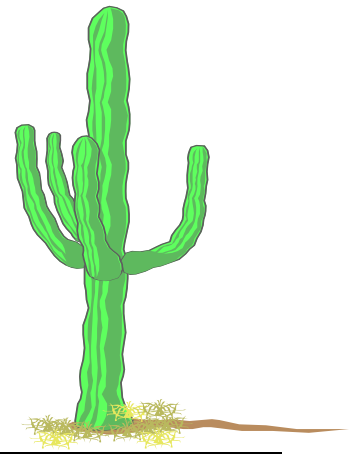


# Oxotica

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

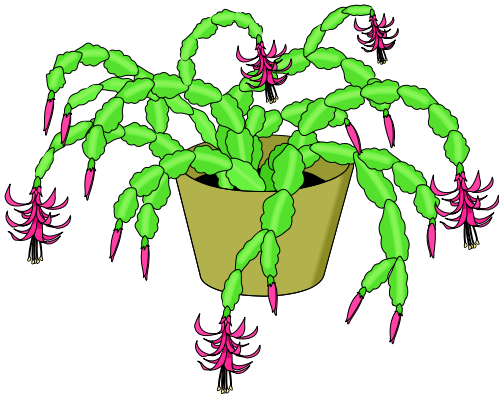
December 2009

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## OXFORD BRANCH CHAIR'S REPORT 2009

by Gillian Evison



This year, my first as Chair of the Branch, has been one of both highs and lows. It came as a great shock to all of us to learn of Cathy Darbon's illness at the beginning of the growing season and, as one of our most dynamic and vibrant members, Cathy's presence has been much missed.

Although Cathy has not been able to physically take part in Branch activities, she continues to provide input to the Committee via Bill and she is much in our thoughts as she takes her first steps towards recovery. Grateful thanks must go to all those Branch members who have quietly taken on jobs at that would normally have been done by Cathy in order to ensure that Oxford has had a full programme of events for this year. We were particularly pleased to be able to welcome Mary Stone back to the Committee for 2009 and Mary has not only taken on the task of hosting our meetings but also added inches to our waistlines by plying us with delicious home made fare.

This year saw an Award of Merit presented to Steve Williams for his services to Oxford, in recognition the important part he plays in the life

of our Branch. As reported in the June edition of Oxotica, the surprise presentation (at least for Steve!) took place at our biennial Branch Auction, which was another high point for 2009. The healthy income from the event proved that, regardless of the recession, people are still prepared to travel some distance and bid high for the right plants. Branch members did a grand job in persuading potential contributors of their urgent need for more room in the greenhouse and presenting the Branch Auction as the easy solution to such space problems. John Watmough ensured that there was a well endowed sales table ready and waiting to part people from any remaining cash. A busy kitchen, offering plenty of good things to eat and drink, also helped to make the day a social and financial success.

Members have again been out and about setting up displays, selling plants and giving talks. My thanks to everyone who contributed to these events and particularly to the heroic propagators of Aeoniums, Echeverias and Sedums, who ensured that this year, on the second occasion we have been invited to Whichford Pottery, we did not run out of other succulents before elevenses on the first day.



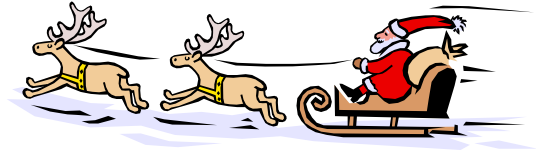
*Eriosyce aurata* (best cactus in Oxford Show)

The final high of our growing season was our Autumn Show, the second that we have held in conjunction with the Haworthia Society and we thank them for their support. Our Show Manager, Bill Darbon, and numerous Branch volunteers ensured that everything went smoothly on the day and the remarks on the BCSS Discussion Forum reflected the high standard of the plants entered. The kitchen team, led by Mary Stone, provided catering of equal quality to the plants and the day ended with a lecture on *Sansevierias* by Alan Butler. David Greenway has ensured that the Show and our other 2009 events live on in virtual form through the Branch website, which, along

with our newsletter, *Oxotica*, reaches out to people well beyond our local community of enthusiasts.

