



**MANCHESTER
BRANCH**

**NEWSLETTER
WINTER 2014**



CACTUS MART

Second

Reminder

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)		

The most southerly species of cacti - continued

In the last newsletter we looked at Pterocactus and Austrocactus. Now we will continue with the other genera that grow in Patagonia.

Maihuenia and Maihueniopsis

Both of these genera belong to the mighty Opuntioideae group. They are grown by only relatively few enthusiasts for a variety of reasons. There are two recognised species of Maihuenia, *M. patagonicus* and *M. poeppigii*. The first of these grows only at altitudes below 1500m whereas the latter is found at much higher altitudes and it spreads into Chile as well. *M. patagonicus* will grow in large clumps up to a metre in height. It is very common in the Province of Neuquén. It should be cold hardy in an unheated greenhouse in winter in Britain. For whatever reason this plant seems to be attractive to ants in habitat. It is a viciously spined plant as seen below (left). Locally it is called *Chupa Sangre* meaning *blood sucker*.



M. poeppigii is a mat forming plant which is less viciously spined. It is not as common in Patagonia as it is in the southern Chilean Andes and is found growing above the 1500m mark. My seed grown plants are now many years old and very slow growing so they do not achieve the size shown above right for a long time. They can also be very long rooted. I grow this plant in a cold, unheated greenhouse in winter and out in the garden in summer from May where it is exposed to all the elements throw at it.

Maihueniopsis is a very widespread species when the whole genus is considered but for the present considerations we will only look at the three named plants that are found in Patagonia. These are *M. darwinii*, *M. hickenii* and *M. platyacantha*. Under the latest thinking these have all been sunk into the single species *Maihueniopsis glomerata*. These two photos show typical plants from this group. They can form large clusters, the segments separate from the parent plants with ease, they are viciously spined and they will withstand winter cold.

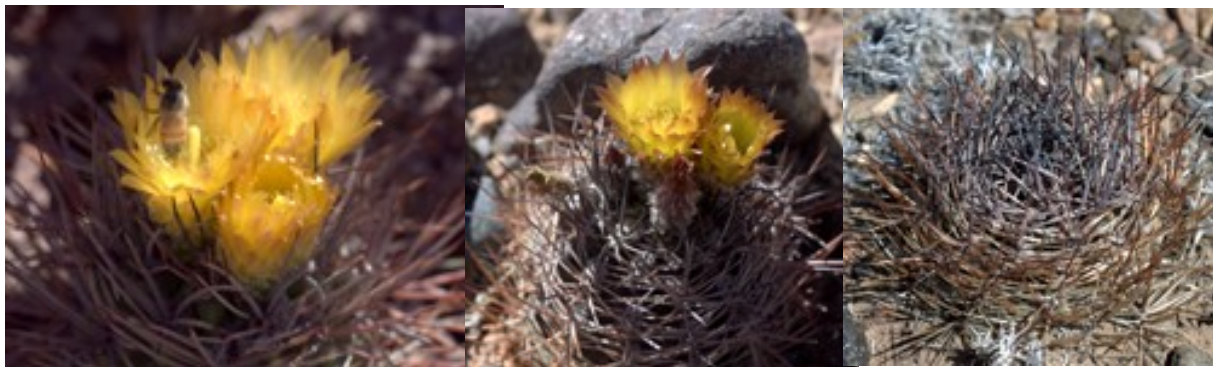


The next genus to be considered is **Gymnocalycium**. The sole species connected with Patagonia is *G. gibbosum* where several varieties/ species have been lumped together. Plants with the names *G. chubutense*, *G. brachypetalum*, *G. borthii*, *G. nigrum* and *G. gerardii* are all *G. gibbosum*. They are widely distributed in the Andes from south of Buenos Aires Province into Patagonia. They are small plants which vary considerably over their range. Spines vary from short to quite long; body shape can be quite flat to well rounded; the flowers are reasonably consistent being a creamy white (very pale pink occasionally) and quite large. They will withstand cold winters comfortably when kept dry. They are both easy and rewarding to grow.



Gymnocalycium gibbosum growing in habitat.

Finally we come to the last registered inhabitant of Patagonia, *Pyrrhocactus strausianus*. If we heed present nomenclature we should call it *Eriosyce strausiana* but I prefer to leave it where it has been classified for years.



From the three pictures above you can see how densely spined the species is which will offer protection against both predators and the weather conditions. Its distribution is in Argentina with many habitats being in Patagonia. Where it is north of this region it will be found above 1500m in the Andes. Though mainly yellow flowered, red flowers do occur on the variety originally known as *P. andreaeana* which occurs at the northern end of its range which is north of Patagonia. Generally, species of *Pyrrhocactus* are not easy to germinate from seed nor are they easy to grow. Surprisingly advice about growing this species suggests it does not like too much cold. It is advised to keep it above freezing where possible but it will tolerate -5°C for short periods only. It needs a well drained, fast drying soil and be careful not to overwater. It is strange that only *Maihuenia poeppigii*, out of all the species mentioned in this series, appears over the border in Chile but it is essential to remember that the Andes are higher in Chile than in Patagonia and the very cold Antarctic current flows along the western shore which significantly affects the weather and growing conditions.

