

EDITORIAL

Time for the newsletter after the unavoidable gap last month. I am pleased to say that I have had an immediate response to my plea for little articles, reminiscences, notes, experiences call them what you will. A few ideas are as follows;

- a) How I came to find the hobby.
- b) Sales and wants.
- c) Something unusual happened in the collection.
- d) The first time of flowering a plant.
- e) My favourite 6 plants and why.
- f) Something I read somewhere.
- g) A visit to a Nursery somewhere in the country.
- h) A visit overseas to a place where our hobby plants grow wild or are cultivated in gardens.
- i) A programme on TV that others may have missed.
- j) Something a little more detailed.

There, that's ten ideas and there are many, many more if you put your mind to it.

I mention d) above from personal experience. There is not much more exciting, even after 40 years in the hobby, than a bud appearing on a plant for the first time. The sense of achievement is immense, even though it is nature that has excelled. To have helped a plant through to adulthood leaves you with a warm glow of thrill. I well remember a time early in my participation in the hobby when I was still learning. I had a lovely little plant of *Copiapoa barquitensis*. I had gleaned a morsel of knowledge that *Copiapoas* were reluctant flowerers in the northern climes due to the lack of constant sunlight enjoyed in Chile. I

didn't realise that this did not include ALL the genus. I was absolutely thrilled that my specimen herewith aforementioned burst into splendid bloom. I mentioned it at a branch meeting to some of the experienced hobbyists. I was met with blank stares which left me puzzled. Months later the reason for the lack of response became obvious. However it would have been much better if somebody had said, "Well, that's smashing," or maybe "Well done, that's good growing."

I promise you no proud achievement will go unnoticed. Added to that your joy will inspire others. So come on all and sundry, share your experiences and inspire others, especially those who are new to the hobby. Your favourite plants, no matter how humble you believe them to be, could be a real inspiration to someone else.

I have actually had a very pleasing achievement this summer. Over twenty five years ago I purchased a plant of *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum* from Blackburn's nursery which was situated just outside Preston. It was a grafted plant, strongly spined, blue bodied, a really handsome little specimen. Through the years it has grown sparingly but never once shown any interest in flowering. Books told me that it was shy to flower at an early age so I waited patiently. This year, through the miserable summer we experienced, it finally reached a state of maturity. I was busy using up a roll of film and had a few exposures remaining. Whilst checking round for something different I noticed a small spot of colour in the crown of the above plant. Closer inspection revealed that all important phenomenon, the first flower. Knowing my work schedule would probably deny me the

opportunity of seeing the full fruition (and it did) I snapped ~~the~~ early stage.

Geoff tells me he has flowered his specimen/s fairly easily but that matters not. This was the first time MINE had flowered. So share your experiences with us all.

**CACTI, COMPUTERS AND THE
*****INTERNET*******

This article has been submitted by Peter Hendry who joined our ranks just a few short months ago. Thank you, Peter.

As a recent returnee to the hobby of collecting Cacti 7 Succulents, it is doubly interesting for me to try to marry the two hobbies of collecting these fascinating plants and computers.

First of all, from the computer side of things, there is the basic record keeping of the collection. This I find easily achieved by using a database of my own design from the Lotus Approach package. It really is quite simple to produce a format which includes anything and everything from identification of the plants to records of flowering or whatever you may wish to record. In the past my records were usually scribbled down in some old exercise book - thankfully that's a thing of the past.

Also, within most Word Processing packages are various charting functions which makes keeping temperature records etc. simple for those so inclined.

Next there is for me the most interesting aspect of today's computers: The Internet or World Wide Web as it is sometimes known.

The Internet is basically an enormous reference library of information and our hobby is very well served. As most of you are aware, our National Society maintains a web page. This is basically a notice board for the society and similarly several of the local branches have web pages or sites, as they are sometimes known. Most of the other National Societies also have sites which facilitates the speed of information internationally. However, from my point of view at present, the most interesting sites are those of various groups or individuals who have created sites showing photographs of their plants. There are many such sites and the numbers are increasing monthly. At present the Austrian Cactus Society's page features dozen's of excellent photographs and there is also a very good site featuring Gymnocalyciums. Other sites of specialist interest give the latest taxa and field number information.

Then there is access to various overseas (mainly USA) catalogues; many of these carry illustrations and are quite interesting and some of the European seed dealers are also represented.

