



MANCHESTER BRANCH

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2013



SATURDAY AUGUST 10TH 2013

WHAT HO! WATMOUGH'S MESEMBS

PLUS RAMBLINGS

by Peter Bint

Well we have had a summer this year even if it did nose dive this week. Plants are blooming, watering and shading has become a necessity and I have had to go and buy fans. Many, many years ago Philip found a supply of computer fans and sold them for peanuts to those of us who wanted to have moving air in our greenhouses (a very important facility as cacti and succulents don't like stagnant air whether it is hot, cold or damp. I bought 5 or 6 and fitted them and they worked very well day and night for years. Two years ago they began to fail, seizing up and no longer turning, though I do have two that still work. This current spell of extremely hot (for us anyway) weather had the plants demanding relief as greenhouse temperatures soared to 100°F. I bought 3 new fans, two that oscillated and a bigger one for the large greenhouse, and installed them where they work through daylight hours moving the air round the plants. I also shaded heavily this year as I noticed one or two plants were showing signs of suffering where they were in the full, unrelenting glare of the sun for hours on end. I have even allowed plants to stand in water for two or three days until it was all soaked up or had evaporated. We sometimes forget that plants have their roots buried in the ground and protected from the sun's heat when they are growing naturally. In our greenhouses the pots, including the roots, are exposed to the sun's heat for long spells so they will need more protection at this time hence I am prepared in such periods to really ensure they are given a drink. Of course it is important that the soil is well aerated with plenty of grit because the roots will rot if they are subjected to a continually soggy medium. They need to breathe just as we do.

Anyway, enough of my ramblings and let's get on to the meeting. We welcome another of our favourite speakers, John Watmough. John has proved on previous visits that he is a knowledgeable speaker, that he can impart his information with aplomb but most importantly that he can add humour to the occasion so that his audience is held enthralled by both picture and spoken information. It is my understanding that this time he will add live plant material to the occasion. The chosen topic this time is that vast but underrated family known lovingly as 'The Mesemb's'. How many of you have even a dozen Mesemb's in your collection? 99% of them have no spines – that doesn't appeal to cactus enthusiasts. If not grown correctly many will not flower – that doesn't appeal to growers in general. Cacti can be grown from March to mid October then they rest and need to be kept dry to survive the rigours of winter. The greater majority of other succulents will allow themselves to follow that routine though there are winter growers amongst Aloe, Tylecodon, Crassula and some others but they do not fuss too badly if starved of moisture. Actually many of the Mesemb's will follow a spring/summer/autumn watering schedule, accepting moisture later into the year than cacti but resting through winter. Other species however are demanding and will not deviate from their habitat demands even if they are grown from seed in this country. If you come from a region that receives rain only during 'winter' months as happens in south west South Africa then they are not going to adapt from that regime just because we decide to throw water at them at a different time of the year. They will sulk, they will refuse to grow, they will rot.

There are the tidy mesemb's that take up little space, remaining small all their life; there are those that form small clumps in bushy format; there are those that sprawl all over the floor and generally lose some appeal to growers. If you were asked to muster as many names of Mesemb genera how many could you muster? Certain ones will flow from the lips with ease – Lithops, Conophytum, perhaps Titanopsis, or Cheiridopsis but what about Vlokia, Phyllobolus, Chasmatophyllum, Jacobsenia or Rabiea? Hopefully John will educate our minds and appreciation because he grows a goodly number of many genera. He is also very active in the Mesemb Study Group helping spread the plants about as he is in charge of the group's exchange scheme – he may explain tonight.

Let's look more closely at Mesembs

Very little has been published about Mesembs until very recent years. The only notable treatise until the late 1990's was Hans Herre's "The Genera of the Mesembryanthemaceae" which was first printed in 1971. This is now out of print. There have been many notable people connected with the study and field exploration of this huge family. The following notable people have done much to help us understand the wide ranging and varied unit: Prof. Paul Hermann, Adrian Haworth (after whom Haworthias were named), Alwin Berger, Dr N. E. Brown, Dr H. M. Bolus, Prof K. Dinter, Dr G. Schwantes, Prof. Nel, Hermann Jacobsen, Dr Marloth, Ralf Rawe and more recently Prof D Cole. It is rare for anyone to write about the whole family of Mesembs because it is so diverse but two more recent works are "Mesembs of the World" where many eminent plants' people collaborated to produce this excellent book and the very comprehensive study and "Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants" by Heidi Hartmann which is a guide to the whole Mesemb family.

As an introduction I would like to explain that 'Mesembs' is a popular term for the succulent members of the family Aizoaceae. They have several popular names such as 'vygies', 'fig-marigolds', 'flowering stones', 'ice plants' or 'midday flowers'. For those of you who grow 'Livingston Daisies' in your gardens you are looking at an annual, non succulent Mesemb. These succulent mesembs show a quite remarkable variation in leaf architecture, flower colour and form and fruit structure. There are currently 123 accepted genera.

