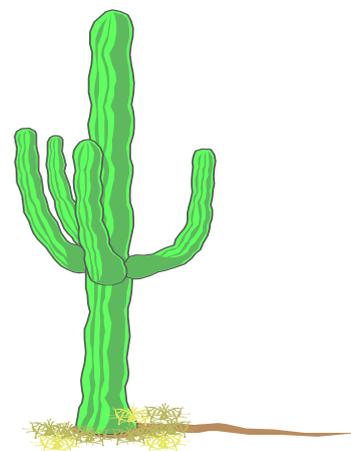


Oxotica

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

December 2013

Volume 18, Number 2



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

2013 has been a year of highs and a year of lows. The first event of the year was the now-traditional annual lunch, once again at the Lambert Arms. It is always a pleasure to welcome members of other branches, and this year we also welcomed two new members of our branch for the first time. Thanks go to Steve Williams for organising this event again.

Despite hard work by John Watmough, the numbers attending our biennial auction in April were noticeably down this time. One factor may be that the AGM was the day before (although we had hoped that this would be a plus). Another may be the absence of the most sought-after taxa put up for auction, such as *Ariocarpus*.

In July we mourned the sad loss of Cathy Darbon, after a long illness. Cathy was a very long-standing branch member, committee member and officer, and was the current secretary. One immediate legacy for Cathy has been the fine programme of speakers that she had persuaded to come to our members' evenings this year. The Branch's main show next year, in association with the Mammillaria Society, will be a special one in her memory.

There were several failures of local shows and conventions this year. However, our own show by contrast was a great success. Exhibitor numbers were up, the number of plant entries were comparable with other years, and the quality of the plants as high as ever. Thanks go to many, especially to Bill for all his work in organising the show, and to Gareth

who stood in for him admirably on the day. It was nice to see Doug Willis after such a long absence; he ran the plant sales, thus releasing John to use his calligraphy skills in writing the show cards. Mary was greatly helped in the kitchen by Juliet Cripps and also by Carol Bamsey and Lesley Carr. Between them they produced a record profit on the kitchen.

Looking forward to next year, we plan to make a big effort on plant sales, and have booked tables at the Convention, ELK, and Banstead. Thanks to Martin's efforts we have a fine speakers' programme for the monthly branch evenings next year, of which the visit of Roger Ferryman must be a highlight.

The Vice-Chairman and I have identified some small changes, and one major addition, that we think should be made to the Constitution, and we will bring these up for discussion at committee in the New Year.

New kid on the block, Nick Boden, helpfully relieved Steve of the job of librarian, one that he has done for very many years; thanks go to them both. This will be my cue for thanking the whole committee for all of their great help and support in the past year.

Good growing in 2014!

David Greenaway

CATHY DARBON

A Personal Appreciation

Members will have read Cathy's obituary in the latest Cactus World, where a formal outline of her services to the Society, the Zone, the Branch and our hobby in general is set out. So I have decided to give a more personal view by describing the powerful influence that Cathy had over my own pursuit of the hobby. Other members will be able to do the same, though perhaps with different emphases.

I had been a backbench member of Oxford Branch for four or five years, attending meetings and learning how to grow our plants, when the Branch decided, at Cathy's prompting, to stage the National Show in Kidlington. It was Cathy who, knowing of my interest in propagation, asked me to take charge of the Branch sales table. I have carried on selling plants ever since and as a consequence have had to become something of a fanatical seed-raiser.

The development of our Show so that it is now "The Best Show in the country bar the National" is due to the prodigious efforts of Cathy and Bill, with the enthusiastic support, it has to be said, of a Committee that most Branches can only dream of.

In 1995 Cathy bullied me into attending my first Judges' Course, and, although I never considered that I had either the knowledge or the ability, I part-qualified first time. This was during a short period of mental breakdown. I have often wondered whether insanity is a requisite of becoming a BCSS Judge. The following season Cathy took me as a trainee to Exeter Show. I remember the pair of us standing in the doorway of the Americas Hall that June, weeping as the snow cascaded down.

For years Cathy maintained a large collection of Mesembs, the central feature of which was a magnificent display of Conophytums. Mesembs were my first love as well, and although I probably grow a wider range of these plants than Cathy ever did, I have never anywhere near achieved her success with Conos.