Getting to know our members

We know our members to speak to, what they look like, their interests in cacti and succulents because we see them on a monthly basis. However, what do we know about their collections. In many cases little or nothing. This series aims to redress the balance and has been inspired by the articles in the Society Journal entitled *'In My Greenhouse'*. As my greenhouses were featured in the December 2013 edition I will not feature here.

Ivor Crook

All pictures used in this article were supplied by Ivor as was the article information

I suppose it is most accurate to say that my interest in cacti and other succulent plants was re-kindled in 1996 shortly after my father passed away. During the process of clearing his house I came across a copy of "The Gibbaeum Handbook" by G. C. Nel which became the first book in my plant library. I remembered reading the book when I was about 10 or 11 years old. The same night I took the book home I re-read it from cover to cover. For me that became the point of no return. I also found an old, gnarled *Mammillaria carnea* and a plant labelled as *Aporocactus flagelliformis*, which is now transferred to *Disocactus*, in my father's possessions. These were the first plants in my current collection

However, the story really starts much earlier than this, I assume in the early 1960's. I also found a photograph of myself at a very young age proudly holding a cactus plant in a pot at the door of my father's greenhouse. I have vague memories of this collection, in particular of a *Gymnocalycium* in a yellow plastic pot and several *Notocacti*. I also remember a story I was told in my early teens that dates back to shortly after this original picture. One day my Father fell onto an *Opuntia* plant and required several large spines removing from his behind. Shortly after this point his collection was dispersed so as to avoid the potential of a similar accident to myself.

I remember visiting garden centres in the early 1980's and being fascinated with the variety of cactus and succulent plants on display but as a busy junior hospital doctor and being newly married with a young family I was unable to pursue my interests any further at that time. By 1996, my family were growing rapidly and beginning to gain a degree of independence. Having also become established in a permanent job this gave me a little free time to begin to pursue my re-found interest. It was the early days of the internet where I found not only the National Society, which I immediately joined, but also several sources for buying plants. My first purchase was a specimen of *Gibbaeum pubescens* from Holly Gate Nursery in Sussex. Having re-read the book I was eager to see the plants 'in the flesh'. Purchases of more *Gibbaeums* followed in quick succession along with several small mesembs.

Here below we see Ivor's newest greenhouse very shortly after its construction. He writes,



*'My new greenhouse was completed on Easter Sunday 2013 and, as you would expect, it did not take long to fill it! The right side of the aisle would house my general collection, plants acquired over 17 years of collecting mainly reflecting my interest in South American cacti. *Oreocereus*, *Eulychnia*, *Notocactus*, *Gymnocalycium*, *Matucana* and *Eriosyce* predominate this bench. The left side is home to my collection of *Rebutias* in the sense of the 5 sub-genera currently recognised in the New Cactus Lexicon, ie *Aylosteria*, *Mediolobivia*, *Rebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia**

I recall being fascinated by the texture of the upper leaves of small Titanopsis, Aloinopsis and Faucaria plants. Windowsills in the house soon became occupied by pots of mesemb seed I had acquired from Mesa Gardens in the USA. The following summer half of my small 8 x 6 foot greenhouse changed use from growing tomatoes to housing my rapidly expanding succulent plant collection. Having soon outgrown the available space a twenty foot greenhouse followed, and most recently, a second twenty foot greenhouse was added early in 2013.



Here we see the second 20' greenhouse in excellent use with the Rebutias in full flower adorning the left side of the staging, the general collection on the right and many plants of Rhipsalis hanging outside.

The older rear greenhouse, just visible in the above photo, thus became the domain of my succulent plants. This greenhouse suffers from the shade of a few larger plants at the rear of the garden but slowly these are being cut back to increase the light to this greenhouse. Poor light in this greenhouse during the summer months is not a big problem. My major succulent interest remains in the plants of South Africa but has drifted from mesembs over the years. I grow Gasterias and some Haworthias under the staging and the rest of the Haworthias near the back of the greenhouse in the shadier parts. I also have collections of Tylecodon and Adromischus. Recently, I have also become interested in the Aeoniums of the Western Canary Islands and found some space to squeeze a few of these in as well.

With winter heating bills becoming an increasing problem, I took the decision to only heat one greenhouse this winter. In late October I lined the inside of the back greenhouse with bubble wrap. The wide centre aisle of the greenhouse became much narrower with the addition of some temporary staging and I also refitted shelving to the full length of both sides of the greenhouse. This enabled me to 'shoehorn' my entire collection into one greenhouse for the winter months.