I would like to close by thanking you all for supporting the Branch over the past twelve months and wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a good growing season in 2010.

GE



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## DROOLING SPINES

by John Watmough

This year has been perhaps our best ever year financially. We had some lucky breaks, of course. But our success has depended on two things: time and effort put in by dedicated members; and adequate stocks of plants for sale. We have been so good at selling plants that we shall soon need to replenish stocks. (Hint hint.)

There has been some discussion as to when Oxford Branch was first formed. We knew it was at least ten years since we celebrated our fortieth anniversary by persuading Gordon Rowley to pay us a visit. But now, thanks to information supplied by Alan Ilott, we can definitely state that the inaugural meeting of the Branch took place in January 1958. Consequently we missed our own Golden Anniversary.

Next year sees the BCSS Convention, which is guaranteed to be a superb event. Your Branch treasurer has booked a sales table there and he will be selling his own plants and Branch plants, plus the plants of any Branch member who undertakes to supply the sort of plants that might interest enthusiasts. All plants should have the usual two labels so that the price and owner

can be identified. The same should apply to the Mesemb Event at Banstead later in the year.

Also to be supported is the Northampton Branch Auction, which should be in April. Any member who wishes to auction plants but who cannot make the journey is welcome to do so through John Watmough. Readers will know that Oxford and Northampton take it in turns to hold auctions and to support each other's efforts.

Ernst Specks is coming to High Wycombe Convention on Saturday October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Buy your tickets early and start saving! Also speaking is Louise Bustard ("with a U", she tells everybody) who is now based in Glasgow but who earned the respect of us southerners when she worked at Kew. She is very knowledgeable, ingenious, and entertaining.

One of the most encouraging sights this year was provided by our own member, Doug Willis, when he came to a Branch meeting with a pot crammed full of seedlings of *Pachypodium brevicaule*. Now that the Madagascan government has banned export of their native plants it is down to us to learn how to propagate them in our greenhouses. So congratulations, Doug!

JW

## BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2010

*(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 have tried to include a good varied programme again this year and hope that there is something for YOUR specific interest. 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.

**28 January     Eddie Harris**  
“My Favourite Mesembs”

Eddie is well known as the Secretary of the Society. Tonight he will bring us some of his expertise talking about his favourite plants, which he has seen in habitat and grown for many years. I am sure we are in for a very good evening as Eddie is always happy to pass on tips about the cultivation of this large group of plants.

**25 February**  
Society Slides (Chris Moore's) “Asclepiads”

Chris Moore was the secretary of Asclepios and grew a wide range of the asclepiads. Sadly he is no longer with us, but has left the Society a digital record and commentary about his favourite plants. I am sure we will enjoy the presentation of his digital images of this diverse family of plants.

**25 March     Graham Hole**  
“They all look the same don't they?”

Graham is well known for his contributions to the Chileans and has travelled extensively in South America and visited other experts in Austria and Germany. Tonight he will bring us his new slant on the Rebutia Group of plants, Graham is always a very entertaining speaker.

**22 April     Dr Colin Walker**  
“Agaves” (if ready; if not, “Aloes”)

Colin is a well known international speaker and editor of BRADLEYA, which has become known as the best yearly publication of its kind. He will have hopefully completed his new talk on Agaves for tonight, otherwise he will talk on Aloes; whichever talk it is, his wealth of knowledge will shine through.

**27 May     Derek Tribble**  
“Extreme plant hunting 2007 (Namibia)”

Derek is another well known speaker who has travelled extensively in South Africa. Tonight his talk will recount his trip with Ernst Van Jaarsvelt to the wilds of Namibia. I'm sure that we will see some quite unique landscape and plants in their natural environment (even if they were hard to spot!)

**24 June     Paul Klasson**  
“What I saw last winter 2008/9”

Paul is well known for his work on Copiapoa and runs a web site dedicated to this genus of plants. He has travelled extensively in South America, particularly Chile. He has not been to the Branch for some time and this talk tonight will relate his travels in Brazil, Mexico and Cuba.

