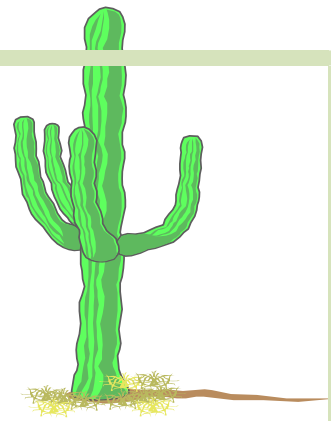


Oxotica

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

Summer 2022

Volume 27, Number 1



Chairman's Chat

Hi Folks. Well, I wonder where the year has gone already; it has been good to get back to meeting again at our regular monthly meetings and I hope that all those who have been able to come have enjoyed seeing other enthusiasts again.

There are of course still some interesting talks to come.

Thanks to all those of you who were involved in our two recent events, firstly at Bury Knowle and more recently (11th June) our branch show at Grove. Although the number of entries was down, there were some still some wonderful plants on display and it was good to see some of the awards being shared around. The branch is always grateful to members from other branches who come along to support the locals.



We had lots of visitors and the nurseries and our own branch plants sales tables were a throng of folk seeing what was on offer. The smell of the frying bacon is always a draw and thanks to the kitchen staff for all the effort. We shared the show with our friends from The Mammillaria Society and their section was well supported - I hope that they may have attracted some new members.

The main awards of Best Cactus and Best Succulent, pictured here, were won by Gillian Evison.

The Best Exhibit in the Mammillaria section was won by Barry Tibbetts from our neighbouring branch at Northants & Milton Keynes.



A report on our three-day display and plants sales at the Blenheim Palace Flower Show on 24th, 25th & 26th of June is on page 7.

As far as the National Society is concerned I hope that you all have the 3rd September in your diary as that is the date for THE National Show which is being held at the George Stephenson Exhibition hall, Newark Showground, NG24 2NY.

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 Mambillaria Society (sadly their planned 60th 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 to display their plants and I cannot thank them enough for coming along; we eventually had 17 exhibitors.

The two judges performed their task efficiently with a few difficult classes, an especial 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 folk 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

Oxford show 2022

Some Gillian Evison pictures



Xerosycios pubescens



Caralluma socotrana



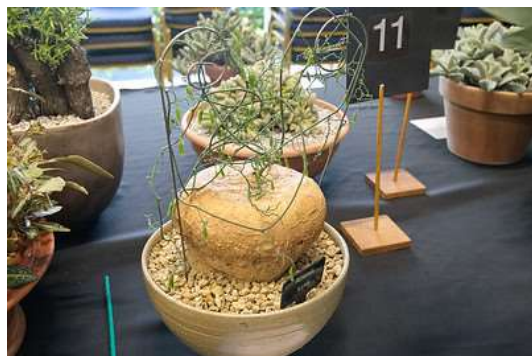
Eriosyce sandillon (aurata)



Copiapoa krainziana



Hoodia gordonii



Adenia kirkii



Echinocactus horizonthalonius

BRANCH MEETINGS JULY-NOVEMBER 2022

*4th 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*

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.

July 28 DR TONY ROBERTS Cultivation of Cacti & Succulents

We welcome Tony Roberts whom some of you may know from his previous talks on Gasterias. Tonight he will discuss and demonstrate his way of doing things and how to propagate plants to good effect; there will no doubt be samples of his results on sale. I am sure we will all get some useful hints.

August 25 KATHY & KEITH FLANAGAN Sulcorebutias in cultivation

Kathy and her husband Keith are friends from our neighbours at Reading and have visited us before when they spoke on Agaves. They are also well known in the Mammillaria Society, where Kathy is now the chairperson and they also distribute the Society's seeds. Tonight's talk will be on one of their other favourite groups of plants - watch out for some wonderful flowers.

September 22 STUART RILEY New and Collectable plants in the Haworthia world

Stuart is well known as the purveyor of plants from his nursery Plant Life; he will be at our show in June to tempt us with his display of plants.

Tonight he will talk about some of the newer plants and species that have become available and that he has seen in propagation - particularly in America and the Far East.

October 27 ALICE VANDEN BON Mesembs in habitat and culture

Alice is secretary of our neighbour at Reading and does a lot of publication layout work for the BCSS Journal 'Cactus World'. She has travelled to South Africa on a number of occasions to look at and photograph some of her favourite plants. So I am sure that we will enjoy her presentation and that it may bring back some personal memories from a trip I made in 2016.

November 24 AGM & SOCIAL Followed by a social get together with Xmas nibbles

Bill Darbon

Oxotica

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The Branch meets 7.30pm for 8pm on the 4th Thursday of each month (except December) at the Rose Hill Methodist Church, Rose Hill, Oxford OX4 4JP.

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POTS PANNED

by John Watmough

Al Laius, in the May 2022 edition of the Mamm Journal, which he edits, has written an article about pots that he obviously hopes will provoke a reaction from readers. (Editors will do absolutely anything to induce readers to demonstrate that they actually read their publications. Writers of articles feel the same anxiety; in their case even a little internet-style trolling would make them happier than the sensation that there is a nuclear wasteland out there.)

This particular writer, having been assured by his oncologist that he is still alive, is determined to prove to the world his continued existence. To begin with, he is congenitally lazy, and advancing years have added an excuse for his indolence. Therefore the very idea of using clay pots is anathema to him. Even in his decrepitude he can still carry a tray of plants in plastic pots, whereas a tray of earthenware pots would cause lumbago and damage to ancient hips and knees. Also, since your author is still in the habit of toting plants around, he knows from experience that you can always get one more plastic pot in a tray. Try that with clay pots!

