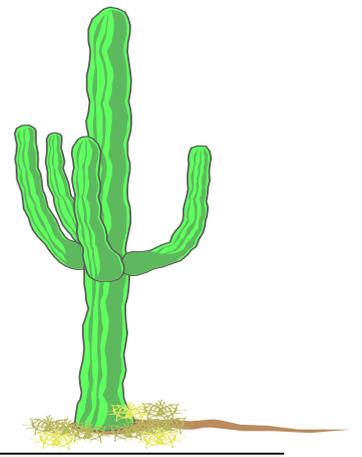


Oxotica

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

December 2011

Volume 16 Number 2



BCSS Oxford Branch CHAIR'S REPORT 2011

by Gillian Evison

Our growing year started with an even colder winter than the record breaking big freeze of 2010. Many plants that had made it through last winter decided to call it a day and the more tender Asclepiads in my collection seemed to have been particularly affected by the long weeks of low light levels. An indifferent summer has been followed by one of the warmest Novembers on record so we have all been able to save a little on the heating bills but it remains to be seen whether the mild winter weather will continue.

One of the big events of the Branch calendar this season was our biennial auction. The healthy turnout proved that the marketing, which included a mix of online and person to person promotion, had been a success. It was particularly nice to be able to offer a warm welcome to Doreen Donaldson amongst our visitors after the sudden loss of Doug in December, whose passing has left a huge hole in our hobby. The auction benefited from contributions by John White, Graham Charles and plants of former member Fred Galloway and, despite the recession, raised a healthy sum for the Branch. If the signature plant of the 2009 auction was *Gymnocalycium saglionis*, 2011 was definitely the year of the *Echinocactus grusonii* with the auction tables looking like a miniature version of the Huntington Gardens Golden Barrel beds. Plants that didn't make it to new homes at the auction are now gracing three raised beds in a Trinity College accommodation block and

providing a taste of the desert for student residents.

Our coffers have further been boosted by members volunteering their time to run stands at Littlemore Fayre and Bury Knowle and also by John Watmough's tireless travels with sales plants, many of which have been donated by Branch members.



Edithcolae grandis

Gillian Evison

Oxford's show this year was held in conjunction with the Haworthia Society and provided a record number of entries, thanks to Bill Darbon's hard work in organising and publicising the event. Fewer shows are organised across the country than when I first started in the hobby and it is a credit to the Branch that our show not only survives but thrives and consistently attracts plants that would grace a National Show. The social side of the show would not be the success that it is without Mary Stone and team providing refreshments throughout the day and I suspect many visitors come as much for the tea, cake and bacon butties as they do for the plants.

The regulars at meetings have been joined by one new face, one new/old face and visitors from Reading and High Wycombe branches

who have all contributed to the social atmosphere at talks. Thanks go to Cathy Darbon for organising a lively line-up of speakers and also to those who contribute plants to the Table Shows, which always provide a talking point. Those who cannot attend meetings are, as ever, kept up to date thanks to David Greenaway who keeps our website fresh and provides extra-curricular

reading material with **Oxotica**, which has a readership that extends as far as the Continent. As this is my last year as Chair I will end by wishing my successor every success and all members of Oxford Branch a merry Christmas and peaceful New Year

GE

THE BRANCH SHOW

by Bill Darbon

On Sunday 18th September the Branch ran a joint show with members of the Haworthia Society at our normal venue in Witney. I am pleased to report that we continue to attract some of the best plants in the south and even without a couple of our normal participants we managed to swell the benches to capacity with 590 entries and over 1500 plants on display. Although the classes for the Haworthia Section were a little disappointing there were still some wonderful entries. The main part of the show was a joy to behold with superb quality plants everywhere. I am very grateful to all those who continue to support us; it makes my job as show secretary a pleasure, apart from using a large shoe horn to fit everything in.

We tried an open door policy this year and it would seem to have worked well as we attracted a lot of passers-by who hopefully bought plants and sampled tea and cake. Despite some equipment deficiencies in the kitchen, which we only discovered on arrival, Mary and Margaret performed their magic to ensure that everyone who attended was very well catered for. I am indebted to Gillian who continues to take pictures of all the prize winners to adorn our branch web page on the Society website.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to a great day to keep Oxford at the forefront as one of the leading shows outside the National Show (not my opinion but that expressed by one of the judges and a well known exhibitor).

