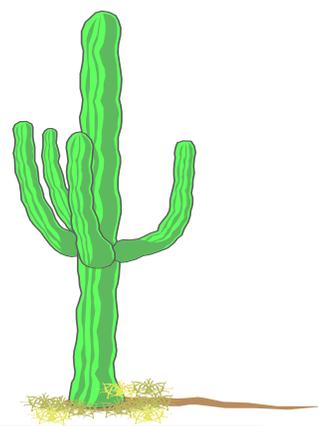


# Oxotica

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

June 2008

Volume 13, Number 1



## OXFORD & NORTHAMPTON

Apart from our close friends down the M40 at High Wycombe, it is interesting to note that our nearest neighbouring branches are in other Zones. There is Reading and Basingstoke in Zone 13, Berkhamsted (very small these days) in Zone 6, Gloucester in Zone 9, and Northampton also in Zone 6.

Of these, we have perhaps the most in common with Northampton. Both branches include among their members keen BCSS officials, show judges and visiting speakers. Also, when Oxford Branch decided to set up a website, it was Northampton's that we set out to emulate.

So it was no surprise that Northampton members should turn up in force to our 2007 Auction. Having seen what a successful money-spinner it was, David Kirkbright (no mean sniffer-out of financial advantage) and other members suggested that they run an auction on similar lines to ours and on alternate years. Oxford members were enthusiastic. We could not expect to provide auction material to the highest standard every year; our own members would become less keen if it became an annual chore; and it would be wrong to monopolise money-making opportunities in the region when our own Branch was already financially strong.

To reinforce our new partnership, Northampton Branch invited us to an Open Day in June 2007. Unfortunately the event was poorly attended by Oxford members, and, it has to be said, even more poorly attended by Northampton members. That was a pity, because those who did attend were welcomed

most hospitably and saw some fascinating collections.

So this year everything was reciprocated. Northampton held their first Auction in April. (It should be explained that there are two kinds of cactus auction: the first is occasioned usually by the death of a member, so that it has to be organised quickly but the plants are to hand and can be listed in a single operation; the second is where the organisers invite contributions. This requires a lot of forward planning, advertising, and the slow accumulation of catalogue entries. Our own experience is that the main building blocks should be in place by Christmas. These include booking a hall, getting listed on the BCSS Events Programme, advising local branches, and providing forms for sellers to submit their plants.)



*Oxford's Auction – Setting up*

Northampton duly booked an excellent hall at Nether Heyford, just off the M1 or A5, and overlooking what must be one of England's loveliest village greens. The build-up of the catalogue was slow. Organisers had to ring

round. But as usual there was a snowball effect, and by the allotted day there was no shortage of plants on offer. A few plants were not very good and even David Kirkbright had a job to sell them; some were good and went cheap; a lot fetched decent prices; and one or two should have been in Sotheby's.



*The Oxford Auction*

Overall, the consensus view was that the Branch had made a satisfactory profit, but that the number of attendees was disappointing despite the welcome presence of some who had travelled long distances. Some thought that maybe the accident of other auctions of deceased members' plants had diluted interest in this particular event. Another view, that Northampton could perhaps refute but that Oxford should bear in mind, is that maybe publicity was directed too strongly towards the

electronic universe that not all of us thorny-handed traditionalists inhabit. No matter! From the Branch's point of view the Auction was a success and should be repeated. From the visitor's point of view it was well organised, a good day out and an opportunity to meet friends and enhance our collections.

The follow up to the Northampton Open Day was our own Open Day on May 11<sup>th</sup>. Gillian Evison, John Watmough and Bill & Cathy Darbon opened their greenhouses at staggered times through the day. They were delighted to welcome eight Northampton members, who were keen to talk plants, chat and drink tea on a pleasant sunny day. Oxford even made a few bob out of plant sales. The one disappointment was the lack of interest shown by our own Branch members, who would surely have enjoyed the excellent company of our friends from up the A43.

POSTSCRIPT. It will be Oxford's turn to organise an Auction in April 2009. It is even now not too early to start identifying surplus plants in our own collections, or even purchasing good plants cheap with a view to making a speculative profit and a guaranteed contribution towards Oxford Branch funds.

*John Watmough*



*Voilà!*

## BRANCH MEETINGS JULY – NOVEMBER 2008

**(Fourth Thursday in month, 7:30 p.m. for 8:00 p.m.). Please bring plants for Table Show**

### **24<sup>th</sup> July: DAVID RUSHFORTH**

Just about retired as the seed purchasing officer for the Society. I say just about, as he has been trying to get rid of this job for the last 10 years to my knowledge. For all these years' work he has just been honoured with the Fellowship of the Society. David has been to Oxford Branch on several occasions, but this time he comes with a brand new talk - "Shooting Stars", for us to look forward to. He will, of course, be bringing plants for sale - these being mostly the much sought after species and genera that are on everyone's shopping lists.

