# Essex Succulent Review

Volume 51 Number 4 December 2014

The magnificent flower of ***Stapelia gigantea***
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British Cactus and Succulent Society – Zone 15 Newsletter

# Editorial

Welcome to the third on-line Essex Succulent Review.

As this is Christmas, more or less, I have added a Christmas item to this issue – a reflection on the unsuitability of traditional Christmas gifts in this modern age. Nothing to do with cacti or succulents but I hope you will find it amusing.

Just a reminder that an on-line 'subscription' is completely free. Just send me an email to the address below and I will add you to the notification list. You can of course stop this at any time simply by telling me to do so.

And another reminder that, like all editors, I am always keen to receive contributions, suggestions or comments. If the gloomy days of winter prompt you to get out your keyboards then do please feel free to contact me.

Finally, I would like to wish all my readers the very best for Christmas and the New Year, and good growing in 2015.


Essex **Succulent** Review

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# Zone 15 Mini-convention 2015

## Sunday 22 March 2015

**12.00noon to 5.00pm**

Capel Manor
Bullsmoor Lane
Enfield
Mddx EN1 4RQ

Bullsmoor Lane is just off J25 of the M25.
Details of how to find it can be found on the Lea Valley Branch website www.leavalley.bcss.org.uk/contact.html

## Speakers

**Graham Charles**
'Gymnocalyciums'

**David Neville**
'Highlights of South Africa and Namibia'

Both our speakers will bring sales plants

Tickets, to include a buffet lunch, are priced at £13.00 and are available from
Eddy Harris,
49 Chestnut Glen, Hornchurch, Essex RM12 4HL
Tel: 01708 447778 email secretary@bcss.org.uk

The ticket also includes free entry to Capel Manor's extensive gardens, including a greenhouse display of mature cacti and succulents. The gardens are open from 10.00am. On arrival please park in the main car park and give your name to the receptionist for free entry.

Everyone is welcome – but tickets are limited. Please book as soon as possible to guarantee your place.

## Lea Valley Branch - change of meeting day

Lea Valley Branch holds its regular meetings at Capel Manor College (see details above). Previously our meetings have been held on Fridays, when only a garden room is available.

In order to obtain a more suitable room Lea Valley Branch will now hold meetings on the second Wednesday of the month (not July or August) which enables the meetings to take place in the main building, in a pleasant and comfortable room.

Everyone is welcome to attend our meetings, and full details of our 2015 programme will be on the Lea Valley Branch website www.leavalley.bcss.org.uk in the new year.

Sheila Cude
for Lea Valley Branch

**Clacton Branch – change of venue**

The venue for Clacton Branch meetings has changed. It is now:
The Committee Room, Holland-on-Sea Public Hall,
137-139 Frinton Road, Holland -on-Sea,
Clacton-on-Sea, Essex CO15 5UR

***Fig. 1***
***Tephrocactus bonnieae***
***See pages 4 & 5***

# Some Tephrocacti in flower

**by Tony Roberts**

When I first starting growing cacti and other succulents, some 35 years ago, I quite quickly built up a general collection with a major specialisation in mammillarias. As time went by my interests evolved and I also became fascinated by both gasterias and small opuntias.

I know how and why my passion for gasterias began (a story for another time perhaps?) but opuntias – ugh! How did that happen? I am not sure really, but I note from my records that the first *Opuntia* I acquired in 1983 (numbered O1) was an *Austrocylindropuntia subulata* (monstrose form). It took until 1999 before I bought a *Cumulopuntia sphaerica* (numbered O50) but only two years later I had reached O100 with a *Tephrocactus molinensis*. It all became a bit obsessive after that for my most recent acquisition in September 2014 was a clone of *Tephrocactus aoracanthus* (numbered O459)!

Well I do not have the space or the time to talk about 459 plants so I am just going to choose six species for this article. Back in the 1970s the majority of the smaller opuntias were grouped into the subgenus *Tephrocactus* (Ref. 1) but over the years more of these have been hived off into genera such as *Cumulopuntia* and *Maihueniopsis* leaving just nine or ten in what is today the genus *Tephrocactus*. So indeed, the six species I am going to discuss are all members of the genus *Tephrocactus sensu stricto*. Although I was first attracted to these plants by their form and spination, when they flower they are doubly rewarding (see Michael Kiessling's book for a vast range of flowers, Ref. 2).

