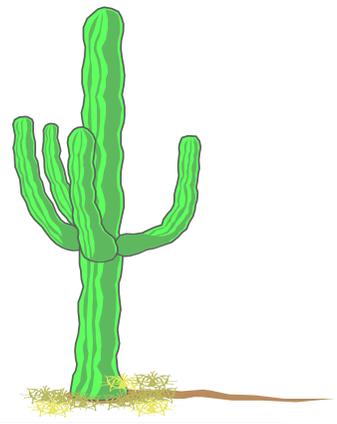


Oxotica

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

December 2018

Volume 23, Number 2



Chairman's Report - Oxford Branch AGM 2018

Well I think that we did ourselves proud in celebrating the 60th year of the formation of the Branch in January 1958. I hope that our forebears would be pleased with what we did to commemorate this milestone in our history.

At this time I normally look back over the year's activities, but thought I would start by saying a big thank you for the support of your committee and **to you our members** as we would not have a Branch to celebrate without you or them. It's a great team that pull together to make the Branch what it is today.

We have seen some new speakers to the Branch over this year and trips to Namibia, Mexico, Texas, Brazil and Peru. Plants in real life and beautiful photography, I do hope that you have enjoyed the presentations and we hope to continue in the same vein again in 2019. Please remember that it's your Branch so do let us know if there is anything specific you would like to see or do.

Highlights of the year were the Anniversary Show on 28th July at Grove with the Mammillaria Society with lots of visiting BCSS members from other branches as well as members of the public coming (even the Thunderstorm did not dampen the attendance) We were again lucky to get coverage on the Radio and in the "News".

At our 60th Anniversary Celebration Symposium on 21st October, we were honoured by the attendance of over 70 BCSS members including our President, Chairman and Tom Hart Dyke one of our BCSS Patrons.

We were presented with 4 marvellous talks from Martin Lowry on Bolivia, Paul Hoxey on Haiti & Dominican Republic, Colin Walker on Euphorbias and Ian Woolnough on Baja. Each talk contained some wonderful scenery and plants and was greatly appreciated by all those who attended.

We have also been busy over the year selling plants at various events including the 3 days at Blenheim Flower Show. 'Only a Silver Gilt' this year for the display, but a great event to publicize our hobby to a large public audience and our Branch in particular. Don't forget if you have any spare plants please let us know, a special thanks to John who continues to cultivate offerings for sale on behalf of the Branch everywhere he goes.

Also I would like to add my thanks to David who keeps our website fresh with monthly additions. I feel that it is very important in this new technological age that we continue to increase our presence in the world of social media on Facebook and the Internet etc. (I personally have not caught up with all the various sites available so thanks to those who understand this new technology and can extend our profile.)

Once again I can only thank all of you (and our visitors) in supporting our activities and making it an enjoyable hobby to be part of.

It just remains for me to wish you all good growing and good health for the coming year.

Bill Darbon

Some pictures from the Anniversary Show
(by Gillian Evison)



Echinocactus horizontalis



Epithelantha sp.



Desmidorchis speciosa



Pachypodium horombense

Blenheim Palace Flower Show

Bill Darbon

Members of the Branch attended the three-day flower show again this year and staged a mixed display in the floral marquee. We thought that it was one of the best displays we had done but sadly '*no cigar*': the judges marked us down on a couple of points; however, we still managed to achieve a *Silver Gilt* award for our stand. We were very well situated near one of the main entrances to the floral marquee and had lots of positive comments from visitors and other exhibitors about the stand. This is an ideal venue for us as a Branch and an event at which to publicize our hobby to the general public. We spoke to a large number of visitors to the show and handed out lots of cultivation information leaflets in the hope that it would attract some interest in our Branch Show in July.



Oxford Branch display at Blenheim

photograph by MartinDoorbar

Media update

If you thought that the recent surge of popular interest in our plants was waning, then think again. In a November issue of The Guardian's Saturday magazine supplement was a two-page spread 'Swipe right for succulents'. Millennials are normally renting their flats, so no decorating may be allowed or pets kept: but plants can take their place. Another factor is social media on the internet, especially the use of Instagram. I leave it to others of you to explain that.

Examples given of desirable plants were stripey-leaved Haworthias, *Opuntia microdasys* (they will soon go off that one if they cuddle it!) and above all, *Ceropedia woodii*.

DG

**BRANCH MEETINGS
JANUARY-JUNE 2019**

*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 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.*

**January 24 CHAIRMAN'S CHOICE
2016 National Show**

The BCSS National Show is held every four years and attracts some of the best plants and exhibitors from all over UK as well as visitors from Europe. Tonight we will re-live the last show at Woodgreen in August 2016.

**February 28 BOB POTTER
Euphorbia odyssey**

Bob is one of the committee members of The International Euphorbia Society and is always an entertaining speaker. He has travelled to many parts of the African continent in search of succulent plants, and has an extensive knowledge of the Euphorbiaceae both in habitat and cultivation.