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**BCSS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION**  
Leicester University 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> July 2010

**OXFORD BRANCH SHOW (With Mammillaria Society)** Langdale Hall 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010

*Cathy Darbon, Branch Secretary*

#### **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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## HAWORTHIA SOCIETY SHOW 2009

by Bill Keen

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September, a day of glorious sunshine, brought together enthusiasts of the Haworthia Society and our hosts and friends of the BCSS Oxford Branch for a combined show in the Langdale Hall, Witney. These combined events with Oxford and Birmingham Branches over a number of years have proved to be a very successful formula and this was no exception. Oxford Branch Show has a well-deserved reputation as one of the premier shows in the country and the Haworthia Society's presence enhances the occasion.

The venue is conveniently situated with easy access from the motorway system, there is more than adequate free parking outside the hall and in the near vicinity, and the hall itself is spacious and well lit. Its town-centre location means that there are restaurants and pubs within easy reach, though I found that the delicious refreshments provided by the ladies of Oxford Branch (bacon butties, salads and home-made cakes) adequately sustained the inner man.

This report is concerned only with the Haworthia Society section, but the Open Classes also contained some magnificent plants worthy of closer inspection. By their nature haworthias tend to be relatively small plants, so a row of tables carrying a large number of plants can look somewhat insignificant to members of the public. A backdrop of large cacti gives a better impression of our hobby.

One of the most eye-catching exhibits in the Haworthia Society section, and indeed in the whole show, was a huge clump of *Aloe erinacea* exhibited by John Warwick. This species is usually encountered on the showbench as a fairly small single rosette, but John's plant with over a dozen heads occupied a 50 cm bowl and was in fine condition. *A. erinacea* demonstrated its popularity as a show plant in the class for two aloes, where Costas Papathanasiou paired the species with *A. longistyla* to take first prize.



*Aloe erinacea*



*Gasteria pillansii*



*Haworthia emelyae* 'picta'



*Haworthia mirabilis* var. *badia*

The two classes for gasterias showed that these plants are no longer the “poor relations” of the group, consigned to dark corners of the greenhouse and to some extent neglected. It was pleasing to see a good range of the smaller-growing species gracing the showbench, particularly in the class for two plants. John Watmough’s entry, comprising *G. vlokii* and *G. baylissiana* won this class, while a very colourful *G. pillansii* entered by Stirling Baker took the honours in the single plant class.

As usual, the “retuse-type” haworthias demonstrated their universal appeal, with magnificent specimens of a wide range of plants in the several classes allocated to them. One entry with the “wow” factor was the beautiful *H. emelyae* ‘*picta*’ which won Stirling first prize. In the same class I was attracted to a lovely Japanese cultivar entered by Alan Rollason, though it was not among the prizewinners.

Class 68 was won by Roger Hefford with a fine glossy-leaved *H. emelyae* v. *comptoniana*, beating Stirling’s equally lovely *H. bayeri* and a huge multiheaded *comptoniana* exhibited by Costas. In Class 70, the top award went to the smallest plant in the class, Alan’s multiheaded specimen of *H. magnifica* v. *atrofusca* in a 7 cm pot.

In Class 71, the first plant to catch my eye was a glossy near-black *H. mirabilis* v. *badia* ‘Crystal Lace’ exhibited by Stirling. However, as a hybrid giving the impression of greater vigour and hence easier cultivation, this had lost out to the “true” species and was not among the prizewinners. Instead, Stirling’s multiheaded *badia* took the honours, with a beautifully marked example entered by Costas in second place. In the next class, Stirling’s handsome clump of *H. magnifica* v. *splendens* attracted my interest and apparently that of the judge, John Betteley, who awarded it the first prize card.

