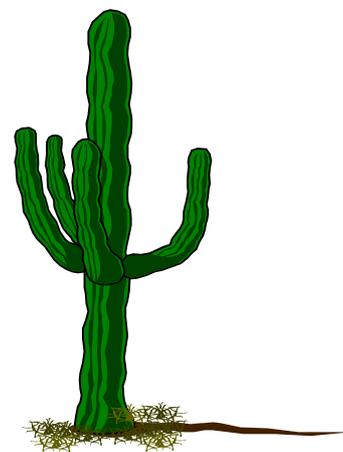


Oxotica

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

June 2003

Volume 8, Number 1



FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Another winter has come and gone. The high humidity caused plants that Bill and I have nurtured for twenty or so years to consider their existence and give up the ghost; at least this has made a little room on the staging for this summer's acquisitions.

The year started for the branch with a change of venue for meetings. I'm sure everyone finds the new hall more than adequate, with the added luxury of parking.

Our Secretary, John Watmough, decided that he would like to concentrate more on Succulents and seed raising, and to do this he needed to sell many of his cacti. So on 13 April about 50 members from Spalding, Taunton and all points between descended on Freeland Village Hall for the auction and sale. The afternoon went well and we have to thank John for his very generous donation to Branch funds from the proceeds.

Our next event will be on 8 June. The Branch is hosting the Zone open day, with Branch, Zone and outside members visiting five collections in our area. Probably by the time you read this the day will have passed: let's hope the weather stays kind to us. This is closely followed by our (now) annual display at Blenheim Flower Show, between 19 and 22 June. Last year it brought some new members and others who attended the

Annual Show. Unfortunately we are not able to sell plants, but if it brings in new members to the Society, it can only be good for the hobby.

As your new Chairman, I am all too aware of the work the Committee puts in over a year to give our Branch the success it has achieved over the last ten years. I hope that those of you who remember John Mullard will feel as I do - that he would be justly proud of the Branch and its members in helping to ensure that the Society and the hobby continue to prosper.

One of our innovations is the lecture at the end of our Shows, where we try to bring over-seas speakers not usually seen on the UK circuit. This year the Branch Show is again to be held in conjunction with the International Ascleplad Society. We would love to see you there, even if you are unable to stay for the lecture. However, to the best of my knowledge Gerhard has not spoken in the UK before, so this is your chance to be in on a *first*. Your schedule is enclosed with this newsletter giving you the full programme for the day, together with your entry ticket order form. Do try to come along, if only to look at some beautiful, National Show quality plants.

Cathy Darbon

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Branch Meetings July – November 2003

July 24th. Graham Hole – Tephrocactus.

Graham is an acknowledged expert on the subject and well known to a number of Branch members. Tephrocacti continue to increase in popularity, perhaps coincidentally with today's interest in reducing heating costs. Last year the Branch hosted the Tephrocactus Study Group Show, and Graham is the right person to keep our interest on the boil.

August 28th. Bob Potter – Euphorbias.

Bob had given up lecturing, to the disappointment of many of us, in order to concentrate on his profession as a civil engineer and on Toobees Nursery, which he runs with his wife Beryl. But arms have been twisted. Bob has worked in a number of the more obscure habitats, and has a fund of stories. He has, however, promised not to mention Sudanese sanitary systems or intestinal worms.

September 25th. John Betteley – The Crassulaceae.

John, who is Secretary of Lincoln Branch, is well known to us as a master Showman. He does not win as many shows as he does without being an expert grower of plants. This talk is a new one, and promises to teach us a lot more than we thought we knew about what plants are available and how to grow them to perfection.

October 23rd. John Henshaw – “Mexico 2001”.

John Henshaw is the sort of speaker who can attract visitors from far and wide. He is the proprietor of Croston Cacti, so it

is just possible that some of John's fan club are more interested in the rare and beautiful plants which he has for sale than they are in his talks. But they would be mistaken, for a talk by John is something just not to be missed.

November 27th. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Please let the Secretary know if there is anything you want discussed – otherwise the Chairman will endeavour to keep it short. Please be aware that the Branch officials are the servants of Branch members and will endeavour to act accordingly. In order to sugar the pill, there will be a humorous quiz beforehand along the lines of the Old Animal Vegetable or Mineral programme, accompanied by mince pies and other goodies.

John Watmough, Secretary

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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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NORTHERN CONVENTION

March 2003, Alton Hall, near Preston

Up the M6 once again, having linked up with friends from Birmingham, arriving in time to meet and greet over a drink before dinner. No time to linger over our coffee - the first of a series of talks starts prompt at 7.30 pm.