There are sites dedicated to individual genera of both cacti and succulents and most of the specific societies have web pages. At present I have at least 30 sites for reference.

So basically if you have a computer with a modem, or are thinking of buying one in the near future, get onto the Information highway, it's well worth while, you never know what you may discover on this ever expanding resource.

A very interesting article I'm sure you would agree. With so much emphasis on computers nowadays this could lead to some useful interchange.

Please let me have any responses to Peter's offering and let me know of any useful site addresses that people could visit.

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

Whilst preparing the editorial I made reference to one of several booklets produced by the NCSS (the National Society as it was known prior to 1983). None of these publications are in print any longer but from time to time they become available due to bereavement and loss of interest in the hobby. Below I list a few worth looking out for especially if you are newish to the hobby. They may not be totally accurate on all counts but then who is ever 100% correct in what they say, plus the fact that ideas change with age.

1. THE SUCCULENT EUPHORBIAS

by David V. Brewerton.

This gives an introduction to the Euphorbias with cultural hints. There are notes on 31 of the more popular species which are accompanied by line drawings/photos of each plant described. There is nothing highly technical which makes it a very readable source of information

The author has produced a single page Forward where he outlines his intentions for writing this small volume.

Published by the NCSS in 1975.

2. ALOES for greenhouse and indoor cultivation.

by W. C. Noble.

There is no forward to this issue but it does contain a short introduction to Aloes. It goes on to give a one page message about Aloes in medicine

before introducing 40 species plus 3 hybrids. Most of the plants offered to the reader are dwarf or small in size with just the occasional plant that would outgrow the greenhouse after 30 years of pot cultivation.

The accompanying photographs and line drawings are of acceptable to good quality. A variety of other reading is offered at the end for those who wish to delve further.

Published by the NCSS in 1976

3. LITHOPS

by Brian Fearn.

Following the Preface the author goes on to give an introduction to the plants which outlines the history of the genus. The readers are also offered a key to help them to their way round the genus.

Plants are arranged alphabetically and there are inaccuracies especially in the light of the monumental work done by Prof. Des Cole. A small number of plants are wrongly combined but that does not deter from the value of the publication. Photographs, all bar one, are from the author's collection.

A long list of references concludes the work. Almost at the moment of publication a new species was discovered. This is appended with a footnote which caused the finder (Des Cole) some anger at the presumption shown.

Published by the NCSS in 1981.

4. GYMNOCALYCIUMS

by E.W. Putnam.

This is a splendid contribution to the knowledge of this well loved genus by a man who was considered to be greatly well informed in all aspects of these plants. He was a real gentleman

of considerable talent who owned a comprehensive collection of Gymnocalyciums. The Preface and introduction are full of interesting details.

All the species known at the time are discussed with clear photographs to back up the writing. A serious attempt is made to clear up the disconcerting plethora of names by reducing to synonymy the invalid descriptions. A small appendix and map complete the volume.

Published by the NCSS in 1978.

5. THE ADENIUM AND PACHYPODIUM HANDBOOK

by Gordon Rowley.

This booklet is almost 100 pages long and lives up to the usual mastery of an extremely talented man. The opening is a little more detailed than is usual for small booklets but is clear and concise in its layout. The key to the Adenium obesum subspecies is straightforward while the photos that accompany the short descriptions are impressive.

The Pachypodium section is laid out in a similar way but has a diagrammatic table to explain the habit and flower forms.

There is a section that deals with cultivation. Propagation is dealt with clearly, including such facets as stem and root cuttings, meristem culture and grafting techniques as well as seed raising.

Published by the BCSS in 1983 (or after).

6. THE 1ST 50 HAWORTHIAS

7. THE 2ND 50 HAWORTHIAS

by John Pilbeam

Both are excellent booklets by a master of the genus. He attempts, successfully, to clarify some of the naming myths that have abounded through the decades. Clear line drawings accompany the simple descriptions.

The second book has a bibliography covering both editions.

Both books are laid out alphabetically enabling a species to be found with ease.

Both published by the Succulent Plant Trust, the first in 1970 with a reprint in 1977, the second in 1975.

8. 50 CHOICE MAMMILLARIAS

By Brian Fearn & Les Percy.

The first 10 pages are given over to general matters including distribution, cultivation, propagation and pests and diseases.

The main bulk of the booklet is the 50 species chosen by the authors, displayed in alphabetical order. Alas, some of the photography is less than adequate, but the overall format is useful.

