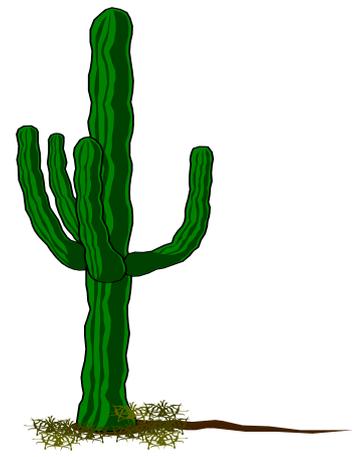


Oxotica

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

December 2005

Volume 10, Number 2



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

It certainly doesn't seem like three years since I took over from Mary as Chairman, and what a time it has been! We've consolidated our position financially thanks to a lot of hard work at displays and of course our shows, by everyone, but especially our globe-trotting Secretary John, who spends most of his spare time seed raising and propagating for the sales table, toting the plants around the country when he's lecturing to other branches.

This year has been a quiet one for us. Last year we held two shows and an auction, not to mention a couple of displays and of course four days at Blenheim Flower Show. Then, for the first time (and the last as it turned out), we had been able to sell, which had been very lucrative for the Branch. It wasn't until well into the New Year that we received confirmation that there wasn't to be a Blenheim Show this year, for what reason we could not be sure. So there was John, his greenhouses full to bursting with plants for the sales table, wondering where the next bit of space was coming from.

We did hold an auction in April, not for the Branch on this occasion, but for Zone funds which had dwindled over the last few years as there had not been an event held to replenish them. I am pleased to report that it was a great success, raising over £200 for the coffers. But, more importantly, all points of the country from Spalding to Taunton and Weston Super

Mare have been enquiring when the next one was being held, and for this reason your Committee has decided to hold an auction every other year - when we have only one show. So, the first of these biennial events will be in April 2007. If you start propagating now there should be plenty of plants for sale.

Our main income for the year is of course our annual show, this year held in conjunction with IAS. The show itself was a success, but nothing seems capable of prompting many members of the IAS to show. For this reason we have invited the International Euphorbia Society to take the spot in 2007; I am still awaiting a reply, so watch this space. 2006 will again see the return of the Mammillaria Society at the cactus only show, and the speaker will be Wolter ten Hoeve. I was hoping John Lavranos would speak at the succulent show, however I have heard from him this week and he is unable to do so as the date clashes with a convention in Australia. Ah well, back to the drawing board, but be assured that there will be a good speaker. The dates for 2006 are July 16th and October 8th - mark your diary before you start arranging 2006 holidays!

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Chairman's Report continued...

It is always a treat to visit other branches and their members' collections; this year the invitations came from High Wycombe and Gloucester. Now we have more members in the southern part of the county, Martin, David and Gillian on this occasion were able to reciprocate, a treat for those members of the Committee who usually do the honours. Needless to say, in all cases a great day was had by all, and

we look forward to arrangements being made for 2006.

Well it may be the end of an era for me, but I am pleased to say the Branch goes from strength to strength, and by coming up with innovations for the show and for our programme, it will continue to do so. I therefore happily pass the baton to my successor saying 'enjoy - this hobby can be so rewarding'.

Cathy Darbon - Chairman

WELL, DID YOU COME ALONG TO THE BRANCH SHOW IN JULY?

If you were not tempted to avoid the Fairford Air Show and Blenheim Palace Country Fair to visit the show, you missed another brilliant display of plants of excellent quality. I can only thank those members who continue to support our show and maintain the high standard of exhibits to make it one of the best provincial shows in the country - not my words but an opinion expressed by one of the Society's leading Judges. We were pleased to welcome along with our friends from High Wycombe and Birmingham, Mike Blake from York, George & Pam Thurston, Adrian Weatherill from Lincolnshire and Mike Cullen from Hertfordshire.

The branch sales table and our two visiting nursery stands were kept busy with a steady flow of eager customers throughout the day, and most visitors left clutching the odd purchase.

