



THE NATIONAL CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY
MANCHESTER BRANCH.

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EDITORIAL

It is always a little sad when the summer comes to an end and autumn begins to wear on. The activity in our greenhouses and around our window ledges begins to slow down. Most of our plants have been put to sleep by now, I say most because there are some succulents notably among the Mesembryanthemums which grow during our winter, due to their natural habits from the Southern latitudes. For the plants from our Northern hemisphere rest is now essential, and the best way to induce this, is to bring watering to a halt except where a plant obviously appears to require it, also bring the temperature down to the minimum required, 40°F being generally adequate.

Good ventilation must be given at every opportunity. Windows should be left open except when it is excessively damp or cold. It is certainly a mistake to keep everything closed during the day time in an attempt to keep the temperature up, let the plants breath.

Having tucked everything up for the winter there is little to do apart from the occasional inspection. Now therefore is the time to catch up on your reading so that when spring comes you will be a keener and more knowledgable cactophile.

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FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME.

December 10th. MEMBERS SLIDES - (Members are requested to bring along any slides of interest - they will not necessarily be expected to talk at length about them!)

January 11th (WEDNESDAY) - to be announced.

MESEMBRYANTHEMUMS

by C. Williams,

A number of workers wish to place the plants we know as Mesembryanthemums into the family Ficoidaceae. However, Dr. Jacobsen informs me that the term Ficoidaceae has not been validly published. Therefore, the plants must be referred to as being in the family Mesembryanthemaceae. I understand that this amendment is to be carried out by Dr. Jacobsen in his revised handbook. This, of course, brings us back to the position we are really in, where everyone, except for a few notable exceptions refer to the plants as Mesembs. The family name Mesembryanthemaceae dates back to the time when all the plants were placed in the genus Mesembryanthemum(L).

Paul Hermann, the director of the Leyden Botanical Garden paid a visit to the Cape of Good Hope in 1952, whilst on his way to Ceylon. He named the plants FICOIDES or FICUS AIZOIDES AFRICANA. Shortly after this, Breyne substituted the term Mesembrianthemums for Ficoides (mesembria-midday and anthemum - flower, thus Mesembrianthemums is Greek for midday flowers). Linne in his main work 'Genera Plantarum' adopted the spelling used by Dillen, who had substituted a 'y' for the 'i' and the term Mesembryanthemums soon came into common usage over the term Ficoides.

Mesembs, as we will call the plants, are mainly leaf succulents. The genera Brownanthus and Psilocaulen have very small weak leaves and are stem succulents. Other genera are leaf and stem succulents. In some plants (Mesembryanthemum, Delosperma etc,) the surface of the plant is covered with papillae, some species have a thick skin, some species have the leaves covered with wax whilst in other species, the dried skin of the previous years leaves cover the newly formed leaves. All these methods of prevention of excessive water loss from the plants allow the plants to survive in conditions which are fatal to most other plants.

As stated previously, the majority of Mesembs are leaf succulents. This is most obvious in genera such as Lithops, Conophytum, Pleiospilos etc. In a number of genera (e. g. Fenestraria, Ophthalmophyllum etc.) the plants have contractile roots which pull the plants down into the ground, only the tips of the leaves showing above the surrounding ground level. In the tips of the leaves are 'windows' which allow the light to enter the plant and so perform as if the plant was above ground.

The root systems of Mesembs are very varied; some, such as *Delosperma* have thick, tuberous roots, *Lithops* and *Conophytums* have very thin short lived roots. A number of species of *Delosperma* and *Nycteran-* thus die back during the resting period and regenerate from perennial root-stock. The resting period for all Mesembs is very long, during which a number of species (notably *Lithops* and *Conophytums*) appear to be dead. Some genera, for example *Cheiridopsis* and *Monilaria*, have two types of leaves, one type being produced in the growing period, the other type being a faultily united pair of leaves which completely encase the new leaves during the resting period.

The centre of distribution of Mesembs is South Africa but certain of the shrubby types are found in N. African, Arabia, Palestine and the Near East. A few species are found in Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru and California. In general each species inhabits only a very small area. This has led botanists to believe that what are at present looked upon as distinct species are in fact only different forms of the same plant. An example of this is the genus *Lithops* in which the number of species has been reduced to about 90 although there are numerous varieties of these species.

The cultivation of these Mesembs presents a number of problems, in general these being associated with the natural environment of the plants. In South Africa there are regions in which the rainfall is during summer, in others the rainfall is in winter. This leads to certain plants e.g. *Conophytums*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Monilaria* etc. growing in our winter and *Lithops*, *Argyrodermas* etc. growing in our summer.

