

Gaultonia

Manchester Branch Newsletter

July 2013

An explanation about the new Gaultonia format.

After a break of longer than would be wished for we are issuing a new edition of the Gaultonia Newsletter. Previous issues of Gaultonia have featured many colour pictures. We intend to still do this, but with one major difference. You will notice that the newsletter you hold does not contain any pictures. This means the printing costs of the newsletter is significantly lower. The full newsletter (with pictures) is available to download (as a PDF) from the newsletter page on our website. If you don't have access to a PC, or have any difficulties downloading, please see Chris.

<http://www.manchester.bcsc.org.uk/index.php/newsletters>

If you haven't already visited our website, please do so as there are lots of pictures and other items of interest.

The North West Cactus Mart – a review by Gregory Bulmer (Sheffield Branch)

The North West Cactus Mart is an annual event held at Manchester Branches meeting venue attracting succulent enthusiasts from far around. This year it was made possible by the tireless work of Peter Bint and other hardworking members of Manchester Branch.

Myself, Phil and driver Mat started early (an alarm set at 6:00am on a Saturday seemed quite unnatural for a teen such as myself) so we could set up the "Made in Sheffield" stand at the mart. Here we sold plants propagated (and generously donated) by Dr Scott with proceeds going towards branch funds as well as displaying some rarer and older specimens to entice the customers over (although Phil's flapjack did that also). However we weren't the only Sheffield Branch members who had made their way across the snake pass. Chris and Dorothy also had a stall at the mart selling seeds and plants while Peter and Michelle set up an excellent display of Sheffield's current ventures in advertising the

Branch and society as a whole (Keep up the good work!). Also present was our newest member Gary with a box full of new acquisitions, I also returned home to an ever groaning windowsill (and family) with more plants.

A vast amount of plants were on sale from the seedling to the mature. One gentleman was selling off his collection of cacti at very low prices to clear room for more succulents, with beautiful specimens available at around £4-£8.

Other traders present were Wendy and Richard Edginton, Gordon Foster, The Plant Lovers, Ralph Northcott, Rene Geissler, Tony Irons, John Henshaw, Ian Robinson, Harry Mays, Brian McDonough, Ray Allcock, Maurice Williams and Philip Barker for pots and sundries. The prices of the plants were very reasonable with Gordon Foster selling some plants at 5 for £1. Plants were available for all interests and all budgets with a variety of different genera.

Gregory Bulmer





The Printed Legacy of Edgar and Brian Lamb

Chris Leather recalls how he became interested in the work of E. & B. Lamb and how he created useful indexes for their serial publications which you can download.

I would imagine that nearly everyone who grows cacti and succulents will have at least one book by Edgar Lamb. Indeed, for many, the names Edgar and Brian Lamb will recall memories of their early collecting days. Perhaps the most famous set of books is *The Illustrated Reference on Cacti and Other Succulents* – five volumes of Cactus and Succulent pictures. Other familiar books are *The Pocket Encyclopaedia of Cacti in Colour*, *Colourful Cacti and other Succulents of the Deserts* and *Popular Exotic Cacti in Colour* to name just three.

Some of you may be familiar with the *Photographic Reference Plates* and the *Monthly Notes on the Exotic Collection*. These were, in a way, early examples of those “part works” that you see advertised on the television. Each month there was a magazine with growing tips, travelogues and other general articles. With each issue there were two numbered reference plates published, each comprising short notes about a particular plant together with a photograph. They were issued over a period of nearly 40 years (1948–1987) and in the end there were over 1000 plates published.

Many, many years ago I was given a part set of The Exotic Collection magazines by one of our late Manchester Branch members in a number of A5 ring binders. Harry Ormerod, the member in question, had been sorting through some drawers at home and when he had pulled out the drawer containing the magazines, it had fallen to pieces. Not wanting to go to all the trouble of putting the magazines back, he brought them to the next meeting and gave them to me. “They need sorting,” he said. “I tried filing them in some sort of order, but then I gave up as it was too complicated.” I spent a few hours over the next few days pulling everything out of the ring binders and putting all the magazines back together with the plates. I suppose I read quite a few, but then they got filed away for years and years until recently I saw some for sale in a catalogue.

Having bought those, I decided to try and find more and quickly purchased another two or three sets of plates. One of the problems with such a long running “part work” is that it is very unlikely that those who were there at the start would see the collection through to the end, and those joining later wouldn’t have the earlier plates. What was obvious was that you can find lots of incomplete sets of plates. So I decided to try and get a complete set. As each batch arrived I would merge them into the ones I’d already had and, after about five or six batches, I found I had no more to insert, but lots of duplicates. At this point, it became

apparent that to make just a list of numbers and plant names wouldn't take into account the variations in plate types. Many plates have at least two different versions. Once all the numbers and plant names had been listed in a spreadsheet, I had to sort all of the plates into the different types. It turns out that there are five major types with seventeen minor variations.

