

EDITORIAL

At long last a few minutes to settle down at the computer to put together a newsletter. Well the weather isn't prepared to relent at the moment so flowering in the greenhouse, though steady, isn't rampant. The pattern to date is very reminiscent of last year so I wonder if we will see anything in the way of long hours of sunlight. I did hear a whisper the other day of a prediction of a ninety day heat wave, peaking in July, the thought being very pleasant.

Growth continues in virtually everything in the greenhouses, some slow others more steadily. Each year seems to bring something new to flower fruition. This year it has been an easily flowered plant, the "new" genus *Cintia*. It is a plant that flowers at a relatively young age and it just happens that mine is in its third season. I know Brendan has flowered several specimens and has endeavoured to set seed on them. Without a shadow of doubt they are far better grown as specimens on their own roots. On a graft, as all the ones I have seen offered for sale are, they become grotesque in a very short space of time. They split with tremendous ease, then offset leaving a mish mash of a plant.

Whilst on about *Cintia*, it is perhaps worth mentioning what a strange mixture it is. Externally it bears a resemblance to *Neowerdermannia*, with its areoles sunken into the axils of the plant. The flower, which

unfortunately I was unable to photograph due to my camera being in for overhaul, bears something of the appearance of both *Mila* and *Copiapoa* so where it really fits into the scheme of things I am unsure.

Also flowering for the first time is one of my two specimens of *Aloe plicatilis* which I acquired a few years ago. It does not have to reach a great size to achieve this distinction. Both mine are in five inch pots though they are due to be moved on as soon as possible.

Another first was a small plant of *Echinocereus triglochidiatus* with a single beautiful orange flower. I was surprised at this because all previous attempts had produced large clumps with never a sign of fruition, yet here we had a three inch high single stem bursting with pride.

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL BUT SMALL IS FOR SURVIVAL by Ivor Crook

Two articles back to back in the latest edition of *Aloe, the journal of the South African Succulent Society* summarise the effects the climate has had on the evolution of succulent plants in North America and South Africa. Anyone who has visited or seen photographs of the two areas must be struck the gross differences in scenery. South West USA being dominated by tall *Yuccas* and *Cerei* and Huge barrel-like *Ferocacti* at one extreme and South Africa by small *Lithops*, *Conophytums* and other small *Mesembryanthemums*. So why the big difference? After all, a desert is a desert and characterised by lack of rainfall. Two factors seem to be responsible for differences between the two regions. Whilst rainfall is low in both areas, in the American deserts it

is unpredictable from year to year. Droughts may last from year to year and are broken by torrential downpours. Large plants, such as the Saguaro that can store literally hundreds of gallons of water, are thus at a great advantage if there are two or even five years between bouts of rainfall. In South Africa, rainfall is still scant but small, dependable and predictable amounts fall each rainy season.

Secondly, the size of the plants influences the pollinator of the plant. Small Mesembs are pollinated by small insects which cannot fly great distances. This frequently leads to small isolated gene pools. Larger Cerei are often visited by humming birds and bats which can travel over much greater distances in the course of their daily foraging.

These factors help to explain the great diversity of the succulent flora in Southern Africa and why it has one of the highest densities of plant species anywhere in the world with over 5,000 species of succulent plants living in one of the world's inhospitable regions.

DEVELOPING LINKS WITH THE GERMAN CACTUS SOCIETY (DKG). By Ivor Crook.

At the Warrington Cactus Mart. Held recently some of us were fortunate to meet up with a visiting member of Astrophytum, the Leipzig branch of the German Cactus Society, **Herr Konrad Mueller**. Konrad is an atmospheric chemist with the University of Leipzig and was visiting Manchester to perform some experiments on our world famous cloud and rain. Since his return home have kept in touch via

e-mail and we have discussed how we could forge stronger links between our two societies.

