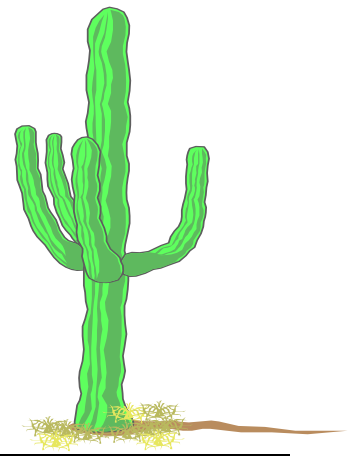


Oxotica

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

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

by David Greenaway

Do all new Chairmen, when they take over, feel 'that was a hard act to follow?'

Gillian's cultivation skills were already challenging the best at the National Shows when I first joined the Oxford Branch, and she has made a significant contribution to our branch shows, and the running of the committee, for many years.

So I was not surprised, but certainly delighted, that early this year Gillian Evison was given the Society's Award of Merit. Her knowledge is being passed on through her popular and widespread talks, and she is continuing to provide us with photographic records of our main and branch show plants. I look forward to her continued contributions to the committee meetings.

My tenure started with a mild panic when we lost the valuable printing services of Edward Stone at a critical moment, but quick work by the committee led to alternatives being found; we are indebted to Edward for all that he did for us over several years. I will take this moment to give my thanks to the executive committee, whose expertise and hard work this year have made my job much easier. My thanks also go other branch members for their help, especially Nick Boden who has been a very willing helper on many occasions. John Watmough has been meticulous in handling all the branch financial matters, and has furnished the committee with regular statements of accounts. Our heartfelt thanks for all that, John.

Secretary Cathy Darbon had worked hard to provide us with another interesting and varied programme for the monthly branch meetings. We welcomed many visitors from other branches to the talks, including Doreen Donaldson who made several trips over during the lighter evenings.

The popular annual Branch Lunch at The Lambert Arms was organised by Steve Williams this year, and we welcomed several visitors from other branches.

The National Show notwithstanding, the highlight of the year for me in 2012 was our annual show at Langdale Hall, run in association with The Mammillaria Society. The usual high quality of the show that we had come to expect was even exceeded this year with over 500 entries of some outstanding plants. Presided over by show supremo Bill Darbon, an experienced team made the day run like clockwork, though for a while, we did wonder if one judge was going to make it in time! On behalf of the committee I would like to thank branch members, and friends of the branch (such as Doreen who ran the auction wonderfully again) who helped make this day such a success.

The kitchen team as usual managed to feed and water all the visitors and exhibitors, a vital contribution. To cap it all, despite the higher hall costs, our treasurer was able to

announce unexpectedly that a small profit had been made on the day.

There are still some issues about the Langdale hall, despite a refurbishment. The kitchen still had no cooker or ventilation (how can it be called a kitchen?), and there was a problem with the poor microphone and the low level of the hall lighting – more important than ever, as there is less window light now. These, and other points, have been taken up with the hall management.

Next year's show will be in association with the Haworthia Society and will include their

show. A lecture by Paul Shirley of the Netherlands will be an added attraction. The biennial Oxford Branch Auction is back for 2013, at the Long Hanborough venue. Check out our web site for preliminary details of all these events.

Now it only remains for me to wish you all the traditional Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and hope that the growing weather next year will be much sunnier. We can only hope!

DG



Lanzarote Cactus Garden - Echinocactus grusonii bed

PILGRIMAGE TO ELK, BLANKENBERGE BELGIUM, SEPTEMBER 2012

Martin Doorbar

The run in to this year's ELK event was somewhat low key for me, as following my return to the UK last year and not having attended the event for a few years I was very keen to be able to browse (and of course buy) from the wide selection usually present, enhanced by the fact I had not found much of interest to acquire on the March 2012 continental coach trip. Our quartet of participants was also not fully present resulting in a sombre mood on the drive down to the tunnel crossing. On arrival we were disappointed to find our train was already full of a cancelled prior train's participants and the next train was also cancelled, so our early start (planned specifically to get us to the event ahead of sales opening) was completely wasted sitting for 90 minutes at the UK end of the tunnel awaiting a crossing slot!

Anyway, on arrival in Blankenberge it was a fantastic sunny and warm September day and after a rapid check in we headed directly to the sales tables - unlike last year's detailed review of the local beers we were concentrating on plants this time!

