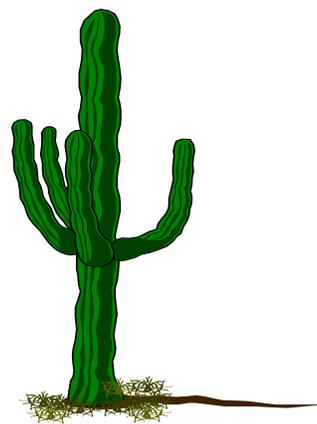


Oxotica

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

December 1999

Volume 4, Number 2



CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY OF THE YEAR.

This year has been overshadowed by the death of our Chairman, Ray Pearce, only half way through his term of office. For many years he had been an enthusiastic grower of cacti and a great supporter of the Society, so his death has been a loss to the Society as well as to the Branch. He was making the Committee look again at how we operated and was trying to bring in useful ideas.

The last thing Ray did was to accompany us on a trip to Kew to see behind the scenes at the succulent greenhouses. He had organised this and it was a most enjoyable and informative day. We made useful contacts with the staff there who have since visited some of the Oxford Branch collections. We are most grateful to Janet's husband, Ron Robertson, for hiring and driving the minibus.

On behalf of Lynne we organised the Auction and sale of Ray's plants, which raised over £2500. A lot of hard work went into the disposal of his plants and the success was a result of the Committee's team spirit in its care of the plants beforehand and careful organisation.

We celebrated our 40th Anniversary in style with a Convention held in the Social Club at Didcot Power Station. Our speakers were the Society President, Gordon Rowley, Professor Len Newton from Kenya and Graham Hole, whose talks gave us a good variety, and we have received many congratulations on the event. There were four nurserymen in attendance who seemed to be doing a brisk trade as did our Branch Sales Table.

Your Committee decided that we would like to commemorate Ray with a Trophy, and Bill and Cathy Darbon have bought a bowl made of burr lime to be known as the Ray Pearce Burr. This seemed appropriate in view of Ray's work and interest in Plant Pathology and his love of trees. Branch members will be able to compete for it in the monthly table show.

We hosted the Zone 8 Show in place of our own usual Show as we had already held the Convention. Again we had a good day, thanks to the team who were responsible for the organisation that such an event needs. On the catering side we must thank Margaret Conway and Rose Warwick for their invaluable help.

This leads to a decision we have made about shows. We now propose to run an Autumn Mesembryanthemum Show every two years alternating with Bristol Branch. The first show will be in October 2000, so our usual Annual Show will come back to 13th June. We hope that this will produce shows that are attractive to the public and also to members who will be able to show more plants at their best. These shows will be held in the Langdale Hall at Witney, which we have found to be convenient and not too costly.

Over the year we have had some really good and enjoyable talks at our monthly meetings and we must thank Cathy for her skill in persuading the best speakers to come to Oxford. In this we must not forget our own local talent - John Watmough spoke on Lophophoras and Gillian Evison gave a Succulent Masterclass; we had a very informative mini-Judges' Course from Cathy, and John organised a Plant Forum, when four branch members spoke about their special interests and showed us their plants. This forum was great fun and we will repeat it again soon.

John Warwick opened his greenhouse to us again; I missed this but I hope there will be another occasion to enjoy.

Each month we have held our usual Table Show, which always produces a spectacular array of plants. There is much to be learned from seeing these plants and it is an important aspect of enhancing our love and knowledge of our hobby.

Cathy Darbon is resigning her post of Secretary to the Branch in view of her increased responsibilities in the Society. We congratulate her on her appointment to the Show Committee and thank her for her commitment and efficient care of the Branch. Fortunately she is still willing to serve on the Committee and I am sure we will find a place for her.

I would like to emphasise how much is owed to the Committee, who not only work tirelessly for the Branch organising and carrying out the programme which is listed on the card, but also put on displays at Garden Centres in order to raise awareness of the Branch and to publicise our Show. On your behalf I thank them for all their hard work. I am particularly aware of this and want them also to know of my gratitude for their advice and support when I had to take over.

We have a nucleus of faithful Branch members who turn up regularly and it is good to have them, but we know there are many more of you out there who do not come the Branch meetings. We would like to meet you - perhaps you come to Shows without making yourself known to us, if so do speak to someone. If you have any comments or suggestions to make, please get in touch with one of the Committee and we could try to incorporate your ideas into our programme to make it more attractive to you. We do have fun and would like you to share it and contribute to it.

