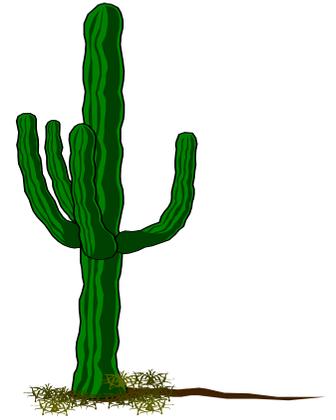


NEWSLETTER

of the Oxford Branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society

Meetings are held at 7.30 PM on the fourth Thursday of each month
in the John Bunyan Baptist Chapel, Cromwell Road, Cowley, Oxford.

March 1996 Number 1



A word from the Branch Chairman

At the November AGM it was my privilege to thank many people who did so much to make the Southern Area Show the great success it was, as well as the members who gave their time to promote the Society at outside events and even on the Radio. Unfortunately I forgot to thank all the members whose combined efforts have made the branch meetings so enjoyable, especially Brian Conway for organising what has become a first-class table show, John Warwick for arriving early and sorting out the furniture and the library, and Mary Stone for doing the raffle.

The 1996 programme that Cathy Darbon has put together is certain to maintain the high standards that we are used to in the Oxford Branch.

Finally, may I pass on my very best wishes to David Greenaway, our Editor. I hope that this pilot edition will persuade you all that this will be a valuable contribution to Branch activities. Please embarrass David with a wealth of articles, suggestions for articles, advertisements, and offers of help.

Odgr / owinggo cactophile
John Watmough

Next Meeting - March 28

South Africa '95 by Eddie Harris

Eddie has been Secretary of the Society since April 1993. He has specific interest in South Africa and the Mesembs. He is also a judge.

Plants of the month:

Four classes: Adromischus, Haworthia Group, Anacampseros Group, and any Plant in Flower.

Bring in your specimens for the mini-show and if you don't have any of these plants, come along and see other people's - but are you sure you don't have ONE plant in flower? See the Table Show page of the membership card for more details.

Also, use the branch library, to borrow not only books but journals such as Bradleya and those of the CSSA, and take advantage of the plant sales - at very low prices.

Tea coffee and biscuits this month will be arranged by Ray Pearce.

Notes on the Lecturers for the next six months

April Mini Judges Course

The Committee decided that, with the National Show being this year, it would be a good idea to run a mini judges course for the benefit of new members, and those considering showing at this level for the first time. It will be organised by Cathy Darbon (our Secretary) who has been a judge since 1988, ably assisted by John Watmough (our Chair) who qualified in September 1995. Don't miss this unique event!

May Bill Morris

Bill has been propagating plants for a number of years, and is well known to members who attend the Judges Course.

June Alan Butler

Alan is a regular visitor to Oxford Branch, both as speaker, and selling plants at our various shows - he runs Brookside Nursery. He is also a judge and has provided this service to the Branch as well.

July Bill & Yvonne Tree

Yvonne was for many years Minutes Secretary to the Society, and Bill is currently on the Shows Committee. They are very well known throughout the hobby and have recently retired.

August Ray Stevenson

A speaker I am sure many will not have heard - but what a speaker! Ray is a judge, and gave a similar talk at the judges course last year. To be honest it was not a talk that many of us were looking forward to, but believe me not one person gave him less than 100% attention all the way through. Ray published a book in 1995 - the Sedum Handbook.

Cathy Darbon

The Judges' Course 1995

Cathy Darbon was to blame, really. Believing that she was in danger of being the only Oxford judge in active service, she bullied me into signing up for the 1995 Judges' course. So in due course she, bearing tray after tray of goodies to help me make up the judging classes, and I, bearing a scrap of paper telling me where to go, duly arrived at Moulton Agricultural College, near Northampton, on Friday 1st September.

The first oddity was that everybody seemed to be in the car park. Every new arrival was greeted like a long-lost brother or sister while a scrum developed round his or her car boot. This was described on

the programme as 'Tea in the Lounge' Later I learned that all the spare time in daylight hours would be spent being caespitose in the car park. Even I was sagacious enough to acquire some new rarities.

After dinner the experts went into a conclave to wrangle about *Conophytum herreanthus* and other difficulties; their decisions will be incorporated in the 8th edition of the Guide to Shows, to be published after the National. The greenhorns were lectured on basic principles and practice by three senior judges. I should say, as a greenhorn, that mealtimes were tremendously exciting, because you dined with all the great and

the good and they talked to you like ordinary human beings.

