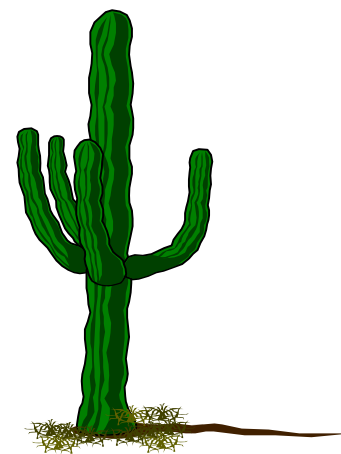


# Oxotica

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

June 2004

Volume 9, Number 1



### AGM REPORT

The Society AGM was held at Leicester on 17th April. The main focus was the appointment of a new president to replace Gordon who had decided to retire and hand over the reins. Gordon was never going to go without some choice words and he did not disappoint; he wished his replacement Bill Keen well in leading the Society to a new focus. He had been conscious that over the last few years his appearances on the society stage have been reserved for special occasions. However he was somewhat dumbstruck when Tom Jenkins presented him with a picture painted by Joyce Coccoza of *Anacampseros scopata* in recognition of his service to the Society.

Tom had already announced that it was his intention to retire at the AGM to the back benches and John Arnold had agreed to accept the position as Chairman and duly took the chair. In his short opening speech he looked forward to leading us towards new objectives. He then presented Tom with a crystal vase on behalf of the members of the society for his past service. June was given a lovely bunch of flowers.

Alasdair Glen was appointed as the new vice-chairman in place of Bill. Next to Gordon's presentation probably the biggest surprise was for Eddie Harris the Society Secretary, when he was awarded a fellowship, as he is supposed to know about these things and was completely in the dark.

The Internet continues to be the main source of new membership but concern was raised that it was important that branches follow up contact with them when they receive their details, as some appeared to be slipping through the net.

David Neville appealed for more articles for the journal as he had little in reserve. It was generally agreed that David had done an excellent job this year with all the problems and that the Journal is recognised as the best of its kind worldwide.

The distribution of *Yavia cryptocarpa* had been a great success and similar projects may be considered in the future, when the opportunity presents itself.

David Kirkbright highlighted the importance of members completing and returning the GIFT AID forms which he sent out February/March as this was an important source of revenue and helped in keeping the subscriptions down, as it meant getting money back from the Inland Revenue, no mean feat in itself.

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The main focus of this year is of course the National Show on Saturday 21 August at Springfields, Spalding and members were encouraged to attend. An added attraction is that there is also a shopping retail outlet on the new Springfields site.

*Bill Darbon*

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## BRANCH OPEN DAY

Oxford Branch have invited Harrow Branch and as many members from neighbouring Branches to our Open Day on Sunday June 27th. Five members are opening their greenhouses through the day. Would Oxford Branch members who would like to visit some or all of these establishments please ask the Branch Secretary for details and a map.

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## FINANCIAL NOTES

### SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Please would anyone who wishes to pay their 2004 subscription but who has not yet done so please send the money to Mr David Slade, 15 Brentwood Crescent, Hull Road, York YO10 5HU. The U.K. rates are: Full £15, Juniors and Over 65's £12. Bradleya is an extra £14. You should preferably quote your membership number, or at least "Oxford Branch".

### GIFT AID.

A while ago the National Treasurer, David Kirkbright, sent a form to everyone

who, on the limited evidence of membership records, might have been able to benefit the Society by allowing it to recover money from the Inland Revenue. The conditions are these: the benefactor must (1) pay Income Tax at the Standard Rate, and (2) must be in the habit of paying the Society more than the cost of the Journal. This means that you must be either an Associate Member paying just the £4 subscription, or that you make a donation with your subscription to the Research or Conservation Funds. The Society can recover 28p in the £ on such moneys, provided that it holds tax certificates signed by the members concerned. Indeed, the Society has recovered a very useful £2000 so far. If you think you qualify but do not have the form, could you please ask the National Treasurer or the Branch Secretary for one.

### NATIONAL SHOW SPONSORSHIP.

If anyone wishes to sponsor a class at the National Show, please send a cheque for £15, payable to "BCSS", to John Betteley, 25 Old Hall Gardens, Coddington, Newark NG24 2QJ.

