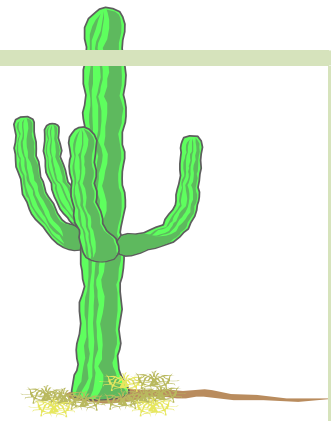


# Oxotica

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

December 2022

Volume 27, Number 2



## Chairman's Chat

Well, it's the end of another year in the life of the Oxford Branch. As the evenings draw in and the colder weather approaches, I look back on what we have achieved during the year. It is good that we have returned to normal branch meetings again and I have been very encouraged by some of our newer members coming along on a regular basis. It has also been good to see some visitors from near and far. I hope that everyone has enjoyed our programme of speakers and my special thanks go to them for sharing their talks and expertise. Don't forget that we hope to attract as many varied talks as possible so any ideas would be very welcome.

Our Branch events at Bury Knowle, Elder Stubbs and particularly Blenheim Palace Flower show brought us into contact with the general public again which was good after a decline due to the Covid restrictions.

The Branch displays attracted some very interested members of the public and our plants sales provided revenue for John to add to the branch coffers.

The Branch Show held jointly with the Mammillaria Society was a great day not only to exhibit our best plants, but to appreciate them in finer details. Special thanks to all those who came along and for the support we continue to get from friends from other branches. My particular thanks go to Gillian Evison and Robin Caddy for providing us with a photographic memory for us to peruse in the winter months.

The Branch is always looking for members to come on the committee - some fresh faces or new ideas are always welcome, so don't be shy, we don't bite.

I just end as normal in thanking you all for your support throughout the year - we cannot run a successful branch without you.

So best wishes for the festive season and good growing for 2023

*Bill Darbon*

## OXFORD BRANCH SHOW 11 June 2022

Well, what can I say? It has been nearly two years since we all gathered at Grove for our annual show. This time we shared the arrangements with The Mammillaria Society (sadly their planned 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary show had to be cancelled in 2020, like so many things over the last 18 months). So it was good that we had the opportunity to share the hall with them again this year.

Sadly due to medical reasons Kathy & Keith Flanagan could not join us, but the Mammillaria Society members put some super plants on the tables.

As always we are lucky that we get support from members from other branches who display their plants and I cannot thank them enough for coming along; we eventually had 17 exhibitors.

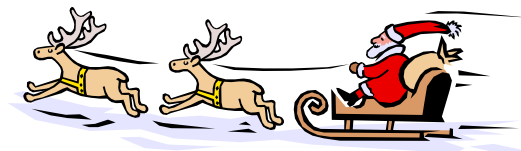
The two judges performed their task efficiently even with a few difficult classes; an special thanks go to John and Alan for writing the cards and recording the results. The plants sales were amazing not only the attending sellers, but in particular the branch sales table; so well-done Nick and Mary for coping with the constant throng of eager buyers. As usual the smell of the frying bacon attracted lots of folk again; thanks to Jules, Hannah and Martin for keeping up with the demand.

As some of you may know we did away with charging for admission some years ago, so it's difficult to give the exact number of folk that came; I understand that the car park was pretty full up by 10am. I did a rough head count at 11am and totted up 150 propleolk in both halls, some of whom had travelled a long way, so the reputation of the show still holds favour.

My personal thanks to Gillian for taking all the pictures which will be published in due course at <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjzTXGW>

A great day of succulent appreciation was had by all, and I hope that all who came along enjoyed the day.

*Bill Darbon*



**BRANCH MEETINGS  
FEBRUARY- JUNE 2022**

*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  
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.*

February 23     **DIGITAL PROGRAMME**  
South African Succulents  
Part 1 of 2

We are lucky that the BCSS Digital Programmes Librarian, David Greenaway, is one of our Branch members; along with other folk in the Society he has been involved in the digitisation of some of the BCSS collection of slides. He has picked one of the most popular sets to give this presentation, a programme created from images taken by Harry Hall, with a commentary by Frank Horwood.

March 23             **DEREK TRIBBLE**  
**The Huntington Symposium 2018**

Derek is a well-known speaker from Harrow and has travelled widely in Africa. This presentation is from a trip he made in 2018 to the Huntington Symposium and includes a visit to Steve Hammer.

April 27                     **JOHN CARR**  
**How I propagate Cacti & Succulents**  
*or*  
**Bolivia**

John is not well known down south - he has a wide interest particularly in South American cacti. He will hopefully tell us some inside

methods of propagating cacti. There is always something unusual to be found amongst his sales trays so perhaps tonight he may reveal some of his secrets as to how to tempt those seeds into mature plants. You may even be able to have a go yourselves.