### **28th August: GILLIAN EVISON**

What can I say about our Vice Chairman? I have known Gillian for many years, and remember her showing in the Junior Section of the National when it was held at Luton. She is a great photographer, as I am sure you will all verify from looking at the branch web-site, and has this year been asked to photograph at the National Show. A very experienced speaker, her talk on this occasion will be "Retro Chic".

### **25th September: GRAHAM HOLE**

A few of you will have experienced this talk before, as I believe it was the first that Graham gave to Oxford Branch ??? years ago, but it has been updated and will include many species not in the original. A very old friend of mine, going back to the early eighties, his plants must be seen to be believed. However, he is very selective in the plants he keeps, being at one stage a member of the Chileans, and also an original member of David Hunt's team when he started writing the Lexicon, although he did not stay until the finish. He will be talking again on "Gymnocalyciums".

### **23rd October: RODNEY SIMS**

Again a very old friend of the Branch, a Fellow of the Society, the first author of the Speakers List used by branch secretaries and until a few years ago Chairman of the Shows Committee.. This is the second time this month that you will see Rodney, as he will be judging at our Succulent Show. It seems that nearly every other year he disappears to the African continent on field trips, and it is from these that his talks emanate. On this occasion the talk will be on "The Eastern Cape".

### **27th November: AGM & ENTERTAINMENT**

For those of you afraid of coming to an AGM in case you get 'lumbered', do think again, we have a very enjoyable evening, and skip through the official bits as quickly as is possible, and then go on to either quizzes or other suitable entertainment and consumables. We would love to see some new members on the committee, but only if you want to - new ideas are always welcomed as it is these that keep Oxford Branch in the forefront of the country's branches.

*Cathy Darbon, Branch 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.

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## GLEANINGS FROM CACTI\_ETC

By David Greenaway

In January 1994 Bob Jewett started the discussion group cacti\_etc by setting up a list server hosted by Hewlett-Packard, his employer.

I discovered it around August of that year, read the back postings avidly, and sent my first email to it the following month; any such mailing went to the 167 people then on the mailing list. Over the years the number grew to almost two thousand subscribers, and then receded a little; by then other, more specialist and non-English language groups for succulent plants had sprung up in 'competition'. I stuck with cacti\_etc because of its general nature (and I have a general interest), but traffic is very light these days.

To date I have 2092 files saved in 22 subject categories, but they occupy only just over 5Mb of space (four diskettes!) because no pictures have ever been allowed in cacti\_etc, just plain text. I have long thought that it might be of interest to others if I were to condense, summarise and distribute some of this material. To do it all would be a mammoth task - and of course the emails are only my personal selections from all the mailings sent.

Nevertheless - here is an attempted summary of the material in one of the smaller folders of 60 saved emails. (Caveat: please note that any quotes from named persons were made some years ago and may not represent their views today).

### POTS AND POTTING

(Not including Composts – that is the subject of another, larger! folder of emails).

#### **Pots:**

There have been many postings about the old argument: what is best, clay/earthenware or plastics? Factors are: weight, cost, aesthetics, 'breathing', evaporation, shelf life, recycling, overwatering, cleaning; I think you can fill in the pros and cons yourselves. One tip is to only use clay for the larger pots; small pots should be of plastic.

Another tip is to save the plastic lids from coffee jars and use them as saucers (Richard Hodgkiss);

'Make holes in plastic pots/bowls with a soldering iron' (Ralph Peters); or heat a nail and use that (Rob Wallace; he was aghast at the recommendation to use an iron for this job). Another writer suggested drilling the pot (though it might make a plastic pot split).

[By the way, the US gallon pot is 231 cubic inches. I thought you would like to know that.]

'Seal the interior of a clay pot with polyurethane to stop excessive drying-out and unsightly salt deposits outside'.

With columnar cacti (in particular), the smaller the pot the skinnier are the stems; the root/shoot ratio is vital for most plants; the quantity of root governs the size and rate of above-ground growth. One of the few exceptions among succulents is Alluaudia; they seem to grow just as well in cramped quarters as with ample root space. On the other hand, some plants such as "epiphyllums" and hoyas don't bloom well until the roots are cramped, said one subscriber.

#### **Re-potting:**

A classic tip to aid potting is to use a pair of brushes to handle cacti, which provide a very low risk of damaging the plant; choose the brush size and hair length to suit the spination. Another idea is to use bubble-wrap: if spines go through, then wrap it again. Alternatively, use crumpled newspaper or tongs; for columnar plants with short spines wrap a folded newspaper round them like a handle. Expanded polystyrene (Styrofoam) blocks/sheets are very useful to stick on the spines to protect both you and yourself.

