



Manchester Branch Newsletter Feb 2000

EDITORIAL

Whilst many of you were relaxing and enjoying Ray Allcock's presentation on *Astrophytum* last month I found myself stranded in London for the whole of the weekend. Determined to make the most of my plight I required only three phone calls to complete my itinerary for my tour of the southeast. Saturday afternoon and a short hop down the M4 from Heathrow airport took me to Reading and the home of Gordon Rowley. Gordon is currently working on a key for the South African crassulaceae and has amassed a significant collection of these in his greenhouse. As many of you already know, Gordon is also world famous for his library, occupying two large rooms of his house. The opportunity to seek out two obscure references in the Argentinean literature about *Tephrocacti* was not wasted and with his usual efficiency Gordon found the requested references and two more besides in a matter of moments.

Sunday morning took me to Ashington and the home of Holly Gate Cactus Nursery. The reference collection remains in good condition and offers the opportunity to view a great variety of mature cacti and other succulents that have the benefit of a free root run. If ever you visit Holly Gate, allow yourself at least three hours for your visit. I split my time equally between the sales area and the reference collection but could have easily spent the whole day there. And this was in January when virtually nothing was in flower.

A twenty minute drive through the countryside and I was in Ansty, at the home of Tony and

Suzanne Mace. My main intention was to see the succulent collection and the newly discovered *Gibbaeum johnsoni*. However, many long minutes were spent drooling over the conophytum collection before I progressed to the other end of the bench to see this latest addition to my favourite genus. The thoughts of the long drive back to Manchester in the dark suddenly didn't seem so awful.



Pilosocereus with free root run in the greenhouse of Tony Mace.

A New Discovery from South America!

Brian Bates writes from Bolivia about the recent discovery of a new plant in Argentina.

The new genus is a plant with roots like *Blossfeldia*, i.e. thick and fleshy and delicate, the body in habitat is like a *Rebutia heliosa* form, but every plant is solitary, and about 1.5 cm dia and more or less buried, very difficult to see, the flowers are small, about 8 mm dia with lots of petals and a bunch of anthers carrying yellow pollen, the petals are pink and look like *Neowerdermannia* flowers. When in active growth, the bodies take on the appearance of an *Epithelantha*. The plants grow near Tafna in Jujuy Argentina and we searched 4 or 5 other hills and didn't find any. That doesn't mean there aren't any, just that we didn't find them. My partner has the most incredible eye for a plant, so I'm sure he didn't miss any. His eye was so good, I developed a complex about going blind! Some of the new plants were showing buds, so I guess they're in flower even as I write. I may go back with a bucket, to collect the seed! On the other hand *Cintias* are comparatively easy to find. They also grow in similar habitats, buried, but are probably more plentiful, although at one site where we found them, the heads were not much bigger than 1/2 cm dia. These flower probably in August, which should make them one of the first to flower, possibly even rivaling *Turbinicarpus* for the first flowers of the season.

Technical difficulties in Sucre - no phones due to 6 inches of rain in a week means that Brian has been unable to forward us a photograph. I hope to include this in a future edition as soon as possible - ed.

New Catalogues

New editions to the following catalogues are now available for your perusal:

Whitestone Gardens 2000

Roy Mottram's latest is now available in the usual style with a wide variety of cacti, succulents and of course all books related to the hobby that are still in print.

Available from:

Whitestone Gardens,
Sutton-under-Whitestonecliffe
Thirsk
N. Yorkshire
YO7 2PZ.

Mesa Garden.

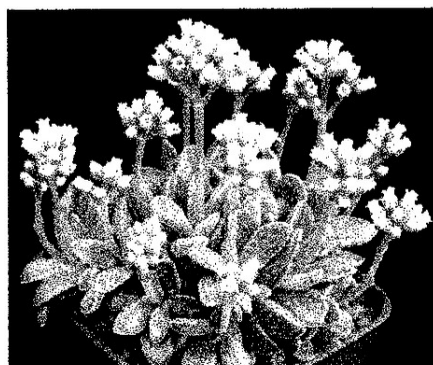
Steven Brack has now released the paper version of his 2000 seed catalogue containing approximately 6800 different species and varieties, many with location data.

Mesa Garden
PO Box 72
Belen
NM 87002
USA.

Or on the Internet via the cactus mall site.

Below: *Crassula ausensis*

Photo: Geoff Bailey - February 2000



Around the Greenhouses.

A new column, taking a regular look at the latest news from our Manchester members.