Composts for Mesembs should be very porous and lacking in humus. The watering should be during the growing period only, during the resting period the plants should be kept perfectly dry. Even shade loving plants should be given as much light as possible in this country since in their native land the sun is much stronger than in these climes. Plants grown in this way will not grow into large plants but they will certainly live very much longer than plants grown in rich compost with heavy watering.

Frequent repotting is not required by these plants. If however plants are repotted all the old roots, dead twigs etc. should be removed, whether or not the papery skins left from the previous years leaves are removed is a personal matter, but it should be borne in mind that mealy-bugs hide amongst these dead leaves and can approach epidemic proportions in a very short time.

Watering as has already been stated should be sparing and carried out with care. Overwatering very quickly becomes evident especially in the highly succulent species such as Lithops, Argyroderma, Gibbaeum etc.,. These plants rapidly take up too much water, the result being that the body will split. Any plants which do split, should be kept dry for a time and from then on, very little water be given to the plant. The plant body which is formed the following year will not have the marks caused by overwatering. Watering should only be carried out when there are signs of new growth. In Lithops the old body dries to a papery sheath. Only when this has happened and the new body is showing should watering commence.

Propagation is done by either cuttings or seeds. Without doubt the easiest method is by seed. This method is exactly the same as has been described in many articles on cacti and succulents. Cuttings are a little more difficult and should be taken at the start of the growing period. If at all possible the cuttings should be taken so that there is a short length of stem below a pair of leaves. A little rooting hormone is advantageous.

The most common cause of failure in growing Mesembs is rotting due to over-watering. Too much water at the wrong time is the surest way of killing these plants I know. Dryness even for a year or more will be tolerated, but over-watering will not. Attention to the resting period moderate watering and the avoidance of cold damp conditions will add up to success in growing these plants.

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CRITICAL COMMENTS

by Ron Ginns.

Like Mr Williams, Mrs Ginns and I had the pleasure of entertaining Dr. Jacobsen to tea. Fortunately it was one of the few sunny days of this unpleasant summer and we were able to have tea on the lawn. He was interested in my collection of Haworthias and congratulated me on growing them in sun instead of shade as is normally done. Readers may remember one of his habitat slides of a bright scarlet Haworthia. Whilst none of my plants could compare with this, there was a very wide colour range including pink, red and bronze. Plants under these conditions do not grow as quickly as those in shade but they look far more attractive. One of the beauties of the other succulents is the wide range of leaf colours which are nearly as beautiful and far longer lasting than the flowers of the cacti.

We disagreed on the growing period of Haworthias. He maintains that they grow in winter and rest in summer. I keep mine dry in winter and water in summer without ill effects. In fact I found last winter that even a moist atmosphere led to rotting in some of the softer bodied species. Moreover they all flower in summer which indicates that they are growing.

I dont know whether Mr Williams was writing on a different slide of an Oxalis plant from the one shown here. This was *O.succulentum*, also in my collection. The interest of this plant is that it is the leaf pedicels that are succulent, not the leaves or even the stem as in *O.sepalosus*.

Pilea globosa, a relative of the nettles, I also grow - not only does it scatter its pollen but also its seeds. This I discovered when I found a bonus of young *Pilea* plants coming up in pots far away from the parent. Fortunately they do not sting like the nettles.

Mention of *Pilea* as a 'windowed' plant made me consider other plants that have adopted this device. We usually think of the Mesembs in this connection, particularly *Frithia* and *Fenestraria*. Many of the Haworthias are windowed - *truncata*, *maughanii*, *nitidula*, so too are the despised *Senecios*. A large pan of *S.herreana*, often called *S.gomphophylla*, always attracts attention with its fat leaves, coloured red but striped with lighter coloured windows looking like a panful of ripe gooseberries. I am surprised that this plant is not more often seen. Collectors who grow only cacti miss a lot of fun by neglecting the less common succulents, - and I dont refer only to the Yorkshire T.C.P.s. Why not try the really succulent *Pelargoniums*? Whilst *P.gibbosum* and *P.tetragonum*, often seen, are only semi-succulent there are species, now available, with stems as fat and spiny as those of a cactus.

With regards to Mr Nyman's note that *Echinopses* are early flowerers, I never get any early ones. In fact some of my species flower quite late in the season, even August and September. A new species from Prof. Cardenas has flowered in July for the first time. This is *E.calorubra* and the flower, long tubed as usual, was a good deep red, breaking away from the usual whites and pinks of the genus. With such a good coloured species there is really no need for the hybrids of which so many are now available.