I also thought it would be useful to know with which magazine each plate was issued. Fortunately, on the inside front cover of the magazines there is a list of which plates were published with that magazine. My own magazines provided some information and I also had some information from Ralph Martin. Hopefully Martin Doorbar and Graham Charles, who are checking their sets, will be able to add more of this information too. My website has two PDF files available for download – a numerical listing and an alphabetical listing. There is also a brief outline of the history of the plates, magazines and the Exotic Collection. The PDF's are free for you to download for your personal use. I hope they prove useful to anyone trying to assemble a collection of plates. Having taken a lot out of the hobby over the years via Branch meetings, the Journals and latterly the CactusWorld Forum, I hope my lists go some way to putting a little bit back. It's been fun doing all the research and all the sorting (even if it was a little tedious and repetitive at times) and I've also made quite a few friends along the way who have given a lot of help and support, for which I am very grateful. I would like to think that Harry would be pleased to know that I have eventually sorted what he thought to be impossible.

Christopher Leather

The Cactus Explorers Journal Issue Five (August 2012)

<http://www.cactusexplorers.org.uk/>

http://www.cactusexplorers.org.uk/Explorer5/Cactus%20Explorer%205_complete.pdf. Reprinted with kind permission.

How I take pictures of flowers by Christopher Leather

Over the last two summers I have been able to take photographs of many of my cacti flowers. I thought it might be of interest to branch members if I detailed some of the things I've learnt and discovered. The camera I have is what is known as a Bridge Camera, i.e. it bridges the gap between a DSLR and a compact/point & shoot. The particular camera is a Panasonic Lumix FZ38.

I don't intend to be very technical or go into "how to" in any great detail. I think it is of more use to explain which settings on the camera I have found useful to alter and the effect they have on the image. I'll also mention a little bit about photo editing, writing again about what to alter and the effect it has on the image.

Taking the picture(s)

It goes without saying that you need a cactus (or any plant) with a flower on it. Ideally I like it to be sunny and I make sure the plant is in the sunshine. Because the light quality (and quantity) is important I always like to take pictures on a day when it is clear blue sky. It means I've one less variable to worry about and the sun is a constant light source (in a clear sky). It doesn't really matter where the camera is in relation to the sun as long as the camera (or yourself) doesn't cast a shadow on the plant. Depending on the photo you are trying to take you may wish to have the sun behind you, at 90 degrees, or in front of you. Whichever – watch for shadows on the flower. Don't forget to take the label out, and then remember to photograph the label after you've finished photographing the flower. That way you've got the name on the computer next to the flower images and the plant can go back in to the greenhouse. The other key thing you need is a black background. Originally I used a board covered with black material. After reading topics on the CactusWorld forum about photographing plants it became clear that by far the best way to get a black background was to

photograph the plant where there is a shadow cast behind the plant. For instance an open kitchen door or a wall next to a window will cast a shadow. The plant should be in the sun with the camera aimed at the shadow. The other black background that I have found to be excellent, provided you don't use a flash, is a flat-screen TV (turned off, of course!).



Photo taken with plant stood on a dark green carpet.



Shadow creating a black background.

S/P/A/M.

Your camera probably has a dial on the top (or back) with amongst other symbols the letters S, P, A and M. To take close up pictures of flowers of any sort the camera needs to be on the M (manual) setting. Using the M setting allows you to alter quite a few settings which will help in taking the picture. You can use the other settings, but you'll

have less control if the light levels are changing (i.e. clouds appear).

Green Squares.

My camera has green squares in the view finder (or on the screen) that tell me what is in focus. To get the best pictures the green square should be over the centre of the flower. The single most important thing to be in focus is the stigma and the stamens. You may get more than one area of focus.

f8.0 and 1/640

Usually at the bottom of the screen there are two sets of numbers one has a decimal point in it the other has a slash symbol. Somewhere your camera should have a little toggle switch (like a mini joystick) or arrow keys. Moving this from left to right will highlight one or the other settings (my camera highlights the setting to be altered in yellow). Moving up and down will change the value of the setting. Let's start with the 1/n setting first. This is the shutter speed. My camera will go from 1/2000th of a second to several tens of seconds. Of course we need it to be a small amount of time. If it is sunny then I find that something between 1/500th and 1/1000th is OK.

