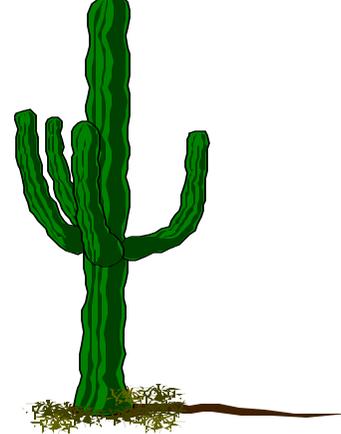


Oxotica

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

June 2005

Volume 10, Number 1



DROOLING SPINES of OXFORD

NATIONAL CONVENTION 2006. David Kirkbright, our National Treasurer, has been presented with a serious problem. He needs to pay a substantial non-returnable deposit by the end of July to book Loughborough University. He dare not do that unless he has an adequate guarantee that attendance will be sufficient to justify it. But to cancel at this stage after all the speakers have been booked would be for the Society an international embarrassment. At the last three National Conventions Oxford Branch had more members present than any other Branch. All those who have attended in the past will know what a tremendous event it is – and next year's Convention has one of the best line-ups of speakers ever! So please would you send your deposits to David right away!

SPEAKERS' GUIDE. In the past few years the Society has lost a number of its most noted speakers by death, retirement, or through ageing speakers seeking to reduce their lecturing and travelling commitments. We need more speakers urgently. The BCSS has published a useful advice Guide, which can be borrowed from the Branch Secretary.

Your Branch Secretary is only one of nearly a hundred Branch Secretaries trying to arrange programmes. He is particularly anxious to recruit new speakers, young speakers, and female speakers. He would welcome a discussion about it with anyone interested, and if you think you might have something to offer (many of our members have years of growing experience and therefore vast knowledge) please contact him.

BRANCH OPEN DAY. Some of our members who live on the southern side of Oxfordshire have volunteered to open their

collections to members of the Branch. The date has been provisionally agreed as Sunday 18th September. Would anyone requiring a map and information regarding times etc. please contact the Branch Secretary.

GLOUCESTER OPEN DAY. This will take place on Sunday August 7th. It is intended to be an Open Day for members of Zone 9 but Gloucester Branch have very kindly extended it to include members of our Branch. There will be some interesting collections to view, including two National Collections. Again, if anyone wants information would they please contact the Oxford Branch Secretary.

HIGH WYCOMBE OPEN DAY. As usual the Donaldsons will be opening up their nursery to visitors from the BCSS with a feast of barbecued sausages and drinks on the lawn. It will be on Sunday July 10th. Oxford Branch have traditionally given strong support to High Wycombe Branch, who are also in Zone 8, and they are sure to give us a warm welcome.

THE JUDGES' COURSE. 2nd to 4th September. The shortage of speakers, as outlined above, also extends to qualified judges and for the same reasons. It is not unknown for judges to travel 300 miles or more because of a local shortage of qualified people. The Society's Judges' Course is designed to train new judges and to keep the old ones in tune with what is currently considered good practice. It is great fun and £100 well spent just for the fun of mixing with fellow enthusiasts during a lively weekend. Contact Bill Morris as advertised in the Journal.

John Watmough

BRANCH MEETINGS JULY - DECEMBER 2005

Sunday 17th July. OXFORD BRANCH SHOW. This year is our year with only one Show, but it is a big one, with sections not only for cacti and succulents, but a special section for asclepiads under the auspices of the International Asclepiad Society, whom we warmly welcome. All Branch members are exhorted to attend. Doors open at Langdale Hall, Witney, at 8:00 a.m. for setting-up. Following the Show there will be a lecture (tickets £3) about North East African succulents by Peter Brandham.

Thursday 28th July. This item in the programme has been changed, since Alan Butler, after judging our Show, is required back at his nursery in the shadow of Vesuvius. **Bob Potter**, who is one of the two B's of Toobees, has kindly agreed to step in and give us **Madagascar 2005**. Members will be able to compare the present state of the island with what it was like in 1993 as David Kirkbright described it for us in February. Bob is well known to most of us. His profession, that of civil engineer, has made him used to coping in places where tourists do not thrive. It should be fascinating.

25th August. We have been very fortunate to secure the services of **Roger M. Ferryman**, who is one of the leading experts on Chilean Cacti. (*Copiapoa ahremephiana* is named after him.) Roger, who is much in demand as a speaker at conferences, will be trying out a talk called **"A New Way of Looking at Chile"** using digital techniques and based on a visit last year. This will be something very special and should attract visitors from other Branches.

22nd September. **Jonathan Y. Clark** is coming to entertain us with **"Stones of the Desert"**, a talk about Lithops as seen by a devotee of Laurel and Hardy. But there will be no custard pies tonight. Jonathan's doctoral thesis was on Lithops and he is a leading specialist on these plants, which should be at their best in our collections about now.