From Geoff Bailey:

Many Crassulas have been in flower since early December including the humble *Crassula argentia*, *C. arborescens* and the much more choice *C. mesembryanthemopsis* that has just finished flowering. *Crassula tecta* is in flower and has been since mid-December. The very nice hybrid *Crassula 'Celia'* (*susannae* x *mesembryanthemopsis*) is just coming into full bloom, and *C. 'Morgan's Beauty'* (*falcata* x *mesembryanthemopsis*) is preparing to put on a good show in about three or four week's time. Amongst the cacti the *Neoporteria*s (as distinct to their lumped partners, *Neochilenia*) have just finished flowering. *Mammillaria plumosa* has had quite a number of flowers over the past month and is still flowering. Although in an advanced state of bud, I won't hold my breath for any actual flowers on my plants of *M. hernandezii* - it just seems that in this country there is insufficient light and heat to develop the buds and I expect them to abort as in previous years.

Time to start sowing all the seed

From the editor:

Unlike Geoff's success, my more mature *Neoporteria* plants have sat through the last few weeks with tightly closed buds that are now dying off without ever showing signs of opening. I have also been hit again this year with my usual problem of having winter watered and growing mesembs in the same greenhouse as my tephrocacti. The high levels of moisture generated by watering the mesembs has led to the return of a black powdery marking around the base of the spines of many of the tephros. This is the fungal infection *candida nigrans* (as opposed to the scourge of many ladies-*candida alba*). It seems to respond well to a light dusting with powdered yellow sulphur obtained from the local pharmacy and applied with a small paint brush.

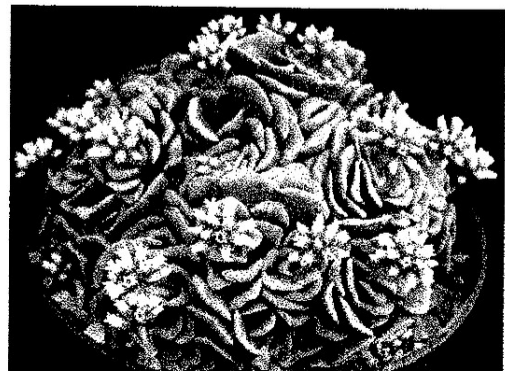
On a brighter note, whilst February may not be the best month for flowers, a recently acquired cutting of *Sedum palmeri* has set forth a most wonderful set of yellow flowers. This is undoubtedly the best month to view the *Tylecodons*, which are all currently in full leaf (with the exception of the frequently stubborn *T. buchholzianus*). Today, a solitary *Faucaria tigrina* flower greeted my arrival in the greenhouse along with the slightest glimpse of yellow petals emerging from a tightly held bud and the first flower emerged from a pot of *Iris reticulata* bulbs planted last September.

From Peter Bint:

The only cactus currently in flower is *Rhipsalis platycarpa* with its flat, heart shaped stems and areoles around the edge. *Mammillaria hernandezii* as usual has sprouted an almost complete ring of buds but as normally happens, all have aborted before opening. *Notocactus vorwerkianus*, from the *Wigginsia* group, is sending up a pink bud in the warm house despite a lack of water. Of the aloes, *A. krapohliana* has recently flowered and has six huge seed pods. Another aloe species sits next to it with three seed pods, presumably courtesy of a friendly passing fly. Several other aloes are presently in flower, most notably *A. albiflora*. *Echeveria laui* is nicely in flower along with a variety of crassulae, most notably *C. mesembryanthemopsis* and *C. tecta*. *Euphorbia shoelandii*, a winter grower is growing on well in the warm house.

Crassula hybrid 'Celia'
in full flower.

Photo: Geoff Bailey-Feb 2000



John Miller forwards this introspective view of our fellow hobbyists, discovered whilst surfing the net.

The Cactomaniac

Whenever man comes in intimate contact with succulent plants strange changes take place in his mind. These changes are usually of an alarming nature and have at long last been recognized by some authorities as a most insidious disease. When the succulent plants happen to be Cacti, the disorder is described as Cactomania and the victim is known as a Cactomaniac. Now Cactomania, in spite of its potential seriousness, has been overshadowed by more glamorous ailments, such as carbuncle, seven year itch, athlete's foot and bad breath. I feel that it is high time that the neglect of medical authorities of this crippling disease be corrected. So, for the protection of mankind in general, I will lift the veil of secrecy which has shrouded this evil in our midst. Ironically, the greatest sufferers from Cactomania are not the victims, but their relatives and friends. For their sake, I will describe the various symptoms in order that they may be recognized. It is imperative that the early signs be recognized. Secret studies conducted in Germany and at the Cactus Ranchitos, of Scottsdale, Arizona, have proven that Cactomania may be roughly classed as occurring in five progressive stages, of which only the first two are curable. The stages are as follows:

