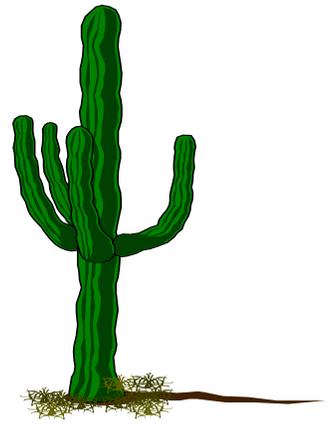


Oxotica

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

June 1999

Volume 4, Number 1



RAY PEARCE BSc PhD

Most Branch members will already have learnt of the sudden death of our Chairman, Ray Pearce on 27th April. A brief outline of his contribution to the Branch and to the hobby as a whole is due to appear in this month's edition of the Journal, but those of us who are more immediately bereft of his quiet gentle humour, his unforgettable presence, his wisdom and sound judgement, and his remarkable knowledge of all things cactaceous, might solicit a more intimate portrait. Probably the same things are being said by his friends in the fungus and antique motorcycle fraternities.

Ray first came to public notice when as one of the "quieter members" of Birmingham Branch, he gave his superb lecture "Through the Looking Glass", illustrated by close-up shots of floral parts. This report, in the June 1978 NCSS Newsletter continues: "Alas, Ray Pearce then left us to transfer to Oxford." Those present at his lectures might have seen the cellular structure of a *Thelocactus* petal, or the sexual parts in three dimensions, four feet across, of a *Crassula lycopodoides* flower.

Ray had mastered the art of growing *Strombocactus*, *Aztekium* and *Blossfeldia* in petri dishes; he could flower his beloved *Fraileas* at will; he could coax *Corryocactus* and amaze us with *Arrojadoa*. Alas, he could never leave a seed unsown, and sometimes he actually had to partially empty his greenhouse in order to get in to water the plants. But there were wonderful things in there: lots of plants just tantalisingly better than your best specimens; great healthy rows of really difficult plants; and real obscure plants that to most of us are just names in books. But all were cacti - he had no love of the spineless.

Ray's professional commitments were such that he usually arrived at a Branch or committee meeting straight from Birmingham University. Once it was straight off the plane from Japan. But once elected to the Committee, in 1994, he would spare no effort to promote Branch activities. When he became Chairman, in 1997, he set the Committee to analysing, one topic per meeting, all the activities of the Branch and questioning even the traditional fundamentals so as to give the best possible service to members.

Our deepest sympathies are tendered to Ray's wife, Lynne, who is an internationally respected ecologist. She loved Ray and his fungi and their motorbikes, but saw his cacti as a harmless eccentricity.

We can best honour Ray's memory by using the botanical and cultivation knowledge he gave us, by administering Branch affairs with his clarity of mind and sense of purpose, and above all, by enjoying the glories of the natural world as much as he did.

John Watmough

Behind The Curtain

Some intrepid explorers from the Branch joined up with members from Swindon and Birmingham on a visit to Kew Gardens, with the intention to look behind the scenes (a visit to Mecca!). Something to make the mouth water, hoping to discover the unexpected.

The trip had been organised by Ray Pearce, and this report is dedicated to his memory.

We met up with the Birmingham contingent at the watering hole (Heston Services).

On arrival at Kew we were greeted by Phil Griffiths. He explained the layout and purposes of each of the new glasshouses - oh for all that space! After his introduction he allowed us to wander around the three relevant greenhouses at our leisure, and remained to answer any questions that may arise.

I don't know what I was expecting, having been to Heidelberg fifteen years ago - perhaps too much. Phil came across not as the toothed monster that perhaps Kew had been labelled but as a sociable and enthusiastic plant lover, particularly for the plants in his care. Shame that he is already looking to move onwards and upwards.

The houses were organised into the various plant families according to habitat. I was quite surprised that they were not in as much order as I had anticipated: in fact quite higgledy piggedy, however if you looked closely you could find the choice plant.

Phil is always on the lookout, providing its origin can be verified, for spare plant material, and is even open to approaches for wants or swaps as he believes that all material should be available even if origins are in doubt.

We whiled away a couple of hours just browsing around and left thanking Phil for his hospitality, and inviting him for a return journey to the backwoods of Oxford area.

