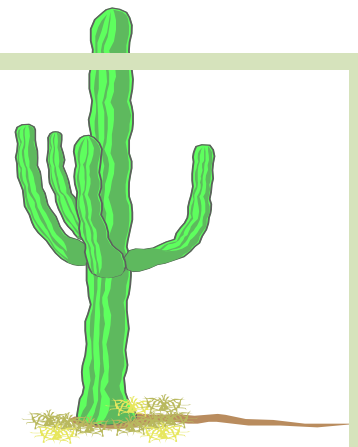


Oxotica

The bi-annual newsletter of the Oxford Branch of the
British Cactus and Succulent Society

Summer 2023

Volume 28, Number 1



Chairman's Chat

Well I wonder where the year has gone already, I seem to have been running around all over the place with various BCSS events, talks, auctions etc. I think looking at my collection recently in preparation for our show (more on that in the show report) that the plants have perhaps not had the attention they should have had, even so some are still flowering well.

I am encouraged that our monthly meetings are being well attended. with some new members and visitors from other branches swelling our numbers. We are still able to attract some speakers from afar and it is at this time of the year we start thinking about next year's talks, so if there is something specific you would like to see or hear do let me or one of the committee know.

Our events this year have been a great success. We spoke to lots of folk at Bury Knowle and the 3 days at Blenheim Palace Flower show were extremely successful:- we managed to get another "Silver Gilt" award for the display, as well as selling lots of plants.

As I write this we are all recovering from an absolutely wonderful show at Grove. I can only thank all those Branch members who came and performed various tasks on the day to make it a marvellous day for the Branch and all those members who attended. A special thanks go to all the exhibitors from other branches who continue to support us in making the show one of the best in the country.

Bill Darbon

OXFORD BRANCH SHOW
with the Haworthia Society
at the Old Mill Hall, Grove, Oxfordshire, on Saturday 1 July 2023

Members of the BCSS Oxford Branch were joined by a number of other members of the Society from as far as Essex, Harrow, Hampshire, High Wycombe, London, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Reading, South Wales, Wiltshire and Woking as well as a large number of members of the public at the Joint Branch Show held at The Old Mill Hall, Grove on Saturday 1st July, we even attracted some folk from Greece who had travelled especially to visit the show (so our fame is spreading).

30 Exhibitors staged over 450 individual entries in the 95 competitive classes, which included 30 specifically for members of the Haworthia Society, which are designated for a number of plant species and varieties which originate from various areas of South Africa. The special section was well supported with over 150 entries.

This year we had some new and returning folk visiting and exhibiting at our show, advertising on social media may have helped.

The car park was extremely full from 0930; it is difficult to exactly say how many people came (as we don't charge admission) but at its height I would say over 100 people were in the two halls at any one time, I suspect that some were drawn by the smell of Bacon.

My thanks go to all who helped out on the day - Jules and Hannah in the kitchen, Nick and Mary on plant sales and John, Alan, Curt and Martin for assisting recording the results, (my son Gareth from Nottingham Branch) for filling in wherever he was needed and of course Gillian (our own David Bailey) for taking photos of all the prize winners; A flicker site" will be set up so you can see the wonderful specimens that were on display.

Congratulations go to all the winners, the prizes for Best Cactus and Best Succulent were awarded to Gillian, several awards of merit were shared between a number of other exhibitors.

Bill Darbon



BRANCH MEETINGS JULY – NOVEMBER 2023

*4th 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
and November*

*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.*

July 27 **CLIFF THOMPSON**
Northern Peru (2017)

North from Lima along the Pacific coast with excursions into the lower Andes, then North and East into the sub-tropical/tropical state of Amazonas, then East and South, back across to the Pacific coast.

Cliff is part of the Portsmouth committee and is a good showman and plantsman. He regularly brings along good quality sales plants. Tonight's talk is about one of his trips to Peru, and I am sure he will show some wonderful plants in habitat.

Aug 24 **ALAN BROWN**
Mexico, Cacti of the Sierra Madre Oriental

Alan is the current chair of Leicester Branch and former show committee member. He has travelled to AMERICA AND MEXICO. His talk tonight will be on a part of Mexico that is rich in flora.

Sept 28 **GEOFF BOWMAN**
What I saw with my camera

Geoff holds the national collection of Agaves in his large nursery near Newent. Tonight he will show us what he has seen with

his camera, I am sure the presentation will feature some wonderful agaves.