**March 28 ROGER FERRYMAN
Eriosyce (in habitat and cultivation)**

Roger has travelled extensively in South America, particularly Chile, and one of his favourite genus is Thelocephala. He has studied this group in the wild over a number of years. He is also in the process of compiling a book on the genus Eriosyce,

so I am sure he will have lots of knowledge to pass on to us tonight.

**April 25 ALAN BROWN
Namibia, Etosha and Lithops**

Alan is a fellow judge and colleague on the BCSS Show Committee and has visited Namibia on more than one occasion. He has a specific interest in the Lithops Group of plants as well as the wild life of the area.

**May 23 RALPH MARTIN
In my new Greenhouse**

Ralph has retired as an Emeritus Professor from academia at Cardiff University and has moved to North Wales. He has not visited us before, and this evening he will recount the trials and tribulations of moving his collection to his new greenhouse. He also maintains a field number data base of plants in habitat.

Bill Darbon

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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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THE BIG BIRTHDAY BASH



Well what can I say about our 60th Anniversary Celebrations? We were very pleased to welcome over 70 BCSS members to join us on 21st October at the Mercure Lambert Hotel, Aston Rowant. It was particularly pleasing that Our President, Chairman and Tom Hart Dyke (one of our patrons) were able to join us.

Our guest speakers gave some amazing talks with stunning scenery and wonderful plants in habitat. Martin Lowry (a former Oxford Branch member) presented 'Best of Bolivia' - he has travelled to this country on a number of occasions and gave us an overview of his various trips including his Best Plant - Best Drive - Best Habitat etc. Paul Hoxey (Cambridge) presented 'Haiti & Dominican Republic', not somewhere that has been visited a lot in recent times, which has an interesting and diverse culture as well as a number of distinctive plants. Colin Walker (BCSS President) presented 'Exploring Euphorbias' - this was a newly constructed talk and as with all of Colin's presentations his research into the historical background of the subject is always interesting. Our last talk was from Ian Woolnough (Exeter) who gave us an insight into Baja California; this area has some unique plants distinct from the rest of the Americas.

I was so pleased that so many folk were able to come along to join us and we hope that we did ourselves proud in celebrating 60 years of the Oxford Branch and that our forebears would have been delighted by the outcome.

Bill Darbon

A simply super celebratory symposium

by Graham Evans

Oxford Branch is probably best known in the Society for hosting one of the very best annual shows in the country, but in October it turned its attention to something different by presenting an excellent convention-style event, the Oxford Branch 60th Anniversary Symposium.

Around 80 people, including Society patron Tom Hart Dyke, President Colin Walker and Chairman Ian Thwaites attended and enjoyed a great day of entertaining talks, quality plant sales, food and conversation, all in the pleasant surroundings of a rural Oxfordshire hotel, the Lambert Arms.



Photo by Helen Evans

Branch chairman and lead organiser Bill Darbon opened the meeting with a brief introduction and was quickly followed by Martin Lowry giving an outstanding presentation on 'The Best of Bolivia'. Martin, who surely knows more about Bolivian cacti than any Englishman has the right to do, cleverly broke down his talk into various categories, including genera, accommodation, drives and discoveries, etc, and selected his personal favourites in each case, making for an interesting and entertaining session. Paul Hoxey then took the floor to speak about his recent visit to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This is a very rarely visited cactus habitat that has not been properly explored in nearly a century, giving Paul the opportunity to add to our knowledge of plants from the region and present a highly informative talk punctuated with fascinating snippets of Haitian history.

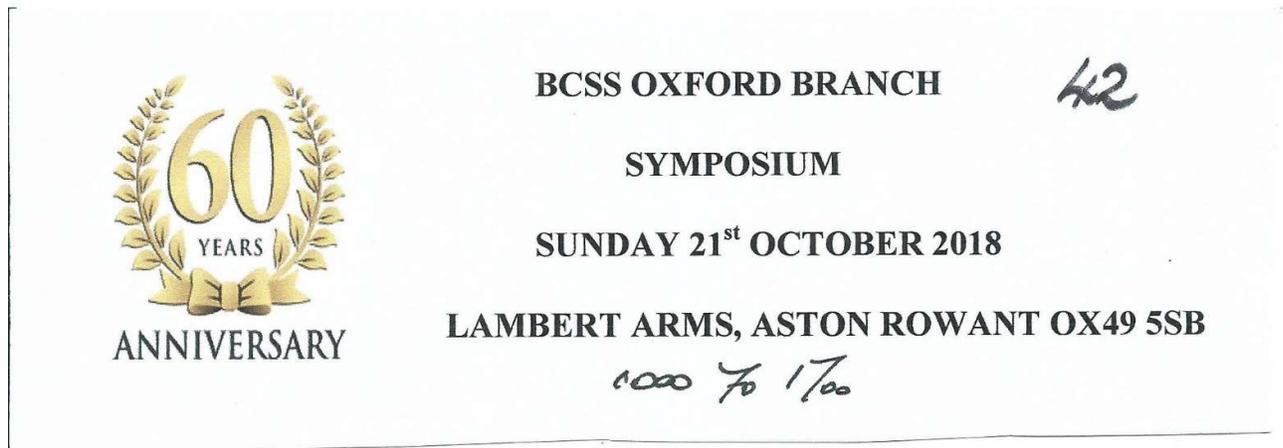
After a very good buffet lunch, there followed a celebratory cake cutting and a small auction of some nice cacti and succulents. Colin Walker was the first afternoon speaker and he regaled us with slides and information on the genus *Euphorbia* in habitat and cultivation, displaying huge knowledge of the succulent species. Being Colin, he could not resist including a few pictures of plants in attractive, ornamental 'presidential' pots! The final speaker was Ian Woolnough, who closed with a highly entertaining exploration of Baja California, that wonderful western peninsula of Mexico that is home to so many fabulous species. Presenting with his customary eloquence and observational humour, Ian brought the event to a very enjoyable conclusion.

