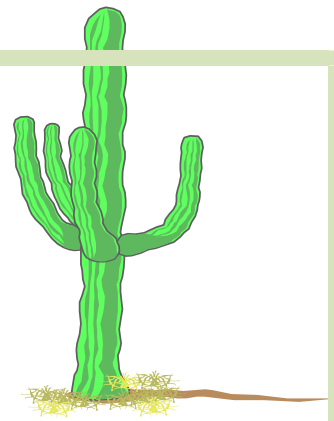


Oxotica

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

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CHAIRMAN'S Message

Well it's the end of another year. We did eventually manage to meet up again in person in September and October. The more social type meeting with plants sales seemed to go down well with those who attended.

Your committee has decided that we will not re-start again till February 2022 and will try and arrange as varied a programme as possible for our meetings, but will keep it a lot less formal.



Some members of your committee have indicated that they wish to stand down so we are looking for anyone that can spare some time to help with the Branch organization.

Looking forward to 2022 it will be a busy year. We are liaising with The Mammillaria Society for a joint show on 11th June at our normal venue at Grove. Again we will want some help so do get in touch if you feel able to help even for a short period of time. We have booked a space at the Blenheim Palace Flower Show 24th - 26th June so if you have spare plants to sell let us know.

This year is the BCSS National Show on 3rd September at the George Stephenson Exhibition Hall at Newark county show ground, so keep that date in you diary and look out for more information in the journal. We hope to attract a large number of sellers to attend (so save your pocket money!).

I look forward to being able to meet you all again next year. I hope that you had a good Christmas, and I wish you all the best for the New Year ahead.

Good growing,

Bill Darbon

CAKE
by Mary Stone

My daughter photographed this in the cake shop in the Covered Market.



GREENHOUSE PESTS

by John Watmough

Much has been written, and will continue to be written, about mealy bugs, red spider mite, and other small greenhouse nuisances. On the other hand, there is not much literature available about the larger pests, so this article is an attempt to rectify the deficiency.

Mammals

CHILDREN

It is difficult for older growers such as myself to know how to handle children. On the one hand, one wishes to encourage a love of nature in all its aspects. On the other hand, too vigorous a display of disapproval, such as strangling the little beasts, tends to lead to societal retribution leading to an enforced separation from one's beloved plants. One should bear in mind that if a child is told not to touch a certain poisonous Euphorbia, it will immediately do so. Spiny plants will be tested to see if they prick. Cacti with hooked spines must be located well away from child reach. It must be remembered that, should the BCSS recover from its current blood-letting, it will need the next generation to lead it into the sunlit uplands.

DOGS

The dogs that cause the most damage are the big ones with waggly tails. They simply sweep plants off the staging. The crashing sounds behind them only serve to make them wag their tails even more. Putting the offending canine down will occasion even more public hostility than putting a child down. The best answer is to keep the greenhouse door closed.

CATS

Cats are some of the most destructive pests. This summer my neighbour's cat Geoffrey, an otherwise idle and useless creature, that loves to sunbathe on my greenhouse roof, decided to organise a fight in my Lithops collection. It took me a whole day to repot the casualties and to match the labels to the plants. Cats also love to pull labels out of pots. Why they should wish to do that is a complete mystery. If on a glorious summer's day you open the windows fully for maximum ventilation, you risk cats jumping through. They invariably bring plants crashing down from the top shelf onto the plants below. Inevitably one's best show plant suffers. One suggested way to keep alien cats out of one's garden is to acquire a Maine Coon. I do not recommend this. I have seen a Maine Coon sweep everything off a shelf with one stroke of its paw. If you have a loose gravel floor, as I do, cats will use it as a latrine. A friend told me that years ago he was minding the collection of a certain lady from near Slough. One

freezing January he arrived to check the heater when a cat that for some reason was inside the greenhouse panicked and ran straight through a pane of glass. He spent ages trying to find a way to block the hole.

HEDGEHOGS

I have written about my travails with hedgehogs in the Mesemb Bulletin. Briefly, a seed tray of seedlings on my bottom shelf got trampled by what, to judge from the evidence, were the footprints of a miniature dinosaur. The next day, the seed tray was overturned altogether. I found a huge boar hedgehog asleep in a large clay pot. Nowadays there are not many hedgehogs left. The main reason is that badgers have taught foxes how to eat them.

FOXES

Fox poo is one of the most disgusting smells known to man. For some reason they like to leave their offerings in the greenhouse, preferably behind stacks of pots or compost bins, to make it difficult to locate them. But bad smells in the greenhouse are not always to be blamed on foxes. One morning my greenhouse stank so abominably that I first of all hunted for fox excrement, then I examined the soles of my shoes, then I finally noticed that *Piarranthus foetidus* was in full bloom.

SQUIRRELS

It is rare to find a squirrel in the greenhouse. One once fell in my water butt and drowned, and went putrid, so that I had to throw about 200 litres of very valuable rainwater away. Otherwise, they may run along the shelves and knock plants off. Growers of South African bulbs may perhaps experience predation from squirrels, but they will not invade if there is a cat sleeping on the roof.