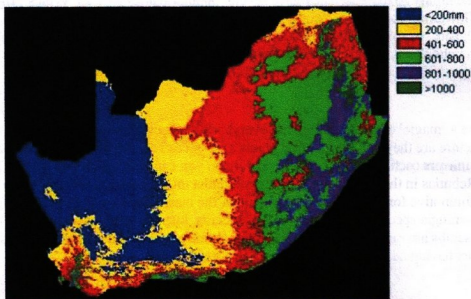
Mesembs have a 'magic' of their own but not everybody succumbs to this magic aura. So diverse in form and structure are they that we can find plants as small as wheat grains and as large as Rhinos. This actually mirrors cacti perfectly because, in habitat, you can find tiny plants such as *Frailea*, *Blossfeldia*, *Rebutias* in the pygmaea group, *Coryphantha minima* (or *Escobaria nelliae*) to mention some of the diminutive forms and giants like some of the massive Cereoid plants, *Carnegiea gigantea*, *Browningia* species, *Ferocactus* such as *gracilis*, *histrix* and *peninsulae* and *Echinocactus grusonii*. Mesembs are radiant in flower with their vibrant colours, and they possess fruits that are highly complex having adapted to preservation and spread of their seeds.

It is an important group of plants in many ways. They stabilise the soil; their blossoms cater round the clock and round the year to the needs of many insects; their fruits nourish rodents as well as provide new plants on an annual basis; their leaves are vital as fodder. The different genera grow in highly varied habitats from rocky crevices to silty flats and saline wastelands. As well as being useful for grazing they are used in soap making, for poultices, preserves and even as a kind of stimulant.

The family has had a widespread impact in the northern hemisphere in particular. They are seen in many countries to which they are not native. *Delosperma nubigenum* is an important ground cover plant in much of the western parts of the USA. In the arid southern parts of California a hybrid of *Aptenia cordifolia* dominates the landscapes. *Carpobrotus* species are also brilliant for ground cover. In the Mediterranean countries and islands many of the shrubby species have naturalised themselves very happily and are readily used for landscaping projects because they enjoy the mild winter weather. Indeed, visitors to Devon and Cornwall, including the Scilly Isles, will have experienced shrubby mesembs growing naturally on cliff tops and other well drained sites because the weather is never excessively cold for long spells. The dwarf species, the sphaeroids or pebble

plants as they are known, have attracted collectors and growers since the late 18th Century. They are highly ornamental and much sought after. Some are challenging to grow because the weather patterns of southern Africa are considerably different to those experienced by cacti which means they don't necessarily conform to our expectation of their growing periods.

South Africa has four fairly distinct zones of weather. Over the eastern sector and a lot of the south rain comes in summer and is more copious to the east of the Drakensberg Mountains that form a spine in the east. Central areas receive convectional rain caused by the summer heat where the warm updraught meets cold air at altitude causing rain to form. To the south west around the western Cape area and up much of the western coast, rainfall, such as it is, comes in winter. Finally further north and especially into Namibia is the area of seasonal fogs where the cold air formed over the sea is swept inland and here meets the warm air on land forming fogs in the process. These fogs are intensely wet and sweep inland until their moisture is exhausted. This is only a very narrow belt of moisture stretching inland for only a short distance. This fog is mainly nocturnal, swept inland by the onshore night winds, though day fogs clearly exist. Fog has usually dissipated by 10am at the very latest often before and are most proficient below 200 metres (650 feet) of altitude. Please bear in mind this is a very simplistic view.



This map shows the amount of rain received by the different regions of the South Africa. To equate this to inches and show a comparison with England is as follows:

1000mm = 40 inches which is far more than anywhere in England

801 – 1000mm = 32 – 40 inches which is still more than the vast majority of our country

601 – 800mm = 24 – 32 inches where the Manchester area averages 25 inches per annum

401 – 600mm = 16 – 24 inches which would cover just about anywhere in England

200 – 400mm = 8 – 16 inches, much drier than we experience

>200mm = less than 8 inches per annum. This could be truly considered as drought.

The Mesembs can be found almost exclusively in the red, yellow and blue areas, particularly the latter two. If we were to continue the map upwards on the left side that would include Namibia which would be coloured yellow or blue.

In the book “Mesembs of the World” the nine co-authors have split the Mesembs into 14 groups of which thirteen of them contain plants regularly grown by adherents of this group of succulent plants. What follows is a list of those groups with the main genera found in collections.

Group 1 – Weedy Mesembs: As the name suggests they exist like weeds in areas which have been disturbed and include *Aridaria*, *Phyllobolus* and *Scelctium* as the most often seen genera

Group 2 – Flat leaved Mesembs: These are mainly annuals and are rarely found in collections.

Group 3 – Flowering stones: Here we have the main groups grown by most people who do collect Mesembs with Lithops, Conophytum, Argyroderma, Dinteranthus, Fenestraria, Frithia, Gibbaeum, Lapidaria, Pleispilos and Tanquana being the most commonly experienced species.