There was still time to wander around the rest Of the gardens and our party divided on their own trails. One of the main attractions was the Princess of Wales Conservatory, divided into different climates for the various habitats. At the entrance was a magnificent floral display of red and white Amaryllis. The cacti section contains some spectacular plants, with aesthetic displays. Other places of interest were the Palm and Alpine Houses.

Time seemed to fly by, but it was now time to leave, a very enjoyable day was had by all. Our thanks go to Ron Robertson for driving us on our adventure.

A special memory of the day, was Ray disappearing into the undergrowth on our way to the Princess of Wales Conservatory muttering something about the disease on some tree or another, saying that he would be writing to the powers that be to offer his expertise and advise - Adieu.

Bill Darbon



SPEAKERS, June - November 1999

22 July Keith Grantham
Caudiciforms

Keith will be well known to most of you, as he is a regular visitor to the Branch. He has recently had a book published in conjunction with Paul Klassen - The Plantfinders Guide to Cacti and other Succulents. Keith is widely travelled, and is not only a Fellow of the Society, but the current Chair of the Shows Committee. We look forward to a very interesting evening on a subject that in itself is new to the Branch.

26 August Graham Walker
Haworthias

Graham first gave this talk at the Judges course, and yours truly felt that it would go down well at the branch level. Graham has just given up the position of Show Secretary to the Haworthia Society, to enable him to spend more time with his plants and family.

August 29

Zone 8 Show at Langdale Hall, Witney.

Many of you tested your knowledge of showing at the Mini Judges Course held in April, now is the time to put what you learned to the test! Why not come along and display your plants to other members of the Society? If it is your first time of showing, please consider exhibiting in the Novice section - it's the first stepping stone!

23 September Dr Geoff Bailey
The Genus Ariocarpus

Another talk found at the judges course, this one not programmed, but one of the slide shows given at midnight, and attended in preference to Lobivias, for obvious reasons! Geoff was for a time Secretary to the Society and is currently Manchester Secretary.

October 28 George Hollis
Pests and Diseases.

George promises me that he will not be bringing plants infested with little horrors to the meeting! However, if you are having problems please take a photograph to bring along and perhaps he can help you to relegate the trouble to the realms of 'the past'. George was until recently the Secretary to the Shows Committee, and is another Fellow of the Society.

November 25 AGM and Roger Smith
Photography.

Roger was Chair of the Medway Towns branch in the past; although not currently a member of the Society, he lives on our doorstep in a village just outside Witney, and regularly attends the Annual Show. He has recently started his own photography business, so a combination of the two should make for a full and interesting evening. The second part of the night is dedicated to the AGM; if you would like to get deeper into the hobby, why not start here and offer your services to the Committee!

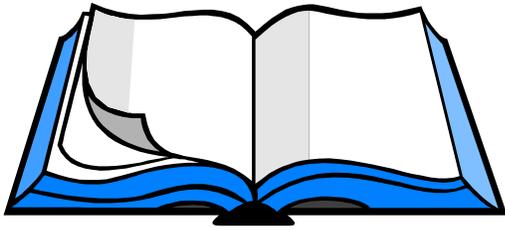
Cathy Darbon

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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:		
Secretary:	Cathy Darbon	01993 881926
Treasurer:	Steve Williams	01367 718944
Show Secretary:	John Watmough	01993 772709
Committee:	Bill Darbon	01993 881926
	Brian Conway	01865 765800
	David Greenaway	01235 762761
	John Warwick	01235 848399

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



Yet More Old Mortar Rubble

I've read with interest John Watmough's articles in recent issues of this newsletter, delving into the past history of your branch. I'm very interested in historical aspects of the cult of cactus and succulent cultivation and study, so I appreciate John's efforts at recording activities in the Oxford area.

One of my own interests is collecting literature on our chosen interest and thanks to your Branch Secretary, I have a full set of 'Oxotica'. In contrast, I do not possess any of the earlier newsletters that John describes, nor had I ever heard of these before. My own library has examples of around 250-300 different periodicals (journals, newsletters and yearbooks) devoted to succulents. Some of you might think that this total is impressive, but it's only around a quarter of those published over the years, beginning in 1891 with the first specialist cactus journal from Germany. How do I know this? Over the past couple of decades fellow bibliophile, Urs Egli of Switzerland, has been collating data on succulent plant periodicals. His most recent listing ('Friciana 60', published last year although dated 1995), provides data on a staggering 960 different titles published world-wide. His first listing, published in 1985, had a mere 480 entries, so in about a decade that's quite an increase. Some of this 'growth' is accounted for by new titles, but quite a few earlier ones were very obscure and overlooked because copies were not readily accessible. Early this decade Urs searched the archives

at the Huntington Botanical Gardens, which helped him fill in many gaps, and other fellow enthusiasts have also provided assistance.