### Tephrocactus alexanderi (T. geometricus)

*Tephrocactus geometricus* is currently considered to be a weak-spined form of *T. alexanderi*, deriving

***Fig. 2 Tephrocactus alexanderi (T. geometricus)***

from the earliest specific name *Opuntia alexanderi* (1923). Collectors will undoubtedly retain its name as *T. geometricus* for it has such a distinctive habit and flower, never mind its potential difficulty of growth, viz. its propensity to suffer from the dreaded black oozing pus. Most plants will suffer from the latter at some stage when grown in UK conditions – our friends in California find this a much easier plant to keep. Nevertheless it is a very rewarding plant, the new segments start off as a striking red-purple before later becoming green-grey in colour. With luck in the following year one or more flowers will appear on the recently grown segments; what superb flowers they are too, a pinkish white several inches across (Fig. 2).

***Fig. 3 Tephrocactus articulatus (T. papyracanthus)***

### Tephrocactus articulatus (T. papyracanthus)

*Opuntia papyracantha* and *O. diademata* are the names I originally associated with this form of *T. articulatus*. It has several distinguishing features, segments 2-3 inches long (or even longer) and several papery spines on each of the upper areoles, making a handsome plant. I have several plants of this form; some are quite tight clumps while another clone with white spines has grown several 'branches' of segments (Fig. 3). This plant has stayed intact (it is depicted in a 19cm pot) and several of the branches are now 9-10 segments long. As I am sure many of you know, this is the type of plant which will fall apart quite easily, especially if it gets too dry in winter. Being a plant that propagates so readily from detached segments, it must have it in its genes that it does not need to flower and set seed to survive, for I am still waiting after many years. I have another clone though, with darker and wider papery spines, which has flowered, for the first and only time, with the typical white flower of this species (Fig. 4).

### Tephrocactus articulatus (free-flowering form)

There are also forms of *T. articulatus* which have no central spines (the names *'inermis'* and *T. strobiliformis* are examples) but I have one other with just sparse central spines that I refer to as the 'free-flowering form'. This flowers profusely each year often having more flowers than new segments. Again the flowers are pure white (Fig. 5) and much brighter than that of *T. papyracanthus*.

### Tephrocactus bonnieae

This species was originally described in the genus *Puna* in 1997 but within five years it had found its rightful place in the genus *Tephrocactus*. (As an aside, the genus *Puna* is now redundant since the only other two species have been 'transferred' to *Cumulopuntia* and *Maihueniopsis*.) In cultivation,

***Fig. 4 Tephrocactus articulatus (T. papyracanthus) in flower***

***Fig. 5 Tephrocactus articulatus ('free-flowering form')***

***Fig. 6 Tephrocactus bonnieae***

***Fig. 7 Tephrocactus bonnieae***

*T. bonnieae* is often grafted and under these conditions the plants proliferate much more rapidly forming a mound of segments. The most common clone of *T. bonnieae* has short curly spines and for me has two flushes of flowers, one in spring and another in autumn. The flowers are again white, but very showy, and are many times larger than the segments from whence they come (Fig. 1. Pg 3).

I have another clone of *T. bonnieae* which, unusually for an *Opuntia*, has no glochids or spines at all – this is one you really can stroke! I used to say 'and this form has never flowered' but last year it did for the first and only time. Interestingly, it has a quite different flower (Fig. 6) to the more usual clone, and 24 hours later the flower colour had darkened considerably resulting in a quite pink flower (Fig. 7).

### Tephrocactus molinensis

This is another species which is a shy flowerer in the UK but, over the years, most of the clones in my collection have flowered, although sometimes only once in a decade. *T. molinensis* has small ellipsoid-shaped segments which again have a propensity to fall off when the plants are not watered in winter. The flowers are small (less than one inch across) and can vary in colour from pure white to a pinkish white (Figs. 8 to 10 left and below).

***Figs. 8-10 Tephrocactus molinensis***

### Tephrocactus weberi

The final species, *T. weberi*, is a bit different for it is the only one which does not have predominantly white flowers, for they can vary from yellow to orange. The plant I have chosen to depict has bright yellow flowers (Fig. 11) and makes quite a contrast among the other plants in '*Tephrocactus* Corner'.

Hopefully, the sight of these plants in flower will give you encouragement to try a few of them, for they are really rewarding and you will no longer say 'No to opuntias!'

