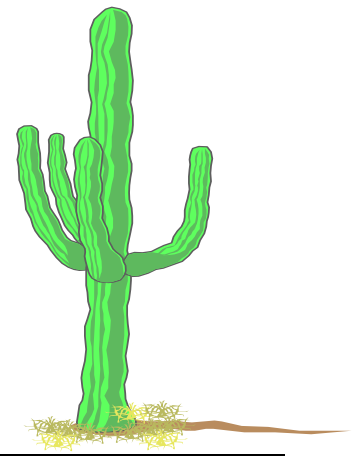


# Oxotica

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

December 2010

Volume 15 Number 2



### BCSS Oxford Branch CHAIR'S REPORT 2010

by Gillian Evison

Our growing year started with one of the coldest winters on record. Experimental 'global warming' outdoor plantings and unheated greenhouse collections were subjected to weeks of freezing temperatures and deep snow. What succumbed and what survived gave us all a few surprises and we were eager to fill the gaps left by the ravages of winter, which must have left the nurserymen of Europe rubbing their hands with glee.

Despite the bad winter and a cold, late spring, John Watmough, our resident road warrior, managed to muster plenty of goodies to sell on his visits as a speaker to other branches. Many of these plants were donated by members for Branch funds and our bank account would not be as healthy as it is without this generosity. Members took the opportunity to promote the Branch and sell yet more plants at the North Hinksey Street Fair and Bury Knowle. The Hinksey Fair was a new event for us, so thanks go to Penny Rodgers for putting us in touch with the organisers. A further selling opportunity was offered by this year's National Convention at Leicester where we had booked a sales table. Members contributed their choicer propagations for the delectation of conventioners and many of our plants found new homes with enthusiasts from all over the country. The Branch also put on a good show in terms of the number of members attending the event, all enjoying the stellar line-up of international speakers and the multiple shopping opportunities.

Although some of our friends and regular exhibitors were unable to come to the Branch Show, which this year was held in conjunction

with the Mammillaria Society, the quality and quantity of plants on display was, as ever, a credit to Bill Darbon's hard work as Show Secretary. Active Branch membership is now at the level that the various jobs that go towards making the show a success can only be covered by multi-tasking and members cheerfully juggled multiple roles throughout the day. Special mention must again go to the dedicated kitchen team headed by Mary Stone with stalwart support from Margaret Conway.

Cathy Darbon's continued improvement after last year's stroke has been a particular cause for celebration and she is now back to keeping Committee meetings in order, relaying us with choice bits of gossip from the higher echelons of the Society and plying us with nibbles to keep our strength up.

As winter sets in and our thoughts turn to more indoor activities, thanks go David Greenaway, who makes sure that we have plenty of fireside reading with Oxotica and who also tends our Branch presence in cyberspace. Like all editors he is always looking for material and, as next year is our Branch Auction, is also looking for information on and pictures of auction plants. If you are looking for New Year resolutions, how about writing an article for Oxotica and pledging an auction plant for what promises to be the social and shopping event of 2011!

GE



### THE AUCTION, 2011

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> April at Long Hanborough Recreation Hall. (Note: Freeland Village Hall has been demolished.)**

**John Watmough needs your entries as usual – please phone or send your entries in the following format:**

<i>Notocactus grusonii</i>	12 inch bowl	Huge plant, needs repotting
Tray of <i>Pelargoniums</i>	-	Eight different species in 3" pots

**The Branch website has full details plus a regularly updated auction catalogue. Reserve prices can be accepted in advance. Sales plants wanted.**

**Help with staging, administration, catering etc gratefully received.**

### DROOLING SPINES

by John Watmough

Branch Members who stayed away from the AGM in the hope of not being elected to anything did themselves out of a remarkable experience this year. No, I don't mean Mary Stone's mince pies and Margaret Conway's cheese straws, though these are what attracted most attendees, I'm sure. No, it was our Chairman Gilly Evison's post-business talk. She simply wired up a laptop and a projector and magically gave us a run-through of a facility called FLICKR. This facility is a database of 5,000,000,000 images, most of which are photographs of cacti and succulents taken by Gillian herself.