When George Wheeler became too ill to manage the Branch's affairs, it was initially Cathy, myself and Ray Pearce who took over. With Cathy's contacts through the BCSS Shows Committee and the F&GP (now the Board of Trustees) we continued to enjoy a really exciting programme of visiting speakers every season. Also, no doubt because Cathy was Zone 8 Secretary, I found myself serving as Zone Rep for some years. (this is the sort of job that rarely attracts more than one candidate for election.)

To sum up, the fact that I have been able to play a minor part in the interlocking friendships and personal relationships that make our Society such a joy to be a member of is considerably due to Cathy's persistence and encouragement. I am forever grateful.

Members should be aware that our 2014 Show, on August 3rd, (with the Mammillaria Society) is going to be our Best Show Ever. Definitely. There will be special souvenir schedules and prize cards, for it will be styled, fittingly, "The Cathy Darbon Memorial Show."

John Watmough

ELK 2013 by Nick Boden



On Friday 6th September I set out early to meet with three members from the Oxford branch travelling to ELK 2013. David Greenaway kindly drove us to Martin Doorbar's house where we met with John Watmough. Before we left, we had a brief opportunity to admire Martin's amazing new greenhouse. The journey to the channel tunnel went quickly with everyone telling me about their previous trips to ELK and the exciting purchases they had made.

I've been collecting Cacti since 2010. One of my first plants was *Coryphantha cornifera* and because it appeared to thrive in my cold greenhouse and produce flowers in my first year of owning it, I decided to collect more of this genus. It's now become an obsession to own and grow all 54 species and subspecies.

When I was first told about ELK by John, he talked of the huge selection of plants on sale, many of which are hard to find and grown to a high standard and at very reasonable prices. He also mentioned the bar selling an excellent selection of Belgian beer. I remember thinking at the time how I couldn't think of a better place to spend a weekend! I had with me my list of 18 *Coryphantha* which I had yet to find, my passport, a change of clothes, and that's about it, as I was told the rest of the room in Martin's very spacious car was for plant purchases! When we arrived in Blankenberge,

the hotel was large and comfortable. We spent all of ten minutes booking in and finding our rooms and in this time the places of importance were pointed out to me – "there's the restaurant, there's the bar".

Everyone was very keen to get to the sales tables and start shopping. We walked out to the large marquee where I found rows and rows of tables laden with cacti and succulents. Initially it was overwhelming, I didn't know if I should systematically walk around and carefully consider my purchases or run around like an overexcited child buying everything I wanted! Thankfully I calmed down, took out my list and went from table to table choosing my plants. After a couple of hours I came out of the marquee to discover another large hall full of plants and book sales tables. During that afternoon I made three journeys back to our rooms to unload handfuls of plants, many of which were only 1 or 2 euros.

The self service restaurant was a pleasant surprise. Although the great variety of food available made quite unusual dinner combinations, it was tasty and plentiful. After dinner we met up in the bar. Many people had been there for some time and were busy sampling and discussing the merits of the extensive beer menu. I loved how each drink was sold in its own unique glass.

After breakfast on Saturday I returned back to the sales tables with the objective of buying a few of the larger plants I had considered yesterday. Then at 10.30am I met with the rest of my group in the lecture theatre to listen to a talk by Paul Hoxey, entitled *Magical Mexico*. This was the only talk of the weekend that I went to and I found it extremely interesting. Paul gave detailed descriptions of the plants I am most interested in and there were some fascinating photos of the plants in habitat. After the talk I took a walk into Blankenberge. When driving through the previous day, it looked quite drab and uninspiring, but on exploring further the town was surprisingly bustling and vibrant. Walking up to the sea front I found a long pier, a sandy beach with

huts and deckchairs, cafes, restaurants and arcades – very similar to Blackpool! I bought some chocolates for my wife and headed back to the hotel.

That evening we all gathered in the bar to discuss the day's purchases, talk about what was new in our hobby and meet with old friends. It had been an exhausting but very satisfying day of plant buying and talks. Part of the joy of ELK is meeting and chatting with many different people with the same interest. Some I had met at previous shows or talked to on the BCSS forum, but many I had never met before.

After a brief final look around the sales tables on Sunday morning to get any last minute bargains, we packed up our crates of plants into the car and made our way home. I had bought 30 plants in total, 29 of which were

Coryphantha (the other was a *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum* with terrific spines) and greatly reduced my wish list from 18 down to 5. ELK was an amazing experience. Many people were booking their places for 2014 by Saturday afternoon and I very much hope I'll be there too.