May 25             **SIMON SNOWDON**  
**A New Love (Dudleyas)**

Simon is the BCSS Membership Secretary and Zone 3 rep. He has a wide range of interest in cacti, particularly *Copiapoa*, but tonight he will present his new passion of *Dudleya* plants

June 22             **PRE-BLENHEIM MEETING**  
**Members night**

Some members may be worn out from putting up the stand at the flower show, so do come along and share your experiences of things you find difficult etc. or just share stories with others in an open forum

*BD*

**Oxotica**

Copyright: Oxford Branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society. Published in June and December.

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.

<b>President:</b>	<b>Alan Ilott</b>	<b>01235 519543</b>
<b>Chairman:</b>	<b>Bill Darbon</b>	<b>01993 881926</b>
<b>Vice-Chair:</b>	<b>Nick Boden</b>	<b>07876 693021</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Curt Lamberth</b>	<b>07763 191072</b>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<b>John Watmough</b>	<b>01865 772709</b>
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Martin Doorbar</b>	<b>01635 268005</b>
	<b>David Greenaway</b>	<b>01235 762761</b>

**Oxotica Editor:** David Greenaway

(e-mail: [david@phonecoop.coop](mailto:david@phonecoop.coop))

**Branch web site:** <http://www.oxford.bcsc.org.uk/>

## THE GREENHOUSE

*by John Watmough*

A wise cactus grower (is there any other sort?) once observed that whereas army hats come in two sizes, Too expletive Big and Too expletive Small, greenhouses come in only one size: Too Small. This article is a warning to those newer growers who have successfully accommodated a small collection on window sills until marital disapprobation or feline depredation has forced relocation away from curtains and claws.

[British greenhouses are nearly always built to imperial units of measurement. Readers who were born after 1793 might, for easy comparison, translate ten square feet into one square metre.]

So our keen windowsill grower, not wishing to choose between his beloved plants and his wife, acquires a standard eight-feet-by-six greenhouse and erects it where the rhubarb once grew. How long does it take him to fill this greenhouse? Estimates range, in this writer's experience, from twenty-four hours (that grower had the flu) to ten minutes. One aggrieved wife noted, wryly, that the identity of the plants on the windowsills might have changed but their number and general awfulness had not.

At this point the enthusiastic grower, after reading *Cactus World* from cover to cover, attending Branch meetings, and visiting other members' collections, becomes infatuated with propagation. Being a beginner, he does not know that some plants are difficult, so all the seeds that he has purchased germinate and all his cuttings take root. Oh dear! He is acquiring a reputation as a master propagator, and his attempts at denial are ascribed to modesty. Experienced growers keep giving him seed.

Furthermore, his wife (who has never liked rhubarb) refuses to sacrifice her herb garden or her lawn or her scented border in the interests of expanding the *Stapeliad* collection. This is where the grower starts to develop low cunning. "We need to move house so that we can be nearer your elderly mother." He will just happen to find space to put up a twenty-by-ten greenhouse. Unfortunately...

Here are some examples to illustrate my point. Names are omitted to protect the guilty.

\*A. Hampshire. This grower bought a property including several acres (two and a half acres equal roughly one hectare) of land, on which he erected a *Crystal Palace* fifty feet by twenty. He supposedly reserved the last ten feet for his wife's tomatoes. No chance! Last time I was there there were crates of plants all along the walkways.

\*B. Rutland. One of our leading specialists once told me that there was no room in his 1400 square feet greenhouse even for one more two-inch (5cm) pot. He arranged a deal with a leading wholesale nursery to grow his seeds.

\*C. Yorkshire. A fanatic built a steel-framed unit 50 feet by 40. It is as high as the surrounding houses. He also stables his car in it as well as his fish breeding tank. His neighbours do not like him.

\*D. Gloucestershire. The national Agave collection is housed in a greenhouse measuring 5400 square feet. The proprietor has to take panes out of the roof every time one of his plants flowers.

\*E. Norfolk. The late Derek Bowdery bought a former African Violet nursery measuring 200 feet by 100 feet. Ventilation is driven by a fan six feet (183cm) across which is powered by its own diesel engine. The present occupant uses this space to propagate seedling cacti.

\*F. Gwynedd. A retired university professor has glazed over most of the Lley Peninsula. Every bench has independently controlled ventilation, watering and fertiliser. It can all be operated by telephone from anywhere in the world.

Sometimes greenhouse building becomes more interesting than the plants inside. Here are a couple of warning examples.

\*1. Yorkshire. As his collection expanded, this grower kept adding new sections to the end of his greenhouse. Each section was different in width and height from the previous one. To join them he manufactured triangular panes and custom-made joints and gutter sections. Last time I saw it, it resembled Monsieur Hulot's house in *Mon Oncle*. You had to go down steps to reach a higher level. It was a long and complicated walk to get from the door to the far end.

\*2. Hertfordshire. Instead of erecting one large greenhouse, as would have been the easiest thing to do, this enthusiast put up four smaller greenhouses in a square. Each contained its own internal water butt, and each had a photovoltaic panel on the roof charging a battery that powered a pump. Each water butt was connected to the other three butts by a spaghetti of plumbing, so that water could be transferred from any one butt to any of the other butts electronically.