The pictures on our website were originally posted on Flickr, where they can be accessed by any subscriber. It seems that we have fans from as far away as Turkey and Argentina. Fans have voted Doug Willis's magnificent *Haworthia truncata* as their favourite plant. Surprisingly, their favourite cactus only ranked twenty-sixth overall. Does this mean that nobody loves cacti any more, or are cactus growers still stuck in the analogue age? Dare anyone suggest a reason?

Talking of Evison Shastri (is this right, Gilly?) I learn that she is going to be the guest speaker at ELK in September 2011. You read it here first, folks!

Ernst Specks says that his visit to High Wycombe last October will have been his last to this country. He says that it was British other succulent fanatics who kept his and Marita's business afloat for the first fifteen years, the continentals all being horny-handed cactus growers. However, a huge trade with the Far East has opened up and they are working flat out to satisfy demand. Besides, we can easily go to Specks ourselves these days. The German Federal authorities have just completed a direct motorway link from Erkelenz to the Channel Ports, in recognition of the Specks' vital contribution to the Eurozone.

JW



## BRANCH MEETINGS JANUARY - JUNE 2011

*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*

Once again we have tried to provide a wide range of speakers and subjects for our monthly meetings and hope that there will be something of interest for everyone. Please let the Secretary know if you would like any particular subject or speaker in the future.

**27 January CHRIS MOORE**

**Asclepiads (Part2)**

We are revisiting Chris's digital pictures of his favourite plants this month, sadly he is no longer with us but his images live on. This is a wide ranging and diverse group of plants and not one that we all grow, but Chris managed to produce some wonderful specimens which will be reflected by his superb photography.

**24 February DAVID MINNON**

**Gardens collections and nurseries in USA**

David is an old friend and well known in Zone 6. He has not visited us for a while, but tonight he will take us on a trip to the USA, a country in which he has travelled extensively. David is always a good speaker and I am sure that we are in for a good evening and will see those mouth-watering plants that we would all like to have.

**24 March BILL MORRIS**

**Succulent Geraniaceae**

Bill is extremely well known and respected in the succulent world and has visited us before. His knowledge of tonight's subject is second to none, so I am sure that we will all learn something about this genus of plants, delivered in his own inimitable style.

**10 APRIL BRANCH AUCTION**

**Long Hanborough Recreational Hall**

The Branch is holding our Bi-annual Branch Auction and plant sales at Long Hanborough Recreational Hall. This is a change of venue this year. Doors open for viewing at 12 noon, and light refreshments will be available. All details are on the Branch web site or obtainable from the Branch Treasurer.

**28 April DR JOHN HUGHES**

**Cool Customers**

John has not visited us for some time but he returns tonight with some useful thoughts on keeping plants for cool conditions. In the current economic climate I am sure that we are all looking at different ways of how we can grow our plants under different conditions.

**26 May ALAN PHIPPS**

**Navajo Country**

Alan has travelled widely in the USA and tonight's talk is not about 'Indian', but plants that grow in this vast area of the USA. I am sure we are in for some wonderful scenery and plants in their natural home, and I am sure that the customary train may well appear as well.

**23 June PAUL HOXEY**

**Chile**

Paul has recently taken over as Cambridge Branch Secretary and has travelled widely in South America with the late Alfred Lau and other prominent cactophiles. I believe that this is Paul's first visit to us as a speaker so please come along and make him welcome.

*Cathy 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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## SUCULENTA 2010 and PRE-CONGRESS TRIP

*By Mary Stone*

I was cutting it a bit fine when I went out to South Africa for Succulenta 2010. I was going through Customs at 8 a.m. and we were on the road at 9.20 a.m.! There were eight of us with three leaders – Graham Williamson, Frans Noltee and Alex Fick – and we were divided between three off-road vehicles. These were absolutely necessary as many of the roads we took were pretty rough and some tracks like washed-out stream beds. Seeing the vehicle in front twisting as it negotiated these tracks and driving over large stones, made one realise what they were expected to take. Apart from a problem with Graham's running-board, we only had one blow-out and that was on a relatively good road!

The plants were disappointing due to the lack of winter rain and the countryside had a parched look, compared with my memories of previous years. Small plants that pull themselves down into the ground were difficult to find or in poor condition.



