears to be aimed at the home market, viz the production of thousands of plants for the shops and garden centres of Mexico City. Their efforts at propagating the rare species is probably much less than 10% of the whole. Although their efforts at the germination of seed seem to be reasonable, the survival rate of the resultant seedlings is poor. The staff do not appear to give a toss about Cante or what it stands for. Their work is both slipshod and seemingly without meaning. They do not appear to have the ability to think ahead, nor the ability to reason. Maybe the pathetic rate of remuneration is responsible; maybe it's the lack of leadership, or a combination of the two. Examples of this can be seen in the way that they will replot or replant just after watering has taken place. The overhead watering of freshly grafted plants (even by

the foreman), the leaving of the *Pereskia* cuttings, despite the fact that their first job after we left for our trip was to plant them and place them in the seed house. The method of isolation of plants for pollination purposes is to place the plants in small, specially constructed frames of glass, that stand in full sun and have no ventilation whatsoever. The plants would remain in these frames for a considerable length of time without water, thus negating nearly all the effort of pollination.

Charles Glass has been a collector of Mexican plants for most of his life, what he doesn't know about Mexican cacti and other succulents is probably not worth knowing. Should Charlie die, heaven forbid, a large portion of this knowledge will die with him, for much of it is not written and probably will never be so. Charlie however could never be described as a good grower or propagator of his beloved plants. *(Alas, Charlie died in 1998 – Editor.)*

The Mexican government now seems to be hell bent on stopping the removal of any plant, or part thereof, from its soil. Even students at the universities can no longer collect plants, even for study purposes. Meanwhile, progress is afoot, with the building of thousands of new schools and clinics bankrolled by The World Bank, while the roads are being upgraded and new roads and toll roads are appearing all over the countryside, financed by both North America and Canada for the enhancement of the new trade agreements. All across Mexico, land is increasingly being put under the plough, to augment food production. The Zimapan dam project has flooded a vast area of habitat and uprooted the many inhabitants of the area who now have to find new homes and land on which to eke out their existence. Throughout all this, the Mexican government and that idiotically pathetic organization C I T E S do absolutely nothing towards conservation (it is still

forbidden to collect plants that have been bulldozed aside during construction work). Unless something is done quickly, many plants will become extinct within a very short space of time, and habitats will continue to be looted by greedy plant dealers.

Just to make things worse (if that is possible) the weather patterns known as El

Nino and La Nina are decimating many areas of the country. When rain does arrive, flash floods are washing away large tracts of land. Fire is yet another hazard. In many habitats, regeneration has ceased and mature plants are dying because of the lack of available water. THE FUTURE IS EXCEEDINGLY GRIM.

Brian Thompson

MEXICAN OVERVIEW



Mexico is in a terrible state. Its railways have been refurbished; they have new rails, new concrete sleepers, yet when you travel along the Mex 81 for Tampico, you pass kilometre after kilometre of rolling stock lying idle, just rusting and rotting. There must be many thousands of wagons on this stretch of line; God knows how much stock is laying idle elsewhere in Mexico.

The amount of traffic on the roads is minimal. Tourists you very rarely see and where the heavy lorries have gone is anyone's guess. I would estimate that since my visit in 1996, something over 30% of all the roadside cafes and stalls are either closed or abandoned. New road systems have taken away the passing trade, and on the toll roads stopping is not allowed. The impoverished population can hardly afford to eat at home, let alone to eat out. In nearly every restaurant where we dined,

we were the only customers. In nearly every restaurant, having placed your order, a member of staff was sent out to purchase the supplies needed to fulfill that order. In many cases, if you ordered drinks, they would also have to send out to purchase them. In the many hotels and motels where we stayed, we were, nearly always, the only customers.

The record low temperatures of December 1998 killed many millions of cacti and other succulents. This has been exacerbated by the El Nino weather pattern. The central states have had no appreciable rainfall for two years.

Millions of plants are dying or dead and regeneration has almost ceased. Many thousands of cattle, horses, mules and even goats are dying from starvation and dehydration, many of them at the roadside.

The aridity is also causing many millions of hectares of plants to perish through fire and is also responsible for the resultant wind erosion. When, during most afternoons, the wind rises, the dust storms are very bad, cutting visibility by great amounts. When it does occasionally rain, the ground is so dry that the resultant water just pours straight off the land, causing flash floods and even more erosion.

It would appear that the only beings that are prospering are the fat cats of business and politics. The vultures, buzzards and the other carrion eaters also seem to be doing well. All in all, it has been a heart breaking experience. Mexico is once again on its knees. This time, I fear that it may never get up.

Brian Thompson