NB



All photographs by David Greenaway



Discocactus horstii



Faucaria tigrina



Huernia saudiarabica



Hoodia gordonii

DROOLING SPINES

by John Watmough

CRASSULA OVATA

This is often called, in non-specialist circles, “The Money Plant”. You may have seen advertised books entitled, for example, “Get Rich in Only Six Months.” When you read such a book, the truth dawns on you that the way to get rich quick is to write books telling poor people how to get rich quick. It is the same with the Money Plant. It turns out that a garden centre in America had overstocked with these plants, which they could not sell. That is, until the proprietor had the bright idea of suggesting that these plants could magically generate wealth. Which they did. To the nurseryman.

PROPAGATION NEWS

The Watmough establishment is chock full at present. The contents of the cold house, bar over a hundred Opuntoid cuttings from France, have been shunted into the heated house. The conservatory is now a nursery. It contains among other things several hundred Mesemb cuttings and two years’ worth of seed propagation. Until recently that included eleven Elephants’ Feet hatched from ten seeds – a ratio of success that not even Gilly Evison can aspire to. Last year I sowed over a hundred packets of seed, but pressure from Mesembryanthemaniacs is so great that I shall have to double that in 2014. Also, I expect to buy a lot of plants on the Continent in March. Numerous wellwishers have supplied second-hand pots. I buy labels by the thousand, and mix compost by the hundredweight (50 kg to non-imperialists). But I shall still need more plants to make full use of all the sales opportunities that are on offer next year.

DEADLY PERIL

We who go to Branch meetings and Conventions have heard lots of stories of the terrible dangers that beset early plant hunters: Forsskål, who died

of a horrible disease in Felix Arabia, or Douglas who was gored to death by a mad bull in the Philippines. More recently, we have been told of Giuseppe Orlando’s fortnight in a minefield (the world’s least explored habitat) and of Ernst van Jaarsveldt’s falling down cliffs (the world’s last unexplored habitat). So we sit at home watching our plants in warmth and security.

Well, we shouldn’t be complacent. Adrian Hardy Haworth died of cholera contracted from the Thames water that he was watering his plants with. Uebelmann killed himself while spraying his collection. More recently a lady (not from Oxford Branch) would visit her GP periodically, complaining of palpitations and numbness in the fingers. After inconclusive blood tests she was finally referred to a psychiatrist. She was complaining about her misfortunes at a Branch meeting, so a fellow member asked her more precisely when did she get these distressing symptoms. “Every April and September”. “And when do you spray your plants?” “Every April and September – Oh!” Amateur diagnosis – organophosphate poisoning.

More recently still, your correspondent was persuaded to join a syndicate to buy a litre of a new wonder insecticide for £120. In due course he was presented with a 100ml bottle containing a colourless fluid, together with a photocopy of the instruction leaflet. He was very alarmed indeed to learn that you were supposed to wear a space suit with a bottled oxygen supply while spraying. Furthermore, if you got any of this stuff on your skin you were to wrap yourself in a white sheet and proceed slowly to the nearest crematorium, having first rung a 24-hour hotline number so that the coroner could be informed. So he rang the good lady who had organised the transaction expressing – what shall we say? – unease. She said not to worry as she and her helpers had got the stuff on themselves when they were decanting it into smaller bottles. “Where did you perform this most delicate operation?” “On the work surface of the kitchen of the hall where we hold our Branch meetings.

By the way, it was very effective.

JW

BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2014

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.

23rd Jan **Dr GILLIAN EVISON**
Retro Chic - plants we have loved and left behind

Gillian is one of our longer serving Branch members and is an internationally recognised speaker. In her own words she loves to grow the unusual and difficult, and as anyone who has attended our shows knows, she does this very well indeed. Her presentations are always peppered with super photography so I am sure we are in for a wonderful evening.

27th Feb **TREVOR WRAY**
A Cactus tourist does Baja

Trevor is well known as “the travelling David Bailey”. He is the editor of The Northants News and has visited both North and South America. I am sure that he will have pearls of wisdom to impart on this journey; more super photography to be seen here.

27th March **DEREK TRIBBLE**
Crassulas everywhere

Derek is another well-known and recognised speaker. He has published many articles and books on Crassulaceae and is a wealth of knowledge on this family. So come prepared with those questions about the plants you have difficulty with and hopefully he will have the answer.

24th April **Dr ALASTAIR GLEN**
Around the Rebutias

Alastair is our BCSS Chairman and has been a judge at our Mammillara Show. He is well known as the co-ordinator of the Society’s Display at The Tatton Park Show. I am sure that we are in for an

informative evening on a family of plants that we all have grown at one time.