It seems a good starting point would be to compile a list of people who would be interested in communicating with members of the DKG, their special growing interests and a list of the magazines they receive. We can then, hopefully, start to put people in touch with others of similar interests to exchange seeds, young plants, information and other ideas. If you are interested to learn more please contact me through any of the means listed below. I would be particularly interested to speak to anyone who can speak German reasonably well.

Ivor Crook

Thank you Ivor for both articles. I could not agree more with you about the content of the second article. We are in grave danger of becoming totally insular. The hobby is suffering seriously from lack of contact, friendliness, call it what you will, and as a result it is contributing in part to the downward trend of the membership in more recent times. I know time can be scarce, I suffer from it myself, but we really should reach out to one another and share our wonderful hobby. So come on, let's respond to Ivor's efforts on our behalf.

BRANCH SHOW

As you are aware, through your schedule of events for the year, we are holding our annual show at **Daisy Nook Garden Centre this year on the weekend of June 26/27**. This could be a wonderful chance to show a much

larger general public than we normally attract how vast the range of plants really is. No matter which Garden Centre you visit the variety is poor, misinformation is rife and the deception, through artificial flowers being inserted or stuck on plants, is an anathema to me (and I'm not alone). I earnestly entreat you to either enter a few plants where you can or visit the event at some time during the weekend to see the display or offer a few moments of your time. Show schedules are available this evening.

ECHINOCEREUS FROM MY VIEWPOINT.

This article was received some time ago with the possible thought of inclusion in the Society Journal. It was refused for whatever reason so I thought it might get an airing here. You might find some of it controversial and are invited to reply through these pages. Alas I have lost the name of the correspondent but he no longer lives in the north and will not be offended if you disagree with him. Having seen his plants however it obviously works for him. (Ed.)

I believe Echinocereus to be an extremely rewarding genus, in part because of its floriferous nature. Some bear magnificent large blooms while others possess smaller delicate flowers.

I was drawn to plants of this genus over 30 years ago when I grew a few in my general collection. Between 1968 and 1973 I began to build up the number of Echinocereus I was growing. I enjoyed the flowers and decided it would be a challenge to learn more about the plants because I could find little specific information about them in the literature at that

time. It was said by quite a few growers around that date that plants such as *E. longisetus*, *E. delaetii*, *E. nivosus*, *E. brandegeei*, *E. stramineus* and *E. enneacanthus* were difficult to flower. It may be that little was known or appreciated about the conditions in which they grew. Certainly they enjoy good quality light but what about the soil conditions? I have tried various experiments with soil types. In more recent times we have learnt much about their habitats and I have been able to use this in my trials. While carrying these out I have discovered that the aforementioned species adapt well in an alkaline soil containing two thirds limestone and grown in full sun flower well.

One type of soil I have found successful is that which I have mixed myself. I use garden soil, beech leafmould, sharp sand, bonemeal, superphosphate and gypsum. The latter contains 40% potash. I also use garden soil, or better still soil from molehills, for seed raising with excellent results. Personally, with my soil composition, I do not use any extra fertilisation at all and find this does not impair germination, growth or flowering. With this soil mix I have flowered *E. enneacanthus*, *E. triglochidiatus*, *E. paucispinus*, *E. dubius*, *E. roetteri*, *E. engelmannii* and *E. brandegeei* regularly. I also find the root structure is good.

I have used John Innes 1 and 2 plus added grit but not had as much success as with my own mixture. I do not believe in soil sterilisation as it removes the useful bacteria. If weeds will grow in the soil then surely our plants will also. 44 years ago when I was an apprentice gardener we made soil from rotted down turf stacks, sharp sand and leafmould as the modern

proprieties were not available. Here is a soil mix I believe you might find workable:

a one gallon mixture made up in the ratio 1:1:1

Loam, sharp sand, beech or oak

leafmould: to this add

4 teaspoons of bonemeal

3 teaspoons of gypsum

1 teaspoon of superphosphate.