It is easy to repot plants that have been grown in plastic pots. You simply ease them or push them out and they slide easily sideways out of the smooth plastic. It is not like that with clay pots. You generally have to ram a screwdriver through the bottom hole, while holding the pot upside-down and trying not to damage the plant if it suddenly drops. The plant is invariably unwilling to shift, because its precious root hairs have grown into the porosities of the container in a desperate search for the nutrients that have evaded it by soaking into the terracotta. The eventual disparity of strength between the enraged grower and the terrified plant results in an essential business part of the plant being ripped off, forming an unwanted lining in the now empty pot. If the plant is spiny or poisonous, its defence mechanisms will have further exacerbated the grower's ill temper. Sometimes the use of screwdriver and/or tyre-lever eventually proves inadequate, and the grower is compelled to surrender the last vestige of his dignity and self-control and apply his last resort: a hammer.

The grower's problems do not end there. It is possible to wash several dozen plastic pots in the time that it takes to render just one clay pot halfway decent. The clay pot will have chalk deposits, or green mould, or even lichens on the outside as well as the unfortunate previous occupier's valuable feeder roots on the inside. It is no use using caustic soda or anything similar, because that will soak into the earthenware and poison the next occupant. Some doughty growers use wire wool. But because the grower's

hands have already been spiked and scraped and possibly poisoned, the wire wool opens up sores. Most growers that I know deal with their dirty clay pots by piling them up at the end of their garden and hoping that nettles and brambles will cover them up.

Furthermore, clay pots are not cheap. The best (i.e. the strongest) date back to the nineteenth century. You can tell by the finger-and-thumb marks made as the potter's wheel turned, and by the occasional small pebble embedded in the clay. Such pots were properly fired, unlike the cheap Italian pots that are machine pressed and sun-dried like currants and tomatoes. After a couple of years of exposure to water and drought and sunshine and winter cold, these start to fragment and sometimes even begin to revert to their native clay.

The next part of the discussion concerns the ideal colour for plastic pots. To begin with, red should be avoided because the red coloration makes the plastic brittle in sunlight. I do not know why; perhaps it has something to do with the wavelengths of light. Red is also to be avoided, along with other bright colours such as blue and yellow, because the proud owner of a collection does not want extraneous slabs of colour to detract from the beauty of hoped-for flowers. Gordon Rowley used to use grey square pots, but that is because he bought a job lot after the Second World War. The grey colour was because the pots were made out of redundant naval components, and the hard plastic was the next generation of polymer after bakelite. So that leaves green, terracotta, or black.

Green is good. My only reservation is that our plants are also green. So a collection in green pots will tend to resemble a rain-forest canopy as seen from above: not enough differentiation between plant and receptacle. Terracotta is also good and most pots are made that colour. The only reason for that is tradition: old-fashioned fired-clay pots were naturally that colour. [*Terra cotta* is Italian for “baked earth”.] From a colour point of view black is best, being least obtrusive. In my case, I have preferred to pot up my favourite plants in black. When the late Malcolm Pym was agent for BEF Pots, I persuaded him to get 2000 black two-inch square pots made for me. [No, I don't have any spare ones!] These I use mainly for Conophytums.

I have not detected any difference in heat retention between black and terracotta pots. As far as I can tell, my plants are equally happy in pots of either colour, as I am in either black or brown trousers. Assuming that the reader is now convinced of the superiority of plastic pots, it has to be said that the ideal plastic is polypropylene. It is hard-wearing, flexible, and will stand being washed in boiling water. It is also recyclable, unlike some of the harder plastics. It is, though, not the cheapest material nor the easiest to obtain.



Martin Doorbar

SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO BLENHEIM

Members of the branch returned to The Blenheim Palace Flower Show on 24th 25th and 26th June. We set up the display on the Thursday for the judging on Friday and were very pleased to receive a **Silver Gilt Award**.



Special thanks to Martin, Bruce, David, Curt, Nick and John for helping steward the stand over the three day, we had lots of people attracted to the stand and managed to sell lots of plants and hand out information about the Society and in particular the Branch. The show attracts a lot of visitors over the three days from all parts of the UK so you never know if we get any new members but lets hope so. I felt that there were some of the major exhibitors missing from previous years, but overall a very good event, which publicizes the hobby to all concerned.

Bill Darbon



Richard Bush (1940 -2022)

Richard met us at Blenheim one year, when the Branch had its little gazebo 'out in the sticks'; he and I we were surprised that we lived in the same street in Wantage! His interest was cacti, not the 'others'. Richard's his eyesight prevented him from driving, so for many years I ferried him to events. He never wanted to come on the committee but was happy to help at plant sales and shows and took a turn each year on the monthly refreshment rota. I shall miss him, but I have good memories.

David Greenaway

I first met Richard through work at Harwell when we both worked in the main radiochemistry building, albeit in different groups for most of the time, (he was on an interview panel I once had for a promotion). Shortly before he retired, when the building was in the process of being closed down, we ended up in the same group for a while and I appreciated his sense of humour. However, I was completely unaware of his interest in cacti until David gave him a lift to a branch meeting after he had retired. He was very modest about his cactus growing abilities. I don't recall him entering plants at the Branch Show although he may have put the occasional plant in the monthly Table show as I recall having seen one or two nice cacti of his. He was always ready to help out with Branch activities. I shall miss him.

Steve Williams