22nd May **EDDY HARRIS**
Plants of the Richtersveld

Eddie is the Society Secretary and another well-known speaker. He is the go-to person when it comes to the “Living Stones”, so this talk will be one not to be missed by the Mesembryanthemum converts. I am sure we will all learn something about this complex group of plants.

26th June **IAN ROBINSON**
5 years from scratch

We are pleased to welcome Ian from North Wales, who has not spoken to us before, although he did judge one of the Mammillaria Shows. He is the RED JUMPER man, a regular attender at the Judges Course. No, you won’t need a phrase book as he speaks good English. *iechyd da* - YAKI DAH.

Bill Darbon

Oxotica

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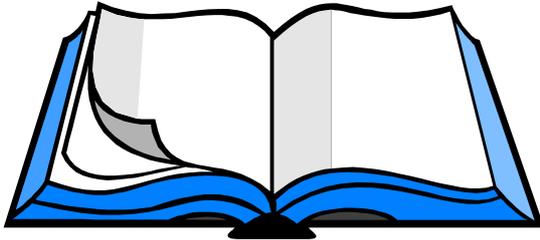
The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

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YESTERDAYS REVISITED – REVIEW OF OXFORD BRANCH

by Bill Darbon



David reminded me that it was some time ago when I penned an article looking back at the Branch history (Oxotica June 2010) and that I might like to do it again. So once again, not being around then (in the cactus world that is) I have looked back through the old journals to try and get a flavour of what happened in the 60's.

The August 1959 meeting was held at the nursery of Max Tonak at Chislehampton Gardens where members had the opportunity of studying Succulent plants grown commercially. I don't suppose it was anywhere near the scale of the establishments in Holland and Germany that some of us have visited (*sadly no pictures to compare*). It is reported that the Annual Branch table show was held, where members were tasked with judging the entries and the results collated, which in most cases agreed with the experts (*an interesting experiment, wonder how it would work at our show?*). October saw Mr G Fuge (of Mamillaria fame) speak on a variety of subjects, and in November members showed their own slides. The Christmas party featured a film of 'Felix the Cat' (*who remembers that?*).

In 1960, January's AGM saw the resignation of Mr P R Hill who had been chairman since the Branch's inauguration (*there is nothing to say who took over*). February members were shown slides of California and Mexico. March saw Mr A S Jones from Guildford give an illustration of how to know your plants and in June JWP Mullard (*who is remembered with great affection*) presented Rebutias in Colour.

Summer outings were planned to Mr S Smith of Stow, Mr G Fuge at Bristol (to include a visit to Cheddar Gorge) and Mr E Taylor at Ascot. (*The choice of nurseries to visit was greater than although some were too far north for day trips*).

The branch members saw a new selection of Society slides of Succulents in Colour in May (*I am sure that David is happier now more slide presentations are becoming available in disc format*). It is reported that at the annual table show in June there were classes for plants grown on members' window sills. In July Edgar Lamb gave a presentation on close up photography. August annual 'bring and buy sale' featured lots of garden produce, which raised £3.7s.7d (*John watch out - Don't spend it all at once*). Mr S Smith, a popular visitor, came in September with a presentation of Stapeliads and demonstrated grafting.

I note that in the 1960 June's newsletter two 16mm Kodachrome Films that had won an Amateur competition were now available for loan to branches you can guess whom from – G D R

Mr Smith visited the branch again in February 1961 and chaired an open discussion on "What do you want to know" which gave rise to a lot of interesting debates. March saw Mr Taylor from Ascot talking about seed raising and in April Mr A S Jones discussed how to grow your own plants. Regular summer branch trips were planned for May, June and July. At June's Annual table show it is reported that the award for the best plant was given to Mrs J Mullard for a wonderful Acanthacalycium violaceum in flower. For the August meeting members visited Mr Tomak at Chislehampton. In November Clive Innes (of Ashington fame) spoke on Epiphytic Cacti with a display of specimen plants, and members quickly made plans for a Branch trip to the nursery for the coming summer. The Christmas party featured the usual Mickey Mouse film.

