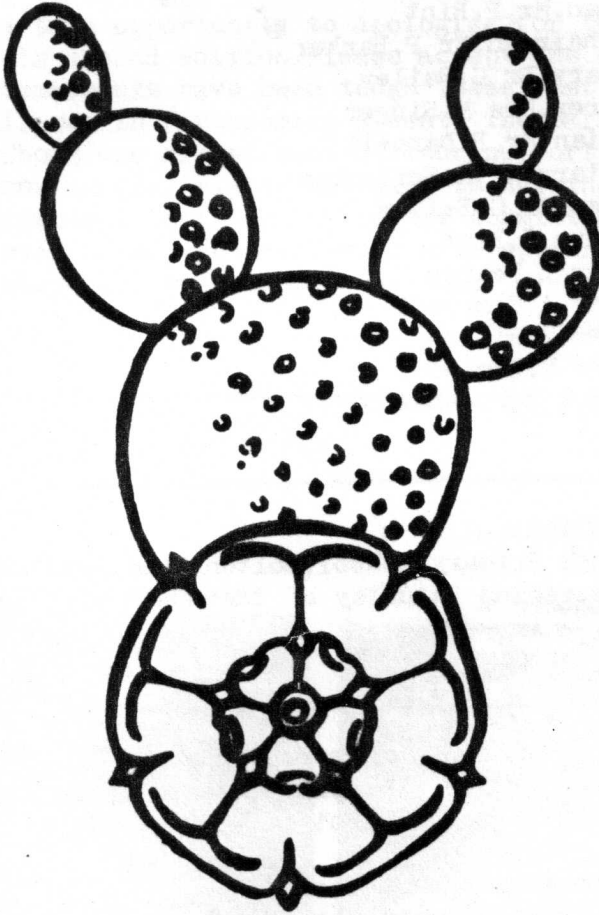


B.C.S.S.
MANCHESTER BRANCH



NEWSLETTER

BRITISH CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY, MANCHESTER BRANCH.

NEWSLETTER, SPRING 1984.

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Mr L. Percy

Mr A. Campbell

Mr J. Hinton

Mr H. Ormrod

Mrs Scrimshaw

MONTHLY MEETINGS:-

St. Augustine's Primary School, Bolton Road, Pendlebury.

At 7.00 p.m. second Saturday of the month with exception

4th August.

General Enquiries and correspondence to:-

Dr G. Bailey, 4, Hargate Close, Summerseat, Bury, Lancs, BL9 5NY

Telephone Ramsbottom 3570.

Newsletter correspondence to:-

Mr L. Percy, 36, Hillingdon Close, Hollinwood, Oldham, OL8 3QJ

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EDITORIAL

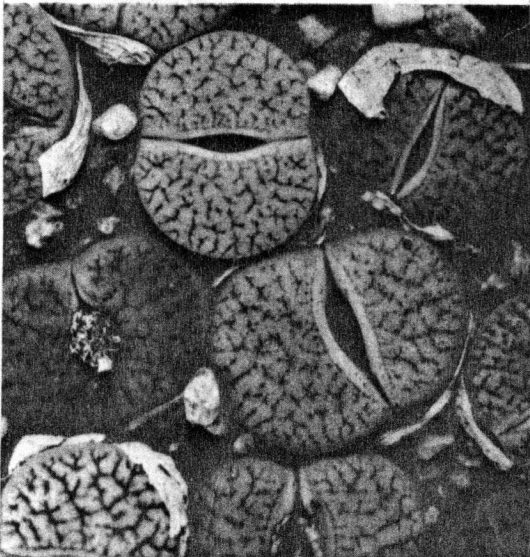
At last, slightly late, is the second issue of Manchester Branch Newsletter. In this edition articles on cultivation, plants and people can be found as well as the regular features.

Once again I will make a request for articles. This venture can only succeed if support is forthcoming. Please have a try at writing something.

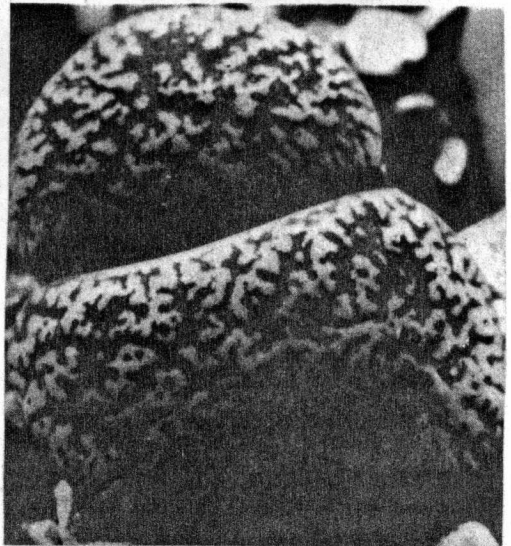
May I take this opportunity to apologise for the late appearance of this second edition. Please accept the excuse that my work commitments have been tough these last few months. As you will see in Forthcoming Events The Salford and Rochdale Shows are almost upon us. Your support is needed not only in showing your plants but also in helping out during the shows. Contact Geoff or any of the committee for details. The next edition of the Newsletter will appear around October and hopefully will be a bumper edition.

