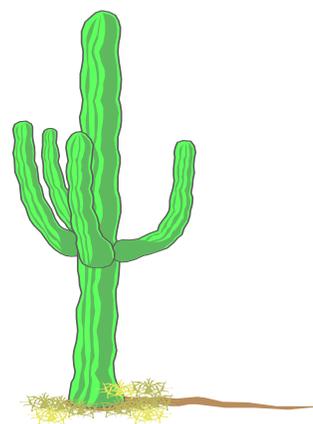


# Oxotica

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

December 2007

Volume 12, Number 2



### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The second year of my chairmanship has been one of our 'single-show' years. On paper, with no National Convention or National Show, it might appear that we could have afforded to put our feet up (or headed out to the greenhouse to do some much needed re-potting). However, as usual, the members of the Branch have been out and about selling plants, setting up displays and attempting to entice a few more people into the hobby that we all enjoy. Our presence was felt at events at Oxford's Florence Park, Cholsey, Whichford pottery and Waddeston. It's rather ironic that the Whichford pottery event was their dry gardening weekend in view of the deluge that occurred across the country the following Friday.



*Oxford Branch sales stand at Whichford*

This year's show was the first we have held in conjunction with the Haworthia Society. The quality of the plants was excellent and the show a great success.

The remarks on the BCSS Forum were very complimentary -

*"What an excellent set of photos of a stunning display of c & s. Only National Shows are better?"*

*"One exhibitor in particular (I won't mention names) had their plants in such perfect condition one could not help but be in awe of their cultivation skills."*

*"WOW!! absolutely magnificent plants!"*

We hope to repeat a show with the Haworthia Society in the future. I wish to thank them for their support, the efforts of the Branch members on the day and John Lavranos for giving the lecture after the close of the show. If you haven't managed to get to a Branch show in a while please think about it next year. Bill Darbon's talents in managing our shows so smoothly over the years have been rewarded with his elevation to the National Show Committee. Well Done Bill and Good Luck for the 2008 National Show to held on 16<sup>th</sup> August at Godmanchester.

Our website continues to attract visitors. Gillian Evison has done a superb job in making sure that the plants at the Table show at Branch meetings and the Branch Show have all been photographed and displayed there. The website also allowed us to maintain an up-to-date list of plants, with photos of many of the lots, for our auction earlier in the year. I am sure this

contributed to the success of that day. We have agreed with Northampton Branch that we will host plant auctions in alternate years so they will organise next year's auction (provisional date is 27<sup>th</sup> April).

There have been some changes to the Committee over the last year. John Warwick stood down from the Committee at the end of 2006, Mary Stone has stood down as Branch representative on the Zone Committee (but remains on our

Branch Committee) and Martin Doorbar has had to resign as Treasurer due to a work posting to the USA. All have contributed to the vibrancy of the Branch and I am grateful for all they have put into our various activities.

I would like to close by thanking you all for supporting the Branch over the last twelve months and wishing you all a Merry Christmas and horticultural joys in 2008.

*Steve Williams*

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### E.L.K.

#### **7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007, Blankenberge, Belgium**

For the passengers, this was the easiest imaginable trip. All that the three of us, David Greenaway, John Watmough and Steve Williams had to do was to give Martin Doorbar the money and do what we were told. Accommodation was arranged through Daphne Pritchard in the posh seaside hotel where the event was to take place. Martin had booked a crossing through the Tunnel, which was easy-peasy, though we learned afterwards that a new ferry service from Ramsgate to Zeebrugge had been opened. You can see Zeebrugge docks from Blankenberge.

Martin has a big estate car, but he would not allow us to take our own trays, insisting that his own would be sure to fit together and take up less room in the car. We also had to saw the ends off our toothbrush handles. When we arrived, we soon got swallowed up in the huge marquee plus two conference halls packed with plants and their sellers from all over Europe. A brief "Wotcher" indicated one of the seventy or so British fanatics. One stall had three hundred Euphorbias that this writer had never heard of. There were all sorts of Melocacti, Asclepiads that had only been seen previously in books, Digitostigmas of every size - and price.

The three days were taken up with dashing round all the sales tables, cramming the purchases into the car, going to lectures (four in English, two in Dutch), and eating and a little bit of drinking. Most people were multilingual, so that when a Frenchman addressed a Czech in German, he would reply in English or whatever until they found a common tongue. Most of the good and the great were there, and most of them were selling things, or buying them. Your correspondent bought a litre of something which dare not be named for fear of a visit from our Secret Police, but which turns out to be on open sale legitimately in Germany despite our authorities saying it is banned by the EC.

We were all a bit punch drunk when we finally packed the car, and unpacked it, and repacked it, trying to fit everything in. Only our wallets were lighter. We watched Ernst and Marita Specks carrying huge piles of empty trays and loading them in their van. Then everybody laughed when we saw Doug Donaldson driving off with his van body scraping the tyres and Doreen in the passenger seat with her feet on some full crates and embracing another pile of crates on her lap.