Mary Stone.

At the **Annual General Meeting** in November, the following changes were voted on:

Mary Stone, previously Acting Chairman, was confirmed as **Chairman**;

Cathy Darbon, resigned as Secretary and became **Vice-Chairman**;

John Watmough, previously Show Secretary, became **Secretary**;

Bill Darbon became Show Secretary.

There is one vacancy on the Committee (hint!)

NEXT YEAR'S MEETINGS

January to June 2000

27th January. JOHN WATMOUGH

“Succulent Humour”.

“We’ve never had a lecture like this before” – Southampton Branch.

Local bore unravels gruesome botanical jokes. Live display (of plants), some slides, and brief lessons in Afrikaans and Zulu if there’s time. Better than Channel 5.

24th February. DOUG DONALDSON

“Indiana Doug”.

Esteemed Scottish nurseryman from High Wycombe gives entertaining illustrated talk about plants and people encountered during his visit to India. Good Fun. Gratuitous insults about the English a bonus, but barracking at own risk.

23rd March. ALAN BUTLER

“Sansevierias”.

Famous nurseryman (Brookside Nursery) well known to Oxford members over many years. Sansevierias are possibly the next plant craze among succulent lovers. There are over a hundred kinds, and nobody is better qualified than Alan to explain them to us. Bring plant tray and plenty of money.

27th April. MEMBERS

“Plant Forum”.

Our own members (and one from Swindon) put on such a good performance last year that we’re doing it again. Four volunteers (you and you) are required, to address the meeting for no more than 15 minutes each, then answer questions and join in a general discussion.

(Note :- If Lufthansa flights and Heathrow officials permit, this programme may be altered – but any such change will be extensively advertised.)

25th May. JOHN ARNOLD

“Melocactus and Discocactus”.

The Society’s legal advisor, member of the F&GP, and former Secretary of Lincoln Branch, will be telling us all we need to know about these beautiful but temperamental cacti. John does not often come down our way, so this is one not to miss.

22nd June. ALAN PHIPPS

“Arizona Adventure”.

Alan, who has long been associated with Bristol Branch, has paid many visits to the United States. This is an illustrated travelogue from a personal perspective. Alan is also a noted propagator and, like several guest speakers this year, will have plenty of goodies for sale.

If you have any comments about or criticisms of the year’s schedule, the Secretary is anxious to hear from you. The Secretary would also like to know if anybody has a good talk or knows a good (reasonably local) speaker, or wants a talk on a specific subject.

John Watmough

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The Branch meets at 7.30 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the John Bunyon Baptist Chapel, Cromwell Road, Cowley, Oxford.

President	Alan Ilott	01865 730924
Chairman:	Mary Stone	01865 774268
Vice-Chairman:	Cathy Darbon	01993 881926
Secretary:	John Watmough	01865 772709
Treasurer:	Steve Williams	01367 718944
Show Secretary:	Bill Darbon	01993 881926
Committee:	Brian Conway	01865 765800
	David Greenaway	01235 762761
	John Warwick	01235 848399

Editor: David Greenaway
(Email: jean.nunn-price@wasps.org.uk)

ZONE 8 SHOW – 29th August 1999

It was Oxford's turn to organise the Zone 8 Show this year. That was one reason why we chose to put on the 40th Anniversary Convention – so that we should have one specifically Oxford showcase during the year. Visitors would not have noticed much difference to the venue or to the Show Schedule from 1998. That is because our Committee contained one National Show Judge (Cathy) and several puisne judges, who were all agreed that the Oxford Show Schedule has evolved to something approaching perfection.

There were 406 entries altogether from 17 entrants representing seven Branches. No class was a disaster and some were magnificent. Dave Hutchinson judged the Show on his own, and did so authoritatively and excellently. Both Alan Butler and Carlos Zeferino seemed well satisfied with plant sales, and the groaning Members' sales table shifted hundreds of plants.

There were some charming personal triumphs. Len Evans of Birmingham had announced months in advance that this would be his last ever Show before he retired from competition. It was fitting that he should take the Ginns Medal and much of the silverware. It was an honour for Oxford that this should be Len's Last Show, for he has refused to be drawn out of retirement even to compete in Birmingham's Autumn Show.

Mrs Chris Cooper of Reading, whom recent attenders of Oxford branch meetings will know, won two firsts in this her first show. She grows some lovely plants and it was good to see some of them on display. Mike Blake of Swindon was another first-time exhibitor, and he won the Novice Section. Since then he has gone on to compete in the Birmingham Autumn Show and from there has gone on to get elected to the Chairmanship of Swindon Branch. Well done !