STAGE 1. A perfectly normal human being sees a cactus. He promptly becomes fascinated by this strange plant. He feels the spines and decides that he must have a cactus of his own... and another... then perhaps two for the road...beside the house. Now is the time for a compassionate friend to take matters into his own hands and sit down with this weird plant lover and tell him the facts of life. Get it through this persons head that he is playing with a loaded gun, a time bomb, a **DANGEROUS AND POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCE!** Tell him to just say **NO!** The Cactomaniac now sends off for some plant catalogues: buys, begs, steals or collects more cacti and, by the end of just one

month, he purchases a book on the subject. This book tells him everything he ever wanted to know about his new found "Spiny Friends" and indeed, even broaches the kinky subject of asexual reproduction by offset. He learns how to keep his cacti happy and contented. He now has pots and dish-gardens filled to capacity with Barrels, Hedgehogs, Prickly Pears, Snake-Cactus, Ruby Dumplings, Silver Torches and Snowball Cactus which all cause him great joy. But, late at night while tossing on his pillow, he begins to think (a most unorthodox and dangerous procedure) and wonder. Just what the heck does a happy cactus look like? The book did not say!

At this stage, the Cactomaniac is still curable. Take the patient and push him, hard, backwards, so he will land, seat first, in a large clump of Prickly Pear cactus. The spines and glochids of these plants will inflict great hurt upon him. After the patient arises, waste no time and bundle him off to any place north of the Arctic Circle where he will have to remain for, ordinarily, not more than the rest of his natural life.

STAGE 2. The Cactomaniac now owns quite a large collection of plants which he proudly displays to anyone who will look and listen. He now haunts other collectors and botanical gardens, boring any and all with tales of his remarkable plants. He asks questions but doesn't seem to hear the answers. He has joined a club of similar individuals who all have equally remarkable experiences to relate. He now, also, begins to try his own recipes for soil mixtures and starts to propagate his plants from cuttings. Someone slips him a packet of cactus seeds! After a soul-stirring struggle with himself he delegates the first book with the happy little cactuses in it to the trash can and in its stead sports abotanical treatise by some well known authority on **CACTI**. Remember those Spiny Little Darlings, Cucumber Cactus, Golden Torches, SnakeCactus and Jeepers Creepers? Well, they have now taken a back seat to Ferocactus, Mammillarias, Echinocactus and Pediocactus. Our victim rambles on and on about "spination and species" and buys a grafted plant!

As he approaches the end of the second stage, I cannot emphasize enough the necessity for curative treatment. This treatment is the same as in Stage 1 except that the plant he is pushed into is a Jumping Cholla or Teddy Bear Cholla and you have talked NASA into carrying a full-time janitor aboard Skylab.

STAGE 3. By now Cactomania is incurable and follows the usual course to the ultimate ending. The living room, bedroom, basement, kitchen and bathroom are cluttered with catalogues from dealers, growers and importers. There are journals, magazines and books, plus assorted notes made by the Cactomaniac personally. Regular mealtimes are a thing of the past and now the members of our Cactomaniac's family wake up (too late, alas) to the fact that there is something radically wrong! Strange characters drop in at all hours to discuss marvelous new observations; seeds are planted, hormones and vitamins are tried. Flower colors and peculiarities of spine formations are noted in little black books.

In cactus clubs and other social gatherings of kindred spirits he readily discusses the works of noted cactus authorities. This is also the stage where numerous new epoch-making discoveries are made. If the Cactomaniac is a man of means, he begins to take five-day weekend trips to cactus-land. His fieldtruck is the equivalent of a British Land Rover and is cluttered with altimeters, high-powered binoculars, expensive cameras and plant presses. Worst of all, the Cactomaniac is just beginning to learn the remarkable fact that his cactus plants do not behave at all as his books have told him they should. With this realization, he drifts into stage 4.

STAGE 4. The Cactomaniac has now lost all sense of humor, if indeed, he ever had one. He is ready for the really BIG TIME! Words like morphology, genes, mutations, chromosomes and phylogeny flow from his lips as if he knew what they signified. He is certain that *Echinocactus polycephalus* var. *Xeranthamoides* occurs along the western piedmont of the Eminence Break region of the Little Colorado River. He knows all the answers

and reluctantly admits that he is the authority on cactus, botany biology and probably life in general. Furiously, he writes learned treatises on any subject that comes to mind. As far as Cactomania is concerned, he dwells at the edges of the inner sanctum of Minerva's Temple. From these Olympian heights he dispenses pearls of wisdom to be gathered up and treasured by the mass of his inferiors. Taxonomy, heredity, evolution...who knows the answers? Certainly not the mediocre minds who, up to now, have labored over the solutions. No! The answer, the only true answer indeed, is here! (He strikes his forehead with a Napoleonic pose.) Now, with a magnanimous show of altruism, so typical of his great mind, he decides to enlighten mankind by giving to the anxiously awaiting world the fruits of his Herculean mental labors. HE NOW WRITES A BOOK; a book to end all books. In fact, THE BOOK!