Les Percy.

▼ LITHOPS pseudotruncatella var. dendritica



▼ LITHOPS aucampiae



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

MANCHESTER BRANCH:

Shows. 11th - 12th August. Salford Show.
22nd - 23rd August. Branch Show at Rochdale Town Hall.

Your support is needed for both these events, don't think that your plants aren't good enough to show, have a go, you'll be surprised. Details on both these events can be obtained from Geoff Bailey.

Branch Meetings. 14th July. Choice Globular Cacti of South America. Graham Charles

This promises to be a most interesting meeting illustrating some of the best cacti from S. America.

4th August. Desert Music and Continental Nurseries 1982. Derek Castle

Something different here, the first half features a slide tape show which should be very interesting indeed.

8th Sept. Cacti of Arizona. Sonia Barker-Fricker.

We welcome back Sonia for another talk on N. American Cacti. If her previous lectures are anything to go by this should be one of the highlights of the year.

BOLTON and DISTRICT CACTUS CLUB.

Meetings held at Small Lecture Hall, Central Library, Bolton.
Details from Philip Barker (Wigan 56440).

July 17th. More Euphorbias. A. Pritchard.

August 14th. Plant Auction.

Sept. 11th. Travels with John. J. Henshaw.

October 9th. The Aristocrats. B. Thompson.

Do you still use clay pots? I can get hold of good second-hand clay pots in most sizes. If anyone is interested contact Les Percy for details.

On Sunday 3rd June twenty seven members and friends braved the elements and assembled in a downpour for the start of our outing. We saw little on the way except rain and spray and over the Pennines low cloud which enveloped us. As we got down to the plains again a rare sight appeared, what was it? The sun of course. It was struggling to appear but as we approached York it turned out lovely and remained like that all day. I think the rain was only laying the dust for us. We dropped three off in York to see the lovely city then on to Walker's Nursery at Barmby Moor just off the York by-pass. It was a bit crowded in the greenhouses but members filled boxes with a lot of plants leaving many bare spaces on the benches. Once we had left the nursery we began to feel that we short of something, we were past our dinnertime and our tummies were reminding us of the fact. We stopped at a pub and ate our butties and quite a number didn't bother opening their flasks preferring a glass of the cooler stuff. We were soon back on the road through Malton and Pickering to the village of Wrelton to stop at Cruck Cottage. Once again many boxes were filled, I noticed a number of cristate Pachypodiums were in amongst the other goodies. On our way again, no rush, we had plenty of time we stopped at the top of Sutton Bank where there is a large car park with all conveniences at our disposal. Continuing down Sutton Bank I had warned the driver that it was a steep 1 in 4 hill. He was surprised how severe it was, but all was well and we soon arrived at Whitestone Gardens to browse around a good array of plants from seedling to mature habitat plants. Monies must not have run out yet as I noticed quite a lot of plants were bought. Most of the vacant seats had now been occupied by boxes of plants, however in our excitement we did not forget that we had dropped three off in York, so back through Thirsk and on to York. Here we met with problems, enjoyable though. We had a tour of York, four or five times around the city centre. We had approached York from a different direction this time. Eventually we found them, sitting on a wall, just about the time we had estimated. I remember saying to Brian when we were on what looked like a hopeless tour of York, "Is it absolutely necessary that we pick them up", (they were his family). Now we were on our way home and as we drove up through the Pennines things returned to the state we had left it in, with rain and cloud. But the day had been first class and it had stopped by the time we reached Manchester. Those of you who did not manage to come with us, why not come along with us in the future, you are missing a lot even if you do not buy plants the tour and the company is worth a lot.

The genus *Astrophytum* are to be found in N.Mexico and into Texas for *A.asterias*.

There are four recognised species,all with several distinct (and not so distinct) varieties.They are characterised by white epidermal flakes,in some species virtually covering the body and large yellow flowers.

A.asterias is the smallest member of the genus and is probably the most popular,although it is not the easiest of plants to grow.However the flowers which have a red centre more than compensate for this.