We had invited the International Asclepiad Society to join us again this year for the third show for plants of their specialist interest, and had invited Alan Butler (who has now moved to Italy) to judge the section, as transporting of plants for display was difficult for him. Sadly this section was poorly supported by its members but there were still some interesting and unusual plants to see and smell!

The Open Section in comparison was totally different and was extremely well supported with plants of high quality and standard, posing our Judges Ian Thwaites and John Foster some headaches and difficult decisions to sort out the prize winners.

Congratulations go to all the prize winners. The Diplomas for the Best Cactus - *Mammillaria perbella*, and the Best Succulent - *Aloe erinacea*, were awarded to John Warwick, and the Diploma for the Best Asclepiad to Dr. Gillian Evison for her exhibit *Pseudolithos cubiformis*.

Our guest speaker this year was Dr Peter Brandham of Kew, whose talk on the Horn of Africa was extremely well illustrated with some superb pictures and was delivered in Peter's normal enthusiastic manner; shame a few more members could not be tempted to stay.

My thanks to Martin Doorbar who took the place of David Bailey to capture all the prize winners. Hopefully the editor will be able to reproduce some of his pictures so you can see what you missed. (Ed: No room here, but they'll be on the website when it is up.)

Last but by no means least all our thanks to Mary and her team in the kitchen, who continue to supply everyone with the required sustenance to keep us going throughout the day.

Bill Darbon, Show Secretary

BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2006

Jan 26th. Doug Donaldson - "I.S.O.C.S. Part 1"

Doug, our neighbouring and neighbourly nurseryman from High Wycombe, is, as you read this, assembling the slides he took on his 2005 visit to India. Doug has judged the All India Cactus and Succulent Show in Delhi several times. He has taken every opportunity to visit enthusiasts' collections as well as plant habitats. Doug's sympathetic but not uncritical view of Indian life, expressed in his uniquely humorous style, will be much better entertainment than anything the television has to offer.

Feb 23rd. Rodney Sims - "Aloe Aloe!"

One of the doyens of the hobby, Rodney has been a long-standing friend of most of us. It is a long time since we have had a talk on Aloes, though all of us grow a few and some of us have a good collection. Rodney will use his expert's eye to guide us through what these plants have to offer and to improve our knowledge of how to grow them.

Mar 23rd. Stan Griffin - "Argentina Part 2"

Stan has already entertained and amazed us with the first part of his account of the 1994 Birmingham Branch Outing to Argentina. This is Part 2, taking us up to the Bolivian border and back through some spectacular cactus habitats that are surprisingly rarely visited by tourists.

Apr 27th. Mal Weobley - "Basic Botany for Cactophiles"

It is a surprisingly long time since Mal made his unforgettable presence felt at an Oxford Branch meeting. It is also a long time since anybody gave us a talk on the basic essentials of what makes our plants tick. This talk is not to be missed. Newcomers to the hobby will learn a lot; everybody will learn something, and everybody is guaranteed an enjoyable evening.

May 25th. Trevor Wray - "Wray's Wrangles"

Though Trevor is no stranger to the lecture circuit, he has not been to Oxford Branch before - strangely, because he only comes from Northampton. He is a plantsman with an interest in alpines as well as succulents. His talk reflects his various interests. It includes some pictures of the celebrated Oxford National Show. Oxford and Northampton are developing increasingly cordial relations and Trevor is warmly welcomed.

June 22nd. John Betteley - "Around the Shows"

Regular visitors to Branch meetings will remember John's superb talk on the Crassulaceae in 1994. He is Secretary of Lincoln Branch and one of the senior judges of the BCSS. He will be giving us an expert's view of several National Shows and perhaps persuading us to dust off some of our own specimens ready for July 16th.

John Watmough, Secretary

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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.

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FIELD TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA

By Mary Stone

Our early autumn is early spring in South Africa and the best time to look for succulents. As I had not been there before, I took the opportunity that presented itself to visit the Richtersveld.

After a cool night in Cape Town, we set out with the weather promising to improve. As my greatest interest is in Euphorbias I was soon in my element as our first stop was by the dam at Clanwilliam to see *E. loricata* – it was a beautiful plant growing out of a crack in rocks by the roadside. I hope it is still as beautiful because on our return journey there were some boys with a bonfire nearby! Soon after we made a stop where there were *E. tuberculata* – big strong plants, such as we never see growing in our greenhouses, also a variety of *E. mauritanica* – I was to learn that there are several variations on this plant.