Group 4 – Tongue leaved Mesembs: this includes plants with highly succulent leaves which slightly flattened and oblong and barely visible stems. The most often seen in collections are Bijlia, Cerochlamys, Glottiphyllum and Schwantesia.

Group 5 – Rough leaved Mesembs: The succulent leaves have rough surfaces, often arranged in rosettes and again barely visible stems. Aloinopsis, Nananthus, Neohenricia and Titanopsis feature here.

Group 6 – Tooth leaved Mesembs: As the name suggests the leaves have teeth along the margins and the plants have shot stems. These include Carruanthus, Faucaria, Odontophorus and Stomatium.

Group 7 – Tufted Mesembs: The leaves are succulent, finger-like, erect and crowded together, often cylindrical or three sided. Well known plants from this group include Bergeranthus, Cheiridopsis, Hereroa, and Ruschianthus.

Group 8 – Bead leaved Mesembs: These are not popular as they can be difficult to grow and appear 'dead' for long periods. The plants form differing leaves in a two year cycle. The new pair look very different from the previous pair. Jacobsenia, Monilaria and Mitrophyllum are the main species.

Group 9 – Mat forming Mesembs: As the name suggests these are ground cover plants that can form sparse to dense patches. Included are Antimima and Cephalophyllum as the two mainly known species.

Group 10 – Dwarf shrubby Mesembs: All species form small upright shrubs and include none that most people grow regularly.

Group 11 – Glittering shrubby Mesembs: Very similar to the previous group though stems may be creeping as well as erect they differ in so far as leaves have visible, tiny, water storing cells which give the surfaces a glittering appearance. Three well known species are Delosperma, Mestoklema and Trichodiadema.

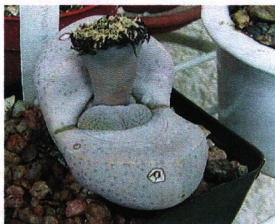
Group 12 – Lampranthus-like shrubby Mesembs: Shrubby plants with creeping or erect stems but bearing a very characteristic Lampranthus like fruit. Plants seen in collections include Lampranthus and Oscularia.

Group 13 – Ruschia-like shrubby Mesembs: The same as the previous group but with fruits specific to Ruschia including Astridia, Ruschia and Ruschianthus.

Group 14 – Leipoldtia-like shrubby Mesembs: Yet again it is simply the fruit that separates the plants into this group. Included are Leipoldtia and Vanzijlia and these are not often seen



Group 1 Phyllobolus resurgens



Group 3 Dinteranthus microspermus



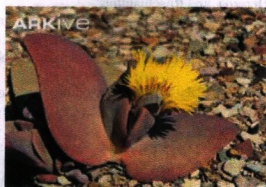
Group 5 *Titanopsis fulleri*



Group 4 *Glottiphyllum regium*



Group 6 *Faucaria tigrina*



Group 7 *Cheiridopsis peculiaris*



Group 8 *Monilaria moniliformis*

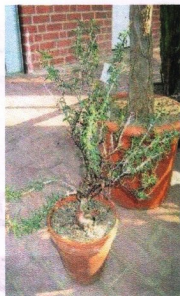


Group 9 *Antimima fenestrata*

THESE ARE JUST A FEW IMAGES OF THE GROUPS MENTIONED



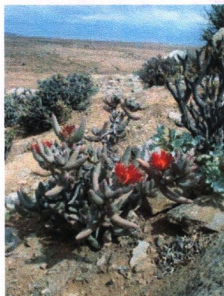
Group 10
Braunsia stayneri



Group 11
Mestoklema tuberosum



Group 12
Lampranthus species



Group 13
Astridia herrei



Group 14
Leipoldtia rosea

These have been just a few taster photographs of random plants from within the groups that I've found but if you go into the Manchester web site you will find dozens of brilliant photographs taken by our own Chris Leather of plants at the Mesemb Show from previous years. Of course he will be there again this year. Be like Chris and come to the Mesemb Show and see a vast array of different species, well grown by their owners. I urge you to visit the Mesemb Show this year to see the vast range of plants on show. I think, from a personal point of view, that this is the best and most comprehensive of the shows arranged purely for plants belonging to the family of Mesembryanthemaceae in this country. Certainly the show schedule invites people to enter plants from virtually every genera of the family that is in existence.

SATURDAY

**OCTOBER
12TH
2013**

North West Mesemb Show

HOSTED BY

MANCHESTER BRANCH

AT ST THOMAS MORE CHURCH HALL

OPEN TO MEMBERS AND THE PUBLIC

FROM 10.30AM TO 4.00PM

AT 2.00PM A TALK AND SLIDE PRESENTATION

WILL BE GIVEN BY IAN THWAITES

"NAMAQUALAND"

This will be the Branch Meeting for members