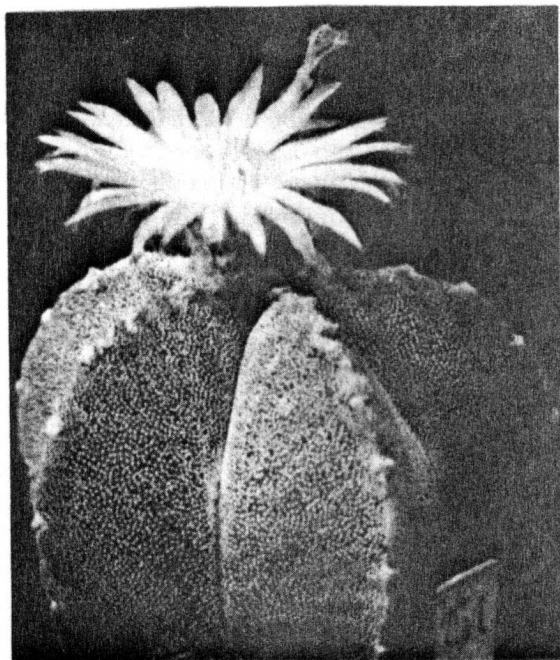
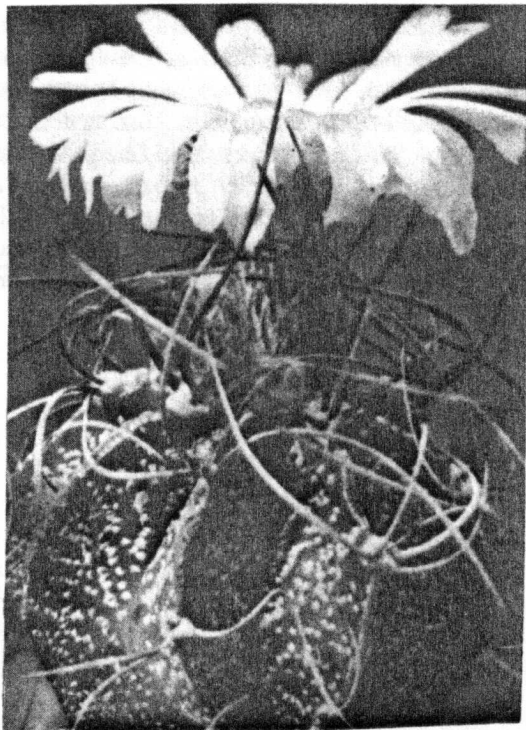
A.capricorne can be found under a variety of names (*A.senile* referable here).These plants are much easier to grow than *A.asterias* and are probably the most floriferous member of the genus.They to have the distinct red centre to the flower.The plants are characterise e by long twisting spines.Those found without are more than likely hybrids with *A.asterias* or *A.capricorne*,as all four species readily cross with each other.

A.myriostigma and varieties such as *coahuilense*,*quadricostata* *columnare* are amongst the most beautiful members of the whole cactus family.They have the most dense covering of the white flakes (with exception of *A.myriostigma f.nudum*).The flowers are slightly smaller than the above two species and are yellow throughout.

the final member of the genus is *A.ornatum*.This is the largest one,in habitat certain individuals have reached over six foot in height,however don't worry about yours suddenly taking over the greenhouse,as they would take centuries to attain these dimensions,remaining globular for many years.Unlike the other members of the genus they have to grow to about grapefruit size before flowering.

All these plants are very desirable and make worthy additios to any collection.With the numerous varieties all readily available a sizeable collection can be built up.They all grow readily from seed and with the exception of *A.asterias* which needs to be carefully watered present very few problems to the grower.

ASTROPHYTUM ORNATUM



ASTROPHYTUM
MYRIOSTIGMA

The weekend of June 2nd and 3rd saw the visit of Professor Desmond Cole and his wife Naureen to Manchester. They are both very interested and particularly knowledgeable in the genus Lithops. To my knowledge this was their first visit to this area. Both they and we had eagerly awaited their arrival, arrangements having been made at fairly short notice. They had been invited to the I.O.S. congress in Germany where Des had been asked to address the members on the topic of Lithops. Consequently they decided to visit old friends and meet new ones during a fortnights trip around England. This was to occur before going on to Germany. It had fallen quite fortuitously at the end of the Lithops growing season in their Lithoparium.

They are a homely, friendly couple who were very anxious to share their knowledge with anyone willing to converse about it. Never once did they attempt to look down upon people less knowledgeable than themselves, nor did they try to force anything upon anyone. They were a pleasure to meet.