27th October. You have only to mention **"Haworthias"** and **Stirling Baker's** name will soon follow. He is widely acknowledged as the best grower of these plants in the country. His talk will be largely based on a breathtaking display of live plants at their beautiful best. This is a talk which will not be forgotten in a hurry.

24th November. This is the Branch **Annual General Meeting**, when members are supposed to call the Branch officers to account and decide how the Branch shall be run. There will be mince pies and fizzy drinks and some light entertainment, and as many members as possible are asked to attend and make their views known.

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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Moving: Experiences of moving over 1000 plants 200 miles south, and a new greenhouse.

by Martin Doorbar

The most stressful things in life so we are told are a new job, moving house and maybe having a child. So having done all of these over the past 18 months I would like to add to this list that doing all of these while also trying to organise selection and purchase of a new greenhouse and then trying to find the time to prepare the new site, find a builder in a new area where you have no contacts so that you can relocate your collection before the end of the summer and they are left with no heating, may be seen as a bridge too far.

This all started back in 2003 when I decided I needed a new job. This I found and was successfully offered but it entailed a move from the North West down to the South. The office was in St Albans and my partner, Juliet, had been offered a job in Basingstoke. So where to live.... not sure really so we rented for nearly a year before starting the hunt. It turned out that south Oxfordshire won the day and we ended up in the village of Cholsey near Wallingford. A petite 2 bed Victorian end terrace with a wonderful 140ft garden south-west facing with no other building shading the area. (it goes with out saying that the greenhouse needs came before all others, Jules !)

Selecting the new greenhouse was easy, the largest one I could afford and sensibly fit into the plot. Although long, the garden is not too wide at only 25ft at the widest point at the bottom of the garden. So mid way down a 20ft by 10ft greenhouse would fit nicely between the tree and the shed leaving a small plot for veg. I was amazed to find out there was an 8-12 week wait for a greenhouse of this size so it was a good job I sorted this out well in advance. So this area currently 5ft high in brambles was the spot I had to prepare for the new structure, this was 1st July 2004 we had just completed on the house !! So winter 4 months and counting!

As the greenhouse had been on order for 8 weeks it was delivered mid July, good job our completion was not delayed, and Juliet had agreed I could focus on the greenhouse and paint the house later on. So clear the plot and dig the foundations. Now all I need are some foundations good job Richard, my brother in law is a practical chap (he's a landscape gardener) and one Saturday with the help of his cement mixer we had some foundations done, end of July 3 months to winter, all it cost me was a curry at the excellent restaurant opposite our house !

Building the frame took a little longer than I had expected, be warned there are a lot of bits of metal which all look the same in a 20ft greenhouse! I did have a few sections misassembled which do not come to light until I tried to put it all together. The door frames the wrong way around, windows sills upside down....! so it was mid August when one evening Juliet and I stood the end of the frame and one side up to fasten them all together. Ironically this was the easiest part of the whole assembly and

within an hour we had the outer frame and ridge piece in place. But glassing..... That was a different matter.

Erection of the new greenhouse and staging



The roof had to be done first and as I had selected single sheet toughened glass the roof panes were a little on the heavy side at 7 ft by 2 ft.... and were not a one man job as I found out after breaking the first sheet. So it was the penultimate weekend in August when after another call to Richard and another curry the roof was in. The following week I was on holiday and it took me most of that time to get the glass finished and a trip to Wicks for some timber saw staging in half the greenhouse. Time for some plants.....

Views of my old greenhouses at my fathers place, move day.



Now having no experience of moving over 1000 very spiny plants I was unsure my chosen approach would work. After contacting a number of office movers at work I decided to rent 50 large plastic stackable crates, which are not expensive at ~£100 for a week, these are about 3 ft by 2ft by 2ft with strong lids. This as it turned out was the best thing I could have done and made the whole job considerably simpler, so long as the plants fitted into the box they were completely safe and protected.

The 50 odd boxes to empty and first plants into the greenhouse.



Packing the collection into the boxes started early on a Thursday morning with the aid of an old friend, the key is to pack each box as tight as you can to prevent movement even if it means forcing the odd pot into the odd gap. We had the contents of 2 tightly packed 8ft by 6ft greenhouses to pack up and after only 1 hour we had packed half of the first house and thought we would be done by lunchtime ! What a mistake. as we moved into the second side of smaller plants time appeared to stand still and it took ages to empty the remainder of the first house, late lunch and onto the second

greenhouse of mainly larger plants, then dismantle the staging and shelves as I needed them again. It was nearly 6.00pm by the time all were packed, luck was on my side as I had used 47 of the 50 I ordered and I started to load the boxes into the van and I set off for home just after 7.30pm. At least the roads would be quiet.