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NORTHERN AREA WEEKEND AT GRANTLEY HALL.

by G.M. Taylor.

The idea of a 'Cactus Weekend' is a relatively new conception so far as this country is concerned. All, organisers, lecturers, experts and novices had some qualms that things might not be quite right for complete enjoyment. In fact, despite unavoidable hitches, the programme was interesting and reasonably varied; the lecturers expounded lucidly and with interest (not one fell asleep despite the persuading comfort of the arm chairs provided); the 'experts' found that their knowledge was far more restricted than they thought and the novices found that they could air their lack of knowledge without any embarrassment.

If you are thinking that I am endeavouring to persuade you to come to the next one - I am, because I am sure that you would enjoy it, even though, at first sight the programme might not be your 'cup of tea'.

I freely admit that the thought of 1½ hours on 'Adromischus' disturbed me considerably. The fact that it lasted an hour longer and that I was still interested must prove my ignorance of a group of plants of which my wife and I must have the wrong 12 out of a possible 100. I hope to append a brief note on this genus in the next issue.

The same lecturer, Bryan Makin, also talked at considerable length, again fully illustrated with slides on another of his pet genera Conophytums. His knowledge was profound but the facility with which he put over his subject contributed greatly to the enjoyment as did his most excellent 'close-ups'. With greater availability this will be one of the popular genera within a very short period.

The appearance on the scene of Gordon Rowley is always somewhat darkened by his insistence of appearing 'canned' or 'taped' one had to make the most of his ready willingness to talk when 'off stage'. A 'straight' lecture from him could last in ones memory for a life-time if only he could be persuaded! Needless to say his two items were of interest to all. However one does hope that in the future he might be persuaded to expound on a subject allied to the basic elements of classification, a point upon which many of us are now requiring reassurance as much as information.

'Hova in the Jungle' and 'Jungle Hova', we had both from Clive Innes went a little further than his usual straight lecture on Epiphytes as the title admitted many other interesting Xerophytic and allied flowering plants. Colourful and interesting

- oh for some elastic gussets to extend the greenhouse, for he insisted that many of the plants could be kept and flowered under our 'usual conditions'.

I leave until last two items as they both illustrate the dire necessity for further weekends and for attendance at them. Firstly the 'Showing and Judging discussion with practical test'. A fearsome item for all. The novices afraid to display their ignorance and the 'experts' afraid to make a fool of themselves in public, especially when they might be called upon to judge at a show. All were conscious of the machiavellian look in the eyes of the organisers - mischief afoot! After almost an hour of studying plants in 6 different classes (sufficient time to change ones mind!) we were ready.

The first class was adjudicated, the experts agreed! Most of us realised that Aloes could be difficult - unhappily we did not fully agree with the experts. We know now. We had learnt and were prepared to bow to expert knowledge. The next class was for 6 Mammillarias, our task to seek out 3. One was rare and looked right (+ mealy bug) another rare but not 'true to type in habitat' - if you had ever seen it before. There were problems. On adjudication it was found that the experts were at variance - horrors! How had the novices fared? - little better; when we read out our results almost a full permutation on 4 numbers (out of 6) emerged, but a computerised answer based on all the results would have produced an agreeably correct result. (Does this mean that we should have 30 judges at a show!)

One had to be present to appreciate the enjoyment which we got out of it - even if one was 'right up the pole' in as the event was conducted in the same light-hearted spirit with underlying serious intent of a game of chance, a game of roulette for matchsticks. It was a very pleasant way of learning. More please - with more time for discussion.

This brings me to the last item. It wasn't on the programme. Discussion. The official programme over-ran its allotted span and discussion was most unfortunately eliminated to allow a surfeit of slides. This is a subject of vital importance such that it continued through meals and long, long past the hour of usual retirement. None of us had to go home, all were heard interesting and interested until morpheus called irresistibly in the early hours.

Roll on 1967. We may hopefully look forward to another restful but instructive weekend. This time in Lancashire?

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GRAFTING CACTI SEEDLINGS.

by E. Barnes.

I graft seedlings 24 hours to 2 months old onto *Selenicereid* or the thin triangular shoots of *Epiphyllum* hybrids which I prefer.

I place 4 or 5 rooted *Epiphyllum* cuttings in a 2½" pot filled with porous compost (I use 1½ measures sand to 1 measure leafmould plus some charcoal.) which is then stood in a shallow tray containing a small amount of water. By keeping the level of the water topped up the cuttings soon become turgid and are ready to be grafted upon once good growth is noticed. I find the best time to graft is mid April to mid September.