On the Saturday evening people came, as a result of an invitation to hear Des talk about trips into Namibia (South West Africa) and Namaqualand in the north west part of South Africa. Anybody who was unable to come or thought it would not be interesting was a real loser I'm afraid. It was a first rate evening. First we were treated to many slides of stapeliads growing in habitat, a host of shots of local terrain and the occasional animal. The photography was absolutely tremendous. In spite of Des claiming that his knowledge about these plants was scanty we were held spellbound by the variety, colour and information that was presented to us. We also learnt just how specialised the natural pollinators of stapeliads have to be. Production of seed by artificial means is virtually impossible without recourse to microscopes and various other surgical instruments. They are a very special breed indeed made just right by nature for the microscopic job on hand.

This was followed by an excursion into the realms of Lithops looking at the multitude of facial characteristics, their habitats the ways of pollinating in cultivation for true seed, the many hours of searching along with the frustrations and jublations at failure and success. They do hope to do many more journeys into unexplored territories and who knows what may be awaiting them around the next corner. We were treated to explanations of how their vehicle is specially kitted out for the deprivations of days away from civilisation. What a strong beast the Land Rover type of vehicle has to be to survive the 'roads' it has to travel on. Tarmac surfaces are not very much in evidence in those wild regions. Many of the areas are so inaccessible that the only

satisfactory mode of transport would be a helicopter. Any offers??

Finally Monday morning saw them move back towards southern England, thrilled at having met many new and ardent succulent-ophiles and friends in this corner of the north west. We await the next opportunity they may have of returning to us with unbounded anticipation.

GRAFTING:

Les Pearcy

Love them or hate them grafted plants are becoming an integral part of our hobby. Now that it is illegal to obtain habitat plants of many of the more desirable species an alternative is now becoming available with seedlings grafted onto Pereskopsis. The growth rate is phenomenal and in the majority of cases without the usual bloating of the scion. In two years Ariocarpus Obregonias, Aztekiums etc., can be grown to a size that would normally take about ten years.

Another advantage of using Pereskopsis is that unlike using Trichocereus or any of the usual grafting stock, the size of stem used need only be about one to two inches long and can therefore be buried. (After a couple of years the stock tends to shrink and become very woody anyway.)

Unlike conventional methods the chosen subject is normally grafted at a very small size, even two week old seedlings can be successfully used. This is another advantage as the majority of these species can be germinated fairly easily, the problems coming at a later date. How many times have you germinated Strombocactus and Aztekium like cress only to find that they have disappeared after a month.

Pereskopsis are very fast growing plants and you will soon build up a sizeable stock. One important point to bear in mind is that being tropical plants they tend to need a minimum of 50°F. They do tend to become hardier once they have been used for grafting. However just to prove the opposite I have brought several of these grafts through the last two winters and I only keep my greenhouse just above freezing.

For those of you who do not like grafted plants many of the normal subjects will reroot fairly easily when taken of the graft.

If you want to build up a collection of the more desirable species remember only seedling raised plants are legal and often grafted plants are the only alternative.

The methods for tip grafting onto Pereskopsis will be discussed in a future edition of the newsletter.

Although I don't claim to be anything like an expert I do meet some in the branch who are just beginning to grow succulents and asking the same questions as I used to ask myself years ago.

It is the simple questions that are sometimes most difficult to answer. The two commonest are:-

- 1) "What kind of compost do you use?"
- & 2) "When and how much do you water?"

1) COMPOST

For the members who have heard of John Innes Composts 1,2&3 it seems surprising to them that few members use one of these ready mixed soils and so save all the worry of mixing.

It is true that the John Innes Laboratory set about making a compost which would do away with the necessity for growers to mix their own composts with varying success and which would be scientifically accurate for most general plant needs.

The true John Innes is very good, but the snag is that so many firms started to make it who used indifferent materials. The principal difficulty was loam - part of the John Innes compost that is difficult to get in some parts of the country - and there is nothing worse than buying a sack and it proving unsatisfactory after potting up all your plants. So, many people went back to making their own.

Then came the 'soilless composts' - Levington was the first I think. These, so far as I can see are a mixture of peat, sand and a concentrated fertiliser base mixed with it.

Two of the main snags with these for cacti people is that

1) Heavy plants topple over in the pot as the mixture is too light to hold the weight upright.

2) The fertilizer base gets used up after about six months and one has to feed the plants by adding more nutrients.

3) After leaving off watering for the winter the compost is so dry it is difficult to wet it again - plants sometimes float out of the pot complete with a solid ball of compost.