### BRANCH FUNDS.

Not all members are aware that BCSS branches are not supported financially by the national body. The entire cost of hiring halls, paying speakers' expenses, staging shows (and producing and posting Oxotica) is met out of money that the Branch raises by its own efforts. At Oxford we do not even levy a charge to attend Branch meetings. So just your attendance at any Branch meeting or event will strengthen it and thereby improve the Branch's earning potential.

*John Watmough, Branch Secretary.*

## BRANCH MEETINGS JULY - DECEMBER 2004

### July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Tony and Suzanne Mace - "Mad Dogs and Englishmen".

Dr Tony Mace is the BCSS Publications Officer. He also manages the Society's Website. He is famous for growing enormous cereoid cacti. Suzanne, as Editor of the Mesemb Study Group Bulletin, is the leading light in growing Mesembs in the U.K. This talk is a tour of nurseries and private collections in the United States, where Tony is a Fellow of the CSSA and Suzanne is a well-known speaker. It is a great privilege to have both of them together.

### August 26<sup>th</sup>. Derrick Jackson - "Cristate Cacti".

Derrick is one of the stalwarts of Leicester Branch. He maintains a wonderful collection of cristate, monstrose and variegated oddities, not all cacti, and his talk includes a wonderful display of real plants in beautiful condition, backed up by some superb photography.

### September 23<sup>rd</sup>. Gillian Evison - "Caudiciforms".

Our very own Dr Evison has established an international reputation as a lecturer and as a grower of wonderful rarities that nobody else can grow. She is a favourite to win several firsts at the National Show. She has very kindly agreed to show us some of her amazing plants and tell us how to grow them. We will all be excited and invigorated, but some of us will wish we had greener fingers.

### October 28<sup>th</sup>. Derek Tribble - "Gasterias".

Derek is especially well known as a specialist in the flora of South Africa, where he has spent a great deal of time exploring

with the world's leading botanists. *Tylecodon tribblei* is just one of his many discoveries. Because of his expertise, his enthusiasm, and his ability to communicate with ordinary hobbyists, he is known as a lecturer worth travelling a long way to hear. Gasterias are excellent windowsill plants, but which have had a number of delightful new discoveries in recent years.

### November 25<sup>th</sup>. A.G.M. + Entertainment.

All Branch Members are earnestly requested to come and contribute to the proceedings. Last year we had fizzy pop and mince pies, and Branch members displayed an extraordinary breadth and depth of knowledge in what was supposed to have been a difficult quiz between two teams.

*John Watmough, Secretary*

## Oxotica

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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.

President	Alan Ilott	01865 730924
Chairman:	Cathy Darbon	01993 881926
Vice-Chairman:	Brian Conway	01865 765800
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
	Curt Lamberth	01865 247609
	Mary Stone	01865 774268
	John Warwick	01235 848399

Editor: David Greenaway  
(e-mail: david@phonecoop.coop)

<http://www.communicate.co.uk/oxford/bcssoxfordbranch/>

## CSSA CONVENTION 2003 - Part 2

by David Greenaway



John Lavranos continued his tour of Somalia, and this time it was in the north, westward from the Horn. A large amount of Mediterranean flora is to be found in this coastal winter rain area, including many endemics. *Aeonium leucoblepharum* (I pricked up my ears, as I have a plant rooted from a cutting that Rene Zahra gave from the large plant growing in his garden), also *Euphorbia balsamifera* v. *adenensis*. Each of these is evidence of the ancient floral continuum that stretched between the Canary Islands and the Red Sea area. *Euphorbia ballyi* is also here, and *Duvalia eilensis*, a plant that John collected only once. Then he reached the western limit of *Adenium somalense* - it does not occur in western Somalia or Eritrea, but reappears in the Sudan. He showed a slide of *Cotyledon barbeyi*, the only representative of this genus in NE Africa. *Euphorbia columnaris* was next, and *Pseudolithos cubiformis*; this is the most widespread of the *Pseudolithos*, he said, but nevertheless always rare. Then pictures of *Echidnopsis ballyi*, an undescribed *Avonia* that grows on granite, and the tiny *Euphorbia immersa*. He finished with some views in the sun-scorched, volcanic depression of Lake Assal, the second lowest point on the earth's surface after the Dead Sea.