Our party was made up of a couple from Austria, another from France, a Dane, an American and myself, led by Graham and Françoise Williamson, Kotie Retief and Maddy Lehman all from South Africa. Their interests were not so much in line with mine and they were soon finding *Conophytum*, *Crassula*, a fat centipede 6 inches long and lovely bulbs such as *Morea* and *Gethyllis*. A short way further on we found a purple-leaved *Othonna*, *Argyroderma*, *Conophytum*, *Oophytum*, *E. exilis*, *E. gentilis* and *E. muricata* – the last one gets its name from feeling like sandpaper, according to our accompanying live encyclopaedia, Graham!

We were visiting places with iconic names like Springbok, Poffadder, Aggeneys and Steinkopf in the first few days and the tally of plants grew. Every stop had its

excitements. We saw *Lithops jullii fullerii*, *Titanopsis hugo-schlechterii*, a magnificent *Hoodia gordonii*, *E. rudis*, and in a carefully protected site within a mining complex, *Conophytum ratum*. We often came across *Avonia papyracea* and also *Avonia alstonii* which was pulled down into the ground. We saw many *Tylecodon paniculata* throughout the trip with their lovely peeling-barked trunks, *Lithops*, *Aloes* and the renowned *Cheirodopsis peculiaris*, which grows in only one place near Springbok. It was overcast when we first saw it, but on our return south we caught it late in the day just before the flowers closed.



Avonia alstonii

Euphorbias were everywhere. I had been thrilled to see *E. rudis* and *E. braunsii*, but then I began to realise the problems of identifying the 'stick' euphorbias! I thought I knew *E. mauritanica*, but then the varieties cropped up. *E. gentilis*, *E. spinea*, *E. ephedroides* and *E. decussata* too, all began to vary according to where they grew. However to cheer me up we found *E. friedrichiae* growing in an open windswept area, South of Vioolsdrif. Back to the 'sticks', we came across *E. dregeana* and *E. gummifera*. At one place near Springbok there were some lovely *Aloe dichotoma* up a hillside; it was quite difficult to get into a good position to photograph them but we did not give up!



Aloe dichotoma

As we were not too late on our arrival back in Springbok, we visited a local hillside which was a real delight. The evening sun brought out the lovely colours of the stones and rocks and it made a good setting for the many succulents. *Tylecodon paniculata*, *Aloe melanacantha*, *Conophytum bilobum*, several *Crassula* and *Adromischus* grew there, and best of all, *E. filiflora* covered in flowers; this is a site I should love to visit again, though of course I could say the same for almost anywhere! Like many of the places we visited the slopes were steep and rocky, and one needed to be fit to scramble up and very careful in coming down safely.

The next day there was another treat in store. On the side of the road to Port Nolloth, growing in fine red sand, there was a colony of *Euphorbia confluens*. They were in full flower and there were a fair number of younger plants. Often the most protected plants seem to be those growing on the verges of the roads, where traffic passes it by and animals do not graze, and here was an example.

We picked up a picnic lunch in Port Nolloth and stopped to eat it by the road going up to Alexander Bay. Here was a gully with the sides covered with succulents, creating a series of natural rock gardens. Again there were several of the confusing 'sticks' -

E. ephedroides v. *cuminata*, *E. burmannii* and of course, *E. mauritanica*, but also *E. chersina*, which is a much more chunky 'stick'. A short way further on, on the other side of the road and growing in very soft sand, were big plants of *E. ramiglans* - this with *E. confluens* made a second variety in the very interesting medusoid group, which we had found in one day.



Euphorbia friedrichiae

Beyond Alexander Bay on the road to Sendelingsdrif, we stopped at another site where, at first sight and at a distance, the flowers were reminiscent of our English primroses. However our stop was to see the succulents - especially noteworthy were some large *Aloe striata* v. *karasbergensis* and we took the opportunity to photograph Graham and Françoise in a pose similar to that on the cover of Graham's book about the Richtersveld. *E. gummifera* provided me with my 'fix' here! We began to see *Aloe pillansii* along the way and at one stop were amused by the enormous nests of the social weaver bird hanging on the telegraph poles.