On Saturday morning, after a tour of the car park, the trainees got another dose of instruction, while Bill Morris discussed Pelargoniums with the others. After coffee, the two groups were amalgamated henceforth for a series of lectures through the day. Graham Charles on Cleistocactus Subgroup was brilliant - his talk was illustrated with dozens of his own magnificent plants. Bill Tree on Thelocactus and Coryphantha was very thorough and quite fascinating. Then Ray Stevenson, the author of the sedum book, gave the most astonishing power-packed lecture that anyone had ever heard. Cathy grabbed him (in the car park of course) and signed him up to come to Oxford in 1996.

After dinner, there was a boisterous rowdiness when John Pilbeam was talking about Limited Pot Size Classes. Some of the regulars behaved like naughty boys, and John did Will Hay impressions. John didn't want to mention Other Succulents, so he managed (with barracking and interruptions) to talk for 89 minutes on cacti and 30 seconds on other things. Your correspondent, who was halfway to the funny farm anyway, felt unable to stand the strain any more and retired to bed, leaving Cok Grootscholten's wonderful

slide show to those who were fit enough to stay up until 2.00 am.

On Sunday came the tests that we all were dreading. One hour for cacti, one hour for other succulents. Cok completed both tests in the same hour. In most classes you had to find first, second and third, and identify NAS entries. In one class you had to point to each entry. Finally, you had to identify ten plants, that is, ten cacti and ten other succulents. In the cacti, I missed an obvious NAS, failed to identify two plants that I have in my own collection, and screwed up the placings. In the other succulents I did a little better, but disgracefully failed to identify Echeveria harmsii (perhaps punch-drunk after Ray Stephenson's lecture).

After the inquest, when all our crimes were revealed, we said our fond farewells (in the car park) and returned home to await 'some time before Christmas' the official notification of pass or fail.

Pass or fail, however, I enjoyed the weekend so much that I resolved there and then to sign up for the next one. I thoroughly recommend other members to consider doing the same.

John Watmough

Cultural hint (from the cacti_etc electronic mailing list):

At Arid Lands we root thousands of euphorbia cuttings each year. The method we have found most successful is placing the cuttings upright in a pot with crumpled newspaper on the bottom.

The pot is left in subdued light until the cuts have not only callused, but root primordia are beginning to break through the callus. We have found this works better than setting fresh or callused cuttings in a rooting medium.

Chuck Hanson , Tucson.

Oxford Branch Officials

The Branch Committee in 1996 is:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Life president | Mrs J Mullard Tel: 01865 248802 |
| Chairman | Mr J Watmough Tel :01865 772709 |
| Vice Chairman | Dr R B Pearce Tel: 01865 66891 |
| Secretary | Mrs C Darbon Tel: 01993 881926 |
| Treasurer | Mr S Williams Tel: 01367 718944 |
| Show Secretary | Mr W Darbon Tel: 01993 881926 |
| Committee: | Mr B Conway Tel: 01865 65800 |
| | Mr D Greenaway Tel: 01235 762761 |
| | Mrs M Stone Tel: 01865 774268 |
| | Mr J Warwick Tel: 01235 848399 |

The Constitution

You will have received with this Newsletter a draft of a new constitution of the Oxford branch of the BCSS. We would welcome your suggestions for additions or amendments.

The revised constitution will be submitted for adoption at the AGM in November.

Gone to Pot

When the subject is raised of recruiting younger people to the Society, invariably at least one older person throws up their hands and says: 'It's no use trying, young people are just not interested in growing things any more.'

This is defeatist talk. It is also untrue. For we are told that between three and four hundred thousand people, almost all young, in this country alone, are devoted to the pursuit of highly specialised horticultural techniques. They buy their seed out of mail order catalogues. Their respected Dutch colleagues organise shows and produce named hybrids in government-subsidised greenhouses.

If you should find one of these people to talk to - and they are, like most heroes, very reticent (it helps if you do not wear polished black shoes) - they will evince an incredible knowledge of hydroponics, the Nitrogen Cycle, and photoperiodicity. They even know absolutely nothing about anything else, such is their dedication. The result of their success has been the reduction of the retail price of their product to a point where it is cheaper to consume their product than it is to consume tobacco - so much so that organised gangsters have been driven out of the market. So important have they become to society, that respected journals with no horticultural connection whatever advertise 'Gro-lights Grow Any Plant', and decent magazines that would not dream of accepting cigarette advertising promote Rizla papers and little machines with conical rollers.

Surely such single-mindedness is unbalanced; a lot of this effort could and should be redirected to growing a wider range of plants: plants with more beautiful flowers; plants with a more harmonious shape; plants that may be endangered in the

wild, whose cultivation may earn the gratitude of future generations.