Never re-pot without breaking up the root-ball in some way; this was a general consensus.

Gloves: No comments noted [I use rubber ones or stout gardening ones depending on the spination - Ed.]

#### **Crockage:**

Best to have none (Mac Clarke); use a piece of toilet paper or coffee filter paper (SB). 'Use

newspaper in small pots, 2mm polyester mesh in large ones' (Ralph Peters).

Gravel at the bottom can represent a discontinuity of soil strata causing *root fear* (Steve Brack).  
[Hold that thought – Ed.]

### Top Dressing:

(In particular Roger Sieloff, Jerry Barad, Dan Mahr mailings).

Much debate, with the conclusion that it is not really necessary, but some people prefer to do it nevertheless.

### Labels:

Much discussion, and much of it US market-based, but it I noted that Avery made a clear laser printable, L7552, for long narrow plant labels, and L7553 for the small 'T' labels. Print from MS Word, say, or print from a small database program which will allow you to specify how many of each label to print.

### When to re-pot?:

'The only months we do little potting are November, December and January. In October we would only do desperately needed cases, sick

plants or something very vigorous' (the Maces). [Interesting, as I do all my re-potting, successfully, in Jan. and Feb. - Ed.]

Someone noted that some very sensitive plants like Mam. tetrancistra and most Echinomastus should be potted when dormant and put in very dry soil and not watered for a good month or more; repot midwinter in dry weather. Another high danger plant is Sclerocactus.

Another comment sent in was that the summer dormancy/stagnation can be a good period for re-potting those "dormant" plants; remove cacti from their pots in July, if necessary roots could be cut; then put plants in close and cool place until they show latent roots. They can then be re-potted, and watered at once. They make a lot of new roots very quickly and during first week after re-potting show well developed growth. 'Re-potting has to be finished by 10.August'.

One final comment - 'Melocactus is intolerant of root disturbance at all stages of growth'.

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## Pictures from Headington Festival, Bury Knowle Park

By Steve Williams

June 2008



*Setting up*



*Sales in full swing*

## MEXICO 2000

By Brian Thomson



[In the previous instalment of this report, which was published in the June 2004 edition of Oxotica, you may remember (!) that we were on the road to Xichu and there was a ‘very large pig, trussed up and lying in the full sun; it is panting like hell’.

You have probably been wondering ever since what became of this pig, so please read on (be warned though – it is not a pretty story):]

We continue our way down to the river, turn left along the river bed for a couple of hundred yards or so, then cross to the other side and climb the hill, following the water pipe. We found a few of the *Turbinicarpus alonsoi* and higher up, Leo found a couple of *Strombocactus disciformis ssp. esperanzae*. Having crossed back over the river, we were met by the owner and his mother, who were returning home. With them was their handyman, who was pushing a wheelbarrow, which now contained the body of the pig which, while we were away had had its throat cut and had bled to death at the roadside. Tomorrow, it was to be roasted as part of the celebrations for the birthday party of the owner’s mother. We again stop for a chat, and are told that the plants that we have been to see grow throughout the length of the valley, a spread of some 60km. We reluctantly turn down his offer of a bed for the next couple of nights and a place at his table during the celebrations. We retrace our steps to the original site and clamber up the arroyo to find only a few plants of *Turbinicarpus alonsoi*, no plants of *Strombocactus disciformis ssp. esperanzae* and

only a few of the beautiful form of *Mammillaria schiediana* with the deep yellow spination. Heading back from Xichu, We stop at km2.5 to show Leo the habitat of *Mammillaria duei*. We find many plants some of which were in bud, however, at this site, we found no flowers. Also growing here are *Ferocactus macrodiscus*, *Mammillaria uncinata* in fruit, *Thelocactus clavata*, *Stenocactus sp.*, and an *Echinocactus sp.* In the main, the plants at this locality were in good condition. When we reached the outskirts of S L P, we attempted to book into a motel that offered prices of 170 pesos, only to find that the price was only for an hour or two and that you also had to hire one of the local women of “loose virtue”. So off we went into town where we booked into the Hotel La Posada at 400 pesos per night.