***Fig.11 T. weberi***

### References

1. G. Leighton-Boyce and J. Iliff, The subgenus Tephrocactus, a historical survey with notes on cultivation, The Succulent Plant Trust, 1973. downloadable at: www.cactuspro.com/biblio_fichiers/pdf/LeightonBoyceIliff/LBITephrocactus_O.pdf
2. M. Kiessling and J. Pöschl, Tephrocactus und andere Feigenkakteen (Tephrocactus and other prickly pears), self-published, 2000. downloadable at: www.cactuspro.com/biblio_fichiers/pdf/Kiessling/Kiessling_Tephro_O.pdf

# Hybrids – art vs science

**by David Offord**

In my last article I tried, however inadequately, to argue the case for hybrids from the point of view of a simple (simple-minded perhaps) grower with artistic leanings – an enthusiast for beauty in all its forms. This is my own viewpoint but it does not blind me to the arguments of the more scientifically-minded.

It is true that most man-made hybrids will add nothing to our knowledge of the plants in habitat, their natural evolution, or how they fit into the ecosystem. The study of all these is of considerable importance but must (to be meaningful) be undertaken in the field or in botanic gardens where there are sufficient specimens. However the growing and careful reproduction of documented plants in our amateur collections can serve as a reservoir of material which may be invaluable in the future.

Yet, as I said last time, nature is a machine for hybridising. So is there not an opportunity for the scientifically-minded grower to apply his knowledge of the habitats of his plants to experiment?

By crossing the forms or (if brave enough) species that may be available to hybridise in habitat some questions of speciation may be at least further argued and perhaps with luck more light thereon may be thrown. True the suggested 'findings' would generate peer review of the heated kind we have seen before and would need to be worked over and habitat compared. Only a very minor advance in knowledge may be achieved until a properly scientifically verifiable definition of a plant species exists but as much scientific progress is made by baby steps as is achieved in eureka moments.

If, in the process of such a scientific evaluation, a match is made which produces a clone more attractive to the observer than any of its progenitors, would any botanically inclined grower/collector throw out poor Bella with other non-probative specimens? If such exists then they would be deserving of pity.

Some truly lovely plants are produced by means of chance. I have a picture of one such that appeared at a BCSS National show but when I enquired of its 'father' some time later he said that it had died without issue. A considerable loss in my view.

However, for every class act of that kind, chance produces many worthless plants which at best are boring and at worst are almost frighteningly ugly.

## Hybrids – art vs science continued

***The lost Haworthia hybrid***

At that end of the scale will the breeders who cross anything available please stop pretending that every plant that survives is worthy of offering to the public. One of many examples is a *H. maughanii* cross still in circulation which has hybrid vigour to the nth degree, threatening to get to cabbage-like proportions and, to me, is as attractive as a slap in the face. Please, you Frankensteins out there, bin your monsters. If, truly, you cannot tell what is an improvement on the parents, or at least an attractive novelty, please call for the opinion of other growers.

The Japanese are a remarkable people, not least for their appreciation of beauty. In the pursuit of this they will go to lengths unimagined in the West. A grower will fill whole glasshouses with specimens of the same species of, in this case, *Haworthia,* each a variation great, small or minute and will cross and recross them in the search for the always elusive perfection. Detailed records of crosses are kept and other pollinators are rigorously excluded. In the process he/she will produce, by this intensification of nature's methods, plants which the old lady might have evolved if given some centuries and enough vectors.

Such behaviour in an 'amateur' here would produce a diagnosis of OCD but in the rising sun it reflects only admiration and appreciation. The results and their acclaim are their own rewards. We now get the chance to grow on some of the second division of these good works in the form of Japanese 'selected clones'.

Because these human selections are not the result of chance encounters of flower and pollinator in a natural environment, but sometimes demonstrate what might happen over a long time scale in South Africa, they form an argument in favour of the wider acceptance of what are, in essence, hybrids.

Of course a purist will forcefully argue that the Orient has been stripping the habitat of extreme forms of the species for production of their improved versions. Therefore, the union of such extremes in nature is so unlikely that the chance of such plants as now circulate with various Nippon names being ever produced there is remote to the point of impossibility.

I say have joy in the bounty of such dedication and please be satisfied with what is now in the captive gene pool and leave the remaining plants where God intended. If, however, a habitat is to be destroyed by man's activities then why not collect what can be saved?