Each specimen is treated in the same way with information about the body, flowers, fruit and seeds clearly tabulated. Type locality and habitat locations are displayed. Finally a glossary is included to help ordinary folk understand the more technical terms; a useful idea.

Published by Abbey Brook Cactus Nursery in 1979.

9. THE GENUS REBUTIA

by Brian Fearn and Les Pearcy.

This is the second contribution by these two people. For those new to us Les used to be a Manchester Member and still occasionally visits us when up to see the in-laws.

The layout follows the same format as the previous volume. Photography, accompanied by line drawings, is much improved. A variety of check lists accompany the text and some attempt to show synonym is attempted at a time where names proliferated due to multiple collections by many well known cactus explorers. To that end a list of field collection numbers for all the eminent explorers of the era are included at the back.

Published by Abbey Brook Cactus Nursery in 1981.

from seed, especially seed brought back from her various jaunts. She was also very generous to her friends, among whom I count myself lucky to be numbered. I have quite a few plants that came from her seed raising programme. One of which I am particularly proud is a lovely grafted plant of *Mammillaria tetrancistra*. When she knew I was looking for this plant she immediately promised me one of hers. Typical generosity.

She was also an extremely accomplished photographer. Many examples will be found if you look back through your journals. At National Shows you would always be able to find her eyeing the exhibit, working out the best angle for light, fighting with the crowds to take the shot as they were about to walk across the front of her camera, and always in attendance, George to aid and abet.

IN MEMORIAM

A card of sympathy has been sent on behalf of all the members of the branch.

It is with great sadness that I announce the untimely death of a lady who has treated this branch to some wonderful lectures about her travels, especially in the States. During her sleep in the early hours of November 2nd. **Sonia Barker-Fricker** slid peacefully off this mortal coil. First and foremost our thoughts and commiseration go to George, her husband and best friend. Having nursed her through a succession of illnesses he will be devastated to lose her while they were both still in their prime. Words cannot express the deep feeling they shared but memories will surely paint an everlasting backcloth to the rest of his life.

Though I never had the joy of seeing her collection I know from the words of others that it was something to behold. She took great delight in raising plants

*****SOME INTERESTING***** **MAMMILLARIAS PART TWO*

Continuing with the theme of the *Lasiacanthae* I offer you the second instalment of this exciting group of small, somewhat demanding group that can be grown to perfection with a little care, but more of that later.

7. **M. schiedeana**. A plant that slowly, so slowly clumps with age. It is characterised by the golden yellow radial spines that wrap the plant body. Pale creamy coloured flowers are easily produced each year, more especially in Autumn. Though these are not spectacular the ensuing bright red seed pods provide an eye-catching display in mid Winter.

There are said to be two forms of this plant. The first, more often seen clone, is the one that offsets from a small size, eventually producing a mound some 6 inches (15 cms) in diameter. The second clone is one that can produce a single headed plant up to just over 4 inches (11 cms) across.

This plant can become susceptible to basal rot. This is due to the lowest areoles sinking to or below soil level, allowing moisture to collect round them. The resultant stagnant condition can be fatal.

The German popular name translates as "golden mouse".

A whiter form exists that is known as forma plumosa. Apart from being much lighter the spination is much more feathery in appearance.

8. **M. dumetorum.** Not every authority recognises this as a species but it is distinct enough to merit consideration. It is undoubtedly similar to the previous species but the spines are much paler and, in the specimens I have seen, a little glassy in appearance. Certainly they are not as soft as in *M. schiedeana*. They tend to have considerably larger tap roots than a similar sized *M. schiedeana*. They are susceptible to rot in exactly the same way as their "golden cousins". It would appear from a large wild-collected specimen resident in the Ashington Collection that offsetting occurs from the tap root rather than from the body of the plant. Upon that I cannot refer further until mine attain a suitable size to compare with this revelation.

9. **M. humboldtii.** Like *M. herrerae*, this plant shows a remarkable resemblance to a golf ball. Some authorities claim it to be much swifter in growth than *M. herrerae* but my small plant, seed grown and of many years, does not uphold the

graft it will make an absolutely magnificent clump, as witnessed in the plant once owned by Harold Gaulton. With extreme age I have no doubt it will make a small clump in the eco-habitat we provide for it.

In contrast to the gleaming white spines, the flowers that eventually poke their way through, are a brilliant carmine colour. Should you be lucky enough to set seed the pod is red.