The set up in the second greenhouse for summer (left) and winter (right). Access is not for the faint hearted but it is certainly a sensible solution for heating. It is the 'huddle syndrome' where plants share close proximity.

My preferred potting mixture has not changed much over the years. Everything is potted in a base mixture of 50% John Innes no.2 and 50% grit. I tend to use the Jonjo Chick Growers grit supplied by Gordon Foster of Oak Dene Nurseries. To this mixture I will often add Perlite or vermiculite for added aeration and to aid drainage. I did, until recently, experiment with using orchid mix of mainly chipped bark for my Rhipsalis plants. I grow these plants in hanging baskets and place them on low branches of trees in the summer months. It worked well initially. The advantage was in less weight and better drainage but the plants grow slowly and as the compost decays it tends to either waterlog or not hold much water in warmer weather.

On reflection, the event which had the biggest influence on the way I view the hobby was my first trip to habitat. In 2002 I was extremely fortunate to spend five wonderful weeks travelling around Southern Peru in the company of Martin Lowry and John Arnold. We visited hot coastal habitats, saw plants on the snow covered top of the Andes and all points in between. Since that time I have been fortunate to see cacti in habitat both north and south of the Equator and succulents in South Africa and the Canary Islands. Not only has this quite obviously affected which plants I grow but also my areas of interest within the hobby. Attending cactus meetings I heard a statement often repeated, 'You can see this plant is quite clearly a separate species because it looks different to that plant'. But when questioned, a lot of experienced, senior hobby members are unable to explain *why* two plants are different. This leads me in the direction of studying the external features of groups of plants (rib count, spine length, etc) and relating them to DNA evidence, climatic factors, altitude and areas of distribution etc. I am currently enjoying ongoing projects with Haworthia and Rebutia which occupy my time and mind in the greenhouse and during the cold winter months.

I don't really have a cautionary tale to tell but I have made some observations about my fellow hobbyists over the years. I rarely fail to be surprised by the warmth of welcome I receive from people within the hobby that I have not met previously as well as old friends. People in far flung corners of the world have taken me in their homes, fed and watered me and engaged in many happy hours of conversation about plants and often other interests in life. I find the hobby attracts a diverse group of people and offers them the opportunity to express their interest in many ways. Some people like to grow plants to show, some to visit plants in habitat, some simply to grow plants they find interesting and attractive. Despite this diversity, or maybe because of it, people tend to take an interest in all other fellow hobbyists. Maybe that is because that's the type of people we all are or maybe it's because we all feel there is always something to learn from someone with a different view on a situation. So if I have to express words of caution for the hobby they would be to continue to respect the views and interests of our fellow hobbyists. Long may the love of plants continue to be the strong force that binds fellow hobbyists together and results in enjoyment for all of us.



On the right we have our genial friend, Ivor, the author of this article.

On the left we have the proof of his comments about the warmth and respect shown by fellow enthusiasts. In the picture are Petr Pavelka (red shirt) and Tomi Kulhanek with their wives in Ivor's garden. They enjoyed Ivor's hospitality when they were in England in 2013 to make presentations at the zone 19 symposium and a great weekend was enjoyed by all concerned.



OPEN DAY

Manchester Branch members will be opening their greenhouses to any of our Branch members as well as members from other branches of the Society who wish to attend. This event is also open to your family members and friends if they would like to come.

DATE: SUNDAY JUNE 22ND

COLLECTIONS TO VISIT

Ivor Crook:

Ivor has an interesting collection which reflects his varied interests. He has a strong interest in the Rebutia genus, has visited many habitats of Haworthia in South Africa and also enjoys growing plants from the genus Rhipsalis. This does not, however, reveal his fascination with cacti and succulents overall. Only a visit to his collection will make this clear. He has recently replaced an 8x6 foot greenhouse with a much larger glass house which allows him to better display his plants.

Harry Mak:

Harry has a superb collection of Haworthias which is one of the National Collections that the public can visit. That is not the sum total of his collection though as he has an interest in other succulents in general, especially small Aloe hybrids, as well as certain cacti. His collection is housed in three greenhouses which half fill his small garden.

Peter Bint:

Peter's collection is the largest in Manchester Branch and reflects 60 years of growing cacti and succulents. It is housed in four greenhouses because the terrain does not permit one large house as the garden is terraced. His collection tastes are gregarious but there is a keen attachment to all mesembs with Lithops being the overriding favourite. The other highlight at his house is the sumptuous buffet served by his wife, Joan, which provides 'the icing on the cake' for the afternoon. TIMES WILL BE ANNOUNCED NEARER THE DAY.