Science has of course also taken a hand in the wide distribution of many copies of wonderful plants both species/selected forms and hybrids via the practice of tissue culture. This puts many specimens of the same clone into the hands of growers all over Europe and beyond. Thus the loss of a worthwhile plant is made much less likely. I can only see this as a good thing but growers should keep records so that sexual reproduction attempts are properly limited. Of course some hybrids have either an unrecorded parentage or such a complex ancestry that inclusion in any breeding programme becomes a very hit and miss affair.

I fear that I am beginning to resemble Rambling Syd Rumpo so lets call fin for now.

The beauty parade from last time. Now my memory may be at fault and I apologise in advance to the owner but I think they were:

| | |
|---|---|
| Fig. 1 | Hybrid |
| Fig. 2 | Selected Form |
| Fig. 3 | Selected Form |
| Fig. 4 | Species |
| Fig. 5 | Species |
| Fig. 6 | Species |
| Fig. 7 | Selected Form |
| Fig. 8 | Selected Form |
| Fig. 9 | Selected Form |
| Fig. 10 | Species |
| Fig. 11 | Hybrid |
| Fig. 12 | Selected Form |

**Just over two years ago, after 40 years of growing exhibition chrysanthemums, my interests changed and I turned to growing a small number of cacti. I joined the BCSS and noticed that there was an annual Photographic Competition. So this year (2014) I decided to have a go.**

# Photographing Carnegiea gigantea

**by David Swinden**

I managed to receive a 'Highly Commended' in the 2014 BCSS Photographic Competition for my picture of the flower of *Carnegiea gigantea* (see right).

***Above: The picture for which I received 'Highly Commended' in Class 1 (Cactus Portrait) of the 2014 BCSS Photographic competition. The picture is also included in the 2015 BCSS Calendar.***

***The photograph was taken with my Canon IXUS 400 Digital Camera. The settings were f7.1 at 1/640.***

***Details of the 2015 BCSS Photographic Competition will appear in December's 'CactusWorld'.***

The photograph was taken on 15 May 2009 near Scottsdale, Arizona. Although the cactus was tall I was able to stand on an earth bank alongside it, and above one of the arms, to take my photograph.

In past years my wife and I have been fortunate to spend our holidays in Arizona. While there, part of our time is spent photographing the wild flowers and cacti. My main interest has been the actual flowers. As we tend to visit Arizona during the months of April and May there is the opportunity to enjoy the wild flowers and the early cactus flowers.

One particular cactus that interests me is *Carnegiea gigantea*, known as the *saguaro* cactus. It grows in the south western deserts of the United States of America and is the state flower of Arizona.

The adult cactus grows between 18 and 30 feet tall and the flowers are produced on the uppermost part of the plant. The large white flowers are normally up to 8cm (3in) in both width and length, and are not produced on the cactus until the plant is about eight feet tall. Up to about 200 blooms can be produced from a single *saguaro* in one season. The flowers open at midnight and close mid-afternoon the next day. Each flower only opens once.

Taking photographs of *saguaro* flowers does present one or two problems. The first is the height of the flowers on top of the cactus. You need to carry some tall step ladders into the desert – not that practical! The second problem is trying to photograph the flower before the lesser long-nosed bats, birds and bees pollinate the flowers during the night, and spoil the blooms.

***Left: The country where the saguaro grows***
***Above: Saguaro flowers***

***Stapelia gigantea –***
***three flowers opening in November***

# Stapelia gigantea

**by Philip Greswell**

Our *Stapelia gigantea* was given to us two years ago by a friend to make more room in his greenhouse. We keep it in the conservatory which is shaded by a tree, and where the temperature is kept at 60F in the winter. It was on the bottom shelf in dappled shade for most of the year. It stands in a dish, so when it is watered it is watered from below and only occasionally during the winter.

It has flowered for us each year. In mid-August this year I decided to bring it on to the bench, and also increase the watering. I was quickly rewarded by a bud, which opened in early September. This was followed by five more flower buds in early November. Three of these have opened at the time of writing but, because it is so late in the year, two of the smaller flowers probably will not open.

The carrion smell is only faint, but was enough to attract a fly in September. With windows closed in November, no insects can get in, though they are still around because of the unseasonably warm autumn, which may also have contributed to the late flowering.

