

A simply super celebratory symposium

Oxford Branch is probably best known in the Society for hosting one of the very best annual shows in the country, but in October it turned its attention to something different by presenting an excellent convention-style event, the Oxford Branch 60th Anniversary Symposium.

Around 80 people, including Society patron Tom Hart Dyke, President Colin Walker and Chairman Ian Thwaites attended and enjoyed a great day of entertaining talks, quality plant sales, food and conversation, all in the pleasant surroundings of a rural Oxfordshire hotel, the Lambert Arms .



Branch Secretary and lead organiser Bill Darbon opened the meeting with a brief introduction and was quickly followed by Martin Lowry giving an outstanding presentation on 'The Best of Bolivia'. Martin, who surely knows more about Bolivian cacti than any Englishman has the right to do, cleverly broke down his talk into various categories, including genera, accommodation, drives and discoveries, etc, and selected his personal favourites in each case, making for an interesting and entertaining session. Paul Hoxey then took the floor to speak about his recent visit to the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which consists of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This is a very rarely visited cactus habitat that has not been properly explored in nearly a century, giving Paul the opportunity to add to our knowledge of plants from the region and present a highly informative talk punctuated with fascinating snippets of Haitian history.

After a very good buffet lunch, there followed a celebratory cake cutting and a small auction of some nice cacti and succulents. Colin Walker was the first afternoon speaker and he regaled us with slides and information on the genus *Euphorbia* in habitat and cultivation, displaying huge knowledge of the succulent species. Being Colin, he could not resist including a few pictures of plants in attractive, ornamental 'presidential' pots! The final speaker was Ian Woolnough, who closed with a highly entertaining exploration of Baja California, that wonderful western peninsula of Mexico that is home to so many fabulous species. Presenting with his customary eloquence and observational humour, Ian brought the event to a very enjoyable conclusion.

Bill and his team deserve big congratulations for a smooth, well organised, nicely situated and extremely successful event; a super celebration indeed.

Graham Evans



Speakers (left to right) Martin Lowry, Bill Darbon, Colin Walker, Paul Hoxey and Ian Woolnough



THE BIG BIRTHDAY BASH

Well what can I say about our 60th Anniversary Celebrations, we were very pleased to welcome over 70 BCSS members to join us on 21st October at the Mercure Lambert Hotel, Aston Rowant. It was particularly pleasing that Our President, Chairman and Tom Hart Dyke (one of our patrons) were able to join us.

Our guest speakers gave some amazing talks with stunning scenery and wonderful plants in habitat. Martin Lowry (a former Oxford Branch member) presented “Best of Bolivia” he has travelled to this country on a number of occasions and gave us an overview of his various trips including his Best Plant - Best Drive - Best Habitat etc. Paul Hoxey (Cambridge) presented “ Haiti & Dominican Republic “ not somewhere that has been visited a lot in recent times and has an interesting and diverse culture as well as a number of distinctive plants. Colin Walker (BCSS President) presented “ Exploring Euphorbias” this was a newly constructed talk and as with all of Colin’s presentation his research into the historical background of the subject is always interesting. Our last talk was from Ian Woolnough (Exeter) who gave us an insight into “Baja” California, this area has some unique plants from the rest of the Americas.

I was so pleased that so many folk were able to come along to join us and we hope that we did ourselves proud in celebrating 60 years of the Oxford Branch and that our forebears would have been delighted by the outcome.

Bill Darbon