Photographs by Gillian Evison



Aloe erinacea (Best Succulent in Show)



Copiapoa cinerria ssp. columna-alba



Parodia procera

**BRANCH MEETINGS
JANUARY - JUNE 2012**

4th Thursday in month, 7:30 pm for 8:00 pm

Please bring plants for the Table Show if you can - each of these meetings except January

We have tried to include a good varied programme again this year and hope that there is something for YOUR specific interest. We are always open to suggestions for the programme so if there is someone or something that you would like us to arrange please speak to one of the committee.

26 January **MARTIN DOORBAR**
Thelocactus

It's that man again, and now he's back in the UK we thought we should make use of the fact. Tonight Martin will be talking about Thelocactus, of which he has the NGSS collection. While he was with Oxford Branch he passed the Judges Course and was Zone 8 Rep before going off to the States.

23 February **RODNEY SIMS**
Off the beaten track

Rodney is a regular visitor to Oxford Branch and also to South Africa which is where this talk centres (although from the title I expect to go places where others have not ventured). Rodney has now retired from the Shows Committee, and in recent years as Zone 6 Rep, but has stayed on its committee.

22 March **CHRIS DAVIES**
Mammillaria of North West Mexico

Chris is now show secretary of High Wycombe Branch and also Chair, Secretary & Treasurer of The Mammillaria Society so who better to speak on Mammillarias. It may give us some idea of what we might expect to see in July at the Show.

26 April **BRENDAN BURKE**
Chile - but not with an overcoat

Brendan was well known in the Manchester area but has now moved to Wales. He currently holds the Society book library. A new speaker to Oxford Branch, I am sure this will be an interesting talk.

24 May **STUART ESTELL**
Tales of a Cactus Murderer

Stuart is the current chair of Birmingham Branch and another new speaker for Oxford Branch. He has recently attended and passed the Judges Course so he is a new judge for the circuit. Tonight he will speak about his experiences.

28 June **KEN SCALES**
Czech Collections

Ken is an old friend and has attended our auctions and Branch as a speaker before. As a keen Mammillaria collector he has made frequent visits to the Czech Republic with David Rushforth.

15 July **BRANCH SHOW**
with the Mammillaria Society
Langdale Hall, Witney
Lecture afterwards by Wolfgang Plein.

Cathy Darbon

Oxotica

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The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

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ELK 2011

Blankenberge, September 9th – 11th

[I suggested to several of our roving reporters that they supply their write-up/photographs of this visit and here they are. I hope that you enjoy the potpourri. *Ed.*]



Photographs by Martin Doorbar

At what seemed a very early hour David Greenaway, John Watmough and Steve Williams arrived at Martin Doorbar's residence in Wallingford. Martin had just bought the biggest possible SUV (Succulent Unfillable Vehicle), and we left in it for Ashford, The Channel Tunnel, Jabbeke Junction, and the ELK hotel in Blankenberge. Merry greetings met us on all sides: "What, not you again!" More than half the previous weekend's Judges Course were here. After wasting 0.5 seconds depositing our luggage in our family suite we hurried down to the sales areas with our burning piles of Euros. "Not you again!" from some of the stallholders, especially the British ones.

We spent the rest of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday buying plants, attending lectures, eating, and drinking. There is no need

to describe buying plants. At the end of the day we would inspect each other's purchases and jeer at their wasting money. Then we would turn to our own plants and wonder if we had done the sensible thing.

Lectures are an important feature of the ELK. They were given in English, French, Dutch and German. As always, spoken Dutch is entirely incomprehensible to native English speakers. The French professor was very clear, but his talk was on how plants function, which is something that hard-bitten succulent growers usually know something about anyway. Marlon Machado on Brazil was fascinating; Ernst Specks gave us a guided tour of Angolan land-mines in what was meant to be German but what turned out to be at least 60% English; and lastly our very own Gillian Evison gave an inspiring talk on the beauties of Caudiciforms. Really she should have been on first, so that crazed members of the audience could stampede into the sales area in search of her recommendations.