Cactomania has now reached its apex and this is followed by a rapid decline. Publishers, being a most un-enlightened lot, fail to recognize the worth of the gem which is being thrust at them and a hoard of rejection slips begin to clutter his mailbox. He has just purchased a main-frame computer, complete with a 3600-baud modem and is communicating 14 hours a day (or night) with every world-class cactus expert. His telephone bill has the same number of digits as his phone number, including the area code. He has dedicated the entire memory of his giant main-frame to Cactomania Trivia, the title of his "soon-to-be-released" book.

Meanwhile, rejection slips continue to pour in from large and small publishing houses worldwide. Some of them arrive shredded! Our victim has worn out 2 industrial copiers providing publishers unasked for duplicates of his marvelous work. He then begins to receive duplicate rejection slips. His postman is earning overtime pay sorting mail by the sack, all addressed to "Mr. Cactus."

The men in the white coats have little trouble in persuading the Cactomaniac to "come along with them." They show our friend a rubber cactus!

Seedling Raising.

by Christopher Leather.

I am sure we have all tried to grow plants from seeds. I am also sure that in each case there has been some success and some failure.

What I aim to do with this article is *not* to go over "my method" of seed sowing. Instead I am going to highlight some of the problems I have encountered in growing plants from seed and invite other members in future newsletters to respond to the points raised and offer suggestions as to what I did wrong or how I might improve things.

This will hopefully benefit us all in increased knowledge.

Just to set the scene I will briefly describe how the seeds get from the packet to the pot.

The pots are washed in boiling water; the compost is microwaved; the water is boiled. Labels are written; soil is put in pots; seeds are put on the soil surface. The pots are then placed in food bags and tied with a plastic/wire tie.

Ok, so the pots are now situated on an upstairs windowsill that faces South East.

I'll list the problems in the order they usually happen.

Nothing grows at all. Even leaving the pots for weeks or even months, there is still no seedling germination.

The seedlings germinate. In this case I get about half a dozen tiny green cacti on the top of the compost which, one by one, disappear.

Plants grow up to about 4mm in diameter and then stop. They never seem to get any bigger. This is sometimes accompanied with a redness of the seedling body.

Plants grow to about 6mm in diameter. One day I look at them and there is just a pile of spines instead.

Quite healthy looking plants up to 10mm in diameter suddenly rot at the base and when I touch them they break away from the soil surface and are all mushy inside.

Sometimes the seedlings grow very tall and leggy. This can affect small plants or quite big ones. I then have trouble getting them to stand upright. Gravel sometimes cures the problem. In other cases it makes things worse.

There also seems to be little black flies that appear every so often. They don't seem to do any harm but are annoying just the same.

So, what am I doing wrong. I am sure Ivor would be glad for your articles offering correction and solutions.

DIARY 2000

Always check with the branch secretary for changes in advance. Information given is as published on the society web pages.

Mid Cheshire Branch- Hartford
Methodist Church Beach Road
7.45pm

1st Mar Rampaging round the greenhouse.
W Morris

5th Apr Brazil K Grantham

3rd May Madagascar D. Porter

Bradford-ShIPLEY Library 7.15pm

8th Mar Mesembraeanthemaceae
H Mays

12th Apr Argentina 99
M Lowry

10th May Plants in my collection
Colin Norton

Leeds-St Columbas Church
Headingley Lane 7.30pm

20th Mar Agave
P Burton

17th April Members workshop

15th May Central Peru
David Edwards

Southport-Luncheon Club,
Rosemary Lane, Formby 7.45pm

22nd Feb Travels amongst the aristocrats
John Miller

28th Mar A bit of cactus history
Brendan Burke

25th April The art of making a hanging basket
Roy Barton

Stoke-Bradwell Lodge, Bradwell
7.30pm

8th Mar Kenya part 1. T Jenkins.
12th Apr From seed to flowering.