We spent the next two nights in self-catering chalets just inside the Richtersveld National Park, which meant going through the security check for a big mining complex. The chalets overlooked the Orange River and we had wonderful views of mountains and the setting sun. Maddy and Kotie treated us to an excellent braai (or BBQ as

we would call it) and the next day to a goulash, also made over the charcoal fire – this was no BBQ cooking as we know it though! The apparatus had a swinging bar, so that a small 'cauldron' could be hung over the fire. We were eleven in the party altogether so many hands made light work of clearing up afterwards.

In the National Park itself we went to Hellspoort Kloof and enjoyed a morning climbing steep hillsides. Again there were too many plants to mention them all, but for me there were *E. hottentota*, *E. guerichiana* and masses of *E. hamata* with its bright red flowers. Having found *E. hamata* we came across it again in several different places. An unforgettable sight was a splendid *Hoodia alstonii* clinging to the hillside. We also found some good examples of *Pachypodium namaquanum* and big clusters of *Conophytum loeschianum*, both of which I thought were spectacular.



Hoodia alstonii

After a picnic lunch we went up to Halfmans Pass. This took us up over some very rough roads which had been washed out by the occasional rainstorms, through spectacular high cliffs, until we came out on a more open space. The hillsides were covered with reddish brown coloured *Aloe pearsonii*; close up the plants did not look special and seemed rather dried up, but the overall effect was beautiful. Looking around we found the now inevitable *E. hamata* with *Crassula hemispherica*, *C. grisea* and *Haworthia cymbiformis* v. *umbraticola* among many other treasures.

The next morning we packed up and moved off. After having to fix a flat tyre, which is an accepted hazard when driving across rough terrain, and during which episode the rest of us looked for anything interesting to photograph, we went on to Cornel's Kop. This is a real treasure trove as everyone knows – and we were not disappointed. From the distance we could see *Aloe pillansii* and it was good to be able to see them close up – it is sad to see that they are not so numerous and healthy as they used to be in the well-known pictures taken some years ago. We found yet more *E. hamata*, *E. mauritanica* v. *foetens* and *E. dregeana*. An interesting item was the parasite *Hydnora africana*, resplendent in its bright red colouring. In prehistoric times this had been a hill fort and it was obvious that it had been chosen because of the way in which it commanded all approaches.

To be concluded.

CSSA CONVENTION 2005

By David Greenaway

Arizona in August, 106F, was this madness? Not really - the big plus was that the Convention hotel room prices had dropped to an all-year low, and the air-conditioning was spot on everywhere inside. The CSSA said that the Scottsdale Plaza Resort was the best accommodation they had ever had for a conference. Jean and I had a huge two-roomed villa with patio for £50 a day. Half a dozen or so other Brits made it over there - apart from the speakers Sheila Collenette, Len Newton and Graham Charles. I had a chat with Woody Minnich at the opening reception, and assured him that our 2006 convention was going ahead (he will be a speaker). He was surprised, as were other Americans, that we had flown direct from Heathrow to Phoenix - a plug for British Airways.

Sheila gave two absorbing talks during the convention, both about Saudi Arabia this time. The questions afterwards were mainly from American women asking how she got on in Arabia as a woman, and Sheila's answers were fascinating. Len's first talk ranged over all the succulent plants of Kenya (500 species now, 57 endemic to Kenya), as a forerunner to the CSSA field trip he is running in December 2006. He mentioned *Aloe muscorvan*, which has a poisonous sap which is used for killing hyenas. It was named after an Italian who never learned of this fact, as he was killed himself three days after the dedication - by an elephant. A friend of his also had a plant named after him, but he was so upset by his friend's death that he committed suicide that following year. If you are superstitious it might be best to refuse to have anything named after you! Graham's talks covered the CSSA trip to Chile in 2004, and a pre-view of his July / August 2008 CSSA field trip to Brazil.