Well done also our own Chairman, Mary Stone, who achieved 100% success. Because her car was stuffed full of what we were about to be stuffed full of, she could only manage one exhibit, but that was the prestigious thematic display and she won it. Her catering was as usual excellent. In fact all the jobs were carried out quietly and expertly. It was especially enjoyable to meet Branch members who cannot often get to Branch meetings, as well as old friends from further away such as Adrian Weatherill

who is now with Lincoln. We even made a profit for the Zone.

Next year we are running two shows !

SUCCULENT WANDERINGS.

After having spent a week with our daughter in Holland, we made our way by Belgian and Dutch railways to Blankenberge for the 1999 ELK (Europäische Länder Kongress). My husband is a railway enthusiast and we usually manage to combine our interests. We arrived on the Friday afternoon just as the Plant Sales were opening. The extent of the stalls must be seen to be believed. There were five double rows of six trestle tables, and other tables round the sides of the hall and in the corridor, with nurserymen from all over the Continent and many amateurs selling plants. Of course everyone rushed in to get first pick and it was wise to do so. However, on the Saturday morning there were even more salesmen in another hall.

The sales were not restricted only to the delegates, as from our bedroom window we could see cars pouring into the car park all day long with people making their way to the Sales Halls and returning to the cars later with boxes and bags of plants.

For the delegates there were lectures in a super conference theatre with an all-day bar next door. ELK is held in a holiday complex and our room was a "studio" which would normally accommodate a family of three - some people did bring families with them. It was comfortable though not plush, and was good value for what we had paid. The food was good and included a free drink at each main meal; we were surprised how quickly we were served when so many people arrived in the dining room at the same time. Although it was the same weekend as the Judges' Course there were about fifty British members in attendance.

John Pilbeam gave the main lecture on Newer Mammillarias and as usual gave a good talk with beautiful slides. Also we heard about Utah

from Ehepar Heidtfeld of Germany, Asclepiadaceae from Louis van der Meutter of Belgium and Ariocarpus from Wim Alsemgeestof the Netherlands. This last speaker was a great character with a puckish smile of glee when he successfully grafted a seedling. Although there was not much on Ariocarpus he covered a lot of other difficult plants and finished with a workshop on grafting the afore-mentioned seedlings. Professor Berthel from France spoke about frost resistant cacti.

For spouses who might not be interested in the plant sales or lectures, there was a guided tour of Bruges on the Saturday afternoon. It was well organised and very much enjoyed at no extra cost. Just across the road there is an extensive sandy beach which would no doubt appeal to younger members of a family.

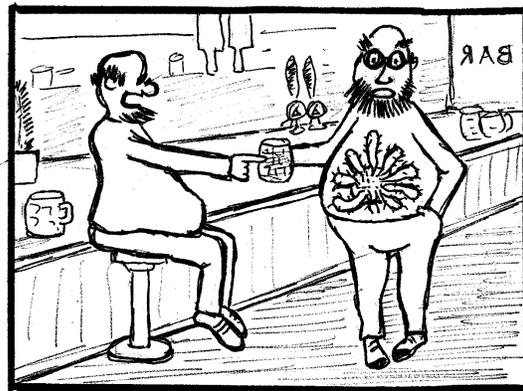
There is a tramway running between Zeebrugge and De Panne via Ostend with a stop just outside the Duinse Polders. This is a most useful and simple means of transport and takes one right to the Hoverspeed terminal in Ostend. We used this to get ourselves to the catamaran from Dover. Anyone wishing to come by car can also use the catamaran and it is then only a few miles drive - if you expect to buy many plants of course a car is a good idea. However,

it is amazing how much one can carry if the need arises.

Surprisingly the variety of nationalities is not a problem. A translation of lectures is given and among enthusiasts there is a great understanding (of course English is an almost universal language!) and comradeship. Everyone enjoyed themselves and there were some of the usual late night discussions in the bar. One evening, as a bonus, on returning to our room we had a wonderful view of a big firework display in Zeebrugge. This is a weekend I would wholeheartedly recommend to anyone who has not already been.