It is fair to say that nowadays a number of firms produce this soilless compost and some are more suitable for cacti than others being heavier in some cases and supporting the plants better.

I have tried all these things and now stick to my own mixing, which I emphasise, is varied according to the kind of plant I am potting. I suppose it is really the same as the soilless compost but with more sand and grit:

50% SAND - very coarse, almost 'grit' in consistency.

50% PEAT - sphagnum moss.

CHEMPAK - as per directions on packet.

MURPHY'S GAMMEXANE POWDER - small quantity to protect against vine weevil.

I mix it all up thoroughly and make small quantities as I need it. This works very well with me. How I vary it according to the type of plant I am potting, is for example, adding more peat for epiphytes. Some vermiculate is also useful for increasing moisture retention. For plants needing extra drainage, like some of the mesembs., and stapeliads the percentage of sand is increased. Finally, it must be remembered that peat in itself is more or less inert—that is no nutritive value—nor has sand to any great extent. It is what you add that feeds the plant.

I change my compost every two years or of course when a plant needs potting on. I have no doubt that other fertilisers will serve the same purpose but I use Chempack.

Part 2, dealing with watering will be featured in the next issue

BOOK REVIEW:

The Cacti of The United States and Canada by Lyman Benson.

How do you review a lifetime's study in just a few lines and do the book justice?

This is probably the most complete work on North American cacti ever published, Lyman Benson has spent over fifty years researching the cacti of U.S.A. in the field, literature and herbarium specimens.

Although it is possibly too involved for the average collector it has been written in a manner that is equally readable for the amateur and professional botanist alike.

The book itself is split into two main sections, dealing with the Biology, Taxonomy and Ecology in the first part and with the cacti themselves in the second.

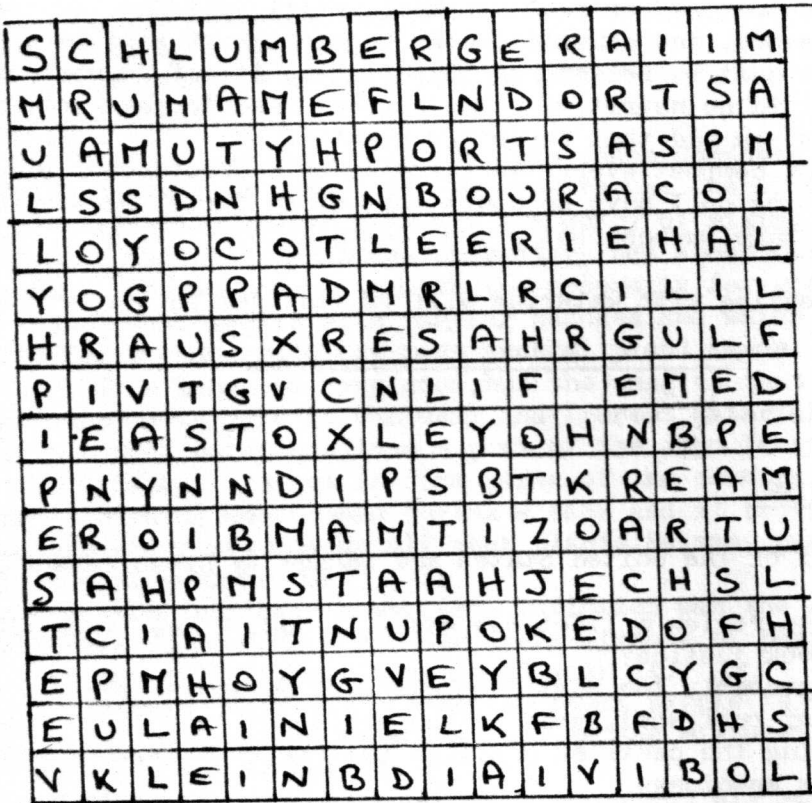
There are 977 photographs of which 194 are in colour, 135 distribution maps and 165 line drawings contained in 1044 pages.

The only drawback is the price, at around £55 it is not the cheapest cactus book around. However the Branch Library has a copy, why not put your name down and take a month to browse through this excellent book.

L.G.P.

WORDSEARCH.

Allan Campbell.



Can you find the following genera of Cacti & Succulents in the above squares.

- MAMMILLARIA
- COTYLEDON
- OPUNTIA
- LOBIVIA
- ASTROPHYTUM
- HOYA

- EPIPHYLLUMS
- SCHLUMBERGERA
- CARNEGIEA
- ECINOCEREUS
- STAPELIA
- KLEINIA