The seedling is prepared first, making a clean cut just above the rootstock using a razor blade which has been swabbed with methylated spirits. This is to remove any trace of grease or oxide which may be present on the blade. Of course, the blade is left aside for a few moments to give the meths time to evaporate before commencing work.

The stock is cut next, with one clean, horizontal stroke approximately ¼" from its apex. For the grafting of very young seedlings a great amount of sap should be present if they are to succeed. If the stock secretes little sap or is in poor growing condition the graft will fail.

The seedling is now placed on the stock directly over the central vascular tissue. No method of holding the graft in place is necessary.

The whole operation of grafting must be carried out as quickly as possible as the cut surfaces must not be allowed to begin to dry before they are brought together. If this happens both stock and scion must be re-cut.

The graft is placed in shade for a few weeks or at least until the seedlings begins to grow properly. As the cut surfaces are embryonic a complete union takes place within a few days.

A good guide to recognising a successful graft is a seedling which is bright green, and has remained turgid since the time of grafting. If it is noted that the seedling is shrinking a little, or, when touched with the finger it is found to be very soft, it can be assumed that the graft has failed. The seedling can be recut and re-grafted onto another stock if this is noted in time but the chances of success are reduced.

I get about 60% to 70% success with this method of grafting young seedlings. Their growth rate is pushed up enormously. For example after 3 or 4 months from the time of grafting one can have Neoperteria or Copiapoa $\frac{3}{4}$ " tol" in diameter which can be re-grafted onto Trichocerei etc. or rooted as cuttings.

Good plants can also be obtained by rooting large pieces of Cerei and grafting upon the young side growths which they produce, but with this method I find it is better to wait until the seedling is about $\frac{1}{4}$ " diameter before attempting to graft. The graft is held in place by a piece of elastic band passed over the seedling and pinned onto the stock at each end, using cactus spines, very little pressure being needed. This appliance is removed after about 3 days. When the seedling has reached a reasonable size the side-growth complete with graft can be removed and treated as a cutting.

With all grafts it is important not to spray them for a few months as rot may form at the union of the two plants. When a good callus has formed there is little fear of rot, providing that the graft was made well above the soil level.

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COMBINING BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE.

by H. Gaulton

On Monday 12th September I had to go to Kettering, Northants on a working visit expecting to last four days, this worked out to plan but there was some interesting side-lights Colin Partington and Austin Fitzjohn had said 'you must call on Ron Ginns if you are going to Kettering', so I managed to work a call in, Desborough is so close to Kettering that it was easy, I was lucky, Mr Ginns was in, Mrs Ginns busy at the typewriter and there was a cup of tea in the pot if I would like one. I was made most welcome, had a good look round his really choice collection, saw many plants that I have not seen before and was able to sort out some of my doubts on plant naming. He has 3 greenhouses, spaced well out, there is that much other growth in the large garden that you can hardly see one greenhouse from another, he is about to erect a new fourth greenhouse. I had another bit of unexpected luck, Mr Ginns said 'are you coming to the meeting', I gladly accepted the invitation and on Wednesday 14th attended at the George Hotel, Kettering. I was made most welcome, was introduced to the members and the first question I was asked was 'what will you have', the meeting was a small one compared to our own but homely, I was

not left out in the cold, there is no tea break but you can nip out if you so desire at any time to the bar and bring into the room a drop of 'tonic'.

The meeting after the usual business was on Members slides and the informal commentaries on the slides and the friendly leg pulling on one another's photography and naming was quite entertaining. The meeting was from 7.30 (7.40 start), there was an attempt to close at 9.30 but everyone was too interested for that, it eventually closed at 10.0 p.m. M

My job finished p.m. Thursday 15th, careful route planning showed that it would not be out of my way to call at Mr Tyrells at Welford on the way back so I took a chance on finding him in as his literature stated 'Nursery open by appointment', lucky again, there he was in his nursery, there was just one big snag, it was the 'monsoon season' in Welford, we know it rains in Manchester but we can't better what was coming down there, a very quick dash of probably 50 yards and I was soaked, however, in a matter of seconds all that was forgotten, I was so engrossed in what was before my eyes that I forgot my discomfort, I was only in my working togs so the state of me did not matter.