*Stapelia gigantea* has the largest flowers in the genus which can be up to 10–40cm in diameter (4–16 inches). Ours is 28-30 cm (11-12 inches). The book 'Stapeliads' by Peter V Bryns, states that it is the most widely distributed species of *Stapelia* in a north–south direction. It is found in a vast area comprising parts of Mozambique, Zambia and Malawi, the eastern parts of Botswana, the lower parts of Zimbabwe, parts of north east South Africa and parts of KwaZulu Natal.

It can grow to clumps of about 1–2m (3–6ft) or more in diameter, some as big as 3m (10ft). In its vast

***Stapelia gigantea – the second flower is now open***

## **Stapelia gigantea** continued

distribution area habitats vary and range from stony or loamy slopes amongst trees, to rocky slopes and granite domes and even coastal sands under bushes alongside mangrove swamps in central Mozambique. Where ours originally came from, of course, we will never know.

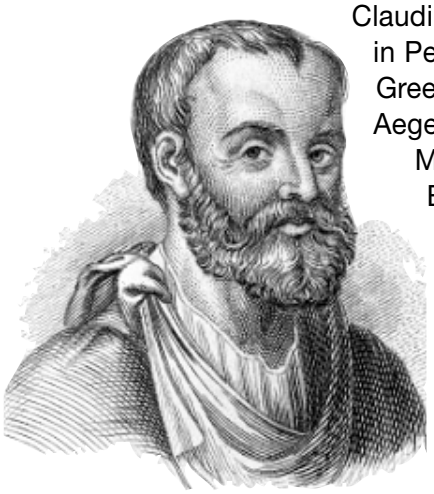
Our friend bought it as a small plant many years ago. When he first grew it, he kept it in the house during the winter and it flowered in the greenhouse where it spent the summer. Over the years it has been split up, re-potted and bits given away. In more recent years he kept it under the bench in his greenhouse where it was kept bone dry in the winter as temperatures could drop to 40F. But it never flowered during that period. It is evidently a fairly adaptable plant as it comes from such a wide range of habitats.

Our plant is still in the 9 inch pan in which it came. Whether it is the size of the plant, or keeping it warmer in the winter that makes it flower or some other unknown factor is unclear. Our friend has noticed that larger *Stapelia* specimens are more likely to flower, though of course they may not do so every year, depending on the species.

It is certainly worth trying to grow *Stapelia gigantea* for these spectacular flowers.

# Claudius Galen [Galenus] (129–c.200/216 AD)

**by Charles Staples**



Claudius Galen was born in Pergamum, an old Greek city on the Aegean coast of Asia Minor (present-day Bergama, Turkey).

Galen, a gifted intellect, became a prominent physician in the Roman Empire. He was also a surgeon, philosopher and natural scientist. His discoveries and theories dominated medicine for many centuries – up until the Renaissance period from roughly the 14th to the 17th century, at which time many of his theories were refuted.

He compiled much of the Greek and Roman medical thought of the time with emphasis on clinical observation. He influenced the development of a number of scientific disciplines including anatomy, pathology, pharmacology and neurology. Galen proved that urine was formed in the kidney and not the bladder, and that arteries carry blood (not air) although he did not discover circulation. He was the first to demonstrate that the larynx generates the voice and he invented the technique of taking the pulse still in use today.

Galen became physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius of Rome and two of his successors. He wrote extensively on medical subjects. His use of 'prognosis' in medical treatment was in conflict with the then-current care that relied upon divination and mysticism. Galen firmly believed that in order to diagnose, one must observe and reason.

You are now asking what all this has to do with the succulent plant world. The answer is that the genus *Galenia* was named in Galen's honour in 1753 by Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778).

Unfortunately Galen seems to have drawn a rather short straw as far as the genus which bears his name is concerned.

*Galenia* is a member of the Aizoaceae family, subfamily Aizooideae, which means it is related, albeit rather distantly, to *Lithops* and other mesembs. There are some 27 species listed in the Handbook of Succulent Plants (2001). With one exception they are described as low, or procumbent shrubs, although it is also noted that some species can grow up to 2m high. They grow mainly in South Africa, South Angola and Namibia. A number of yellow-flowered species are often found brightening the roadsides.

Two species *G pubescens* and *G secunda* are naturalised in Australia where they have been declared noxious weeds and *G secunda* has also made its way to Spain. To add to its popularity *G pubescens* is reported to produce plentiful nectar, which bees love, but which unfortunately renders the resulting honey inedible for humans.