Class 75 catered for the two species *H. springbokvlakensis* and *H. bruynsii*. Here the more uncommon *H. bruynsii* claimed the top two places for Stirling and Roger respectively. The next class contained the largest haworthia in the

show, a magnificent *H. truncata* shown by Doug Willis that dwarfed everything else on the bench. I recall this specimen from the 2007 Oxford Show and was pleased to see that it showed no sign of deterioration. The heads were uniformly well-grown and, apart from a few tiny marks, were unblemished.

The long-stemmed haworthias such as *H. coarctata* and *H. reinwardtii* are less popular on the showbench than the retuse forms. I feel that this is a great pity: a grower who can produce a large specimen that has not suffered the irritating drying-up of a few leaves high on the stems deserves credit. The class-winner, Mike Cullen’s *H. reinwardtii* v. *olivacea*, had a few damaged leaf-tips, but was attractively coloured and drew attention among its greener rivals.

The class for hybrids and variegated plants was won by Steve Williams with an interesting cross between *H. scabra* and *H. koelmaniorum*. Hopefully this will prove more amenable to cultivation than its parents!

The class for a collection of haworthias in a seedtray attracted five entries. Depending on the pot sizes, these comprised either eight or fifteen plants. Alan’s prizewinning entry of 15 single-headed plants consigned Stirling’s collection of eight larger plants to second place.

The Haworthia Show was judged speedily and efficiently by John Betteley, himself a very successful grower and exhibitor. He has requested to add a final word to this report:

“On completion of judging I detected the odd element of surprise that I did not give a more prominent placing to a few attractive hybrids that were scattered throughout the show. I maintain a longstanding belief that, in general, true species should rank above hybrids, particularly as the judge is often having to second-guess the ease of cultivation and the vigour inherited from potentially unknown parents of some of the more obscure hybrids in cultivation.”

BK

## FIELD TRIP TO REDINGTON PASS

by David Greenaway

The middle day of the 2009 CSSA Convention in Tucson AZ was a day out for everyone, with several choices. Jean chose to go to the Kartchner Caverns, while I went on the field trip to Redington Pass (“Special Plants in Native Habitat”). The latter turned out to be very popular, 90 or more of us in a fleet of MPVs. We split into two groups, 4 or 5 vehicles in each, with a knowledgeable local person leading each group. I sat with Martin Doorbar, who had flown in with his family for the Convention.

We went due east out of Tucson on the dead straight Tanque Verde road which abruptly became a very bumpy dirt road as we left the city limit, and started winding uphill. We had reached the Redington Road, and the Saguaros stood on the lower slopes here in their thousands. At the first stop we piled out and started searching. The fellow on the right in the picture has just found some *Mammillaria grahamii*.



Also around was *Echinocereus fasciculatus*, *Mammillaria macdougalii* and *Ferocactus wizensenii*. More about these later.

At the next stop one of the plants we found was *Coryphantha vivipara*, but none was in flower.



Next, we reached the “Staging Post”. These days there is nothing there except a large flat area and a primitive toilet. A metal sign had a good map of the area, complete with bullet holes.



At least our vandals in the UK do not usually have guns!

We wandered around but there was little in the way of interesting plants. Then I noticed a group of us over on some rocks, taking photographs, so I wandered over to see what they were up to:



They had found a goodly number of *Echinocereus rigidissimus* in a small area:



Also there was a *Mammillaria macdougalii* in flower. This must be the flattest mam. I have ever seen, sitting even lower than my *hemisphaerica*. In the dry season, we were told, it pulls itself right down to ground level.



Then we caught up with the other group who had stopped for lunch. All the the food was in the back of one of the vehicles. There was very little

shade, but being April it was not too hot. There were no new plants in this area.



We got going again, and I found a sun-tanned *opuntia*, and a *Ferocactus wislizenii* in fruit.



We eventually stopped where we could see the view beyond the pass, with agave and Fouqueiria in the foreground.



Some of the more energetic wandered into the mid-distance, but that did not include me.

The Fouqueiria flowers were brilliant in close-up.



I was intrigued by the habit of the opuntias here – a chain of pads along the ground.



At the final stop before we turned for home were some gems – Echinomastus erectocentrus:



And, at last, an Echinocereus in flower.

