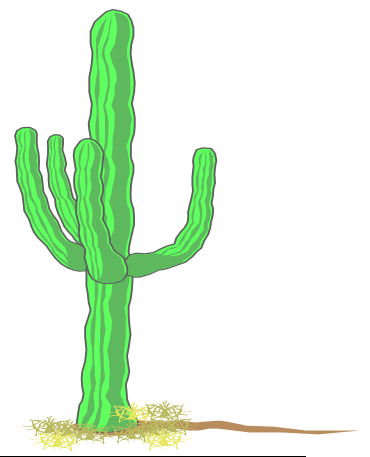


# Oxotica

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

December 2017

Volume 22, Number 2



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Well as we draw to the end of another year of our hobby, or is it an “obsession”, looking back we have had a very busy and varied year. We have seen some new faces appear at our Branch meetings, which is always nice, and I hope all of the newcomers continue to join in and support our activities in the future. I look forward to 2018 as it is the *60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* of the formation of the Branch and we are hoping to arrange some special events to mark this in particular.

Sadly there are few members who were around then who are still with us, but the Branch continues to move forward and I hope that those who have left us still watch over us to ensure that we are doing it right.

In addition to our monthly meetings, which have brought some new speakers to the Branch, we had a very successful ‘Members Evening’ and may look to do this again. Your Branch is run by a very dedicated committee and I cannot write without expressing my thanks for all the support that they have given over the last year.

I must mention Blenheim Palace Flower Show, which we attended again in June and were fortunate to get another GOLD AWARD for the display. It's our major public event and shows off the Branch and the Society to the

public at large, as well as raising a significant amount from the sale of plants. Thanks again to those members who helped steward the stand.

Our Branch Plant Sales events at Bury Knowle and Wychford Pottery were also very successful and gave our funds a significant boost. The continued additions from the propagating factory in Church Cowley Road. It is not an insignificant contribution to this success.

The Branch Show this year in August with The Haworthia Society was again exceptional in the quality of plants and the number of visitors we attracted. The show continues to be recognised as one of the best type of this event outside of the National. We even managed a centre page spread in the local papers the following week. Perhaps next year we may even get a “Live” broadcast.

[http://www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/15471995.Prickly\\_decision\\_for\\_judges\\_as\\_hundreds\\_of\\_entries\\_put\\_forward\\_for\\_cactus\\_show/?ref=mrb&lp=9](http://www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/15471995.Prickly_decision_for_judges_as_hundreds_of_entries_put_forward_for_cactus_show/?ref=mrb&lp=9)

I would like to record how much we appreciate the support that we get for exhibitors from other branches as well as all our own home-grown stalwarts. I should also mention the excellent catering supplied to all who attended this makes the day even more enjoyable (the smell of cooking bacon is irresistible!).

Your committee is always willing to receive suggestions for talks or other events and hopefully the arranged programme for 2018 will have something for you all to enjoy. Don't forget that it's **your Branch** and any suggestions are always welcome. A big thank you to everyone for your continued support of the Oxford Branch in all that we do.

It just remains for me to wish you all good growing and good health for the coming year.

Bill Darbon  
Chair

## THE BCSS SEED LIST 2017/18

*John Watmough*

As ever, David Rushforth, he who is always hoping to retire from his job of Seed Purchaser, has assembled an interesting and varied list of seeds. This year's list comprises over 250 items. As ever, again, Cacti vastly outnumber the Other Succulents. This is not necessarily because David, or the BCSS membership, prefer it this way; more probably it is because the seed of the Other Succulents is harder to source. Some Other Succulent seed, moreover, has a short shelf life.

Newer members are especially exhorted to try growing from seed. There is no mystique about doing this, and lots of advice is available through the Society and elsewhere. One reason for holding back is the fear that it might take years to get results. It pays to be a little selective here. Our present list has a large offering of *Aylosteras*, *Mediolobivias* and *Sulcorebutias* that ought to flower in three years or so, and flower most beautifully moreover. So, the time scale works like this: Year 1, ten pots of seedlings (themselves little beauties in miniature); Year 2, ten pots of larger seedlings and ten pots of small seedlings; Year 3, ten pots (or pans, now) of flowering plants, ten pots of larger seedlings, and ten pots of small seedlings; Year 4, twenty pans of flowering plants plus twenty pots of seedlings, i.e. 50% pans of mature plants giving a dazzling display in the spring.

By this time the now not-so-new grower has some decisions to make. The first is how to dispose of surplus plants. The easiest way is through the local Branch at monthly meetings and public events. The second will already have been taken, which is to diversify into the remaining 20,000 types of cacti and other succulents. Many of these are horrible; some are of interest only to specialists. Though it has to be said that today's specialists all started with a few plants on the windowsill.