Editor

**Last year I gave a talk at the Oxford Branch of the British Cactus and Succulent Society about caudiciform plants, showing the wide diversity of species contained in this group, and in this article I will highlight a few of the species discussed in my talk.**

# Caudiciform plants

**by Paul Shirley**

Caudiciform plants include a number of unexpected ones such as *Anredera cordifolia* which does not, at first glance, look like a caudex plant at all. It is a climbing species, originally from South America, which can produce many metres of growth in a year. It flowers in the autumn with white, scented flowers. The tubers are produced from the nodes along the stem, eventually falling to the ground and so beginning a new plant. It is because of the large number of tubers it produces that it has become an invasive weed in countries such as Australia. It can be cut back hard after it has flowered and it will grow and flower again the following year.

The genus *Adenium* is better known than *Adenia* and the two genera are often confused because of the similarity in name. They belong, however, to two different groups; *Adenium* belongs to the Apocynaceae family, and *Adenia* belongs to the passion flower family.

The latter's attractiveness lies in the caudex rather than in the flowers which are mainly small and insignificant. *Adenia keramanthus*, for instance, can be propagated by cuttings and will produce a tuber. I use softwood cuttings, putting them under plastic to root. A number of caudex plants can be propagated this way, but not all will produce a tuber.

A very good example of this is *Adenium obesum*, which, although it propagates easily from cuttings, will not produce a tuber. The roots will thicken up with age and can be raised up in the pot to give the appearance of a tuber, but the only way to grow a plant with a proper tuber is to start from seed. The pollinating insects are moths and the ripe seed horns split open, producing up to a hundred seeds which are dispersed by the wind. Germination from fresh seed is quick, anything up to 95% and more within days. But seed that has been kept for a year has poor germination results. Flowers can be expected within 18 months after sowing.

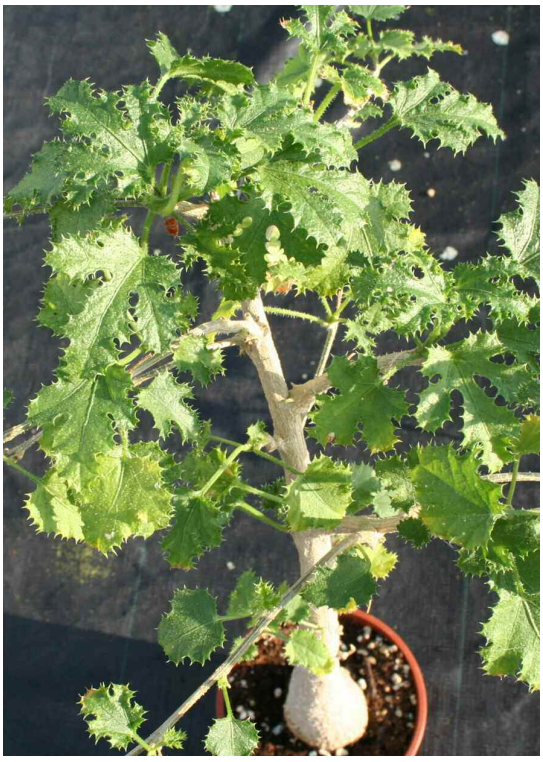
Many people think of caudiciform plants as something from far away continents, but *Bryonia* is a European plant that also grows in Britain. It has a large tuber that produces annual climbing growth and is easily recognised by the red berries produced in the autumn.

***Above:***
***Fig. 1 Anredera cordifolia***
***Below:***
***Fig. 2 Adenia globosa***

Ceropegias, on the other hand, do not grow in Europe, with the exception of the Canary Islands, but come from Africa, Asia, or Australia. Many are succulent climbers and are difficult to find in the wild. And most difficult of all the ceropegias to find are the tuberous-rooted species because of the thinner stems and smaller flowers. The tubers grow underground in the wild, but are placed on top of the soil in cultivation, reducing the chance of the tuber rotting in the winter, and also for aesthetic reasons; collectors like to see the tuber. Most *Ceropegia* tubers are smooth on the surface, but one species, *Ceropegia pachystelma*, has root nodules and this makes for easy identification of this very free-flowering and distinctive species.