Tuesday was taken up by 'field trips'. Not being a cactus-rich part of America, we went to the Missouri Botanical Gardens instead. This used to be famous for its succulent collection, but unfortunately the desert house had to be dismantled a couple of years back, being structurally unsound, and the plants were scattered around and at the moment out of sight. I was fascinated, though, by the herbarium in the Monsanto building next door, as I had never seen one. Plants are usually dried and pressed in the field by collectors, and sent back to herbaria around the world; even parts of succulents were kept in bulky folders. They had arranged a small display for us. One could see, for instance, the actual mounted *Opuntia* pad that was illustrated in a plate of a hundred-year old publication.



*Herbarium stack, Monsanto Building.*

The last two days of the convention were on cacti. Jim Mauseth was supposed to talk about botany, but instead took us through a trip he had made in the Andes. Of the high altitude plants, he said that *Oreocereus celsianus* was not hurt by freezing, and *O. trollii* only reaches two to three feet in height. The *Soehrensias* were found at higher altitudes, and get much water in summer. *Trichocereus pasacana* is very slow-growing – only one areole per year! Some *Trichocereus* will take full sun and some will not. *Matucana aurantiaca* has a very wet habitat. *Vatricania (Espostoa)* can easily take frost, and the *Cereus aethiops* stems get frozen back each winter.

Straight on to the second half of his talk, this time entirely about *Backebergia*, which seems to have made a big impression on him. He said that the apical meristem in cacti is sunken deep, and this allows the *Backebergia* to go corky at the top in the summer sun, and then grow through later. Different arms of these plants become adult at different times. The striking terminal cephalium is shed when old, but still attached to a piece of the main branch, which sometimes roots. He saw no seedlings at all in habitat.

John Rebman next, on the Cacti of Baja California, moving from north to south during his two talks. He first mentioned the invasive *Carpobrotus*, known to Californians as 'the green carpet of death'! *Cylindropuntia californica* is very rare. He showed a slide of *C. prolifera* with stamen aberration; this is triploid, consistent with its hybrid origin. The southernmost part of the 'Californian Floristic Region', the NW coast, coexists with the Sonoran Desert type which extends down from SW USA on the Gulf side, giving rise to intergeneric hybrids. The Viscaïno desert can go eight years without rain, but it gets fogs. *Epithelantha pedilanthus* is from there (this is a late summer grower for me, but with a very short growing season). He

concluded this part of his talk on Guadalupe island, where a dioecious *Mammillaria* grows.

Hugo Cota-Sanchez spoke next, on survival strategies of epiphytic cacti. He distinguished autotrophes from heterotrophes. There are about 250,000 vascular plants, of which 10% are epiphytic. Of the cacti, 18 genera out of 115 and 150 species out of the 1500 are epiphytic. He showed photos of epiphytes growing on a Bolivian / Argentinian *Cereus*. *Morangaya* has adventitious roots. *Rhipsalis baccifera* v. *horrida*, from Madagascar, is tetraploid and octaploid, whereas the American *R. baccifera* ssp. *baccifera* is diploid and tetraploid. An ancient species.

Joe Clemens, on Cacti from Seed, mentioned the rare *Adenium socotranum*, a plant of which went for \$350 in the auction. He said that they, C&J growers, have several coming into flower now, so some seed should become available on the market. *Discocactus* seed germinates best at 18 months old, whereas *Asclepiad* seed needs to be fresh. *Lithops* seed can last up to 25 years (Hammer). C&J use 50/50 perlite and coir. When pricking out crowded commercial flats, they extract clumps of five and plant them; they will go on to fill the new flat.

John Spain, in two talks on hardy planting, spoke first about the troughs and containers that can be used. He makes his own troughs, out of 1½ parts perlite, 1½ parts peat and 1 part Portland cement. He uses wet sand to cover the mould, then makes balls of his mix 'slightly larger than a baseball'. He covers the shape with these – they stick together and he fills in any gaps – and leaves them 4-6 weeks. Alternatively, there's the 2-hour method – a plastic dish from a store, 2 or 3 rocks, plants left in their little pots (with labels, maybe); pop them in and finish with gravel.