Let us look at what David has put on the list. One thing that stands out is that there is no consistency with the plant names. That is not merely because of botanical disagreements, which, like the poor, will always be with us. It is also because some nurserymen have remained in the horse-and-cart age, and others are just confused. Let us pick a few examples.

*Echinofossulocactus* has disappeared from mortal ken since David Hunt abolished it in the 1980's. Other old names, now more or less superseded, are

*Bartschella* (Mammillaria), *Gymnocactus* (Turbinicarpus), *Helianthocereus* (Echinopsis), *Krainzia* (Mammillaria) and *Wigginsia* (Parodia). It is as well to know these things: it makes it easier to consult the literature when deciding what seeds to buy.

As for confusion, well! The genera *Coryphantha*, *Escobaria* and *Acharagma* are all muddled up. This is due partly to the Americans never having accepted Britton and Rose's establishment of *Escobaria* in 1923. Some of the names given are merely synonyms, and just a few names are not to be found in any work of reference. The bold will not begrudge 30p to find out what comes up, even if it takes years to identify the plants.

A further benefit of growing plants from seed is that some are difficult to obtain by other means. Nurseries are often reluctant to grow such plants as *Coryphantha* (the real ones) or *Parodia* (sensu stricto: there aren't any of these on this year's list) because they take so long to reach saleable size. *Ariocarpus* are also notoriously slow (apart from *agavoides*) because they give priority in their first few years to expanding their underground parts before they take off visibly.

Among the Other Succulents on the BCSS List, mesembs massively predominate. There are many lovely plants here, and would-be purchasers will want to distinguish between summer and winter growers in order to decide whether to sow the seeds in spring or autumn. The two Acacias listed, both non-succulents, are perhaps more suitable for the Eden Project, though bonsai lovers may be able to keep them small and pretty. *Dracaena draco* is the Dragon Tree, fast becoming a favourite of sub-tropical municipalities. *Dyckia distachya* (that is the correct spelling) is a Bromeliad like the pineapple, so it is not listed in the BCSS Guide to Shows. *Tylecodon singularis* is a remarkable member of the Crassulaceae: it grows just one huge leaf in winter followed by a tall flower spike. *Sinningia warmingii* is a sort of succulent African violet, an attractive caudiciform that can be reproduced from leaf cuttings (see Hazel Taylor's recent article in Cactus World).

The Mesemb Study Group has a seriously interesting seed list due to be published in February. Membership is only £12, so now would be a good time to join. Good Growing!

## BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY-JUNE 2018

*4<sup>th</sup> Thursday in month, 7:30 pm for 8:00 pm  
Please bring plants for the Table Show if you  
can - each of these meetings except January*

*We are always open to suggestions for the  
programme so if there is someone or something  
that you would like us to arrange please speak to  
one of the committee.*

**January 25** **ROY EARLE**  
"Hunting for Lithops and other  
succulents in nature"

Roy will not be known to many of you but he is a very keen member of the Mesemb Study Group and is a native of Namibia, where he has a home, and has travelled widely in South Africa. I am sure that we are in for a treat accompanying him on his searches for Succulents in these diverse countries.

**February 22** **CHRIS DAVIES**  
"Roving in North East Mexico"

We welcome Chris back to the branch from our neighbouring branch at High Wycombe. Chris is the Chair of the Mammillaria Society with whom we have had successful joint shows. He has travelled widely in Mexico so I am sure we will see some of his favourite Group of plants in habitat.

**March 22** **LES PEARCY**  
"Texas and Big Bend"

Les is a colleague on The Haworthia Society where he deals with the sale and distribution of seeds. He comes from the Nottingham Branch and has not been to us before. Tonight he will take us on a trip to the USA to this particularly rich area of plants.

**April 26** **TONY ROBERTS**  
"Gasteria in habitat and culture"

Tony is treasurer of The Haworthia Society and he has spoken to the branch in the past. He is probably best known for his favourite plants which he will speak about tonight. He has visited the habitat of these plants as well as grown them for some time so I am sure we can gain some tips from him.

**May 24** **MEMBERS' NIGHT**  
"Your choice"

Following on from the successful evening last year we have devoted this evening to YOU. Please come along to discuss any aspect of the hobby that you may wish to, it's an open forum to exchange knowledge and experience.

**June 28** **RICK GILLMAN**  
"Brazil"

Rick again may not be known to many of you. He came along to our last joint show to judge the Haworthia Section. He has not spoken to us before, but tonight will relate a journey he made to this vast and diverse country. Not sure if it was 'Madis gras' but I am sure we will enjoy the evening.