Soon after our return we were making a visit to Dorset for a gathering of model railway enthusiasts and, true to tradition, were able to visit Bradley Batch Nursery and stay the night there on our way down to Cornwall. John and Lesley White gave us a great welcome in their old and comfortable cottage. Even so soon after ELK, I was able to find some good plants: especially exciting was a lovely *Euphorbia superans* to add to my collection of Medusoids. John gave me a conducted tour of his greenhouses and was generous in his sharing of knowledge and tips. This was another worthwhile visit and should be included if you should be going down to the South West.

Mary Stone.



"Euphorbia?"

"If I were against it I wouldn't be here."

Western Cape Tour , August 1998

Part 1 - Cape Town to Calvinia, via Clanwilliam.

Last year, Jean and I went to the International Organisation for Succulent Plant Study Congress at the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town. In the quarter of a century of existence of the IOS this was the first time that the biennial congress had been held in South Africa, even though 47% of the world's succulent plant species are indigenous there. There were several possible pre- and post-congress field trips, and we chose the Western Cape tour.

Craig Hilton-Taylor was to have been our guide, but in the event it fell to James Townsend, another botanist from Kirstenbosch Gardens, and very good he was, too. So with him and Afrikaaner Philip Nieuwoudt as our driver, we set out in an eight-seater vehicle, pulling our luggage along in a trailer. The others on the trip were René Zarah and his wife Nina from Malta, and Prof. Jim Mauser, a botanist from the USA who is currently the IOS Secretary. The first day we travelled to Saldanha on the coast, where the flora is Lowland Fynbos and Strandveld. My main impression was of the vast arrays of Kaffir Lilies, Gazanias and other wild flowers that were out. We saw no succulents, but found a small, colourful tortoise, the first of several.

On the second day we went on to Clanwilliam, where we stayed two nights at an excellent family-run hotel. On the way, there was an abrupt transition to Karoo vegetation as we crossed the Piekensklou Pass, scattering baboons up the hill-side in the process. Then we started to find succulent plants - the object of the trip! At the first road-side stop we found *Gasteria pillansii*, several *Adromischus* including *A. orbiculata*, *A. mamillaris* v. *ruber*,

and *A. marianiae*, *Conophytum obcordellum*, *Crassula hirsuta*, a *Quaqua*, a *Crassula* and a *Euphorbia*. No doubt there were many more species. I was struck by the fact that many of the succulents there lived in the half-shade, and that we had to search under the bushes for them.



Tylecodon wallichii

The procedure, which happened many times each day for the whole week, consisted of stopping at sites that James knew of, or if someone thought they spotted something, and then everyone tipping out to find it, photograph it, or whatever. As many of the species are very small, this meant peering intently at the ground, stooping, kneeling etc. The best stuff was usually beyond a barbed wire fence, and we got quite skilled at crossing these. Philip and James used a geophysical positioning satellite (GPS) navigator to help find previously-recorded sites and to record new ones. Accuracy is to a few metres; a great new tool for the field biologist.

Leaving the trailer at the hotel in Clanwilliam, we went to the succulent paradise of the Knersvlakte, an undulating plain just north of Vanrhynsdorp, and covered in white quartz pebbles. Here we found *Dactyloopsis digitata* or “finger and thumb”, *Conophytum bilobum*, *Argyroderma congregatum*, *Monilaria chrysoleaca v. polita*, *Aloe krapohlina* and *variegata*, *Crassula cylindrica*, *Ruschia bina*, three species of *Cheiridopsis*, an *Oophytum*, and much more. No shade here - full sun for all. I was surprised that the spiky bush called *Ruschia* was a Mesemb.; I didn't know they could look like that!

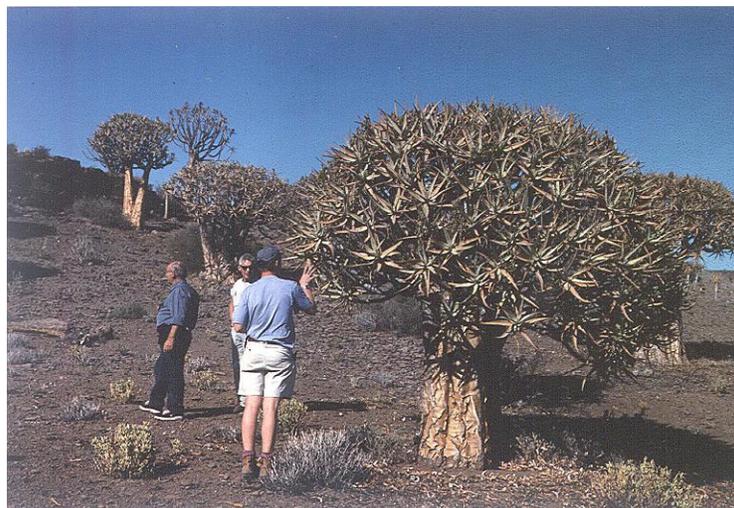
The middle day at Clanwilliam we went on a trip to the old Moravian mission of Wuppertal in the Cederburg, which I vaguely remembered from history lessons at school. There were no succulents to be seen along that road, but there were brilliant displays of *Gazania*, *Nyctotis* and *Helichryson* in flower. Back at the Pakhuispas pass we found *Pelargonium magenteum* with its deep purple flowers, *Conopytum obcordellum ssp. obcordellum*, two kinds of *Anacamperos* and cluster swarms of *Conophytum minisculum*. The curious geophyte *Massonia depressa* also lives there - flowering was over and it was just two round leaves flat to the ground.