An initial quick trip around the 2 sales areas was enough for me to realise that this year they had quite a number of interesting items for sale and so lifted my enthusiasm considerable as I started to fill my box with plants. Within the first hour I had already made 3 trips back to the room to drop off plants having found a nice mixture of items from my wants list alongside interesting impulse buys!

This year I had a specific interest in looking for some of the South African bulbs and found quite a few. Then, some time on Saturday morning, I bumped into Steve Williams hovering around the Specks stall diligently searching through a bunch of *Sinningias* (an interesting genus of flowering plants in the family Gesneriaceae, named after Wilhelm Sinning (1792-1874), a gardener of the Botanische Gärten der Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Germany). There are about 65 species of tuberous perennial herbs plus many horticultural hybrids. They are endemic in Southern America, with the greatest concentration of species occurring in southern Brazil. Ernst Specks' stall had a very good selection of species and a few hybrids, all at reasonable prices, in 2-3 inch pots. I think many people will be familiar with *Sinningia leucotricha* formerly *Rechesteineria leucotricha* (Pic 1), with its wonderful silvery leaf and orange flowers, but there is a great variety of leaf forms and flowers to be had. In the current BCSS Guide to Shows both *Sinningia* and *Rechesteineria* are recognised as succulent plants and are eligible for the ADENIA group on the show bench.

I originally picked *S. leucotricha* up many years ago from Specks when I went on a trip with Coventry & Rugby branch to Europe, around 1990 and it's grown quite happily alongside the cacti, but I suspect it needs a little more water than I tend to give it as although it produces leaves and flowers most years, the tuber has not grown in size that much. Anyway, back to the sales plants: Steve and I spent the next few minutes picking up interesting looking plants; we did not exactly compare selections (maybe we should have done so as to facilitate propagation and exchanges later!).

Pic 1 - *Sinningia leucotricha*

I bought the following from the show although there were many more varieties on Specks stall.

- eumorpha
- douglasii
- rupicola, MP0609
- sellovii 'Purple Rain'
- sp. 'Florianoopolis' Santa Catarina State, Brazil
- sp. 'Santa Teresa', MP0974

A well known related species is the African violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) and a number of web sites indicate similar treatment for Sinningias is suitable. Having only grown the one species before I am by no means an expert on these and can find little information about European greenhouse culture other than that on the Specks website at

http://www.specks-exotica.com/en/cultivation_data.html

Ernst told me at ELK to give them plenty of water during the growing season, and grow them in an open compost with light shade and they will grow quickly. Hence my comments earlier about needing more water; the web site indicates a warmer winter's rest with light watering for most species. They tend to have seasonal growth (but not

some of the smaller species apparently) with the leaves dying back in the rest period, which appears to “correct” to our summers (being a southern hemisphere plants).

Propagation from seed is documented widely but I am unable to find much information regarding vegetative propagation. As African violets can be grown from leaf cuttings, I will try that with a *Sinningia* leaf next spring. Also, I am interested to see if the tubers can be cut up and plants propagated that way?

If you have any experience of growing and propagating these species, especially via vegetative means, I would love to hear from you.

Pic 2 – *Sinningia eumorpha*



Pic 4 – *Sinningia rupicola*, MP0609
(entering dormancy with fading leaf colour)



Pic 3 – *Sinningia douglasii* (epiphytic in habitat)



Pic 5 – *Sinningia sellovii* ‘Purple Rain’



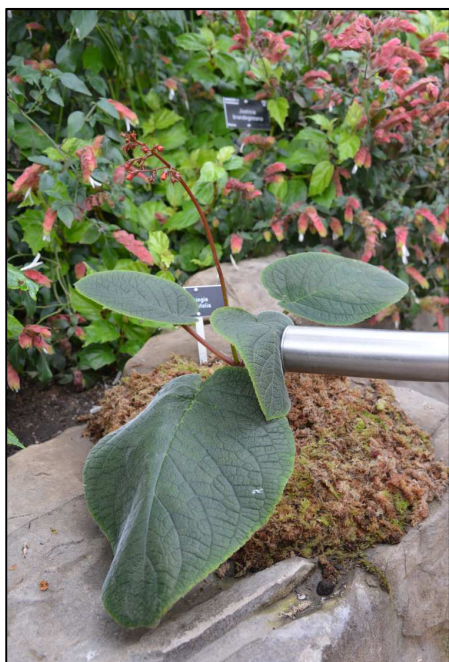
Pic 6 – Sinningia sp. ‘Florianopolis’



Interestingly, on a recent visit to RHS Wisley there was a Sinningia growing in the tropical greenhouse by the pathway, *Sinningia gigantifolia* (Pic 8)

In summary, the ELK weekend this year was great fun and was also very fruitful for me in relation to new plants and interesting finds (I really am unable to resist the mainly Czechs selling loose seedling plants like ‘Pic & Mix’ sweets !!).

