

MANCHESTER BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2013



Forthcoming events
Saturday April 13th 2013
Epiphytic Cacti
by
Mark Preston

Martin is new to the speakers list and we offer him a hearty welcome to Manchester Branch. Epiphytic cacti are not plants that all cactus enthusiasts like to grow. This is probably because most people think of Epiphyllums and 'Christmas cacti' when the expression Epiphytes is mentioned. What are 'Epiphytes'? An Epiphyte is a plant that grows on another plant for support. It is not parasitic because it does not gain a food supply from the host plant. Many plant families contain Epiphytes and most are to be found growing in tropical forests. This would be a little too wet for cacti that have developed epiphytically but such plants in the cactus world do enjoy more water than most. Where they do grow on other plants their roots are used to hold on to the supporting member and are not surrounded by soil so it does not matter if they are subjected to considerable rainy periods because the moisture soaks the roots and runs away. However, many Epiphytic plants have learnt to root themselves into soil and grow very happily there. They also enjoy living in less well lit conditions in the forests and will tolerate being grown under the bench in our greenhouses. In these shady conditions many epiphytic cacti have evolved into plants with flattened, leaflike stems where the spines have become much reduced. Some, but not all, produce large and highly colourful flowers. At this meeting you will be introduced to a much wider range of genera.



Why These Plant Names?

Plant names have been written in Latin for centuries as this was the only universal language available. However names were long and cumbersome as they described what the plant looked like rather than acting as a name to call the plant. Not many of these early names are known to literature nowadays but a little research is able to reveal a few. David Hunt in his book "A New Review of Mammillaria Names" tells us that *Mammillaria mammillaris* was well known in Europe by the end of the 17th Century. It was illustrated in the book by Leonard Plukenet called "Phytographia" which was published in 1691 and its pre-Linnaeus Latin name was written as 'Ficoides s (ive) Melocactus mammillaris glabra, sulcis carens, fructuum suum undique fundens. How big would a label have to be if all plants were still labelled that way nowadays?

Plants from the Caribbean and Mexican mainland found their way back to Europe following the Spanish conquest of the area from the time of Columbus and the exploration of the 'New World'. As this is an area of considerable warmth we are lucky that some of the plants were able to survive in our less tropical temperatures. I suspect that had these plants been first returned to Britain rather than Spain the hobby might have been less likely to have thrived in the way it has.

However, in the mid 18th Century Carl Linnaeus, the father of all plant naming today, started on the mammoth task of binomial plant naming in 1753 in his book 'Species Plantarum'. He gave the above mentioned plant the name 'Cactus mammillaris' and described it as 'Cactus subrotundus tectus tuberculis ovatis barbatis' which translates as 'the nearly round cactus covered with ovate bearded tubercles'. That description would fit many *Mammillaria* species today but in 1753 the description would have been appropriate as it was the only cactus of that shape he knew.

In his attempts to make plant naming more friendly for collectors and botanists Linnaeus divided plants up into groups based on common characteristics. The system has had to be refined through the years but it still follows those basic concepts. All plants have a two part name. The first refers to the genus or family to which they belong and the second name refers to the particular species of the family. So, referring to the above named plant it belongs to the genus (or family) *Mammillaria* and

has the specific name *mammillaris* to indicate its position in that genus. The second part can also act as an indicator as to whether the plant is a hybrid, or a cultivar, or a variety, or a sub-species or a form. These terms are more fully explained later.



Mammillaria mammillaris showing a flower



Mammillaria mammillaris in fruit

Essentially, the classification works as a hierarchy, and attributes are listed

in the same order as the definitions which follow:

FAMILY – this is a group of plants, consisting of a number of genera (plural of genus) that have common features. These are usually based on the structure of the flowers, fruits or seeds. Some of these families may have two names. An example of this is *Compositae*, which may also be known as *asteraceae*. The first is the original name introduced by Linnaeus whereas the second is a more modern name introduced in the interests of a standardised system where all family names end *-aceae* and are preceded by the key genus of the family – here the aster family. The family name does not appear in the commonly used Latin name.