The 1998 total, though, is incomplete, since a number of new periodicals are missing, for instance, the popular glossy magazine 'Cactus & Co.' from Italy. None of the Oxford Branch newsletters are included either, which is an unfortunate omission. Perhaps someone in the Branch could collate the available information (volumes, numbers of issues, dates of publication, etc) on the Abingdon and Oxford Branch newsletters, so that Urs could incorporate the data into a future, revised listing. This would push the 1998 Great Britain total of 98 periodicals over the 100 mark. Even so, I'd guess that America will remain in the lead in terms of publishing country, since there most of the 60 or so affiliate societies each issues its own newsletter, and of course, as in all other countries, there are quite a number of now defunct titles too. Currently it seems that relatively few BCSS branches publish their own newsletter. My own branch is perhaps unique in that it issues two different titles: one is a single-page monthly flyer, whilst the other is a more substantial newsletter issued only three or four times a year.

One goal I have is to collect at least an example of every British succulent plant periodical. To date I'm missing around 30 titles so I've quite a way to go, but the collecting bug has bit! In this context, does anyone have any spare issues of the Abingdon & District Branch newsletter please, so that I could add another title to my own library?

*Colin C. Walker
(Northampton & Milton Keynes Branch)*



GIBRALTAR AND MOROCCO

The 1st International Conference on Cacti and Other Succulents was held in Gibraltar in early November, 1998, followed by a trip to see habitat plants in Morocco. It was organised by Brian Lamb, Curator of the Gibraltar Botanical Gardens, his wife and John Lavranos, helped by John Cortes, the Director of the Alameda. The organisation had had last minute hitches, with Seymour Linden having cancelled through ill-health and the non-appearance of a lecturer from Morocco! Also after the Embassy bombing in Kenya, seventeen U.S. delegates had cancelled their bookings.

Fortunately John Lavranos was able to get Petr Pavelka from Prague to fill in despite the short notice. He is a young plant explorer and this was his first presentation on the international circuit. His English is almost perfect and he gave an illustrated talk about his long trips to Lesotho and eastern Cape Province and to the Richtersveld. No doubt he will soon be a much sought-after speaker.

The emphasis of the Conference was on water saving by the encouragement of succulent planting. We visited the Alameda Gardens, now home to the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens where the succulent beds have recently been greatly extended in an effort to interest the residents of Gibraltar in growing plants

which do not need watering. While there, the Conference was officially opened by the Minister for Tourism and Transport - he was keen to publicise the Gardens as an additional tourist attraction, and the proceedings were all duly broadcast on local television.

The Governor welcomed us with a reception and visit to his garden to see the large and very old Dragon Trees. We were interested also to see a magnificent *Kleinia neriifolia* in flower which must have been there a very long time and about which they seemed to know nothing.

We had lectures from several speakers with local knowledge and from Juan Mora who has a cactus nursery in Spain. We heard from Susan Carter Holmes on the Aloes of Tropical Africa and Succulents of Kenya, John Lavranos on Exploring for Succulents in the Yemen and on nearby Socotra and Madagascar. Myron Kinnach told us about Landscaping with Succulents and Cacti in the Huntingdon Gardens, and Research and Horticulture in relation to Conservation Laws. As well as Petr Pavelka another speaker who was unknown to me, was Pierre Braun who has had some real adventures during his plant seeking visits to Brazil. He is a lecturer of real knowledge who sprinkles his talks with anecdotes of his narrow escapes: his expertise has been recognised by several plants being named after him and even a new genus - *Pierrebraunia*. Brian Lamb spoke about using succulents in North Europe.

As must always be the case at such events, probably the best part is meeting old and new friends from the U.K. and making friends with people from all round the world. Talking to experts in their field is a great experience, as well.

Most of our botanising was done in

Morocco but while in Gibraltar we were able to see *Aeonium haworthii* in enormous colonies, *Aeonium arboreum* and *Aloe arborescens* nearly in flower and growing in great profusion. There were also *Sedum*, *Umbilicus* and *Carpobrotus* growing on the rocky hillsides as well as many interesting non-succulent plants.