The other setting alters the aperture size (or how wide the shutter opens). The bigger the number the smaller the aperture. Also the bigger the number the bigger the depth of focus. My camera aperture setting ranges from f2.8 to f8.0. Altering this does two things. Firstly it dictates how much light enters the camera. It also dictates what is in focus. A good example to think of is an Echinopsis flower. It usually has a really long flower stem leaving the face of the flower about 5 inches away from the plant body. Now if you want the plant and the flower to be in focus using f2.8 for the aperture will not work – one or the other (usually the plant) will be out of focus. You need to have the setting nearer to f8.0. I have had some success since using a shadow as the background by putting the camera on the "macro" setting and using f4.5 and 1/500th, again with a clear blue sky. As you

usually need to zoom in (otherwise the camera will shadow the flower) you need to make sure the camera is rock-steady.

Like a lot of things it is a case of trying the various settings and seeing the results of the changes. Take lots of pictures and compare them afterwards on the computer. What you are looking for is an image of the flower that is well lit, but not “blown-out”, with as many petals defined as possible, and also one where the background is completely black (or as near to black as possible).

It may be sufficient to alter just these settings before going onto the photo editing part. There are, however, a couple of other settings I’ve found of use which I’ll mention first.

(-).

To alter the weighting/metering setting (symbol looks like this (-)) you will need to go into the menu on the camera. The menu my camera calls it “metering mode”. There are three settings (-), () and -. The best one to be on is the () setting. If you want to know why this is, it is better to refer to the internet where a fuller explanation can be given than I’ve space for here.

+/-

Somewhere on the back or top of the camera there will be a +/- button. This is the Exposure Compensation button. What this does is to help in the situation where you have a lot of one colour, for example, a large flower filling the viewfinder. By adjusting this setting towards the minus side you will (in effect) turn down the saturation of the picture and will allow the camera to pick up more highlights and shadows and prevent your image from being “blown out”.



“Blown out” red – “in camera” saturation set to +2

The worst colours for this are Red and Yellow. You can also turn down the saturation within the camera menu if you are still having trouble with “blown out” colours. The only thing is to remember to turn up the saturation afterwards for normal photography otherwise everything looks pale. You may have to press the +/- button twice as the first press may take you to the Auto Bracket function. This lets you take more than one picture each time you press the shutter button – not something we need go into here.



Reduced “in camera” saturation to -2.

Photo Editing

Once you’ve transferred your pictures to the computer you may find you want to alter them. This is quite straight forward with even a basic photo editor program. I have a folder on the hard drive where all the photos are kept and I also have

another folder where I then put all the best pictures (usually one of each plant). The photos in the first folder retain their original photo number, but the photos in the second folder are given the plant name followed by a number if I've got two or more pictures of the same plant. There are four main things that you may wish to do to the image that you have picked to alter. It is not essential that all four are done or indeed in the order below. The order set out below is what I've found to be the most efficient order to do things.

Straightening your picture

You shouldn't really need to do this, but sometimes you find that in your best picture the pot is slightly out of true and it is making the picture look odd. To straighten all you need to do is pick two points on the image that lie on a line you want to straighten to and the computer will make the image straight. If you want to practice with this take pictures of walls or lamp posts or, best of all, the horizon at the sea side.

Cropping your picture

Your camera probably takes pictures with a 4:3 aspect ratio (the same as the old style televisions). You should really try and crop the image to that same ratio (most editor programs give you a selection of sizes). Having said that if you want to use another ratio then do so. If you want to print your image on a 6"x4" paper then you'll need to crop to that size (but don't save at that size). By cropping your picture you may be able to correct any slight composition error.

Altering the colour

Again you shouldn't really want to, or need to, alter the colour of the image, but sometimes a small tweak in the right direction will enhance the image slightly. There are three colour bars. Cyan/Red then Magenta/Green followed by Yellow/Blue. I've found it best to alter the Yellow/Blue first followed by Magenta/Green and

then Cyan/Red. Normally the image will want altering to the Yellow/Magenta/Cyan sides of the slider bars. This also has the effect of slightly darkening the image. Sliding the bars in the other direction will also lighten the image.

Brightness and Contrast

Ask yourself is the background of my image jet black? If it is close to black, but not quite, you'll be able to make the picture a little darker. Don't go too far or you will make the flower darker too. You may also wish to alter the contrast slightly to either give more or less contrast as this will highlight the shadows between flower petals etc, but don't go too far.

Paintbrush

The final thing to check is that the background doesn't have any white speckles on (you made sure the black board was clean at first didn't you?), or stray light sources. If there is use the Paint Brush function to paint it carefully out.



Stray light on right can be painted out.

Well, that's basically it. I don't use Photoshop or anything fancy like that and I don't spend hours and hours tweaking this and that. It's just a case of using the camera and the computer together to make the best image possible. The only other thing I do (and you should too) is make sure you keep back-ups on either CDs/DVDs or better still an external Hard Drive.