It took your writer three days just to repot his purchases, and he has not yet managed to find room for them all. A remarkable event!

*John Watmough*

## BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2008

(Fourth Thursday in month, 7:30 p.m. for 8:00 p.m.). Please bring plants for Table Show

### January 24th: COLIN WALKER - Macaronesian Memories.

Dr Walker is well known to many of us as the Editor of *Bradleya*. He is a professional botanist at the Open University and a highly respected lecturer at our Society's conventions.

"Macaronesian" means "relating to the Canary Islands and the Azores". We shall be seeing some relatively familiar plants in habitat, but some much less familiar, presented most beautifully.

### February 28th: CHRIS DAVIES - Mammillarias in Variety.

Tall Chris from Amersham used to be one of the moderators of the BCSS Forum. He has an enormous greenhouse containing specimens of almost every cactus that will survive without special heating. This talk will be new to most of us, but those who have seen Chris's talks will know that it will be fascinating. This talk will focus on a few kinds of *Mammillaria* and *Coryphantha* in habitat with a view to examining the variability of species.

### March 27th: THE COMMITTEE - Library Pictures.

A show from the National Slide Collection featuring some of the very high quality slides that are available.

### April 24th: MIKE STANSBIE - What's in a Name?

Dr Stansbie has served as Chairman of the Shows Committee and knows a thing or two about plants. This talk approaches the hobby from a different angle: he will give us some idea about how plants have come to be named as they are, with an insight into the current botanical rules that

govern these things, with illustrations to amuse the less litigious.

### May 22nd: DOUG DONALDSON - World of Cacti.

Doug is always welcome. Since retirement he has rapidly become one of the Society's favourite speakers. This talk features a whistle-stop tour round two continents featuring some of Doug's favourite cacti. We can also expect plenty of jokes and a fine selection of sales plants.

### June 26th: EDDY HARRIS - Walk on the Wild Side (Part 2).

Eddy is of course our much-loved National Secretary. Strangely, though he makes a point of visiting all the Branches of the BCSS, he has not been to Oxford since 1996, when he gave his South African talk "Walk on the Wild Side (Part 1)". This must be the longest interval between two halves of a talk in BCSS history!

*John Watmough, Branch Treasurer*

## Oxotica

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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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## OXFORD HAWORTHIA SHOW

*By Bill Keen*

The Haworthia Society Show 2007, held for the first time in conjunction with the BCSS Oxford Branch Show, was staged in the Langdale Hall, Witney on 16<sup>th</sup> September. Assuming my counting was accurate, a total of 212 entries comprising over 330 plants were displayed for the pleasure of visiting enthusiasts. The appointment of the Haworthia Society's most successful exhibitor, Stirling Baker, as judge opened up the field to challengers and it was rewarding to see that they seized the opportunity. All 24 classes were well supported, with an average of just under nine entries per class.

The overall quality of the plants exhibited was very high and I feel sure that Stirling must have agonised over many of the classes while making his decisions. I heard no criticism of his judgment, so he must have got it right on most occasions! I shall not attempt to list the winners in each class, but instead will highlight some of the exhibits that particularly caught my eye.

It was noticeable that in the class for *H. arachnoidea* and related taxa, the three prizewinning entries were all growing in clay pots. This had encouraged a tight compact habit and showed the plants at their most attractive. The two classes for *H. emelyae* and its close relatives included a total of 20 entries displaying the range of colour and markings that make these plants so popular. Among the entries denied a prizecard, a huge specimen of *H. emelyae* var. *comptoniana* with six heads attracted attention, but unfortunately had a few small marks.

The three classes provided for *H. magnifica*, *H. retusa*, *H. mirabilis*, *H. mutica* and *H. pygmaea* were well supported with a total of 34 entries. I was greatly impressed by the brilliant colours of many of the entries. A

dark purple, almost black *H. magnifica* var. *atrofusca*, beautifully marked specimens of *H. magnifica* var. *splendens*, chocolate-brown plants of *H. mirabilis* var. *badia* and the subtler coloration of *H. mutica* had me wondering how their owners achieved such perfection without scorching the plants. The winning entry in the class for *H. springbokvlakensis* and *H. bruynsii* was a fine specimen of the former, filling a 3-inch pot and looking extremely handsome.



*Haworthia truncata* var. *truncata*

The class for *H. truncata* was dominated by a huge clump of *H. truncata* var. *truncata*, fully 15 inches across. This was a magnificent specimen and, although having a small number of minor marks on some of the heads, thoroughly deserved the award of a BCSS Diploma and Silver Medal for the best plant in the Haworthia Society section of the show. I also admired a very nice specimen of the slower-growing var. *maughanii* which took the third prize.

It was good to see some fine specimens in the class for *H. coarctata* and *H. reinwardtii*. These hard-leaved species are often ignored in general cactus and succulent shows, where they usually have to compete with the retuse types. They often lose out because of their frustrating habit of losing odd leaves part-way along the long stems. The class contained some well grown examples of several different forms.