As a general rule, if you are buying your compost ingredients by the lorryload and mixing them in a cement mixer, you may be advised to wonder whether you have bitten off more than you can chew. Also, remember that as your plants get bigger you will be getting older and feebler. There will come a point at which, through no fault of your own, the collection starts to become unmanageable. A lot of growers have pre-empted this sad state of affairs by specialising in smaller plants such as Haworthias, Crassulas or Mesembs. This enables the ageing fanatic to shoehorn even more plants into the same space, while carrying on with seed raising until, at last, he himself is converted into bone meal or worm fodder.

Personally, I prefer my greenhouses to be measured in six foot units of width. This allows for staging two feet (61cm) wide with a walkway also two feet wide. Thus I can reach over all my plants for inspection or admiration. I have visited greenhouses where the walkway is only one foot wide (30.5cm). Even my delicate bum acquires



spines in this environment. My original greenhouse is too low. Visiting Dutchmen scrape their skulls or get cricks in the neck. Extra height is good for the plants, too. Also, be aware that the cost of heating is an ever more important consideration.

Finally, remember that the world is bigger than your greenhouse (in some cases not a lot bigger.) My late wife said, disparagingly, that the cactus-growing hobby is an obsession. When I mentioned this in the course of a lecture, an elderly gentleman in the front row exclaimed “It's not an obsession, it's much more than that!”

JW

## JURASSIC COAST SUCCULENT



*Carpobrotus edulis* at Buddleigh Salterton

Photo: David Greenaway

While visiting our friends in Budleigh Salterton this September, a walk on the coastal path revealed a green swathe of the South African succulent *Carpobrotus edulis* subsp. *edulis* along the cliff slopes. In Gideon Smith's book *Mesembs of the World*, it says that it occurs in various part of the world, mostly along the coast at low altitudes. It also says that *C. edulis* and *C. chilensis* are naturalised in many parts of the world, particularly in regions with winter rain and hot dry summers, such as Australia and California; in Budleigh Salterton as well, apparently. Britain's first strip of Mediterranean climate!

But how did it get there?

Personal note – at the 1998 IOS congress in Cape Town we were all given a paper-back copy of *Mesembs of the World*, except that I was missed out somehow. I told Professor Smith and he immediately gave me his own hard-back version of the book, which I still have. A very nice man.



Cutting (rooted in water first)

## **HISTORY OF THE FILM SLIDE AND DIGITAL PROGRAMME LIBRARIES 2003 - 2022**

by David Greenaway

I took over the job of librarian from Cathy Darbon in 2003. It was to package up and send 35mm film slide sets by Special Delivery to BCSS branch secretaries, on request. They paid to cover the mailing costs and returned the sets Special Delivery at their own cost. Each was accompanied by a printed script for the presenter to read out at the meeting where the slides were shown. The script had to be returned with the slides. I took each package to the nearest Post Office Counters, and if I was out of the house when they were returned I then had to go to the delivery office for them.

In 2009 trials started, headed by Roland Tebbenham, to digitise the slides that were in good enough condition. I lent all the slide sets to the members who had volunteered to digitise them (Jim Gibbs and Victoria Burton had the most); I also scanned all the presenters notes for the use of those who were constructing the programmes. I eventually received the bulk of the digitised programmes on an external drive and added further programmes from time to time as they became available. David Lambie took over from Roland as leader at the end of 2016.

After getting the drive I copied digitised programme sets from it onto compact discs and sent them to branches as they asked for them. The cost to branches for postage and consumables was much lower than for film slides and they did not have to return them. A programme consists of files in three formats, Postscript and two versions of PowerPoint, and a presentation script; the PowerPoint files also included the script.

In April 2018 the film slide distribution was closed. In its time, I sent 124 parcels of film slides to 45 branches. To date I have produced 152 discs of digitised programmes and sent them to 38 branches in 80 postings - in the pillar box on our road, thankfully.

The demand peaked in 2017 at 17 postings and then fell away, only 7 in 2018 and 6 in 2019. I did wonder whether this may have been partly due to a general move in the market away from discs and towards streaming and downloads. Laptop computers, a vital link in projecting presentations, were getting slimmer and lighter and did not have CD drives. I sent 4 postings at the start of 2020, and then the Covid pandemic and the lockdowns struck. No programmes were requested for the rest of the year or in the whole of 2021. There were two orders from branches this autumn.



At the beginning of 2020, David Lambie decided that he had to stand down, and there has been no replacement leader. There have been no new programmes to add to the library since 2019.

For the future it seems to me that distribution of the programmes on disk will die away. Memory sticks are an option, but expensive. Derek Tribble suggested distributing the programme files by email/Dropbox. If branches could download the files themselves from the new web site then no librarian need be involved, but there may be security, financial, and copyright issues to resolve.

DSG