Rene Zahra, from Malta, is our first speaker. His subject is 'Raising difficult cacti from seed'. Using his own preferred seed mix to grow the seedlings for the first six weeks, he then selects 50% for grafting. Rene uses *Hylocereus* as his stock, using rooted-up side shoots for the softer, faster growth. He likes to complete his grafting before the eighth week from seed. Rene points out that *Hylocereus* grows best on a very alkaline soil.

We then had a photographic tour round Rene's greenhouse and frames, observing *Discocactus*, *Sclerocactus*, *Geohintonia*, *Perrebraunii*, *Blossfeldia* and *Cintia* (amongst many others) in their various stages of growth.

Saturday Morning.

Martin Lowrie conducts a short tour of the S.E. corner of Bolivia, to find Ceroids and (would you believe?) *Lobivias*.

He also showed many variations of *Sulcorebutia* en route, causing us to wonder how they could ever have been separated. Next, we just hop over to the South-West, casually dropping off here and there to view marvellous stands of *Cleistocactus* and *Oreocereus*, before reaching our target point - *Lobivia famatimensis* in the wild, beautiful!

Off we go again, with hardly a pause for breath, down into Peru. Magnificent specimens of *Weberocereus*, stunning clumps of *Oreocerei*, *Denmoza* one and a half meters tall, more *Sulcos.*, *Lobivias* and *Parodias* too! Breath-taking scenery thrown in.

After a break for coffee it is the turn of Ray Stevenson. His talk is on the reclassification of *Crassulaceae*. Updated from Linnaeus to DNA via Britton and Rose, then Belger's taxonomy and thus to date. Present day classification includes the introduction of clade groupings, particularly in the wider *Sedeae* (*Sedum*) family. Interesting, but a little out of the way for the average collector, I thought.

After lunch the sales room was unlocked for the normal (?) dash and scrabble round the sales tables. Seedlings and grafts from David Rushforth, plants from Birmingham and bricabrac via Stan Griffin, plus a wide selection of plants brought by several individuals.

Next was a very busy tour of Mexico lead by John Miller. Following a largely north/south path, but with many diversions, the variations of *Ariocarpus* at different locations, and sometimes within a single area, were noted. The differences covered leaf (?) changes in width, length, thickness and tuberculation, also flower colour – often on the same site. Dealing with each species separately, John showed us just why he believes the new names (particularly of Czech origin) have no validity. At the same time one could appreciate how some of the old ones came to be given prior to deeper studies. Just to lighten the mood occasionally we also saw some *Turbinocarpus*, *Ferocatus*, *Mammillaria*, *Epithelantha* and *Astrophytum*, to mention just a few, to talk about over dinner.

The next talk by Rene Zahra, was really different. Rene is not familiar with succulents of the Western Cape, of South Africa, Unfortunately, so it turned out, neither was his 'botanical' guide. This led, throughout the slide show, to much discussion and declamation over the plant names. Perhaps this talk was made more enjoyable because of the audience participation.

Sunday morning, bags packed and rooms cleared ready to go, some of the more distant travellers already departing. The rest of us

enjoy the succulents of Greece with Ray Stevens; the scenery was magnificent too. The plants involved were Hyloteophum, Jovibarba, Promethium, Sedum, Sempervivum and Umbilicus. Out of approx. 30 species shown, 20 plus were Sedums and their variants. Some were interestingly different, but many would be familiar on many rockeries.

Lobivias revisited by Martin Lowry. No! – not the expected trip to Bolivia, more of a potted history of nomenclature. From Britton and Rose, through Borg, Backeburg and Ritter, on to Raish and Hunt. Perhaps Rob Wallace and his DNA students will settle it for evermore. After lunch, the closing talk ‘Growing Succulents in Malta’, is given by Rene Zahra. We start with a look at various Cerii and Euphorbia growing wild along the route

between the airport and Rene’s home. Another look at Rene’s rooftop greenhouses and cold (?) frames, leaving out the propagations. I’m jealous already of the colours and spination. Then a helicopter’s view of other cacti and succulent roof gardens. We then went for a tour of his fellow enthusiasts and their collections, stopping off at times to see marvellous specimens in gardens and fields as well as many just along the roadside. Probably these had been dumped at some time.

Fairwells are made over tea and biscuits and promises to meet again before travelling home.

Brian Conway

Zone 8 Open day – two of the venues



Brian Conway's

John Watmough's