Eating at the ELK is peculiar. Breakfast is a normal continental breakfast, lunch is dinner, and dinner is breakfast all over again. But drinking makes up for any perceived lack of solids. One of our number set out to sample every Belgian beer that was on offer. But he repented after No 13, which was something akin to chocolate-and-raspberry flavoured firewater, and he reverted to the modest 7.8% Trappist lager. For real enthusiasts there is a small bar opposite No 1 Sales Area so as to save time in between. Obviously the purchase of plants is undertaken with greater frenzy and less discrimination after adequate refreshment. Sunday morning is dedicated to inter-nursery trade, though good bargains may still be sought and sometimes found. Vans leave, some grinding along with the bodywork scraping the tyres, others bouncing along like new-born lambs. We had one last opportunity to jeer at one another's purchases, then, while complaining about each other's oversized toothbrushes, we crammed all our plants into the SUV and retreated towards normality. However, on the Friday night we had already booked in for 2012...

John Watmough



As well as hosting five talks, a lot of plant sales, and various book and sundries sales it is also possible to sample a product that Belgium is famous for at ELK. No - not chocolate, no - not frites but beer. Despite the small bar area at ELK a number of Belgium's finest were available, each served in their own individual glass.

Here are a few tasting notes compiled by your intrepid cacto-succulentophiles while recovering from their various shopping expeditions during the weekend.

Straffe Hendrik Tripe – a strong rich beer from Bruges, David quite liked this.

Rodenbach – a slightly sour red beer.

Mort Subite Geuze – a light sour acidic beer, Steve really liked this but nobody else seemed to share his enthusiasm.

Mort Subite Kriek – the beer above flavoured by infusing cherries. More general enthusiasm than for the Geuze but not universal.

Chimay - a strong beer originally brewed by Trappist monks – almost complete enthusiasm.

Duvel – a light golden beer, deceptively strong, we all liked this, especially John.

Maes – Martin stuck to this one every evening.

To quote Michael Jackson (no, that's not the Michael Jackson you are thinking of) in his book *The Great Beers of Belgium*: "No country can match Belgium in the gastronomic interest of its beers".

Steve Williams

This was my first ever ELK, prompted by being asked to speak and the late Doug Donaldson managing to persuade 'Him Indoors' that he really did want to drive me halfway across Europe. We knew we had reached the right venue by the flocks of Kangoos, Berlingos and Doblos in the car park and although we arrived just after 4pm, the official opening time, folk were already staggering out of the door laden with plant treasures.

Sales stretched across a hall and a large tent and the sheer density of sales plants made it all rather overwhelming. It was interesting comparing the event with the sales at the American Convention earlier this year and, generally speaking, plants were smaller but the range of species, particularly choice items, seemed larger. The range of evil chemicals far outstretched anything available in the UK and Brits were stocking up on plants and poisons as fast as they could fill their boxes, baskets and cars. It took only a couple of hours to spend my budget but John had cunningly extended his browsing opportunities by bringing wants lists for absent friends, which kept him going well into Saturday.

The bar area was, thankfully, far more sedate than internet discussions had suggested and the conservatory made for a pleasant place to sit and try a few of the local beers of an evening. I drew the short straw with timing for the talk being scheduled for the last slot on the Sunday when most were heading for the ports but with loyal support from fellow Oxford members and David Rushworth threatening to lock the doors on anyone who looked like leaving we managed to muster a reasonable audience before all dashing for the next train/ferry home.

Gillian Evison

So, over to ELK in Belgium again with the three lads, a re-run of our 2007 trip. The journeys out and back, via The Tunnel, were uneventful, i.e. they went well.

In the sales I was disappointed to see that the pseudolithos that I bought in 2007 were now higher priced and half the size, from the same nursery. I did not buy! All in all, though, there was plenty of choice for everyone in the two big sales halls, and at competitive prices.

After hearing about the precautions that more than one person takes when using the insecticide that we dubbed 'Agent Orange' (my lawyer advises against giving the real name), I decided not to buy any.

The accommodation was quite satisfactory, as it was last time, but the food down a bit if anything. I tried a wider range of beers this time. The best for me was the Trappist ale Chimay Triple. A 'sipping' beer at 9% abv, so perhaps it is as well that I did not discover it until last.

The only minor downside was that I left my little yellow plastic plant carrier behind, in the room. Otherwise, a first-class trip with great company.