A change of direction next as Rob Wallace gave us his update on DNA sequencing: the usual tour de force. Too much detail to get down, alas. I did note that *Hatiora*, *Schlumbergia* and *Rhypsalis* are seen to be very closely related, all having a 'missing sequence'. The nearest relatives to the Cacti are the *Portulaca*, *Talinum* and *Anacampseros* (*Grahamia*). *Aguirranus* (two species) are most closely related to *Obregonia*! Did I really hear that?

Hugo Cota-Sanchez talked on epiphytic and semi-epiphytic cacti. I made a note to grow *Nyctocereus phyllanthoides*, but where do I get it from? There has been a lot of name-changing in this area. Thus we have *Schlumbergia* (*Zygocactus*) *truncatus*, *Disocactus* (*Aporocactus*) *flagelliformis*, *Disocactus* (*Epiphyllum*) *ackermannii*, *Hatiora* (*Rhysalidopsis*) *rosea* and *Hatiora* (*Schlumbergia*) *gaertneri*. I'm sticking to the old names!

Roger Brown's second talk was 'Pampering your Cacti'. People don't use white or transparent pots because they let light in which leads to algae; they also get brittle faster. He recommended covering the drainage holes with a piece of paper towel. The many dead roots in a pot after the winter rest are a source of infection, so re-pot. He recommended using a wetting agent when applying fertiliser (do we?). He uses fertiliser in the water for 3 out of 4 waterings, and waters every 7-10 days in growing weather, every 4-6 weeks when the plants are resting. The bodies of *Pseudolithos* should not get wet. Fluoride in the water reacts with phosphates to produce toxins, he said. He noted that cacti do not sweat (!), so do not let them over-heat. He does not apply chemicals if the temperature is over 85F (30C). Shouldn't worry us too often.

John Rebman continued down Baja California. He mentioned *Pereskiaopsis* (I didn't know that came from there). *Mamillaria dioica* comes in female and hermaphrodite forms, a rarity among cacti. The Cardoon is trioecious, a really mixed-up kid; they are bat-pollinated. *Echinocereus mombergerianus*, from 8500ft, is also trioecious. *Ferocactus chrysacanthus* (a favourite of mine) is from the San Pedro Islands. I also noted the names of *Cylindropuntia wolfei* and *Mammillaria louisae* when he showed their pictures, so they must have something going for them. *Mammillaria dawsonii* grows flat on the ground, as does *M. brandegeei*.

John Spain rounded off the Convention with 'Hardy Cacti'. *Opuntia humifusa* is a pretty good candidate - it occurs naturally in all the states east of the Mississippi except for Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. He has no *Sedums* in his hardy garden, as it is an invasive ground cover. He takes *Opuntia* seed pods off after flowering, else they can rot at the base during winter.

I went to the newsletter editors meeting, and promised to email *Oxotica* to Carol Clapp, for the newsletter archives. I could say a lot more about the trip, and New Orleans - where we went after the Convention, but I won't. Only four other people went to St Louis from the UK (excluding the two speakers).

Well that's it folks! The next Convention will be in Phoenix in 2005; we have booked for it - in fact we were the first to do so. See you there? Or Seattle in 2007?





*Table display laid out for the CSSA Convention visitors, Monsanto building, St Louis.*

## MEXICO 2000

(5-05-2000 to 26-05-2000)

*by Brian Thompson*

**Day 1. Fri. 5<sup>th</sup> May.** Early afternoon, a lift to the port of Harwich from Alan, to catch the cat to the Hook of Holland. Sailing is delayed by 1 hour, so arrival was not until 1-00am European time. Leo had borrowed a friend's car to collect me and following a drink or two at one of their watering holes, we finally arrived at the Hotel Campanile in Rotterdam at about 2-00am.

**Day 2. Sat. 6<sup>th</sup> May.** Visited various relatives of Leo, and visits to the nurseries of Cok Grootsholten and Alfonso Morcus.

**Day 3. Sun. 7<sup>th</sup> May.** Following more visits to other relatives, Leo's brother drove us to

the airport for ca., 2-00pm. Take off was 5 minutes late, at 3-05pm. And following an eleven-hour flight, we duly arrived in Mexico City at 7-00pm local time.