10. **M. solisioides.** To speak in the understatement mode, this is a difficult plant to grow, a real CHALLENGE to anyone brave enough to try. Put in the vernacular, it's a real swine. Seed is difficult to obtain and even more difficult to raise. The young plants are painfully slow to grow but amazingly swift to damp off.

Mature plants (how mature does one get?) have the nasty habit of surprising you by turning up their toes (or roots, as you wish) when at the flowering stage. Buds are prone appear in winter when there is never enough sun to aid their formation. However if you can fool a plant for long enough they might change that habit for a June/July show. The temptation to assist them with water in Winter is certain cacticide. They dislike our grey skies, pining for the warmth of sunny Mexico.

They require a very, very, very, etc gritty compost and the gentlest whiff of water. If you have the joy of actually witnessing full floral production you will be regaled with a small yellowish flower with a red mid stripe on the outer petals.

If you succeed in growing one to old age you might be rewarded with a small clump. It is a beautiful plant and my present specimen is grafted in the hope of greater success. It is reaching the record set at two years. Right, now confound

theory. As a plant on its own roots it is extremely reluctant to offset but on a me by announcing that yours is 6 inches across, flowers with ease and you regularly drown it in water!!!!

11. **M. pectinifera**. At one time this was known as *Solisia pectinata*, a genus erected by Britton and Rose. Superficially it looks similar to *Pelecyphora* (as it was known) *asselliformis* crossed with *M. herrerae*. Some years ago it was transferred into *Mammillaria* by David Hunt, a move that is generally accepted.

A globular, solitary plant, it shows some affinity to *M. solisioides*, and some of its difficulties in cultivation. Spines look like a comb hiding the plant body. It is easier than its compatriot but care with soil content and water are essential. Growing to a 5cm ball it bears a taproot of equal girth. On a graft it will exceed the normal size.

The flowers are borne part way down the side of the body (up to a third of the way below the shoulder of the plant). They can be the best part of an inch long but half the length is hidden in the space between the tubercles. Colour is white to pale pink with a darker midstripe, pink in hue. Seed pods are, unusually for *Mammillaria*, green and barely protrude from between the spines.

12. **M. lauii**. This is the most recent addition to the series. In the late 70's David Hunt named and described this plant in honour of the indefatigable Alfred Lau in recognition of the tremendous work in the world of cacti he had performed. Three forms were described.

a) *fa. lauii*. Found at an altitude of 1,000 to 1,600 metres, it is a plant of clustering habit. It is covered in a vast array of spines that intergrade from central to radial with no evident join. The spines

tend to be glassy white and quite stiff.

b) *fa. subducta*. This occurs at a lower altitude at about 800 m. There is more evidence of a central spine in this form. Spine coloration, in my experience, is yellowish and they are very stiff.

c) *fa. dasyacantha*. This is to be found at a slightly higher altitude from 1,400 to 1,700 m. In this form the spines are much more hairlike and softer. They are almost invariably white in colour. The individual head size in this form is much smaller and they form clustering mounds.

Flowers are a deep pink colour and occur quite early in the growing season. It is an easier plant to grow than many of the *Lasiacanthae*. Though Hunt allies it with *M. humboldtii* it is also close to *M. schiedeana*. Also growing in close proximity is *M. carmenae*. It is recognised that there is grounds for believing there to be a natural hybrid between *fa. dasyacantha* and *M. carmenae*. I believe I have one. It looks very like a yellow spined *fa. lauii* and the flowers are much paler pink.

To summarise the group: There are two outstanding aspects about the plants.

a) they are slow growing in comparison with most cacti.

b) the majority have extensive tap roots. Both these characteristics have led to the early demise of many a plant. You cannot achieve a superb show specimen in a few years. Patience and TLC are essential ingredients to success. The neck of the plant (where body adjoins root) is a vulnerable point open to infection and rot. A thick collar of grit at this point is compulsory for success. A very open compost, well gritted, will allow you to water them (most that is) without being mean. Do not leave them standing in water for too long. They are a beautiful, rewarding group to grow if you follow these simple guidelines.

SMALL AND SLOW GROWING

Here is something for those of you who are interested in succulents as opposed to cacti and lack a lot of space.

Agave pumila. This has long been recognised as a miniature amongst a group that can attain considerable girth. It can with age reach 6 inches in diameter. Because it is rarely offered by nurseries it has become somewhat sought after. It has been known to cultivators for just over a hundred years.