An announcement in the newsletter of March 1961 is interesting: Mrs Middleditch was hoping to organise a Continental Cactus Trip

– *the main objective being to visit Jardin Exotique in Monte Carlo and collections on the French and Italian Rivas, the Zurich University and Tremezzo collection nr Lake Como, estimated cost for a fortnight of £50, sight seeing included. Post note in the March 1962 newsletter that sufficient bookings had been received for the trip to go ahead.*

At the AGM in January 1962 Mrs Trafford retired from the Treasurer's role and Mr John Billing was elected in her stead (*note from memory: John used to run a small nursery in Bladon and sold Tom Jenkins one of his first Ariocarpus*). In February slides of Cacti in habitat were shown and March saw a visit by Mr Tookey from Sussex with a display and talk on rare imported plants (*I wonder what if any restrictions there were then*).

In April Dr Hardy (Abingdon Branch) spoke on the Geographical distribution of cacti. *I can find nothing about the activities of Abingdon Branch at this time other than that they met on the 1st Thursday of the month at the Church Hall annex*. Branch outings were arranged to Clive Innes in June and Mr Fuge in July. The annual table show attracted an increase in numbers of exhibits and Mr Henshaw awarded prizes for Best Cactus to Mr J Fathers and Best Succulent to Mr J Billing (*I wonder if it was one of John's echeverias that he grew so well*). It is noted that several members were increasing their greenhouse space to cope with extra purchases made during the summer excursions to Ashington, Bristol and Chislehampton (*it's difficult to suppress that urge, when you see a nice plant and then realise you have to try and fit it in somewhere when you get home – Oh for expanding glass!!*).

In the summer of 1963 members enjoyed visits to nurseries at Mansfield, Bristol (including Slimbridge) and the regular visit to Chiselhampton Gardens. At the Annual Show judged by Mr Tookey, awards for the best plants were given to Mrs J Mullard and Mr J Billing. The August and October meetings were dedicated to member's slides of their plants in flower and in September Mrs

Stillwell from Windsor spoke about plants in her collection. In November Mr L Tookey returned, speaking about his collection of rare imported plants, which brought a flurry of activity when he produced some of the plants for sale. The Christmas social revolved around a beetle drive with prizes for everyone.

In the 1964 June Newsletter I note a report on the First Southern Area Show held on 9th May at Farnborough the first of its kind, the report goes on to say that 48 exhibitors from 11 branches staged 410 entries numbering 1,250 plants – I am pleased to say that our own Branch show compares very favourably with these numbers for which I am very grateful (again no pictures Shame, perhaps they didn't have a Gillian!).

The Branch had a busy summer that was highlighted by a new innovation where branch members held Open days of their collections. Branch outings had been held visiting Mrs Coombes at Coventry, Mr Nunnerley at Redditch and Mr Tonak at Chislehampton. The annual show saw Mrs Stillwell cope well with the increase in entries and Mr J Mullard and Mrs M Dudley (*more familiar names to me*) winning the awards for best plants. Members were looking forward to the winter programme, which would include a visit by Mr Gordon Rowley.

The popular displays of members' slides occupied two autumn evenings but the long awaited visit by Gordon Rowley, presenting four of his award winning films, was attended by a record number of members. In November Mr Tookey presented some excellent photography of his rare plants. At the Branch Christmas Party members enjoyed a variety of games.

January 1965 saw the resignation of the long serving Secretaries Miss and Mr D Candy and Treasurer Mr Billing, Mrs M Dudley and Mrs D Williams being elected in their place. *I note that Abingdon Branch meetings were now being held in Members' homes*. February saw John Mullard (*now branch chairman*) speak on Rebutias and in March Mr Hanacher

presented Cactusland USA. April brought Mr Bish from Farnborough with Parodias and Echinocereus, and a branch trip was planned to Roanoake Nursery at Ipswich. The May 'bring and buy' saw Mrs William (Treasurer) raise a record amount for branch funds. The annual show in June saw Mr Billing win both Best Cactus and Best Succulent. For the July meeting members had been encouraged to bring slides of their own plants to show, this being one of the most popular meetings of the year, and a display of excellent photography was enjoyed by all of the attendees.

1965 saw a Dramatic event for the Society when all 6 of the main officials tendered their resignations, effective at the AGM. The subsequent Ballot for replacement officers was held to be void as it was in breach of the constitution, but following an amendment being passed to appoint temporary officials until the next AGM, it allowed the Society to continue without recourse to a Legal action.

I will conclude my ramblings there and look forward to recalling more of the events of The Society and the Oxford Branch in particular until the next instalment.

Bill Darbon

All photographs by David Greenaway



Crested *Rebutia heliosa*



Mammillaria hemisphaerica



Mammillaria spinosissima 'Uno Pico'



Echinocereus schmollii