Many of the delegates went on to Morocco, but before that we visited Juan Mora's nursery in Spain. En route we stopped in Estapone to see a really good example of succulent bedding right along the seafront. The Moras had removed to Casabonarela from Majorca, hoping to be nearer a market for their plants. On arrival at our destination we were greeted by the Mayor of Casabonarela, the Regional Director for the Environment and the District Representative for Rural Development with television cameras in attendance. Apparently the transmission with interviews from some of our lecture is came over very well in the evening news. The Moras had been welcomed as potential employers in the area and on hearing of the visit by an Inter-national Conference everyone turned out to greet us. We were given a local style reception where we were plied with all kinds of local food and drink and when we left it was each with a bag of gifts and a photograph of the Nursery with the village in the background, dated to commemorate the visit. The Nursery, after less than two years, is settling in well with most of their plants in the open ground and only a few in a polytunnel; it should go from strength to strength.

We had to make an early start for our flight to Morocco in case there were delays on the Spanish border, so it made a very long day before we reached Agadir. However, two nights in a very comfortable hotel helped us to recover, and for Daphne Pritchard's luggage to catch up with her! We

botanised around the Medina which is close to Agadir town - it is the type locality for *Euphorbia officinarum* var. *beaumieriana*, unfortunately there were few flowers out, but the hillside is covered with these plants. Also we found *Kleinia antephorbium*, which is used locally as an antidote to *Euphorbia*, and *Salsola oppositifolia*. The latter is a halophyte, growing to about 18 inches in height and covered with whitish papery bracts. The Medina overlooks the sea, but we were surprised to find that *Salsola* grew nearly everywhere we stopped, even many miles from the sea. It is a pretty small shrub which varies in colour from white and yellow to deep pink and seems to have had very little written about it.

The next day took us down to Tiznit botanising as we went. We found *Euphorbia echinus*, again with the *Kleinia*, and after much searching *Caralluma europaea* and *C. burchardii* var. *sventenii*. These really hide themselves in amongst the *Euphorbias*: having found a small bit hidden under the edge of a *Euphorbia*, one is surprised after two or three minutes examination to see that there is actually quite a lot growing up through the centre of the plant - so good is their disguise. The following day we drove down to Goulamine to the camel market which was a novel experience! We went on through some lovely hills and found a very spiny *Euphorbia* which Brian Lamb was sure was undescribed, but which Susan Carter Holmes decided was just another form of *E. echinus*; however it is a handsome plant and one which we found again several times. We passed *E. obtusifolia* var. *regisjubae*, lining the road for miles. We were able to find some more *caralluinias* including this time *C. hesperidum* and *C. burchardii* Var. *Maura*.

Three days were spent up in the Anti-Atlas staying at interesting hotels in Tafrouete and

Taroudant; one evening we went to a Berber feast in a tent! We found hillsides covered with *E. echinus* and *E. resinifera* as far as the eye could and after much searching more *Carallumas*. I think it is safe to say that we found many new habitats for *Carallumas* and they are perhaps less rare than was thought - it is just a question of getting the eye in and searching. We saw the famous Argan trees which produce a high quality oil and a valuable hardwood, the natural forests of which are being decimated because goats are allowed, and even encouraged, to climb up into them to eat the leaves.

It is difficult to understand, even in an impoverished community, that they allow the destruction of the trees from which they derive some income. Another exciting find was a recently discovered *Chamaerops humilis* with pale blue leaves; so far it has only been found in this one area. It is being propagated by seed at a nursery which we visited on the way back to Agadir. It is possible, of course, that it grows elsewhere as most of the mountains are not easily accessible - we were very close to the recently discovered forest of Dragon Trees, the only ones found growing naturally outside the Canary Islands, but without 4WD vehicles and time to hike further we were unable to see it, so there must be enormous areas that are completely unexplored botanically.

So home again with happy memories and new friends - "You must come the Convention in Las Vegas next year

Mary Stone

CONSERVATORY TALK

Brian Conway rescued a bin liner full of offcuts from the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens stand at Chelsea Flower Show last

year. These cuttings of native South African plants were rooted, potted up, labelled and distributed for sale. The result was that the Conservation Fund benefited by well over £200. Even better, because Priscilia Schwarz brought the plants over, this money has been earmarked as additional funding towards Priscilia's personal project, the reestablishment of *Aloe suzannae* in its native Madagascar.