*Bill Darbon*

### Oxotica

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The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

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## OXFORD BRANCH SHOW 2017

*Bill Darbon*

Our Branch show continues to be recognised as one of the best of its kind and once again this year we had tremendous support from a number of folk from other branches coming along to display their plants in the various classes: a total of 28 in the open classes and 17 in the specialist section for the Haworthia Society; with a total of 620 entries and approximately 1000 plants there was plenty of variety and marvellous quality throughout. There were a few exhibitors who were not able to be with us for various reasons, but the extra entries would have given us even more of a headache to fit them in. The continued co-operation with a specialist society brings another dimension to the show and extra interest for those members and public who came along. I don't know why but this year we seemed to have had a very large number of visitors come through the door and it was nice to see so many members attend from all over the country. At times the sales tables were engulfed with people clamouring to buy and of course the smell of bacon cooking in the kitchen always attracts folk.

I can only thank all those who helped on the day to make the event an outstanding success. It was really nice that we got a Centre Page Spread about the show in both The Oxford Mail and Wantage Herald the following Wednesday. *Photographs, below, by Gillian Evison.*



**Avonia quinaria ssp. alstonii**



**Pachypodium horombense**



**Mammillaria albilanata**



**Astrophytum capricorne / Astrophytum myriostigma 'Onzuka'**

## THE HAWORTHIA SOCIETY SHOW - 12TH AUGUST 2017

*Rick Gillman*

I was very pleased to be asked to judge the Haworthia Show held in Grove (near Oxford) on 12th August 2017. The Show is a biennial event held in conjunction with Oxford Branch of the BCSS, in a huge hall with great facilities. The quality of the exhibits was in my opinion second only to those at the BCSS National Show, with some astounding plants to see, not just in the 31 Haworthia Society classes, but perhaps even more so in the 61 other classes.

In the Haworthia Society section, some classes were real head-scratchers for me as the judge, with many entries containing very good plants. Additional problems arise from the different views that are taken by eminent botanists about where one species stops and another begins, what names should be used, and changes in these classifications over time. Also, hybrids can have many parents, so may be eligible to be exhibited in classes where they may look quite different from the unadulterated species. The lot of the judge can be tough!

Alan Rollason's *Astroloba spiralis* ssp. *foliolosa* won the class for one Haworthia (no limit to pot size) and, for me, stood out from all the plants in the show. Alan also won class 63 (*H. emelyae*) with a superb "picta" and class 69 with a beautifully grown *H. badia*, amongst others.

Amongst the many exhibits, perhaps the most difficult class for me as a judge was that for four Haworthias (maximum pot size 10cm) - there were a lot of very nice plants, but in the end I had to award first prize to the four plants grown by Stirling Baker which were all immaculate, nicely grown, and beautifully presented. Stirling also won quite a lot of the other classes (!), including class 77 with a near perfect *H. sordida*, class 65 with a lovely *H. bayeri*, and class 92 (one Gasteria) with a good-looking variegated *Gasteria armstrongii* - but don't be put off by Stirling's success - rise to the challenge!

Other class winners included Les Hewitt (*H. groenwaldii* was nice to see), Steve Williams, Adrian Weatherill, Graham Walker, Martin Edwards, Gill & David Wilson, Diane Tripp and Tony Roberts.

It was a great show, and a great day out!