Too much nitrogen in the mix leads to bloated plants whilst too little fails to encourage plant growth

I have increased my collection considerably since 1968 to the point where I possess around 2000 Echinocerei, grown mainly from seed. I keep a record of all my acquisitions. What I find confusing is the proliferation of field numbers with so many people collecting and supplying seed. What I believe is most important for study purposes is to know the locality of the plant or seed. Quite often the same area has been a source of plant material for several different collectors which means seed from the same source is available under different field numbers.

If you are a serious collector of a specific genus I believe it is necessary to acquire the habitat source of the seed or plant to carry out your studies properly.

EVENTS IN THE REGION

Macclesfield: July 11th.
Branch Show at Carnival Field,
Altrincham Road, Wilmslow.

July 12th. Succulent Specialities by
Ralph Tomlinson.

Manchester: June 19th.
Branch visit to Ray Alcock at
Liverpool.

July 10th. Argentina Eyes Opened by
Graham Hole.

Stoke: July 14th. Bring and Buy.

Other Events.

June 13th: Cactus Market at Percy
Thrower's Garden Centre, Shrewsbury.

July 11th. 50th. Anniversary
Convention for Chester Branch, at
Ness Gardens. Further information on
Billie Bennett (secretary).

Southport: June 22nd. Astrophytums by
Ray Alcock.

Chester: July 2nd. Cactus evolution by
Rodney Sims.

Mid Cheshire: July 7th. A View of
Venezuala by Ralph Tomlinson.

TONIGHTS SPEAKER

Our speaker tonight really needs no introduction for most of us but for the sake of newer members a few words of introduction are necessary. **Tom Jenkins** has risen through the ranks to now be at the helm of the Society in the position of **Society Chairman**. I am sure in the far distance of Tom's interest in the succulent genera he never dreamed he would one day attain such a position. However he first came to the notice of most of us when a new nursery appeared in southern England, rejoicing in the name of Jumanery. This was an anagram of June, his wife and Mary, a family friend.

The enterprise burgeoned and a move to more spacious accommodation became essential. Hence one half of

the business moved north to the spacious realms of Lincolnshire. June and Tom had a home built and a spacious greenhouse appeared, large enough to house Tom's personal collection and a sizeable sales area. Something exciting had arrived close enough for Manchester members to visit with ease. Those were the days we could fill a 53 seater coach and visit two or even three nurseries on a summer Sunday.

Tom and June were always most welcoming and hours could be whiled away scanning the goodies that were always available. Tom had many contacts and many were the journeys he made to Heathrow to collect parcels from various corners of the succulent empire.

His own collection was fairly specific and he always lent towards the strange succulents that appeared in the old world. He had some beautiful cacti also and many were the envious eyes that scanned the plants that were always available for viewing.

He was always willing to travel to the four corners of the country to help others enjoy the fruits of his travels. Wherever he went, sales plants also went. To have Tom talk to your branch was a sure way to swell the audience with visitors from surrounding branches. The sales tables were readily surrounded by avid buyers and if you didn't arrive in the first foray you missed the specials he always brought.

Then came the thunderbolt Jumanery was closing! A hole appeared in the available nurseries especially for us in the north west. The hobby was on the wane and to buy plants in profusion also has to be

accompanied by the market to sell them. So Tom and June moved a few miles up the road and a modest collection accompanied them.

For a time Tom worked with Brian Goodey at Southfields, desperately trying to encourage him to indulge in greater propagation of the succulent goodies. Brian was too entrenched in his ways, being very much a cactus grower so Tom didn't achieve his aims.

Eventually Tom retired completely from business and was free to follow his wish to be Chairman of the Society and also he had the time to travel without having to worry how business was going.

Tonight we can enjoy travelling with Tom to one of the less travelled countries, Kenya, to see what plants grow there. I am sure we will also see the occasional animal or bird also.

IN THE FUTURE

July sees the welcome return of **Graham Hole** to delight us with an account of his journeying around the Argentinian cactus lands. Those who witnessed his previous talks will realise how eminently enjoyable are the evenings he provides.

All in all we have a feast of cactophilia and succulentophilia during the next seven weeks culminating in a visit to **David Rushforth's collection in late July.**