Following a long wait, we finally took charge of the hire car and headed in the direction of Queretaro. Reaching Tequisquiapan at 1-00am, we booked into the Plaza Hotel.

**Day 4. Mon. 8<sup>th</sup> May.** At the crack of dawn, we were rudely wakened by the church bells. As they did not start breakfast until late, we headed across town to the Hotel Paraiso, to the mocking calls of the grackles. After breakfast, we drove round the corner to the home of Manuel Rivas. He has a superb collection of Mexican plants, including 4-inch wide *Turbinicarpus alonsoi* and specimens of the yellow

flowered *T. pseudomacrole* that Charles Glass had collected. Our car is a Dodge Neon, and is way too low for the terrain that we will be covering, so we might have trouble. Our first stop is at the hill opposite Pena de Bernal. It lies between two cement works, so will no doubt be for the chop at some time in the future. Our goal is *Turbinicarpus pseudomacrole* and from about two-thirds up the hill we find it without too much trouble. A little higher we find it in flower, so the first stop has brought an unexpected bonus. It grows with 4 UFOs, *Ferocactus latispinus*, *Coryphantha erecta*, and an *Echinocereus sp.* This between km 41/42. A further stop at km 50 finds another couple of *Coryphantha sp.* On the road to Penamillar, at km 8, we find *Astrophytum ornatum* in flower. In Penamillar, every available space appears to be under construction. On leaving town we stop ca. 1km at the hill on the right, to find *Lophophora diffusa* growing with *Astrophytum ornatum*, *Opuntia microdasys*, *Ferocactus sp.*, *Echinocactus sp.* all growing amongst the many resurrection plants. At km 88, off the road at the old chapel and double back along the dirt track down to the river, then left, along the riverbed for 600 yards or so. The high riverbank on the left, is home to hundreds of *Strombocactus disciformis*. At the top of the bank, you find *Lophophora diffusa*, *Mammillaria elongata*, *Coryphantha sp.* and *Thelocactus sp.* Back to the road, with much scraping of the bottom of the car, and across the road, to the big hill opposite, to look for *Thelocactus hastifer*, without success. On our way down the hill we find a couple of policemen at the car. They want to know why we are there and what we are doing. They seem friendly, and when we have shown them our papers and can see that we are not carrying arms full of cacti, we go our separate ways. These hills have had no appreciable rain for God knows how long. Across the road to the left is another hill, quite low. On it grows *Ariocarpus*

*kotschoubeyans*. After an hour, we have found only 1 seared, shrivelled specimen. No doubt there will be many more that have pulled themselves down below the surface, to escape the unremitting sun. As with the hill opposite, even the UFOs are dying.

Several kms further, we enter an entrada on the left and search under the electricity pylons for *Wilcoxia schmolii*. As before, no success and as before, plants of all shapes and sizes are dying by the hundred. Now to the Mex 57 to find a motel and a meal. We have a cheap night, with the room costing 120 pesos and the meal and several drinks costing 140 pesos.

**Day 5. Tues. 9<sup>th</sup> May.** Along the Mex 57 and off to the right heading for San Luis la Paz, we stop at km ca. 12.5 to look for *Mammillaria herrerae*, where it grows with 3 *Coryphantha sp.*, *Mammillaria sp.*, *Ferocactus latispinus*, *Echinocactus horizontalonius*, and *Hamatocactus grassa*. Off to San Luis la Paz, where the road is unpaved, covered with topes, (sleeping policemen) and, where there is no petrol in town. We leave S L la P heading for Xichu. The road into Xichu is being rebuilt. In several places, they have blasted a pass through the mountains. The new road is being metalled. In Xichu, the high road out of town has been washed away by flash floods. The low road is OK. We travel to half a km past the site of *Turbinicarpus alonsoi*, park the car and head down the dirt road towards the river. Halfway down, we meet some people at the roadside. One of them is the owner of the land that we hope to explore. Having convinced him of our good intentions, we are given permission to cross the river to his property. With them at the roadside is a very large pig, that is trussed up and lying in the full sun, it is panting like hell.

*To be continued*