**Euphorbia tuberculata**

*Mary Stone*

We travelled up to Clanwilliam on the first day where we stayed at an old farmhouse. There we were regaled with a good dinner and the next day with a big breakfast which set us up for the day. Notable plants which we found on our various stops were *Euphorbia loricata*, *E. muricata* and a

large *E. tuberculata* which was still flowering. At one stop we met another party of plant hunters who were volunteers at Kew and very excited to meet Graham as some of them had seen his book on the Richtersfeld. The next night was spent near Springbok and then we went via Poffadder to De Rust to Mr. Kruger's farm. This is usually a wonderland of interesting plants, but we did not find so many this year. He showed us again his pride and joy, a *Hoodia flava*, which he hides under stones in case it is taken by the local people for food. It had elongated since I saw it before, due no doubt to the lack of light.



**Kokerboom Forest**

*Mary Stone*

A night spent at Pella gave us the opportunity to see, nearby, a veritable forest of Kokerbooms, some more *Hoodias* and *Psilocaulon*. With permission from the mining company we visited the Gamsberg Reserve, hoping to find *Conophytum ratum*, but it was not to be. This time we went right to the top of the extinct volcano and into the crater. There were spectacular views and some interesting plants, though not the treasures we had hoped to find. However on the way there we had a bit of luck when we spotted some *Euphorbia namaquensis* just inside a fence at the roadside, and *E. braunsii*, *Lithops juilii fullerii*, *Hoodia gordonii* and plenty of *Kleinia longiflora*. These finds cheered us a bit.

Continuing the trip, we went to see *Cheirodopsis peculiaris* and growing nearby was *E. filiflora*, both of which were looking pretty good. On the way to Port Nolloth we turned off to see *E. conflens*, which was looking so happy five years ago in its roadside site, but this year an area of

about two acres looked as if something had hit it and everything looked greyish and the Euphorbias were almost non-existent. We stayed right on the sea front near Port Nolloth and had a good time looking for plants which might be more adapted to life by the shore. There was *Cono. meyerii* and a *Crassula* with lots of beadlike red heads. Throughout the trip we found many *Crassulas* and were to learn that they could vary very much, *C. elegans* and *C. atropurpurea* in particular. *C. columnaris* was common everywhere but in one or two places *C. columnaris* v. *prolifera* was a revelation – it is small and a beautiful red colour.



**Aloe pearsonii**

*Mary Stone*

We went on up to Alexander Bay and thence to the Richtersveld National Park. A drive up the Helshoogte Pass was the big challenge for the vehicles – a poor road at the best of times, it had been washed out and was like a mountain stream bed! At the top the plants were poor and I thought there were nothing like as many *Aloe pearsonii* this time. I was glad that we drove on further this time because we found some lovely stapeliads, an *Orbea*, in flower, *Gethyllis* and some other little things which were fun to photograph. Some of the group were hoping to find *Conophytum* and here there were *C. bilobum* and *C. loescherianum*.

On the way back we stopped at Cornel's Kop and found that the *Aloe pillansii* still seemed to be in decline, though one of our party found two small ones, so perhaps there is hope for them. There were more *Crassulas*, *sladenii*, *elegans* and some happy looking *corallina* in flower. Nearer to the coast we found *Euphorbia ramiglans* with just the tips of the branches showing through the sand of the coastal desert, *E. stapelioides* and *Sarcocaulon*

*patersonii*. A bit higher on an outcrop of rocks we found a lot of the lovely little red *Crassula columnaris*, *prolifera* and some delicate looking pinks, which seemed out of place in such a harsh place. An excitement was an *Aloe krapohlana*. A bit further south we found *E. ramiglans* in a more sheltered place, which was growing above ground in the more generally recognised way of medusoids. Also we found *E. hamata*. This seems to have a wide distribution and usually has a red flower, but here we found it looking much more pinkish/purple.

Coming back through the Cedarberg, we searched an area where there were lots of little bulbs, which were more numerous this year I think. To my delight we found quite a large number of *E. tuberosa*, in flower and looking quite healthy, also *C. nudicaulis* and *namaquensis*. At another site we found a beautiful *Euphorbia* which Graham and Frans seemed unable to name – it lay close to the ground, 'streaming' in one direction, in much the same way as *E. lumbricalis*. Does anyone have any ideas? I am wondering about *E. gentilis*.