Bill and his team deserve big congratulations for a smooth, well organised, nicely situated and extremely successful event; a super celebration indeed.



Photo by Helen Evans

Speakers (L to R) Martin Lowry, Bill Darbon, Colin Walker, Paul Hoxey & Ian Woolnough



Oxford Branch 60th Anniversary Symposium
at The Mercure Thame Lambert Hotel, Aston Rowant
Sunday 21st October 2018
by Maria Ilett

The Oxford branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society held its 60th Anniversary Symposium on Sunday 21st October 2018, celebrating the branch's beginnings in 1958.

It was a fresh but bright October morning and the event was held at The Mercure Thame Lambert Hotel, Aston Rowant. The venue was really easy to find being just off the A40 and had convenient parking next to the hotel. We were greeted by a member of hotel staff when we arrived and shown to the function room. It was bustling with conversation and we were offered a selection of very welcome tea/coffee, croissants and other pastries.

We took our seats for the first speakers of the day and were warmly welcomed by Branch Chairman Bill Darbon.

The mornings speakers were:

Martin Lowry – The Best of Bolivia
Paul Hoxey – Hunting for Cacti in the Caribbean

A buffet lunch was served, a chance to stretch our legs and indulge in the social side of the club. Luckily the sun was shining, the only evidence of the rain the day before was slightly damp cushions on the outside furniture which caught some of us out! But it was nice enough to eat 'al fresco' and enjoy the hotel's patio. After lunch, a marvellous commemorative cake was cut and we enjoyed a piece with our coffee.

There was a raffle with cactus-related prizes ranging from the useful to the novelty! And several plant stalls with a wide range of plants for sale. My interest in succulents first started a number of

years ago when I bought a Tiger Aloe plant in a terracotta pot from a carboot sale for 50p. The lady who sold it to me knew nothing about it other than it flowered; well I had to wait 3 long years before it flowered while under my care but when it did, with its olive-green stalk and delicate flamingo pink flowers, I was captivated and felt like I had witnessed something magical. Shortly after this success, my brother bought me an Aloe Vera as a house warming present. It loved the warm sunny top floor flat we used to live in and promptly set about making itself at home and taking the place over. It was so successful I used to call it the 'monster plant' and one year it was so large I dressed it in tinsel and baubles and we used it as our Christmas tree! I have since split this plant (that was a job and a half!) and once the new pups were established, I have done my own car boot sales and taken them along. I enjoy talking to people about them and how best to care for them as that's how I first found this fascinating hobby and it would be nice to think I could pass some of this joy along.

I am a relative newcomer to the BCSS, joining the society around 18 months ago when I attended the Oxford Branch Annual Show at Old Mill Hall, Grove for the first time in 2017 and picked up a membership form. I have found the plant sales absolutely invaluable as you buy direct from the grower and have a golden opportunity to ask about a plant's specific care requirements plus the plants all have their correct names given making further research possible.... up until joining the society I was at the mercy of garden centres and supermarkets that simply label their plants as 'cactus' or 'succulent' (if you're lucky). Not all of these purchases thrived as I struggled to identify and care for them properly. Along with the monthly branch meetings I have also since found the BCSS Facebook group which is a great resource, people are always so helpful, it is a lovely community.

I also bought two 2019 BCSS calendars on the day (one for myself and one as a Christmas present for my brother) which have beautiful photos to enjoy all year round.

There was a plant auction, with Bill stepping up as auctioneer, with some beautiful examples going under the hammer.

The afternoon's speakers were introduced:

Colin Walker (BCSS President) Euphorbia in Habitat – complete with photos of plants in favourite and unusual pots.

Ian Woolnough - Baja California

All the speakers were fantastic, I always learn so much not just about the varieties of plants but also about their habitats, the geography, history, different cultures and political climates. The slide shows are so interesting giving you a glimpse of another way of life, like when you've read a good book you feel like you've been on a journey too.

It is a real skill to present a talk on such a specific subject that appeals to all from beginners like me up to knowledgeable experts on the subject, while keeping it both interesting, informative and fun. It was a perfect programme of speakers and my thanks to them all for sharing their knowledge and experience in such an engaging way.

It was very well supported, with approximately 80 members attending from all over the country, and all thoroughly enjoying their day. A big thank you to Bill and all involved at BCSS Oxford Branch for organising a fantastic event and a great celebration that will be remembered for many years to come.

Maria Ilett, BCSS Oxford Branch Member