Nurseryman Chuck Hanson talked about 'Difficult Succulents from Seed'. He mentioned that some seeds need a long maturing time before they will germinate, e.g. *Jatropha* and *Cyphostemma*. He said: crack open the black seed shell of *Uncarina* just before sowing, to extract the seed within. Nurseryman and biologist Guy Wrinkle gave a spirited talk on 'What Habitat can Teach us about Growing Plants'. His final conclusion was - almost nothing! The one notable exception to this was the need to note the winter growers. He had much to say about succulent plants that we can grow but not 'show', such as cycads, bromeliads, orchids and bulbs. Chuck's second talk was also about succulent orchids; many of them can be grown in exactly the same conditions as our cacti etc. Mark Muridan gave an enthusiastic account of his trip to Socotra. This was his first time out of the States, and *en route* he seemed to have enjoyed London.

Betty and W A (Fitz) FitzMaurice spoke on *Mammillaria* of Mexico (no surprise there) and 'Unknown Mexico'. They have lived there for 31 years - by choice, as they were at pains to point out - and gave a fascinating insight into the country and its peoples. Biologist Teresa Terrazas gave two very technical talks on the columnar cacti of Mexico and their relatives. Raul Puente-Martinez of the Desert Botanical Garden, Phoenix, spoke on *Opuntias* (Prickly Pears) in Mexico; he is presently working on a taxonomic revision of the genus *Nopalea*, the subject of his second talk. Kathy Rice, also of the DBG, gave two interesting talks on some of the rare cacti of the U.S. Southwest, and of the ongoing conservation efforts.

For the field trip day we went on the desert habitat tour with Len, Sheila, and about 25 other people. We were in luck, in that the searing heat was alleviated that day by

some cloud cover. In fact we started out at the second site in the rain - the tail end of a thunderstorm, a most unexpected desert feature. The first site was to have been on an Indian reservation, accompanied by a guide, but we got there an hour late and not surprisingly he had gone. As a result we missed seeing *Mammillaria thornberi* which grows there, a disappointment to me as my seedlings of this taxa are now flowering-sized clumps. The reservations are total no-go areas for non-Native Americans - they will not even set foot on one without an invitation. The worry is not the arrows these days, but that the reservation's police who would arrest them for sure.



Arizona!

We first found the Teddy Bear Cholla, *Cylindropuntia bigelovii*. This makes do with green flowers, as it doesn't bother to attract pollinators but propagates entirely vegetatively; the fruit rarely have seeds and when they do it is sterile. Packrats had collected fallen joints and piled them under a palo verde tree to protect something or other. How they move them is a puzzle. Lawrence Garvie, our tour leader, warned us repeatedly that these chollas were the most dangerous things in the desert, even more so than the rattlers. He carried a big pair of pliers for emergency spine-extraction!



Mammillaria tetrancistra

We then photographed, amongst other things, *Carnegie gigantea* (of course), *Mammillaria tetrancistra* and *M. grahamii* in flower (the former has a curiously soft body, squashing down if pressed from above with a blunt stick and springing back when the stick is removed), *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* (boring), *Ferocactus wislizenii*, *F. emoryi* and *F. cylindraceus* in flower, *Echinocereus engelmannii* var. *acicularis*, *Jatropha cardiophylla* with tiny white flowers, *Fouquieria splendens* and *Peniocereus greggii*. Lawrence promised a prize for the first person to spot the plant of *Peniocereus* at our first stop. I described it to Jean and she saw it before anyone else, growing through a *Larrea tridentate* (Creosote bush) as they do. The prize was a large packet of the seed, collected the autumn before.



Peniocereus greggii

The last speaker at the Convention was the President, Dan Mahr, who spoke about the invasion of the cactus moth into the Florida Keys a few years ago, and the way it is spreading along the southern states. He organised the first conference on this invasion, and it has become a priority issue for the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. Biological control may prove to be the answer.

At the opening banquet the four Fellowships awarded this year were presented to Sheila, Graham, LoWilla Wilson and Duke Benidom. Gerry Barad gave a very technical talk on pollinating stapeliads (it is not easy). Another evening he ran the Convention Auction, though Bob Smoley did most of the calling. The highest bid for a plant was of \$300 for a single pad of *Opuntia sulphurea*. What makes this Argentinian Prickly Pear so desirable?