The entries in the class for *H. koelmaniorum* demonstrated that some growers are not only successful in growing this tricky species but are even persuading the plants to cluster. The winning entry had two heads and the runner-up three, both plants being in excellent condition. Similarly, the class for *H. scabra* and *H. sordida* attracted twelve well grown specimens, the best of which, a perfect *H. sordida*, received an Award of Merit

*H. cooperi* var. *venusta* has been available for only a short time, but three nicely grown specimens took the winning places in the class for *H. cooperi*.

The class for one haworthiad provides scope for exhibitors and, as usual, attracted a range of very different plants. First prize was awarded to a large but compact clump of *H. nigra* var. *diversifolia*, almost black in colour, while second prize went to a large clump of the hybrid *H. 'Chocolat'*.

The remaining classes in the section were allocated for groups of plants. These presented a challenge for exhibitors, but they rose to the occasion. It was pleasing to see the diversity of species, the colour and markings on the plants, and the evident skill of the exhibitors in displaying the groups to advantage.

As a bonus, the Oxford Branch section of the show produced some fine plants of particular interest to haworthia addicts. In the unlimited pot size Aloe class, first prize went to a large clump of *Aloe descoingsii*, about nine inches across and in lovely condition. Second prize was awarded to a fine double-headed specimen of *A. haemanthifolia*.

In the Gasteria class, two large clumps of *Gasteria nitida* var. *armstrongii* vied for the minor placings behind a superb specimen of the unusual *G. rawlinsonii* in a large bowl. The long pendent stems radiated in all directions and were just coming into flower.

Away from the competitive classes, mention must be made of the sterling work of John and Joyce Jackson, who set up and manned our publicity stand. This attracted attention throughout the day and, I understand, several new members were recruited.

Although these do not come within the scope of this brief report, there were some superb cacti and other succulents to be seen in the other section of the show. Oxford Branch are to be congratulated on staging what must be one of the best shows in the country. As an added bonus on this occasion, those exhibitors and visitors who remained in the hall after the show closed enjoyed an excellent lecture on "The Newer Aloes" by that eminent plant-hunter John Lavranos. It was an enjoyable and memorable day out.



*Gasteria rawlinsonii*

## TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF A SHOW SECRETARY

*By Bill Darbon*

For this year's show we decided to invite The Haworthia Society to participate in a joint show. To this end, and knowing that their members can be slow in showing when Stirling Baker is an exhibitor, we thought that the easy way round this was to get him out of the picture by judging this section. As he agreed, he also set out their part of the schedule.

Once their schedule had been distributed via the June edition of *Haworthiad*, we then got to thinking about the space at the hall. We decided that it might be politic to only invite one outside nurseryman (Croston Cactus) and use the second alcove for the Branch sales, utilising our normal sales area for extra staging. Well, it was just as well that we did.



*Aloe haemanthifolia*

Although entries were slow to appear (as usual) at first and a week before I was ringing round some of our normal exhibitors to check that they were coming, I need not have worried.

The weekend arrived, as did 650 entries, and as I was writing out the entry cards, I began

to realise quite how many there could have been if some of those who usually show (but we knew were not this time due to clashes in their private lives) had also come - where would we have put them?????????

This was the most that we have managed for a Branch Show!



*Corynopuntia invicta*

The day of the show arrived and all the plants were being trundled into the hall, and still more - larger now - how on earth were we going to get them all in????????? A little reorganisation was required, and eventually all managed to find a space - I still think we had a little room spare - not a lot.

Every class was well supported with a good quality and variety of plants, many of which were of National standard and posed our judges Tony Morris and John Betteley some awkward decisions.

I am indebted to Gill Evison for leaving the kitchen and taking the photographs of all the main prize-winners that you can now see on our website, 170 in total, which will give you something to remember on a wet afternoon when you should be in the greenhouse.

Bill Keen, our Society President, put on his Editorial hat (*Haworthiad*) and has allowed us to print his appraisal of the Haworthia

Section.

What a great day it was, especially finishing with John Lavranos' lecture, and looking back where would we have put another 100 plus entries?

ELASTIC HALL REQUIRED!!!!!!!



*Whiteslonea crassa*



*Pelecylflora aselliformis*



*Mammillaria humboldtii*

**STOP PRESS**

Your Committee is in the process of arranging an Open Day on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2008. Details are yet to be finalised, but when they are will be given out at the April Branch meeting. If you are unable to attend meetings, please ring me a bit nearer the time, and I will forward the necessary timetable and map. *Cathy Darbon, Branch Secretary*

## More pictures from Washington State

(see the CSSA Convention report in the previous Oxotica)



*Maihuenia poeppigii*



*Opuntia basilaris*



*Echinocereus x lloydii* (Pecos County, Texas)



*Opuntia pulchella*



Packed lunch time, in front of the house.