All Branch members who helped in distributing these KBG plants or indeed in buying them can be proud of their involvement in this prestige project. Brian tells me that he will be back at Chelsea this year. Unfortunately, Priscilia will not, so we don't know whether we can repeat the exercise.

The BCSS at its Executive Committee adopted a resolution (craftily proposed by Suzanne Mace) that the Society's attitude to *Aztekium hintonii* and *Geohintonia mexicana* should remain unchanged for another year. By that time, of course, everybody will have *Aztekium hintonii* and we shall all be trying to get hold of *ritteri*, which grows much more slowly and is rarer in habitat. Since Rob Wallace proved that *Geohintonia* is an intergeneric hybrid and not a new genus at all, interest in it has waned. Strange how altering a label alters a plant. I personally have got hold of another plant that should never be available - *Ariocarpus bravoanus*. How? Ted Anderson says that *Ariocarpus fissuratus* v *hintonii* would be more accurately labelled *A. bravoanus* v *hintonii*. All things come to the patient owner of a Pilot marker.

One cactus that is seriously endangered in the wild is *Echinocactus grusonii* (soon to be put into *Ferocactus*) as a result of the Zirnap6n Dam. Of course, this plant is to be found in huge plantations in the Canaries, Israel, and the USA, and is extremely common therefore in cultivation. One spin-

off from the Dam, however, is that the people who lived on the valley floor have been resettled on the top, with their goats and motorbikes. This is the habitat of *Thelocactus lausseri*, a rare beauty. So if you've got it, please breed from it and make it common in greenhouses, where there are fewer goats and motorbikes.

Back to the subject of labels. If you have old plant material with obsolete and discredited names, don't rush to bring them up to date. Old names can sometimes be traced back to specific imports in the days when it was respectable to dig up other nations' treasures; therefore some material is bound to be irreplaceable if it comes from a habitat which no longer exists. I made this observation at Kettering Branch, whereupon a young man gave me *Lophophora lewinii* and a piece of *Lophophora ziegleri*. These things are still around and should be kept in circulation.

Additionally, collectors' numbers or nurserymen's numbers should be carefully preserved and transferred with cuttings (only cuttings). In most cases these can be linked with specific habitats and could prove to be of scientific importance in the future.

Not long ago, cacti were for the hairy and prickly lovers of the quaint and unusual, but our plants are no longer just peripheral and aesthetic, but central to important scientific research. It was recently rediscovered that the medical skills of the Sh and 16th century central Mexicans were vastly superior to those of contemporary Europeans. They had 1,200 herbal remedies, many of which were cacti, and could treat even some diseases that modern medicine has difficulty with. Soon afterwards, Mexican ethnobotanists, pursuing the matter, learned that present-day Mayan villagers have 1,600 herbal remedies, many of which are derived from

epiphytic cacti. According to Dr Helia Bravo, the botanists of Mexico University are analysing all these with a view to expanding the resources of scientific medicine.

Whatever we may think about Mexican law and the policing of it, we must not forget that Mexico has a long and proud tradition of botanical science. We gringos must be careful to treat its specialists with the great respect that they are entitled to. Mexican legislators will listen to them, but not to us.

The last thing that Ray Pearce did for the Branch before his untimely death was to lead a party to Kew Gardens. Janet Robettson's husband Ron expertly conveyed a minibus full of Oxford and Swindon members, and we met three Birmingham members at the gate.

We were conducted round the private succulent house by Phil Griffiths, the curator of the tropical section. Phil proved to be a very engaging young man with tremendous dedication and enthusiasm, not just for the plants but for the educational and conservation concerns that our Society shares with Kew. Perhaps inspired by the luxury of a new super-greenhouse, Phil and his staff had moved mountains to tidy up and re-establish the old tatty remnants that Kew used to have, and to bring in new plants. Some of Ken Burke's specimen cacti are here and they are in excellent condition and conditions. If this is the next generation of Kew specialists, we are very lucky indeed. We left feeling both honoured and excited, and believing that we have built a few bridges into a brighter future. The last thing that Ray Pearce did for the Branch before his untimely death was to lead a party to Kew Gardens. Janet Robettson's husband Ron expertly conveyed a minibus full of Oxford and Swindon members, and we met three Birmingham members at the gate.

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