The blue-grey leaves are thick and very succulent and end in a dark spine. I know nothing of its flowering propensity but, like all Agaves, it is terminal. It is sparing in the production of offsets.

Cultivation seems to be reasonably easy though I have to own to the fact that I have had two plants at one time or another and lost both. Possibly your greatest challenge could be tracking down a specimen.

Aloe descoingsii. Aloe is an extensive genus with plants varying from tiny plants less than two inches across to huge trees. The vast majority grow within the African continent with other representatives coming from Arabia and the surrounding islands and from Madagascar.

A. descoingsii comes from the last mentioned. Although many of the islands plant populations require higher temperatures this little Aloe is not quite so demanding and I have kept it safely even though temperatures have dropped to 45 degrees Fahrenheit for short periods.

The plant is low growing with the rosette rarely exceeding 2 to 2.5 inches. Some clones form clusters of twelve heads or more while others stay as tiny groups.

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The leaves are a dull green with numerous off white raised dots over the leaf entire surface. The leaf edges bear widely spaced, stout, triangular teeth but these tend to be absent near the leaf tip. The flower stem is about 6 inches long ending in a small number of orange red bell shaped pendant blooms.

Cultivation does not seem to prove too taxing and offsets will root readily should you so desire to increase their numbers.

Crassula mesembryanthemopsis. This is a distinctive member of the genus and one that is widely sought. The fleshy, angular, blunt tipped leaves are blue covered in a whitish grey covering. They form small rosettes which slowly multiply into a low, dense clump. Under the plant a turnip shaped rootstock forms.

In cultivation prudence demands you keep the rosettes away from any lasting dampness to prevent rot. A thick neck of grit round the neck of the plant is highly desirable. White flowers are produced from the centre of the rosette in late autumn or into winter.

A free draining compost is recommended and then you should not encounter too many problems. Propagation from seed is easy; the availability of seed, rare. Leaf cuttings, if taken with extreme care so that the base is not torn, give a success rate of around 75%.

Euphorbia obesa. This is a readily available plant that grows very slowly. If you are lucky enough to find a nicely marked plant it will grow into a beautiful "tartan" globe.

In habitat, Cape Province, South Africa, it reaches a diameter of about 4 inches (10cms) and can become slightly columnar in aspect. In the splendid surroundings of the clement greenhouse it can achieve greater dimensions but will never outgrow its welcome. With age they can become corky around the base, a natural progression to support the weight of the bulk above.

Plants are single sexed (dioecious) necessitating two opposite genders to produce seeds. Seed pods are three celled and dispatch the resultant seed explosively so it is essential to place some mechanism in place to prevent missing the ripened seed which will surely explode hither and thither when you are not looking. In common with most *Euphorbia* flowers, they do nothing florally to excite the beholder. Fresh seed germinates readily and grows agreeably well within the first year and then slows down to a pedestrian rate..

Haworthia maughanii. The genus *Haworthia* is a popular one, the section *Retusae* very much sought after, and *H. maughanii* and *H. truncata* very popular indeed, belonging to the section *Fœnestratae*. They are closely related to one another, even merely varieties according to some sources.

Originating from Calitzdorp, in Cape Province, the plant forms a rosette of flat topped leaves which would normally be buried to the very tip of the leaves. The windowed ends allow light to penetrate thus facilitating photosynthesis. In cultivation it would be unwise to ape nature, thus they are grown with the entire leaf section above grit level.

They are undemanding in cultivation, but some moisture during the autumn/winter season is necessary. They possess thick succulent roots which are prone to dry up if left too long dry. Rerooting is usually not too difficult but much of the growing season can be lost in the exercise.

Propagation from seed is easy but slow. Two or three leaves are usually produced by the end of twelve months. After 18 months they are readily recognisable. Flowers are typical of the genus, white on a simple 12" high stem, arising from the centre of the rosette.

TO TAKE YOUR MIND FORWARD TO SPRING CLIMES

My catalogue fell with a thud on the mat,
With bills and reminders and such stuff
as that,
(but they're bound to remind me again
next quarter,
and I can't miss new types just to do what
I oughta!)

So with egg on my envelope, I scribble
and figure,
Just how to afford four or five a size
bigger,
And how can I get my order in faster,
While the marmalade turns my cold toast
into plaster. *Anon.*

Now that people are responding to
requests, can I ask that the be sent to me
at: 313, Manchester New Road,
Alkington, Middleton, Manchester M24