Workshops were this time run in parallel with other evening events. Steve Hammer had recovered well from his bicycle accident earlier this year, and gave his workshop on Succulents from Seed. I went to the newsletter editors' meeting, led by the current editor of "To The Point", Tom Glavich. He was into Web sites, using Content Management Systems (check it out). The local society, the Central Arizona (CACSS), has maintained a Web site for the past two years, but has resisted distributing their newsletter electronically.

At the closing banquet we shared a table with speakers Betty and Fitz, and Teresa and Raul Terrazas. Three Native Americans entertained us with traditional dances, songs and music, and at the end they had everyone up for one of their easier dances (Jean and I with the FitzMaurices). Fitz has a waggish sense of humour, and altogether they are a delightful couple.

On the technical side both the microphones and the remote control for the projectors

gave trouble to some speakers, but the digital visual projection was superb. I was interested to note that only the U.K. speakers still used film slides - all the Americans have gone over to digital presentations.

Although not having voting powers, we went to the Affiliates Meeting out of interest. The 2007 Convention is already settled - it will be in Seattle - and two C&S societies had bid to host the 2009 Convention, namely Tucson and San Diego. The voting went to Tucson for 2009 and San Diego for 2011, so these will be the proposals to be set before the CSSA Board.

We had a week in New York (Jean's first visit) on the 'way home'. One morning we visited the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and I was quite impressed by the Desert House there. A wide-ranging and imaginative collection of cacti and other succulents had been planted out in beds with pathways. One other relevant thing I noted that week was that when we were on the Metro (underground train) my eye was caught by the name *Hoodia gordonii* on an advertisement. Yes - it was a component of a claimed appetite-suppressant product. I think it might be in present in rather small quantities, given the speed at which these plants grow in my greenhouse.

Perhaps the craziest thing we did on this trip was to bring home 11lb of pumice in our suitcases. Jean got one of the exhibitors at the plant sales in Scottsdale to let us have some (for free). I know it is supposed to be light, but the suitcases were heavy already. Pity we could not persuade Rainbow Gardens to ship it back with the books that we bought!

David Greenaway

OTHER BRANCH EVENTS

Sunday July 16th 2006 at Langdale Hall, Witney
Summer Cactus Only Show, with Mammillaria Society.

Sunday October 8th 2006 at Langdale Hall, Witney
Autumn Show – Mesembs and Other Succulents.

April 2007 (date to be fixed) **Branch Auction.** Please start thinking about plants for auction and plants for sale. 20% of proceeds to Branch funds. Information from the Branch Secretary.

CALENDAR

Sat. April 8 th .	BCSS A.G.M., Leicester
Sun. April 23 rd .	Zone 9 Convention, Hardwicke, Gloucester
Sun. May 21 st .	High Wycombe Show
Sun. June 11 th .	Birmingham Show
Thu. – Sun. Aug 17 th –20 th .	National Convention, Loughborough
Fri. – Sun. Sep 1 st – 3 rd .	Judges' Course, Moulton, Northampton
Sat. Sep 23 rd .	Mesembryanthemum Event, Banstead
Sun. Oct 1 st .	Birmingham Show
Sat. Oct 14 th .	High Wycombe Convention

John Watmough

OXFORD BOTANICAL GARDENS

One result of gene sequencing has been the taxonomic reallocation of just over 25% of the flowering plants. (The most obvious effect on our hobby has been the disappearance of the family Asclepiadaceae and the transfer of all the genera belonging to it into the Apocynaceae.) Oxford Botanical Gardens have always kept their beds planted so as to reflect understood relationships: now that so much has

changed so quickly, they have decided to engage in a major replanting exercise. This is now more or less completed, except for the arid house. The Botanical Gardens are using the enforced replanting there as an excuse to get their tatty old succulents out of their ancient clay pots and plant many of them in raised beds. They expect to have finished this by Christmas. It will be interesting to look round the Gardens next spring and view the results of their labours.

Source: Oxford Today, Michaelmas 2005