David Greenaway



[Finally, just to show that there really were plant sales there, here are a couple of photographs that I took in the smaller (!) sales area.]



JOHN MULLARD A reminiscence

All older members of the Society will have fond memories of John Mullard, who doubled being Secretary of the National Cactus and Succulent Society with being Secretary of Oxford Branch. It was John who supervised the amalgamation of the NCSS with the GB Society in 1982 to form our present BCSS.

Residents of Cowley have another reason to remember John with fondness. It was he who, in his capacity of Oxford City's Chief Public Health Officer, gave British Leyland a fortnight's notice that he was closing down their factory unless they installed filters in their paint shop chimneys. When the company tried to prevaricate and suggested that he either did not have the power, or that his employers would never allow him to use it, he sent them a copy of the Victorian Statute from which he derived his authority. So the routine smell of acetone and the accompanying drizzle of coloured droplets that had for years enlivened local washing lines disappeared as if by magic.

But John had another enemy, who outlasted him. Oxford residents will remember that every now and again the Eastern Bypass would be blotted out by black smoke. That was because Pressed Steel's furnaceman (known as Wild Bill Poisoner) had saved up a ton of waste paint and arsenic and burnt it all in one go in the factory furnace. This used to cause huge unease – and, presumably, disease.

When Wild Bill retired to his little house in Cowley he continued his pyromania. He could, and would, burn absolutely anything. He burned a three-piece suite (phosgene) and a laurel hedge (prussic acid). He burned a thirty-foot pine tree, a vanload of polystyrene blocks (black pustules stuck to cars and greenhouses over much of Cowley), and the rear tyre of a tractor garnished with a plastic watering can full of old chip fat. He burned his dog when it died. Whenever he danced in the flames of his bonfire with his red coat and his pitchfork the local churches reported larger congregations. He was the only person in the area who did not have lung disease. The City Council eventually secured a court injunction against him, but before it could be served he died and, it is said, cremated himself.

John Watmough

THE GORDON ROWLEY BASH

Some of us from Oxford went down to the village of Swallowfield, near Reading, in the heat of July to join a large number of members from other branches in celebration of the 90th birthday of the great Gordon Rowley.

Speakers during the day were Graham Charles, Len Newton and Nigel Taylor. There was also a short presentation by Gordon himself, which included a compilation of several of his humorous (of course) and biographical videos.





Signing the Aloe books

DG

In addition there was a big variety of sales tables, a fine buffet lunch, and a piece of Gordon's special birthday cake each. During the lunch break John Lavranos, Len Newton, Susan Carter and Colin Walker signed a great pile of their new book "Aloe - The Definitive Guide".

To say that the day was memorable would be an understatement.

David Greenaway

A CHICKEN WRITES

I shall refer to our Ape as "He" even though he has, as far as I can tell, only one female and yet he seems to be womanpecked. The wretched creatures seem to have difficulty communicating. They can only grunt and force air through those horrible teeth and lips that inadequately serve the purpose of beaks. Our Ape must be exceptionally stupid because he chooses to live in a transparent coop.

Henrietta asked what he keeps in those pots which fill most of his living space. So I sent Egwina to follow him into his coop and carry out some eggspionage. She reports that what he keeps in those pots is earth! Furthermore, every pot with earth in it appeared to have a vegetable growing on top. Pots without earth had no vegetables in them.

The eggsplanation, girls, is that our Ape, who tries to fob us off with a few scoops of corn and mash every day, is breeding WORMS for his own consumption. He does everything in his power to stop us finding out. Worm breeding, or as we chickens refer to it, vermiculture, is his main purpose in life. That is why he spends so much time shifting earth from one pot to another. Many of the vegetables are furnished with spines: this is to stop the worms getting out. But obviously the main purpose of the vegetables is to serve as a crude labelling system.

I promise you, sisters, that he will not get away with this much longer. Already we are staking out the door to his coop. Volunteers are banging on the glass panels to lure him out. He is too stupid to remember to close the door every time he emerges. And when he forgets...

The whole flock will invade. We shall kick over all his precious pots and eat all the worms in his wormery. And, just in case any of the marker vegetables might be edible, we shall give every one of them a thorough pecking.

Cluck cluck!

(passed to me by John Watmough. *Ed.*)