***Above left:***
***Fig. 3 Bryonia dioica***

***Above right:***
***Fig. 4 Impatiens flanaganae***



***Below:***
***Fig. 5 Dendrosicyos socotranum***

A number of rare and distinctive plants come from the island of Socotra off the coast of Yemen (formerly Aden) including *Dorstenia gigas*, *Adenium socotranum*, and *Caralluma socotrana*. Another rare and unusual species is the cucumber tree, *Dendrosicyos socotranum*, which is endemic to Socotra. It can grow up to six metres tall and one metre in diameter. If grown in a warm greenhouse, it can grow all the year round. It prefers warm, dry conditions, in full sun and should be fed regularly to get the best growth. It can be propagated by both seed and cuttings. It does not seem to be too fussy as regards soil and I find that it does well in a peat-based compost.

With over a thousand species in the *Impatiens* family, it is not surprising that a few have a tuber. The most well-known of these is *Impatiens tuberosa*, which comes from Madagascar and must be grown from seed to get a tuber. Cuttings taken from the annual growth will root, but will not form a tuber. South Africa is home to three species of *Impatiens*, but only *Impatiens flanaganae* has a tuber. This species also produces annual growth like *Impatiens tuberosa*, but it can be propagated by cuttings to form a tuber. *Impatiens* in general are best grown in the shade and should flower from June to October. New tuberous species from Thailand are appearing in collections. One of them, *Impatiens mirabilis*, can form a tree that can reach three metres high with flowers that are either yellow or pink.

Some of our ordinary garden plants have tubers, but many people do not realise this, because the tuber is planted below soil level. A good example is *Incarvillea delavayii* which originates from China. It has fern-like leaves and flowers that can be likened to those of Adeniums. It can be grown with the tuber either above or below the soil. In the winter it can be treated like a dahlia.

## **Caudiciform plants** continued

Many years ago I worked in a nursery that imported *Jatropha podagrica* from a plantation in Kenya, although the plant originally comes from South America. It is an ideal plant to grow above the central heating, prefers the full sun and does not require much water. The imported plants were potted up and no water was given until the flowers were 5cm tall. Then they were watered to encourage leaf growth and when they were large enough, they were marketed. The orange flowers stood out and were very popular. At the end of the season (November), a batch of about 2,000 plants remained unsold. The plan was to put the tubers in one of the greenhouses and drop the temperature from 20°C to 5°C till March and then pot them up into new soil, get them into flower and sell them on.

***Fig. 6 Jatropha podagrica yellow flower***

Unfortunately, they all died because it turned out that they need a fairly high winter temperature, about 15°C. In one of the batches that was sent over from Kenya were two plants with very rare yellow flowers. Soon after the plants were found, the owner of the nursery died and I obtained one of the plants. The other had disappeared. Another nursery took over and they too found a yellow flowering plant in one of the batches from Kenya. That nursery was sold and I was able to obtain the plant, so that I had two yellow-flowering plants. I cross-pollinated them and got seed, which I promptly sowed. Unfortunately, the flowers turned out to be orange. Further crossing and back-crossing eventually produced a stable yellow one.

*Mirabilis* has about 70 known species in the genus. Only three or four are readily available to collectors with *Mirabilis jalopa* being the best known. It comes from South America, but has spread around the world in all areas where there is no frost. The tuber grows underground, but can be lifted above the ground without any harm. The colour of the flowers varies a lot, although red, white and yellow are the more predominant; bicoloured or multicoloured flowers are also possible. It is an easily grown species, both from seed or tubers. It can be grown outside where it will flower well, but must be brought in before the first frost.

***Above: Fig. 7 Mirabilis jalopa***

*Plectranthus ernstii* comes from South Africa and is named after Ernst van Jaarsveld. It is very easy to grow, either in full sun or shade. Propagation is by cuttings and the lower part of the cutting will swell out to form a tuber. The plant has small succulent leaves if grown in full sun, but the leaves will be longer if the plant is grown in the shade. It can take a lot of water in the growing season, but if given more than it needs, it will grow like a non-caudex *Plectranthus* with lots of leaf growth. To keep it more compact as a caudiciform, it must be kept on the dry side. The flowers are pale blue and will produce seed, but only one per flower.

***Below: Fig. 8 Plectranthus ernstii***

## **Caudiciform plants** continued

***Above:***
***Fig. 9 Talinum guadelupense***

Most collectors know *Talinium paniculatum*, which is a fast growing succulent that can easily get out of hand and become a weed in the greenhouse, because of the large number of seed that it produces without having to be cross-pollinated. A much rarer species is the slow growing *Talinium guadelupense*. It forms a thickened stem with crowns of leaves that resemble an Echeveria. The flowers are pink and fairly large, but it does not flower easily and self-pollination does not seem to work. Unlike *T. paniculatum*, which can take a lot of water, one has to be careful with watering *T. guadelupense* and even with high temperatures, one can easily lose the plant to over-watering.

