



**MANCHESTER
BRANCH**

**NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN 2013**



A look back at the summer

Eventually, after a long, cold winter and a less than pleasant spring, summer appeared and provided a lot of pleasant heat with long periods of sunshine. Plants were late in waking and flowering and not perhaps quite as floriferous, in my greenhouses anyway, as might have been expected. The summer and autumn flowers were magnificent with many plants flowering for long periods with wave after wave of flowers.



The first picture is a seed raised *Delosperma harazianum*. I have several of these and they have all flowered well producing blooms from June right through to October. It grows well in the greenhouse and outside in the garden in summer as do most *Delospermas*. It is actually endemic to Yemen. It forms a tap root with age which is about 6cm long and up to 4cm across. The second picture is a seed raised specimen of *Pelecyphora valdezianum* (or *Turbinicarpus valdezianum* if you follow the latest thinking) which is flowering for the first time. I was lucky enough to be at a Bolton Cactus Society meeting when they were holding an auction (shortly before they closed their doors for the last time) and I bid successfully for a pot full of seedlings. It was well worth the money as many beautiful plants have been grown on.



Here are two more happily flowering plants. On the left is *Aloinopsis schooneesii* which is currently still a small plant but has the ability to grow a rootstock some 20cm (8 inches) across. The *Aloinopsis* genus tends to prefer to grow in our autumn to spring with flowers occurring during the later part of this period for me. The flowers are attractive with a

colourful midstripe which is most attractive. On the right is a beautiful specimen of the more recent Mexican discovery, *Geohintonia Mexicana*. This plant has a pale blue body and flowers continuously through the summer with several waves of blooms. Although it is not necessary many of the plants currently to be seen in collections are grafted because it was necessary to make plants available quickly to stop the cactus poaching confraternity from stripping the habitat bare. There are many seedlings now available on their own roots. The flowers are a deep cerise which contrasts vividly with the blue body. They are produced from the apical wool where they form, hidden from view. It has been suggested that this species may be a natural hybrid between *Aztekium hintonii* and another, as yet unidentified species, from the area local to *Geohintonia* in Neuvo Leon, Mexico.



Two more floral offerings from our productive summer. First is *Frithia pulchra* with its pleasing purple flowers which is often mixed up with *Fenestraria* as the two genera grow in a very similar fashion. In habitat all that would be visible are the leaf ends where the window is situated to allow sunlight in so that chlorophyll, the life blood of plants, can be produced. They are spring to autumn growers and receive quite a good sprinkling of rain in habitat which is to the north east of Johannesburg and east of Pretoria. On the right is a seedling *Ariocarpus lloydii* which is about seven years old now. It is a regular flowerer now and this summer has been a real tonic to all my seedling grown *Ariocarpus* with virtually all of them flowering profusely. This is in contrast to the aged specimens from habitat which I acquired in the 1970's of which none have flowered. This will be because light levels are poor compared to what they received in Mexico.



For our next offering yet again the ample summer sun has produced bumper flower crops. On the left we have the first species of Lithops to flower each year, namely Lithops pseudotruncatella. Last year was disastrous for Lithops with very poor flowering all around Britain but they have more than made up for it this year. My greenhouses have been resplendent with yellow and white flowers in profusion. It is true that the variety of colours is twofold but the derisive comment ‘there are only two species of Lithops, yellow flowered and white flowered’ is uncalled for as the variety in the flowers is enormous. Some flowers are tiny, barely half an inch across, but at the other end of the scale some flowers can be up to two inches wide. Some lie flat to the leaf surface while others stand proud above the leaves. Even late in October as I write this there are still dozens of plants in flower. Another genus to have benefitted from the copious sun is Tephrocactus and its allied genera. On the right is one of many specimens to flower this year, nearly all for the first time since I acquired them many years ago.

The most southerly species of cacti

Following the look at cacti that will grow in Canada with its cold winter climate we will now travel to the other end of the American continent and take a look at what grows in the Patagonian region of Argentina and Chile. Four main groups of cacti live in these regions, namely, Austrocactus, Pterocactus, Maihuenia and a few Gymnocalycium. First we need to consider the terrain of this region.

Patagonia covers the entire southern section of Argentina and Chile from latitude 37°S to 55°S. Comparing this with Europe that is like saying from North Africa along the Mediterranean to the Scottish border with England. At first glance that would appear to be quite an equitable climate but the region is totally open to the cold blasts from the Antarctic as well as being surrounded to east and west by cold seas especially up the Chilean coast.

From the east the terrain is that of a plateau which rises in a series of steps from about 300 feet at the coast to 1300 feet in mid terrain and eventually reaching 3000 feet at the base of the Andes. It is a treeless area where the wind can always be felt. It is a barren and arid area where spring and autumn are very short periods that separate summer from winter. In the north of the region it can get hot in summer but the further south you travel the cooler it becomes. There are considerable temperature ranges between winter and summer. Cacti will not grow throughout the whole region. The Andean Patagonia is humid with 2000mm+ (approaching 70 inches) of rain a year but the further east you travel towards the Southern Atlantic Ocean the drier it becomes with only about 200mm (8”) per annum at the coast. On the map here Patagonia is roughly below the black line. On a broad scale cacti will grow as far southwards as the green



line. The cold is too long lasting and intense in the long winter spell to support succulent life any further south than this. There have been reports of occasional cactus plants almost as far south as Tierra Del Fuego but there is no substantiation of this in print of which I am aware.

PTEROCACTUS



Pterocactus tuberosus.



