

MANCHESTER BRANCH

NEWSLETTER

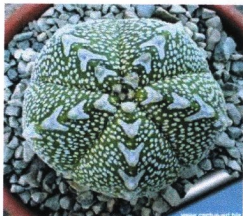
SPRING 2013



Forthcoming events
Saturday June 8th 2013
Gardens of the Western Cape
given by
Trevor Wray

We should be welcoming Rob Stevenson, and maybe his wife, back to Manchester Branch but more urgent matters have intervened. This would have been Rob's third visit and right from his first talk he proved himself well able to entertain the members and offer good advice about growing plants. Instead I am pleased to announce that Trevor Wray has agreed to step into the breach and bring his talk forward to June. From past experience I know Trevor will keep you all enthralled with his entertaining delivery and excellent photography as he explains that gardens in South Africa are not always quite what we would expect.

However I will still leave this article about hybrids for you to read. Rob will be with us some time in 2014 to deliver the accompanying talk. For many decades in the early history of the NCSS, as it was then known, the mention of hybrids was almost taboo. To be known to grow such plants caused scorn to be cast in your direction as the 'purists' thought it an anathema to grow such 'weeds'. Of course, in those days, there were masses of new discoveries as the world 'shrank in size' and explorers delved into unexplored regions, especially in South America. Notable names such as Werner Rauh, Alfred Lau, Walter Rausch, Albert Buining, Helmut Amerhauser, Albert Fric, Curt Backeberg, Dirk van Vliet, Friedrich Ritter and Leopold Horst, to name a few, had delighted the cactus lovers with the many new genera and species suddenly becoming available. The same was happening in Africa in particular with many new Other Succulents also being discovered. Thankfully, nowadays, hybridisation is recognised as a true benefit to the hobby, as we see with floriferous *Echinopsis* and *Rebutia* hybrids as well as the marvellous *Haworthia* hybrids that Harry Mak and many others produce. Rob's talk should be a real eye-opener.



'Radiance', a stunning orange.

The most northern species of cacti in habitat

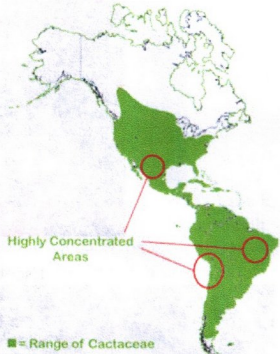
This map shows, in green, the full range of cacti habitats in the Americas. The three ringed areas show the places where there is a high concentration of species but in this article we will concentrate on the absolute extremes of habitat growth and the conditions they endure.

In Canada cacti are found in the south of the region from Ottawa in the east to British Columbia in the west. In the drier, milder west they can be found at more northerly latitudes than they can in the colder east of the country. Half a dozen species can be found at these latitudes.



Escobaria missouriensis

This is one of the most hardy cacti (to -35°C) and grows up to and along the Canadian border. It has the ability to survive in Scandinavia and northern Europe without protection but needs good drainage. It is very variable in habitat from single specimens in the west to large 30+cm clumps in the east. As protection from the severe cold it will become almost flat topped and its roots will drag the whole plant just below ground surface level. Flowers are produced very close to the plant apex in spring. They can be as large as two inches high and across though usually a little smaller. The petals are greenish yellow through to yellowish green, the latter being the more attractive, and they have a midstipe running down the petals which can be green of rose pink to brown in colour. The fruits are a bright orange red to scarlet and very long lasting in the green house (from



summer through to the following spring) but not in habitat.

Escobaria missouriensis in flower.

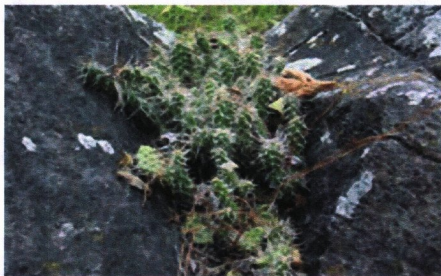


Escobaria vivipara



This is an extremely widespread variety of cactus but from the point of its northerly extent it is encountered in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba in Canada. There are five phrases that make this plant a dream for those seeking to grow cacti in the garden: cold hardy, moisture tolerant, low growing form, beautiful flowers and adaptable. Studies by Nobel and Bobich* on Canadian cacti have discovered that this species has developed so specifically to winter conditions that it is capable of withstanding temperatures of -220°C . Absolute zero is -273.15°C . This means this plant and other Canadian species have developed respiration

and photosynthesis to such a degree that they can survive the long, harsh, cold winters that their cousins in the southern USA would find intolerable.



Opuntia fragilis is the first of three *Opuntias* that grow in Canada. Like *E. vivipara* it grows in a great many American states as well as across much of Canada. It is the most northerly growing of all cacti, being found within 8° of the Arctic Circle at 58°N (which is almost as far north as Thurso in Scotland). It is so named because the small segments easily detach. This leads to its nickname 'Brittle Prickly Pear Cactus'. It is a low growing, sprawling plant that uses its low growing characteristic as an aid against the severe winter cold.



The second *Opuntia* is *O. humifusa*. This is unique in so far as it is the most eastern species of *Opuntia* in the USA and Canada being found from Florida northwards to Ontario in Canada leading to its nickname 'Eastern Prickly Pear'. It is low growing with flattened rather than ovoid pads. It bears waxy yellow flowers, sometimes with red centres, about two inches

wide. The red fruits are sweet and edible.



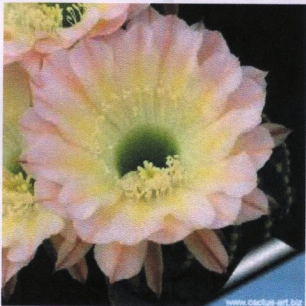
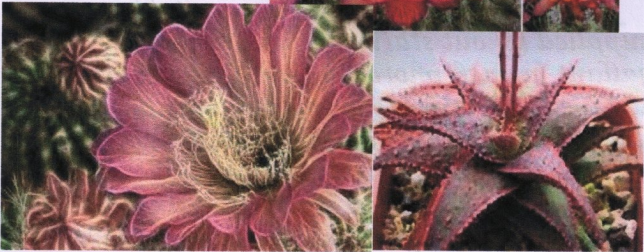
Opuntia polyacantha in flower (colour can be very variable red through orange to yellow).

This is widespread in western Canada (as well as much of western USA down into Mexico). This is a low altitude loving *Opuntia* that forms large mats and grows taller (up to 8" in Canada, taller further south) than the other *Opuntias* mentioned. It is a plains, grassland, open woodland or low hillside loving plant.



Pictures of hybrid cacti and succulents

It is amazing to see the beautiful flowers and plant forms that can be produced by hybridization. Here are a few examples



Saturday October 12th
North West Mesemb Show

As always this is the last major event at Manchester Branch, in the cactus and succulent year, designed to attract visitors from around the north west of the country in particular but also we have visitors and entrants from much further afield. The entries are always impressive and the show is enjoyed by a good many enthusiasts. Good food and drink are readily available as supplied by our stalwart kitchen team. Our gallant branch photographer, Chris Leather, always takes a great many photographs. He places all the results on the Branch Web site.

Please visit the site

www.Manchestercactus.co.uk

And see what a good job he is doing there.