The following morning and I unpacked the crates into the back garden. Now this is where a 140ft garden becomes a pain as the contents needed to be moved to the greenhouse about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down. At least I had some help from Juliet but with her 5 months pregnant she could only move the plants a few at a time. Also the weather was very warm topping 90 in the greenhouse with all doors and windows open not good for her. So Jules moved the plants a tray at a time and I sorted things out in the greenhouse. We started Friday morning and did not empty the last crate until around mid afternoon on Sunday. The other shock was that I had nearly filled the new greenhouse now how does 8ft by 6ft twice translate into 10ft by 20ft full ?

The grand opening.

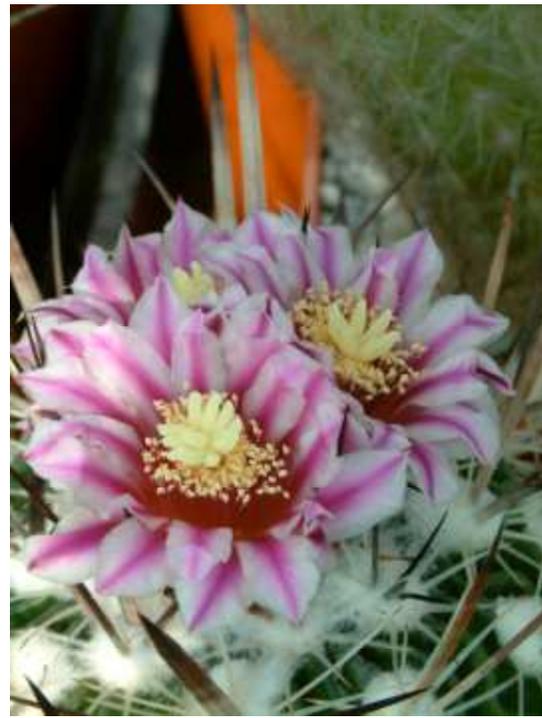


So now all plants were in and I had achieved my goal of moving them by the first weekend in Sept. Still with a bit of summer left to encourage some growth. A little too much summer as it turned out. The previous greenhouses were a little shaded and so the fully exposed location of the new site proved a little too much for some of my plants and a number suffered some quite bad scorching the second weekend in September. At least it

warned me and I have been able to fix up shading this spring to prevent any further major damage. So a weekend in mid September we arranged a family get together as the opening for Cholsey Gardens as friends had started to call it, well this was the cover story to get the whole family down as the key objective was to inform them we had got engaged. The day went well and Juliet fixed up a red ribbon for me to cut and a bottle of bubbly to spray over the greenhouse. Now all my excuses had been used and I had to go and start painting the house before the arrival of our other expected new addition.

Even the short end of summer in the new bright location obviously did the mesemb some good as I had the best show of flowers on my Lithops and Cono's I have ever had. Also as I write this at the end of May I have already had a number of my cacti flower which have not done so before so the combination of a new house and probably the fact I have repotted the whole collection is having very positive effects and I am now looking forward to a summer of enjoyment and a little less work !

All in and into the first full summer, May 2005.



First flowers of spring 2005.



So what are the key items to help you if you have to move your collection ?

From this experience I would say

- Rent some crates and get some help;
- Order the greenhouse well ahead of when you need it; larger houses can take 8-12 weeks to be delivered !
- Rent some crates and get some help;
- Build the new greenhouse before you try to move your plants if you can possibly arrange this (difficult I agree if selling the house where the collection is located but may be worth negotiating re the terms of departure ?)
- Rent some crates and get some help;
- Moving them yourself is not that difficult and at least you are in control of how they are handled.

Now as we have an allotment for the vegetables, that area where the veg plot is, I am sure a 12 by 8 would fit into there.....

I wonder what Jules would think to another small addition!

BRANCH SHOW

I trust that all branch members have made a special note in their diary to visit the branch show this year on 17th July. You might even feel like dusting off the cobwebs and find some plants to enter in the show. There is a special section for plants from the Asclepiads. This will be the third show of this type that we have organised and they have proved a great success in the past by attracting some plants that are not always seen on show benches. And don't forget this section is open for all members to enter, so why not come along and have a go to see how your plants compare with those of other members. I will be pleased to receive any number of entries.

As you know our current format is to try and arrange a speaker to give a short lecture after the hall has been

cleared of plants. Cathy and I struggled to find some one to come along this year till I happened to look in our local village magazine and saw that Dr Peter Brandham was speaking at our local Gardening club in February. We last heard Peter speak a considerable number of years ago at Spalding before Gareth was born, and know how well he presents his talks. So along we duly went on a cold February night and we were not disappointed. I am sure that some of you may recognise the name. Peter's roots are at The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew but don't let that put you off. He is not at all stuffy and he has an extensive knowledge of all types of flora and his talks are not to be missed, so I am sure we are in for a treat. Please try and make the effort to come along and support your branch.

Bill Darbon