We were amazed at Mr Tyrells plants at our June lecture but that was nothing, I saw his fabulous Zygocactus, I don't think any other word would describe it, I saw many grafts, all flourishing, hordes of seedlings and some really choice plants. His largest greenhouse with a centre staging is a 'jungle' of really super, lush, very much alive plants, I even saw an Ariocarpus stood in a saucer of water and soaked but really looking full of life. I saw the plant which was used for the demonstration at Manchester, a Pereskia with 5 or 6 grafts on, we saw it with its clothes pegs on in June to hold the grafts, now pegs are off and each grafted piece has a score or so of tiny new stem segments on, its really flushed with life and will soon be a lovely big standard plant, it is the variety 'Winters Tale' with the attractive notched stems.

I called at the wrong part of the season to buy plants but there was still plenty to buy, time was pressing, I had a home to go to so I had to leave but not without a few plants and a couple of those coveted Pereskia's to grow-on for grafting experiments.

One thing is certain I am going to Mr Tyrells again, whether it is a special journey or just a passing one.

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'IT SEEMS TO ME'
(RANDOM JOTTINGS..... by YOUR CHAIRMAN)

A STANDING INVITATION. Following the apparent success of the Open Day held at my home on July 31st when 37 members of the branch visited my collection, I am more convinced than ever that visits to members greenhouses are one of the best ways of getting to know other members; and chatting with them in a pleasant atmosphere on matters connected with our hobby can only result in a stronger and more vigorous approach to the life and activities of the Branch. In view of this I feel that a Chairmans Open Day might well become an annual event in our programme and would express the hope that other members with representative collections might arrange similar events next summer. In the meantime I would like every member to know that they are welcome to call on me at any time for a chat and a look round my collection, the only proviso being that they first phone me (WALKDEN 3525) in order to make sure that I will be at home. I find more and more of my spare time being taken up by society meetings etc., but Sunday is still a day when members are likely to find me at home!

THE COMMITTEE'S SINCERE THANKS. are due to the one in every three members who took the trouble to fill in and return the Questionnaire circulated in our July issue. It is a sad fact that the apathy to which I referred on that occasion still persists with the result that only 40 questionnaires were returned out of approximately 130 sent out. Acting on the assumption that the 40 helpful members of the branch represent a fair if somewhat small cross-section of our membership, your committee have analysed the replies received with some rather interesting results:•

- 1) It appears that over half our membership have relatively small collections (i.e. less than 300 plants) and that almost a third of our members have no greenhouse and grow their plants on window sills - 3 people are gallantly striving to house collections in cold-frames.
- 2.) Practically 80% of members are generally satisfied with our programme and activities but over one third of members find Saturday meetings inconvenient and almost all these members opted for Wednesday as an alternative meeting night. Your committee feel that this is a sufficiently large proportion of members to warrant support and accordingly it has been decided that of the ten meetings to be held in the Milton Hall next year, five of them will be held

on Saturday as in the past and the remaining five on Wednesday evenings. This will be an experimental arrangement for one year and a careful check will be made of attendances in order to decide whether the change to Wednesday evenings results in better attendances.

- 3) Regarding content of meetings it was apparent that non-technical talks on individual genera and slide shows are by far the most popular items; there was a smaller demand for technical talks by botanists and surprisingly Quizzes and Brains Trust type meetings interested hardly anyone.
- 4.) The Branch appears to be equally divided on the question 'to show or not to show' but I was concerned and a little alarmed by the number of ultra-modest members who confessed to an interest in showing but felt they had insufficient good plants! Your committee will doubtless make provision for some class(es) for the more common plants in smallish pots at our next show in an attempt to tempt the faint-hearted to give their plants an outing in the Deansgate sunshine next year.
5. The final question on the list explored the possibility in addition to our normal monthly meetings:- the possibility of holding informal meetings in members homes received little support but 80% of members wanted more Open Days in members greenhouses and 75% wanted to take part in visits to Nurseries in private car parties (expenses to be shared.)

Certainly your Committee has now a far clearer idea of members wishes and already they have started planning your 1967 programme bearing in mind the views expressed.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE LADIES OF MANCHESTER BRANCH who did so much to make the first Northern Area Meeting to be held in Manchester, such an enjoyable affair! I was delighted at the magnificent response to the Committee's bullying and cajoling which prompted a number of our lady members to provide such a varied and appetising 'spread' for the delegates to the meeting. Even so the running buffet would not have been so successful had it not been for the hard-working ladies who actually kept the buffet 'running' by their untiring efforts brewing tea and washing plates. I know they were far too busy to hear the official vote of thanks made to them, so lets give those ladies an extra cheer!