Finally leaving Clanwilliam on Day 4 en route to Calvinia, we first poked our noses into one of the Oliphantsriver wineries, and then went on to Vanrhynsdorp, to visit a well-known succulent plant nursery that was holding, coincidentally, a one-day festival for which the owner had thrown his private collection open to the public. Rene bought some plants (CITES documentation was prepared at the Congress the following week). I bought some seeds. We then took a road that headed north to Nieuwoudtville, and had lunch at a gorge which featured a high waterfall. We found many plants of *Tylecodon wallichii* and *paniculatus*, *Gasteria batesiana* (Penge form), *Crassula falcata*, *lycopodioides* and *rupestris*, and just above the falls *Aloe mitriformis* was in flower.

A bit further on, at the northernmost limit of our trip, was an astounding forest of the tree aloe *Aloe dichotoma*. The species occurs mainly in the Richtersfeld, and this disjoint patch is their most southerly outpost; we wandered in awe among them for some time. *Hoodia gordonii* was also growing there, and two *Sarcocaulon*, one showing yellow flowers.

David Greenaway

(Concluding part next time)



Aloe dichotoma, near Nieuwoudtville

CHRISTMAS QUIZ (Award yourself points out of 30)

1. What is the relationship between the members of these pairs :

- a) in e.g. *Ruschia intrusa* (Kensit) L.Bol, Kensit and Louisa Bolus ? (2)
- b) Steven Brack of Mesa Gardens and Mabel ? (2)
- c) Antifessor Yelwor Nodrog and the President of the BCSS ? (2)

Award yourself 2 extra points for getting the point.

2. In which country are : Collywobbles ? “Diarrhoea Valley” ? “Latrines” ? (3)

3. Assign the plant to the pollinator (6 points)

Brighamia ; *Caralluma* ; *Carnegiea* ; *Cochemia* ; *Massonia* ; *Pleiospilos*
Bats ; Bluebottles ; Gerbils ; Humming birds ; Pollen bees ; Students.

4. What, in the folklore of botanists, originally pollinated *Rafflesia* ?

- (a) leeches ; (b) elephants ; (c) dung beetles. (1)

5. Similarly, what originally pollinated Magnolia trees ?

- (a) dragonflies ; (b) small finches ; (c) pterodactyls. (1)

6. The specific epithet of *Lophophora decipiens* means “deceiving”. Who is being deceived ?

- (a) You and me ; (b) The Federal Narcotics Bureau ; (c) Goats. (2)

7. The biggest *Haworthia* is called “*pumila*”, which means “dwarf”. Why ?

- a) It was previously described as an Aloe;
- b) It was first seen through the wrong end of a telescope;
- c) Botanists never get anything right. (2)

8. Who lives at :

- “Cactusville” ? “Detritus” ? “Parodia” ? (3)

9. Lau066 and Lau1495 refer to a *Mammillaria*. Write down its name correctly. (2)

Now, for no extra points, do it on a label.

10. *Conophytum ernstii* ssp *cerebellum*. In whose honour was the subspecific epithet given ?

- Which Branch of the BCSS used he to be associated with ? (2)

30 points	Decipiens !	
25-29 points	Magnifica/us	You will be asked to give a lecture.
20-25 points	Superba/us	You will be asked to make the tea.
10-19 points	Modesta/us	You need to get out to more Branch meetings.
0- 9 points	Flaccida/us	You need to stay in more and read old Bradleyas.

Answers at our January meeting or an s.a.e. to the Branch Secretary.

John Watmough