Oct 26 **IAN WOOLNOUGH**

Baja 2023

We have a change of speaker for our October meeting – however, it will be the same subject. Ian Woolnough will present this talk about the intrepid exploits of six cactophiles to the fascinating “Mexican State” in January 23. It is quite varied and involved a lot of travel up and down and off the Mex 1, and it will include visits to some of the Islands in the Sea of Cortez. Ian as you may know now runs Eau Brink Cactus Nursery and has now travelled to this part of the world three times. I can assure you that there are some wonderful plants and stories (I WAS THERE!)

Nov 23 **Branch AGM and Social night**

Dec 29 **No Meeting**

Bill Darbon

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

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THE BEST BITS OF BAJA

by Bill Darbon

For the purposes of OXOTICA I am condensing details of my 21day trip to BAJA in January of 2023 (see main article on Oxford Branch web site). It is difficult to pick out the best bits of a wonderful, interesting and sometimes unknown experience.

https://www.discoverbaja.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/map_cmyk.jpg

Firstly, my sincere thanks go to Ian Woolnough and Sarda for their guidance and patience over the time we travelled together. I, along with 3 other newbies, Alice Vanden Bon, Keith Flanagan and Ian Priestley, ventured off in early January. Ian W had been twice before, but not for 5 years, and had mapped out a rough plan and itinerary (although nothing was set in stone) and as it turned out was quite flexible.

The intention, as you can guess, was to see as many plants in habitat as possible, but not like mainland Mexico where the plants are in greater numbers and more profusion, in Baja they are a lot more spread out and you have to travel quite some distances to see them. As it turned out, with environmental changes and some development and American investment in places, some things had changed. Although there are plants that grow here and nowhere else, which we hoped to encounter, Mammillarias were particularly on the list for Ian P and Keith.

Undaunted we set off with great anticipation arriving at San Jose del Cabo after the flights (we had to change planes on the way) we picked up our 2 hire cars (3 in each car) as it would help if one broke down etc., on the journey.

We stayed in a number of varied accommodations over the time, but had intended to travel most days. In fact we clocked up around 5.5 kms. (3.000miles).

We travelled mostly on the MEX 1 the main highway, which twisted through wonderful scenery as it runs south to north through small villages on either side of the road. Apart from the main towns most of the area was quite sparsely populated.

Some of the plants we saw were amazing - 40ft plus high specimens, and as wide, with loads of arms (mainly *Pachycereus*, but other *Cereus* species) down to small Mammillarias, loads of Agaves, Opuntias, Ferocacti, Fouquierias and Boojams.

As said picking out highlights is difficult, but the impressive *Pachycereus* stood out on the hillsides as we travelled around, like soldiers standing to attention; the visit to see the Creeping Devils near Loreto; the plants in the bolder field near Catavina.

The vegetation was mainly unidentifiable bushes and not as many animals as I expected to see. It was very dry and sandy in most of the trips off the main roads.

We had planned a couple of boat trips to some of the islands in the sea of Cortez, which were very interesting. We saw a number of different species of Ferocacti as well as *Cereus* and some Mammillarias. There were also lots of sea birds, Brown pelican, Cormorants, Shags, Gulls etc.

Although as I said the main focus was "Plants in habitat" the boat trip to the Laguna Ojo de Libre near Guerrero Negro to encounter Gray Whales was probably for me a real surreal experience, as despite being nearly extinct from being hunted years ago (now being protected) they were remarkably tame and came right up to the boat. Their migration journey is one of the longest for this species of whales.

LA Paz was the largest place we stayed and like most large towns was awash with cars. The sea front marina was full of boats, but beware of Mexican drivers as they are dangerous and they will pinch any space you leave. However we managed to avoid any collisions on our journey.

An amazing experience to visit such a diverse environment and encounter some wonderful plants and scenery. This was one I would not have missed, the wildlife (birds) and the varied food were all part of the experience, which will linger long in the memory. As they say:

“leave only footprints and take away only your memories”

Bill Darbon 2023

70 YEARS AGO...

by David Greenaway



This *Lithops* died last year, the last survivor of my 1952 sowing of *Lithops* seed – mixed species. 120 of the seeds germinated, and when things had settled down, 80 seedlings had survived. Where most of the plants went over the years I did not record, but a few survived the five moves to greenhouses in various locations.



Sad, but hey! Here is *Mammillaria rhodantha* that I raised from seed in 1951, seed from Harle of Reading, favourite nursery of Gordon Rowley at the time. It was in flower a couple of weeks ago.