Pterocactus meglioli



Pterocactus australis



Pterocactus tuber showing just how large they can be in comparison with the stems.

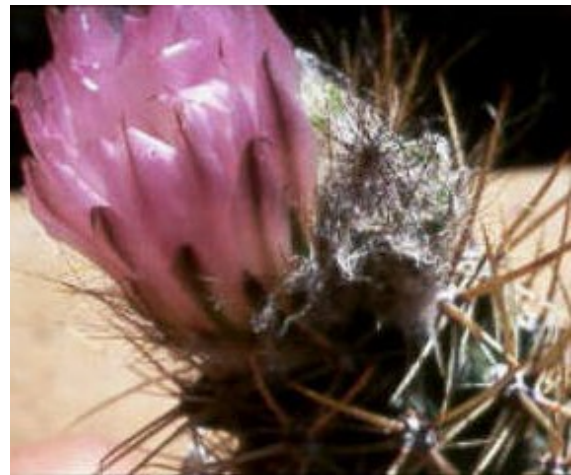
All the *Pterocactus* species can be found north of Patagonia but they do also grow in this region we are considering here. It is hard to get definite information but it appears that *P. australis* is the species which grows furthest south out of the whole genus. It has been reported from Chubut Province which can be seen on the map. *Pterocactus* has a fairly unique method of propagation. As you may know the thin stem growths on several of the species are deciduous. These drop to the ground at the end of the growing season and the ever present wind blows them across the grassy plains. Eventually they will come to rest in a less windy niche where they can grow new roots and eventually a new tuber. Obviously all the stems will not create new plants or the plains would totally covered by *Pterocactus* plants. Flower colour is not enormously exciting generally ranging from pale yellow through pale orange to pink.

AUSTROCACTUS

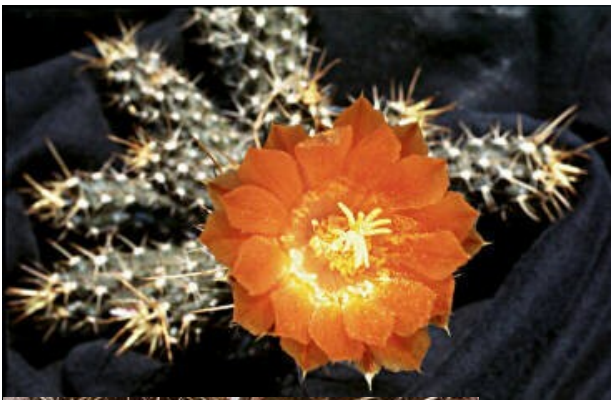
Until recently it was considered that 6 species of *Austrocactus* existed but the current thinking expresses the fact that five of the original six species, namely *A. patagonicus*, *A. coxii*, *A. gracilis*, *A. hibernus* and *A. bertinii* should be considered as variations of *A. bertinii*. All these species are regularly found in the provinces of Chubut, Santa Cruz, Rio Negro and Neuquén with occasional incursions into La Pampa. They are low growing plants that will shelter from the wind amongst the coarse grass and occasional low shrubs. Remember the plateaus are virtually without trees. There are two more species in the genus, *A. spiniflorus* and *A. philippii* which are found in Chile, the former close to Santiago and the latter in the Andean foothills near Chaca which is a short way south of Santiago. Neither can be truly thought of as Patagonian and until recently they had been part of the genus *Erdisia*.



This picture shows *A. bertinii* growing among the sparse grasses and using a rock as a suitable shelter from the elements.
Right *A. patagonicus* with a pink flower that



is as deep a colour as you can expect and below *A. hibernus* with a deep orange flower. As can be seen in the pictures the spines are quite stout for such small plants. Although the spines visible here are straight, plants will just as readily sport hooked spines as this cultivated specimen of *A. coxii* below right.



Bottom left:
Austrocactus spiniflorus



To be continued
in the next newsletter

CACTUS MART

SATURDAY MAY 3RD 2014

In St Thomas More Church Hall

from 10.30am to 2.30pm

Refreshments available

Nurseries in attendance:

Gordon Foster (Oak Dene Nursery)	The Edgintons	
Tony Irons Seedlings	Ralph Northcott (Cactusshop)	
The Plant Lovers	Rene Geissler	Ray Allcock
Ian Robinson	John Henshaw (Croston Cactus)	
Harry Mays	Brian McDonough	Philip Barker
Keith Larkin (Books)	Branch Sales (incl John Gregory)	
William's Cactus from Pontefract (first time attendance)		

BRANCH PROGRAMME 2014

January 11th	South Africa 2013	Andy Young
February 8th	Argentina	Ian Robinson
March 8th	The Genus Aeonium	Ray Stephenson
April 12th	Dwarf Flowering Opuntias	Stuart Estell
May 3rd	Cactus Mart (a week later than usual)	
May 10th	Kenya	Harry Mays
June 14th	Snow, Rain and Penguins	Brendan Burke
July 12th	Big Bend National Park and the Southern Rockies	Graham walker
August 8th	What happened to me in winter 2013/14	Paul Klaasen
Sep 13th	Aloes of interest for small spaces	Brian McDonough
Oct 11th	Mesemb Show From the Cape to the Orange River	Alice Vanden Bon
Nov 8th	A Double Act	Ivor Crook Dorothy Minors
December 13th 2015	AGM including a DVD presentation of 'India' by Keith Grantham	
January 10th	Oklahoma (singing not compulsory)	Peter Berresford