Only - do not mention Lophophora.

Perhaps we could sneak our own advertisements into their specialist magazines. 'Bring some Colour and Variety into your greenhouse'. 'Embrace the Cactus'. Keep the Police Helicopter Away from Your Patch'.

John Watmough

Events at the other Branches of Zone 8 (you will be welcome at any of these):

| | | | |
|-----------|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 13 March | Keith Grantham | India Part 2 | High Wycombe |
| 13 March | Jean Ellis | Teneriffe | Swindon |
| 19 March | Bill Keen | Stapeliae | Birmingham |
| 10 April | Mr Fowler | Orchids | Swindon |
| 10 April | Keith Mortimer | Cacti & Succulents of the West Indies | H.Wycombe |
| 16 April | Alistair Glenn | Mammillarias Old and New | Birmingham |
| 27 April | Convention with Ernst Specks and Nigel Taylor | | High Wycombe |
| 8 May | Mr T Wells | Bonsai and Bonkei | Swindon |
| 8 May | Susan Holmes | Somalia 1985 | High Wycombe |
| 19 May | Annual Show | | High Wycombe |
| 21 May | David Rushforth | New Mexico | Birmingham |
| 26 May | Display at mayor's Carnival | | High Wycombe |
| 8 June | Annual Branch Show | | Birmingham |
| 12 June | John Pilbeam | Mammillarias | High Wycombe |
| 12 June | Sonia Barker-Fricker | Baja California | Swindon |
| 16 June | Open Day - Keith Mortimer | | High Wycombe |
| 18 June | Tony Johnston | Austrocactus | Birmingham |
| 10 July | Doug Donaldson | Beyond the Chiricahuas | High Wycombe |
| 10 July | Bill Maddams | Coryphantha & allied genera | Swindon |
| 14 July | Open Day - Doug Donaldson | | High Wycombe |
| 16 July | Keith Grantham | Caudiciforms | Birmingham |
| 10 August | Hughendon Village show (Competitive display) | | High Wycombe |
| 14 August | Plant Auction | | Swindon |
| 14 August | Bill Tree | South American cacti | High Wycombe |
| 17 August | NATIONAL SHOW | | Spalding |
| 20 August | Sonia Barker-Fricker | Lithops | Birmingham |

Jardin Exotique, Monaco.

Forgive me for waxing lyrical about this garden, but I was fortunate enough to be able to visit it last February, nearly forty years after my parents trod the same paths.

Clinging to a steep hill-side above Monte Carlo, this claims to be the 'largest succulent plant rock garden in the world'. Planting started 62 years ago, but some of the plants are much older than that. A huge clump of *Echinocactus grusonii*, the largest in Europe, is 130 years old and is the only plant in the garden to be given a light protection against the elements:



Nearby are some *Nolina recurvata* with impressively large caudexes. At this time of year the main group in flower are the Aloe, and quite spectacular they are too. From May to August it is said that the *Opuntia* and *Cereus* forms produce the most brilliant blossoms. Other principal points of interest that are singled out are the *Portulacarea afra*, *Cyphostemma juttae* and *Hylocerus undatus*. Ceroid cacti have grown into small forests here over the years, and there is an area of cristate and monstrose plants in abundance. One section is devoted to 'hundred year-old cacti and euphorbia'.

The success of the site is partly due to its exceptional micro-climate. At its height up the mountain-side it has an average annual

temperature of 17C (64F) and an average winter temperature of 11C (52F). Facing south, on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, it is baked in the sun (even in February my wife decided to put sun-screen on).

If you should visit the South of France and find yourself within striking distance of these 'Exotic Gardens', I would recommend making the effort to visit them. The area is well served by railway and bus, and if you have a car, the road from Nice along the Grande Corniche is one of the great drives of Europe. At the end of it I think you would spend a most enjoyable hour or two walking along a landscaped platform, surrounded by our favourite plants, and with a panorama taking in the whole of the Principality and the coastline up to Italy. Magnifique!

David Greenaway

Tailpiece

Well, that's it for now! Please let me know if you like the newsletter. This has been a trial issue, and the future of the newsletter depends on your response. What would you like to see in a local newsletter? What could you contribute? - cultural hints and tips, articles for beginners, reports on local nurseries or new products, news of members, letters to the editor, photographs, recommended books, what your collection is like, how you got hooked? Think on't.

My thanks to the Committee for funding this enterprise, and for their encouragement. And particular thanks to Cathy Darbon and John Watmough for a wealth of material.

DSG