The Congress was held this year in the Flood Museum in Laingsburg; the town had been hit some years ago by a flood which came through the town causing much damage and loss of life, and this was the Memorial to the disaster. It made a good venue and the delegates were accommodated in nearby hotels and guest houses. It was good to meet up with old friends and I was flattered to be remembered by name even though we had not met for seven years. The lectures took place in the mornings, and in the afternoons we made plant hunting trips in the neighbourhood.



**Euphorbia hamata***Mary Stone*

As usual the opening talk was by Prof. Braam van Wyk. He is a man of great wisdom, I find, and always worth hearing. He spoke on this occasion about the naming of plants and whether we have the choice of which name to use when they are changed, especially in view of DNA evidence. I am glad to say he thinks we may choose. Frans Noltee gave an introduction to the plants of the Laingsburg and also gave a useful photographic tour of the plants of the area. Ernst van Jaarsveld told of his expedition to Angola – his trips are always adventurous and he always finds wonderful plants, so it is inspiring to hear him speak. Gerhard Marx and Peter Bruyns spoke about Haworthias, which of course also brought into question the naming of plants as there is much discussion on whether there should be so many varieties or if they are just variations due to location. There were several good and quite academic talks from other speakers and a delightful description from Prof. Eric Hankey on Vertical Gardening –growing succulents on a wall. If only our climate would allow such a thing!

The afternoons were like a continuation of our pre-Congress trip. I was lucky enough to be transported around by three young men whose enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, everything to do with the countryside, birds, animals (and reptiles!) and plants seemed to have no end. This was a great bonus for me. One such trip took us to a farm where we saw the recently found *Haworthia marxii* – it was an adventurous scramble to see the best of them, but I thought it was wiser to be content with photographing one which was hiding under rocks in poor light!

**Crassula corallina***Mary Stone*

Another trip was to Frans Noltee's farm which is very rich in succulents, but it turned out to be damp and very cold, so we soon repaired to the bar of The Lord Milner Hotel in Matjiesfontein where we had a chance to warm up. However, before we left we had a quick look round a rough patch nearby and found *E. stolonifera*, *E. multifolia* and *E. multiceps*.

**Euphorbia ramiglans***Mary Stone***Orbea variegata***Mary Stone*

One evening at the hotel we met a farmer who was interested to hear about our activities and he invited some of us to his farm to see the plants. We took the opportunity to go there on the afternoon at the end of the Congress – this was a bonus missed by those who left straight after the last talk.

It was with reluctance that we dispersed, but I have two invitations to visit again, so I might be able to go again and to visit areas new to me.

MS

## WINTER GROWERS A Voyage of Discovery

by David Greenaway

### Early cultivation methods

When I started collecting I grew mainly cacti for a long time and I used to treat all the plants as recommended - dry in winter and with regular watering in the summer, with epiphytes kept less dry at any time. When I added 'other succulents' to the collection this seemed to work for many of them too, except that there were problems with some.

### Problem plants

Some succulents fared badly. "It is summer and that *Testudinaria* has lost all its leaves – it must be dying for a drink", I thought. So I kept it well-watered, and it died. The stems of one of my two *Euphorbia cylindrica* flopped over double every winter, until I gave in and gave it a drop of water. The plants hardly grew at any time, once they were out of the seedling stage. I put this fact to the 'cacti\_etc' forum, which had recently started up (this was 15 years ago) and some people replied, but no one came up with the answer. There were many other examples.

### The penny drops

The next year I watched those *Euphorbias* carefully. In August, they came into flower and started producing leaves. I put them in the brightest spot in the warmer of my two greenhouses, and continued the occasional watering. They put on growth throughout the winter, but when March came they dropped their leaves: they had decided that it was time for bed. I looked them up in Jacobsen to find they are from Cape Province, Calvinia Division. My *E. loricata*, from nearby Clanwilliam Division behaved in a similar way.

It was not until the turn of the century that the light began to dawn on me. It may have been my interest in plants of the Canary Islands, which led

me to read that most plants from there were *winter growers*.