Pic 8 – Sinningia gigantifolia



**Additional information on
Sinningias can be found at :**

Specks cultivation advice
http://www.specks-exotica.com/en/cultivation_data.html

Sinningia & Friends (California grower)
<http://www.burwur.net/sinns/sinns.htm>

The Gesneriad Reference Web
<http://www.gesneriads.ca/>

The Gesneriad Society (USA)
<http://www.gesneriadsociety.org/>

The Gesneriphiles mailing list
<http://lists.ibiblio.org/mailman/listinfo/gesneriphiles>

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THE CACTUS GARDEN OF LANZAROTE

by David Greenaway



La Mareta

David Greenaway

The local artist and sculptor César Manrique was an advocate of using only traditional Lanzarote architecture when building or renovating. He maintained that buildings should have white walls and their paintwork should be dark green, brown or blue – the colours of the land and sea. He opposed having any high-rise blocks on the island and he advocated the removal of all advertising billboards from the streets. He was supported both in high places and by the citizens themselves, and by following his principles they have enhanced the island's unique appearance.

Through his vision were created several features that blended in with the natural landscape, and which are some of the most popular tourist destinations of today.

The seventh and last of Manrique's tourist centres on Lanzarote was the Cactus Garden. A deep pit left by an abandoned quarry in the middle of Guatiza's opuntia fields seemed the perfect setting. These fields had long been used to cultivate (!) the mealy bugs used to make cochineal or carmine colouring matter (organic - yes, Vegan-friendly - no).



The Opuntia fields today

Lorry loads of rock were transported to the site and a team of workmen worked it by hand. The windmill overlooking the site and known as La Mareta, built between 1860 and 1870, was completely restored to working order before the opening of the garden.

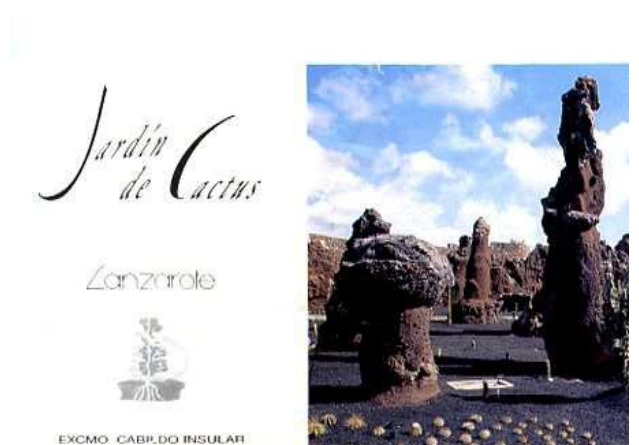
There are said to be 10,000 cacti of 1100 different species planted in the Garden. The first cactus planting was in January 1989, and it opened as a tourist centre in March 1990. Jean and I visited it two months later:



Entrance gate



Some of the first plantings, 1990



The site includes a snack bar and a small gift shop. We visited the Garden again in 2000 and in 2005, and some of the photographs here are from these later visits.

A note here on the black appearance of the soil in the garden. The very low annual rainfall on Lanzarote has encouraged farmers all over the island to use a water-conservation process known as *enarenado*. Their crops are generally grown with a 10 - 15cm layer of black *picón* covering the sub-soil. The purpose of these porous volcanic granules is to allow mist and dew to collect as droplets and run off into the soil; they then lessen the evaporation off the soil and so allow the crops to grow. In some areas the top dressing is of sand, rather than *picón*.

Lines of flat stones are often to be seen on these black fields. These also aid the collection of air-borne moisture by selective cooling.



Mammillaria spinosissima sanguinea



Ceropegia fusca, bleached white by the sun





Entrance sculpture