Class 80, A. Rollason, *Astroloba spiralis* ssp. *foliolosa*

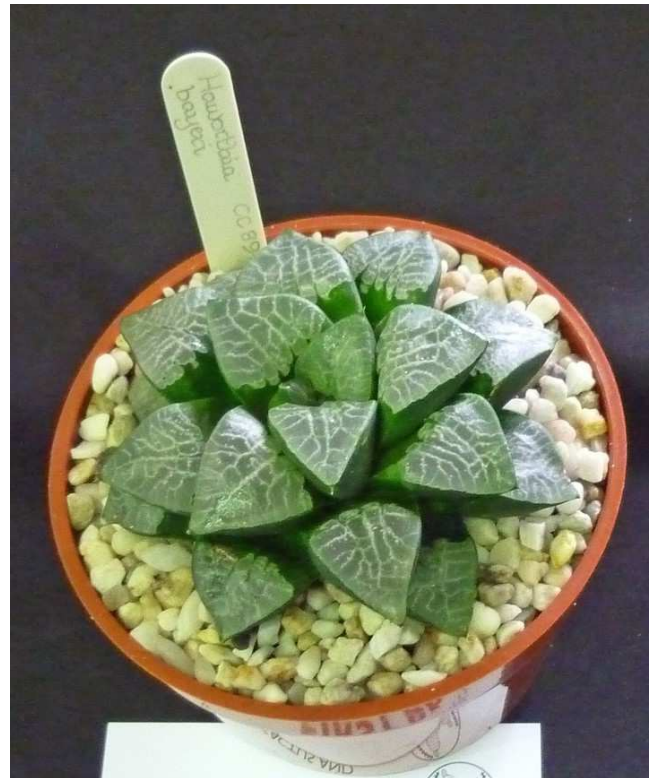


Class 63, A. Rollason, *Haworthia emelyae*





Class 69, A. Rollason, *H. mirabilis badia*



Class 65, S. Baker, *Haworthia bayeri*



Class 77, S. Baker, *Haworthia sordida*



Class 92, S. Baker, variegated *Gasteria armstrongii*

## **BLenheim PALACE FLOWER SHOW 2017**

*Bill Darbon*

Three days of sunny weather brought over 5000 cars and lots of folk each day to attend the Blenheim Palace Flower Show from 23<sup>rd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> June. There were more stands outside this year as well as the craft and food tents and wonderful displays of flower arranging in the NAFAS tent and 40 exhibitors in the floral marquee. Cacti & Succulents were well represented by a number of stands, the Oxford Branch and Craig House Cacti being the two main exhibitors. Both stands I am pleased to report received a Gold Award from the judges for their displays and Stan Griffin was surprised to receive the “Best in Show”. We hope that we may have recruited a couple of new members and certainly spoke to a large number of interested visitors and handed out lots of information leaflets.



Picture of Oxford Branch's Gold Award stand courtesy of Martin Doorbar

## FROM THE MEDIA

### **Trendy cacti**

The Guardian G2 supplement of 01/06/2017 had the cover and a four page article on the revival of interest in cacti. Talk was much about the demand for big specimens, such as ceroids, for room decoration. This is the boutique side of succulent plants. Not much to interest us and no mention of our hobby or the Society.

This theme was also pursued in Radio 4's "You and Yours" of 4th September. House plants are fashionable, for the first time in a long time, and there is a new trend for succulents, partly because they photograph so well for social media use ("instagrammability"). Staff at a London garden centre said that sales had rocketed, over the last 12 months particularly. The 'money plant' (*Crassula ovata*) is very popular, and others even smaller are collectable; they take up very little room and are affordable, starting at around £3. There are some weird trends going around due to social media, and some areas have large numbers of 'followers'. They turn up on t-shirts, jewellery, socks. They are good for today's apartments and small houses where little or no garden space is available – it puts a little green in people's lives, their own urban jungle. People are 'seeing them as pets or even children'. Round the country, garden centres have been quadrupling sales over the past two years. Suppliers say that they are also going into new places, such as outfitters.

The December issue of the RHS publication "The Garden" has arrived, containing a 6-page article on succulents which confirms much of this; 'cacti and other succulents are in vogue both with interior designers and beginner gardeners', it says. Very boutique, again. The BCSS is mentioned.

Chris Pugh, our wholesaler friend from Warwickshire, is struggling to keep up with demand. He has had to go to Europe for back-up stocks unless he runs out. The succulent side, especially, is more than three times what he has experienced before.

### **Succulent bouquets**

The BBC reports that brides and bridesmaids are favouring succulent plants in bouquets now, rather than just flowers. Echeverias with a blue/grey colouring are especially liked because they blend in with the pastel shades of the bouquets.

## **Global warming**

The RHS reports that due to global warming the northern half of the British Isles will become wetter, and windier, whereas the south will become drier and warmer and so favouring the growth of drought resistant plants. Start planning those cactus borders!

## **Biofuels**

Oxford Today, Vol. 29, No.2, p.41

New sources of biofuel are being studied [at Oxford Uni.], such as plants with a Crassulacean Acid Metabolism (CAM) including prickly pear and Euphorbia tirucalli. In place of growing corn, sugar cane, and traditional biofuels on prime agricultural land, CAM species grown on unproductive land can make a huge contribution to sustainable biogas production. Oxford Martin fellow Dr Mike Mason estimates that I would take no more than 12% of available semi-arid land to match natural gas's five petawatt hours of electricity per year.

## **A living sculpture**

A work of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei went on display for a month at the Pippa Holdsworth Gallery in London. Entitled "A living sculpture" it consisted of a live Echinopsis and modelled crab. Ai is a cactus collector, but prevented from leaving China by the authorities. The gallery staff had a long job tracking down the specific Echinopsis that he insisted on. They guessed that the work had a political meaning, based on his own treatment.

## **Prickly means cactus**

Newspaper photograph of a plant of Aloe polyphylla, called a 'cactus' by the reader who sent it in, reminds me that most prickly succulent plants are called cacti in the media, whether not they are or not. Most often the plants are Agaves, which are nearly always called cacti, though Euphorbias are another likely group (perhaps a more understandable error).

## **Aknari jam**

A British Airways advertisement featured a photograph of an opuntia with red fruits on the pads. It suggested that we fly to Morocco and eat Aknari co-operatives's jam that is made from them.

I may be scraping the barrel (or whatever the jam is kept in), so I'll end there for now.

*David Greenaway  
News at Ten  
Wantage*