### Observations recorded – a diary is kept

Inspired by the tables of growth and flowering for mesembs and cacti in Haage's 'Cacti and Succulents', I started recording information year-by-year in a special diary (I find that W H Smith's A6 day-to-a page diary to be good for this purpose). Among other things I noted were the flowering dates of most of my plants and, for the 'other succulents', the dates on which growth started and finished. These turned out to be particular for each species. Following Haage I have been making a table on the computer from observations of my 'other succulents'. For each species listed, this shows month-by-month the growing and resting period, and where applicable, the flowering month(s) as well. Plants that leaf up anew each year on succulent stems or caudex are the easiest plants to notice and record. Other plants need more careful observation, and my records for those are far from complete.

A few of the cacti are of interest here too. Some cacti from central Chile manage autumn and spring flowering under glass here, so perhaps we should treat many species of these genera as summer dormant and take more care with watering at that time. My *Neoporteria wagenichtii* regularly flowers in the autumn until December, whilst *Neoporteria microsperma* buds up in the autumn but waits until January and February to flower. Haage notes this bi-modal growth pattern for both *Copiapoa* and *Neoporteria* in his table of cactus flowering times.

Keith Grantham and Paul Klaasen, in their book 'Plantfinders Guide to Cacti & Other Succulents' have another table of growing and flowering times. They note that some tropicals such as *Rhipsalis* and *Lepismium* have a short summer dormancy, and most remarkably they note that *Micranthocereus* is a winter-grower and flowerer, and has a long summer break. The coastal regions of N.E. Brazil, anomalously, have most of the rainfall in their winter months, but the reverse is true of the interior, and, indeed, the rest of Brazil.

The leaves of my Pereskias start yellowing off in December, and have all fallen by January. Very careful watering is needed until new leaves start in April. I only twigged that a couple of years ago: I lost one before that, probably by over-watering at the 'wrong' time. I was surprised that the only cactus that is not succulent should rot off. True, this one is not a 'winter grower', but it is an example of the need to know the resting periods for all of the plants that we grow.

### 'Mediterranean plants'

Why do some of our succulent plants insist on growing in our winter, under glass, while the others are summer growers? You can water the former in the summer, along with everything else, and they either rot off or they just sit there; either way – no growth. Then, when they decide to, they start growing, and at more or less the same time every year.

I get the impression that succulent plants from any of the parts of the world that have a Mediterranean climate, with its hot, dry summers and milder, wetter winters tend, to a greater or lesser degree, to be winter growers here. This climate regime occurs on the western side of the continents and at latitudes between 32 and 38 degrees north and south. SW Africa, California (and part of Baja California), central Chile, some coastal regions of south and south-west Australia and the Med. itself, cover the obvious areas. Plants from other places that have rain falling in the winter, albeit very little of it in some cases, such as the Canary Islands and northern Somalia, fall into this category also.

Many plants in these places, not unreasonably, like to grow in their cooler, wetter season, rather than the hot, dry one. At those latitudes in winter, the sunshine is substantially stronger, and the days longer, than here in the UK.

### Dormancy

Nevertheless, even the 'winter growers' go into torpor here in mid-winter; I doubt if there is much growth in my greenhouse in December! Autumn and spring growers would be a better name, or simply 'summer dormant' plants. The only

substantial list I have seen is in the section 'dormancy' of the document at

[http://www.highlandsucculents.com/culture\\_guide.htm](http://www.highlandsucculents.com/culture_guide.htm)

As it says, there are exceptions for some species. We need to know those as well.

The 'summer dormant' list surprised me when I first found it. Sedum? Crassula? Avonia? Until I found this reference a few years ago, I had not even realised that Haworthia, Gasteria, and Adromischus would be included! I was growing them all wrong! Of course, those of you that have been growing and specialising in these plants for many years knew all about this long before I did, and I should have listened more. Fortunately, many of my plants probably survived because I did not keep the 'other succulents' quite as bone dry as the cacti in winter.

Much more publicity about this subject is required, else novices – and others – will continue to suffer the disappointment of unnecessary losses.

Something was still nagging me (being of inquiring mind). Whatever possesses these winter growers from the southern hemisphere to want to grow in the half of the year that is so much colder and darker here? Our native or garden plants are not silly enough to attempt that! The reason is not because we have them under glass, but because they cannot help it. But more of that another time. Maybe.

*DSG*



**Euphorbia loricata** Mary Stone