GENUS – a group made up because the plants share many common features. This is denoted by the first part of the Latin name – *Rebutia*, *Lithops*, *Mammillaria*, *Aloe* and so on.

SPECIES – individual plants that are alike, and will naturally breed with one another. This is the second part of the Latin name – *Aloe vera*, *Denmoza rhodantha*, *Lithops aucampiae*. Notice the genus name has a capital letter but the species name does not.

HYBRID – a cross between two genera or two species. This is indicated by a cross (X) between the contributory plants and can be stated in a couple of ways e.g. *Mammillaria X mammillaris* or more specifically *Haworthia maughanii X Haworthia magnifica* where both parents are definitely known.

CULTIVAR – this is a variant of either a species or a hybrid that has a special characteristic that has been developed and maintained under cultivation. An example would be leaf variation and the cultivar name is in English and placed in inverted commas after the full Latin name, e.g. *Lithops optica* 'Rubra' – this indicates the plant is from the specifically named plant 'Lithops optica' but has red leaves instead of the normal greenish grey colour.

VARIETY – a sub-division of either a species or hybrids, usually with a distinctive difference, such as flower colour, but with only very minor differences in botanical structure. This is indicated by *var* after the full Latin name –



Mammillaria herreae var albiflora



Mammillaria herreae (normal form)

SUBSPECIES – a variant of the species. This is indicated by *subsp* after the full Latin name – *Lithops aucampiae subsp aucampiae*.

FORM – a form has only minor, but nonetheless noticeable, variations from the species which might flower colour or size and so on.



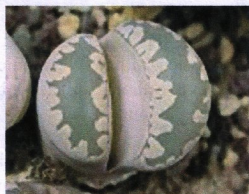
A colourful Aloe hybrid



A profusion of Rebutia hybrids



Lithops otzeniana 'Aquamarine'



Lithops otzeniana

BESS Zone 19 Symposium

Saturday July 6th

This is the first time for about 5 years that the zone has been able to hold a Symposium. Two Czech speakers have agreed to come and provide talks for the occasion. The day will go as follows:

9am Registration, tea/coffee, raffle ticket sales and plant sales

10.15am 'DNA – Darned Nasty Answers' by Ivor Crook

11am Break for tea/coffee, plant sales and a chance to talk.

11.30am 'The Best Habitats in Argentina – Gymnocalycium' by Tomi Kulhanek

12.30pm Buffet Lunch

1.30pm 'The Best Habitats in Argentina – other cacti' by Tomi Kulhanek

Followed by a mini break while Petr prepares

2pm 'Succulents of the Angolan South West' by Petr Pavelka

3.15pm Short break to draw the raffle and have a drink

3.35pm 'Rebutia – a personal point of view' by Ivor Crook

4.50pm Closing comments

5pm Close.

Petr Pavelka: Petr has been to many habitats through the years but has tended to concentrate on the African continent and associated islands. He has been to Madagascar at least twice, to Kenya and now to Angola. Very little is known about the Angolan succulent flora because it has not been a safe environment in which to travel. We are grateful that he has ventured into such unknown territory and for his willingness to show the results at our symposium

SATURDAY APRIL 27TH NORTH WEST CACTUS MART

Nurseries in attendance:

Croston Cactus - John Henshae

Richard & Wendy Edginton

Oak Dene Nursery - Joan & Gordon Foster

The Cactus Lovers

Ray Allcock

Ian Robinson

Rene Geissler

Tony Irons Cacti

Cactusshop - Ralph Northcott

Maurice Williams

A Branch Sales Table

And maybe some others.

Spring will be with us, plants will be growing again, possible spaces will have appeared on the benches due to unfortunate plant deaths so here's a chance to stock up again.



Figure 1. An ancient *Welwitschia mirabilis* in Namibia. Photo: Ernst Van Jaarsveld.