D Quail

10th May Namaqualand. Wet and Dry
Harry Mays

Warrington Leisure Centre, Meeting Lane
Penketh. 7.45pm

8th Mar Seed raising
Members contributions

12th Apr A look at cactus like plants
John Henshaw

10th May Problem plants
Members contributions

Wigan-All Saints Church Hindley
7.30pm

24th Feb Euphorbias. A Pritchard

23rd Mar Cacti and succulents
explained. B Law

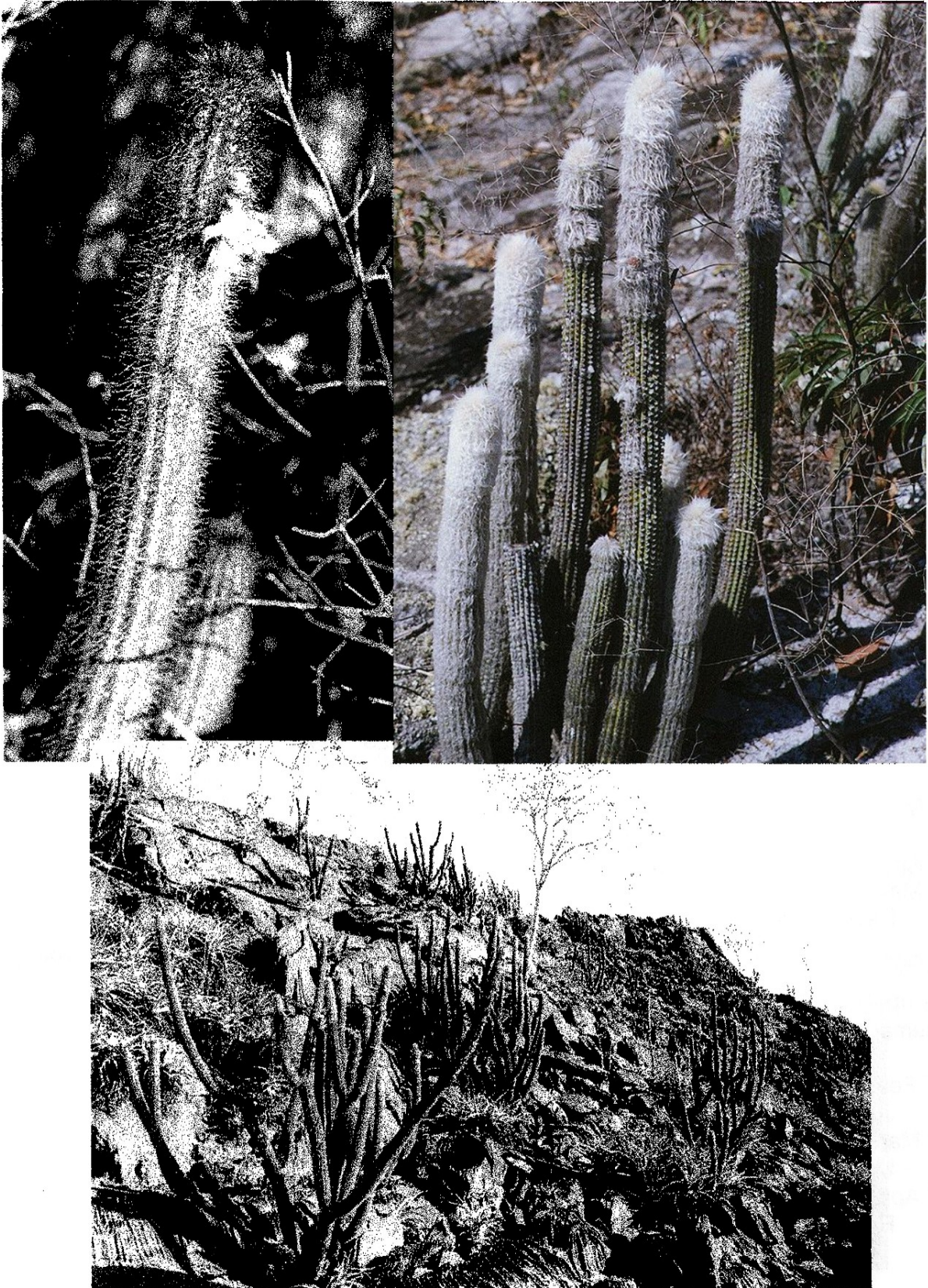
27th Apr Pests and diseases.
P Downs

DON'T FORGET

North West Cactus Mart
Woolston Sports Centre
25th March 2000

Leeds Plant Sales
Roundhay Tropical Gardens
15th/16th April 2000

Pilosocerei in Habitat



Top left and bottom - *Pilosocereus densiareolatus* at Engenheiro Dolabela, Brazil.
Top right - *Pilosocereus aurisetus* var *densilanatus* on a limestone outcrop-same locality