**Day 6. Wed. 10<sup>th</sup>. May.** Mex 57 again. We stop at km30 on the old “libre” or free road to see *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* growing with *Mammillaria aurielanata*, (the original form with white wool) we found just one, with *Ferocactus sp.* and a couple of *Coryphantha sp.* We now head for Huizache Junction, to see if there are any *Ariocarpus bravoanus* still there. We drive to the microondas and having parked the vehicle, we head for the third electricity pole, despite the fact that the land is now fenced off in at least two places. We spend 90 minutes at the site, the bulk of which is on hands and knees, finding not a trace of the plants. The other plants are still there, the *Agave sp.*, *Yucca sp.*, *Echinocereus sp.*, *Thelocactus sp.*, and the beautiful, deep red spined form of *Ferocactus pilosus*. Continuing our journey to Huizache Junction, it is noticeable that change has taken place. The roadside stalls that sell animals, snakes and birds have been reduced by at least half. Because of the reduction in traffic, the army no longer has a checkpoint opposite the original habitat of *Turbinicarpus klinkeranus*. I take Leo round the corner to see the superb stands of *Lophophora williamsii*. He is suitably impressed, also with the many stands of *Echinocereus sp.* that are in flower. We are also able to watch the many buzzards etc., devouring the body of a cow that had died by the roadside. Off now to km160, and the turn towards Villar, to see *Mammillaria aurielanata* (this time, the form with yellow wool). The area from Huizache Junction is very arid, with even the UFOs and

*Myrtilocactus geometrizans* dying by the thousand. Even the many *Yuccas* are struggling, and the *Agaves* appear to be all shrunk and wasted. A sure sign of rain shortage is the grass at the roadside: if there has been even a small amount of rain in the recent weeks this grass is green, as it receives the run off from the road. Here, the roadside grass is as brown as that in the fields. On reaching La Bonita we pull off the road and park at the base of the low hill on the right.

We spend over an hour on the hill to find a dozen small and seared plants of *Turbinicarpus polaski*, most of which were seedlings measuring from as little as 0.5cm, but at least, it shows that there is some regeneration. Following our baking in the sun of La Bonita, we make our way down to the restaurant, only to find that it is closed and boarded up. The forecourt is about 3cm deep in white dust, which billows up around us as we walk.

At a small turning just before the government's experimental garden, we take a left on the dirt road and through the puebla Palmas, where they fence their gardens with large specimens of *Cereus marginatus*.

At 0.5km past the village, we park at the electricity post on the right to find *Ariocarpus fissuratus var hintonii*. There are very few cacti growing here now; there are, however, plenty of holes, where it looks as though plants have been removed, maybe to the experimental garden. Here, there is no regeneration of any of the cacti that once grew here. We now head into Matehuala and turn right on Dr. Arroyo road looking for km31. However, the km signs here are only sited at 5km intervals. Our goal is a little past San Gregoria, where we find *Encephalocarpus strobiliformis*. Once again, it is raining, and although only a little, it is sufficient to cause a significant drop in the temperature for which we are thankful. (It has rained every day since our arrival, though in very small amounts.)

Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> electricity poles on the right, we park and head straight up the large hill. From about half way up you are in amongst a whole host of cacti. There are *Mammillaria formosa?*, *Ariocarpus retusus*, *Encephalocarpus strobiliformis* by the hundred; you also find

*Ferocactus sp.*, *Echinocactus sp.*, *Neolloydia sp.*, *Thelocactus sp.*, and *Glandulicactus sp* *Mammillaria sp.*. Fortunately, there is no rain at the moment; however, there is much thunder in the mountains both ahead of us and behind us. From here to Saltillo everything is seared and dry, with many dust storms. For 30 of the last 33km, we drive through heavy rain, but amazingly, for the last 3kms it is bone dry again and we can hardly see the town for dust. We book into the Okey hotel for the night. Feeling in need of a little pampering, we cross the road to the Hotel La Calandra for our meal. Here, the rooms cost from 1000 to 4000 pesos per night. We wine and dine while writing up our notes to the refrains of the hotel's combo.

**Day 7. Thurs. 11<sup>th</sup>. May.** We turn right on highway 40, heading towards Torreyon. At ca. km20 we join the toll road. Here, the km signs reverse, throwing everything into confusion viz, instead of being at km20 and counting upwards, we are at km225 and counting downwards. Judging by the grass at the roadside, there has not been any rain for a long time. Here, there are no large cacti at all, viz no *Myrtilocactus*, none of the other *Cerei* and no barrels or tall UFOs. There are a few creeping ones and even the small bushes do not appear to have leaves. Many of the *Yuccas* look to be dying. However, there are many *Fouqueria splendens* (probably hundreds of thousands of 'em), but none is showing any signs of growth. Just before the end of the toll road, we run out of petrol.

*To be continued.*



# Pictures from the High Wycombe show

By Steve Williams



*John Watmough's*



*Cathy and Bill's*



*John Warwick's*



*Unknown exhibitor*



*Doug Donaldson's*