WEASELS

You may think that I am making this up, but I am not. The late and lamented Brian Conway of our Branch once had a spate of plants being pushed off his top shelf. Eventually he traced the problem to a family of weasels that were chasing each other along the shelves and round the pots. Admittedly Brian had a reputation for being accident-prone, so this event may have been unique in the history of greenhouse cultivation.

MICE

Mice can be a nuisance. They nibble holes in bags, and chew into the tops of Lithops. They may even build nests in greenhouses, though I suspect that a greenhouse would have to be rather scruffier than even mine is before mice are attracted. Also, the smell of some of the chemicals that we used to use (and still do if we can get hold of them) is a serious disincentive to mice. Perhaps a cat patrol is worth having after all.

RATS

The same as mice, but in spades. I once saw a rat as big as a medium-sized cat, but that was in Ebury Square next to London's Victoria Station. My next door neighbour's other cat, Mia, is a tiny brindle queen. She is astonishingly athletic, and she regularly provides her owner with dead rats. She patrols my garden. She stands guard over me when I go outside, and she always comes to inspect visitors to my establishment. A friend in very rural Norfolk reports having had an invasion of rats, which ate all his seedlings except one species: *Delosperma ashtonii*. This plant is hateful to rats, and though the plant itself is not much to look at, there may be some merit in growing it in bulk for that reason.

DEER

Suzanne Mace once reported having found a fallow deer in her mesemb house. There's only one thing worse than that, and that is a goat. Her greenhouse is long and narrow and it has a door at each end. She was able to open the further door without spooking the animal, then she managed to drive it out before it could do any damage.

Birds

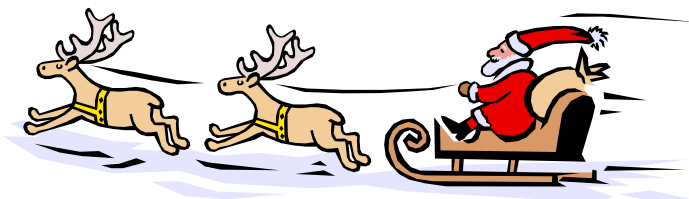
GEESE

A lady in Sussex found a gaggle of geese inside her greenhouse. That could have been worse than several goats. Worse, the geese attacked her when she tried to shoo them out. I guess she was at fault for leaving the greenhouse door open.

BLACKBIRDS

These are not commonly pests, but they have been known to peck holes in the tops of Lithops. They are connoisseurs, and will only favour the prized rarities. *Lithops optica v rubra* is their especial favourite. Blackbirds also love pulling the labels out of pots and throwing them around. Nobody understands why they do this.

Good Growing!



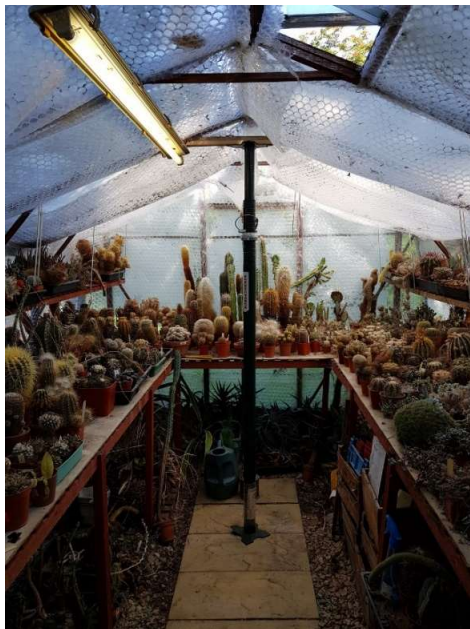


GREENHOUSE REPAIR

David Greenaway

My larger greenhouse, bought in 1996 from Alton Greenhouses, started sagging in recent years. This may have been due, at least partly, to my lack of rigour in painting the wood (western red cedar) regularly with preservative; that certainly helped the eaves to decay somewhat, causing slippage of the glass roof panes. I have partially dealt with that by reinforcing the eaves. In the case of the sagging I also wonder if there is a design fault in this otherwise excellent greenhouse. The long sides are splayed out, rather than being vertical as in all other greenhouses of which I have seen photographs. The current versions of the Alton range (now marketed by The Greenhouse People) all have vertical side panels.

Fearing total collapse of the greenhouse, I bought a Strongforge Acrow prop by mail order from Scaffolding Direct. I moved the strip lamp which was central along the roof, and then reinforced the strut under the point of maximum sag. I positioned the prop to press up on the strut, and then jacked it up as far as I could (see picture). When my friend (who did the original assembly of the greenhouse along with his son) comes again, I may try to jack the roof right up to its original position. Anyway, so far some of the sag has gone, and I have high confidence that the structure will not now collapse!



Prop jacking up the roof



Residual sag today