*Uncarina* is a Madagascan genus that is proving popular with collectors because it is easy to grow and can flower when the plant is still fairly small. Uncarinas belong to the Pedaliaceae and can grow up to seven metres high. There are three main colours of flower: yellow, red and white, with yellow being the most common. The only white species is *Uncarina leptocarpa* which is quite rare in cultivation, but will flower at about 50cm. There are two red species, *Uncarina abriviata* and *Uncarina stellulifera*, but these need to be much larger before they will flower. The other ten or so species are yellow-flowering of which *Uncarina roeoesliana* is the easiest to grow. It can flower after a couple of years from seed. The flowers are pollinated by bees and the seed capsule is covered with nasty fish hook-like barbs which catch on to animals' fur and so is spread around. Each seed capsule contains about 20 seeds; sometimes they germinate well and at other times they do not. Why this is so is not known.

A number of the tubers we grow as collectors are used as vegetables in tropical countries, such as *Ipomoea batatas* (sweet potato) or Dioscoreas. Immigrants into Europe from the tropical countries where these roots grow naturally, often sell the roots in their shops, often at a fraction of the cost we would pay at a specialist nursery. Who knows what you may come across in the vegetable department of an Indian, Chinese or Thai shop. They, however, invariably fail to have the Latin name with them, so it is a bit of a gamble what will grow out of them. Good fun, though.

***Below:***
***Fig. 10 Uncarina leptocarpa hybrid***

# The Unthank you note

*by David Offord*

*Dear Tom*

Christmas this year has been unforgettable thanks to your unstinting, if unlooked for and unfortunate, generosity.


The little bird and the unseasonable tree were kind of cute, but I did not see the point of their repetition on Day 2. Still less appropriate were the two noisy birds, making four of our feathered friends.


I now had to find food for all and with the pet shops closed for the holiday.


On Day 3 imagine my surprise when a third apparently dead tree in a tub arrived complete with another partridge, two more twittering companions and three Gallic fowl.

Really that was, as I expressed in my polite text to you, more than enough avian visitations.


But oh no the next day what (you know very well what) did I find on the doorstep but a fourth reiteration of your original bidding. So I was now the keeper of two clutch of partridge, four non-bearing fruit trees, six expressive feathered songsters, six clucking French hens and four miniature pigeons.

A less tolerant party might have been forgiven for feelings of persecution but I, the too-forgiving, thought there was a computer glitch somewhere and that you would put a stop to the avalanche of feathers.


So it seemed, when the post delivered five beautiful gold rings (way too many but hey a girl should not complain).


No! Six productive geese, delivered to my back yard too, too early, warned me of the postman and the gold rings he carried and then of the dump and run of fresh dinosaur invaders in numbers now familiar. Warned yes but out of patience and wearied beyond measure.

For St. Michael's sake please stop, I desperately texted. Did that do any good? You bastard you know dammed well it did not.


Dawn of Day 7 and I was haggard by loss of sleep, worry and the exhaustion of curating the feathered fiends so I suppose the seven swans in my fish pond were intended to calm my nerves. Well, even to such a hard-hearted soul as you I wanted to be charitable. By midday the horror al la Hitchcock began all over again and those gold rings just don't cut it you know.


Day 8 and now at last no early postman calleth. My feathered fantasy was at an end! Oh no; you had more useful gifts in mind. In an age where few can afford servants why did you think I had room, wealth and the wish for no fewer than eight milk maids and a herd of cows requiring their services?

Later that afternoon one of the maids knocked at the door dropped a delightfully old fashioned curtsy and asked where should they put; well you, of course, know just what was arriving. I do not believe Messrs F & M had messed up but surely they must have twigged that something was amiss when their stores and contacts were scoured clean of every shape and description of non-raptor birdlife.

The Local Authority was now showing an unhealthy interest in your best wishes as my neighbours, not unreasonably, were complaining of the noise and now the smells. I have a Noise Abatement Order and a warning that Planning Consent must be obtained before using my outbuildings as a dairy! Please, I begged in my messages to you, no more, please take them away. My entreaty was ignored and your vicious pummelling by presents continued.


Just what was I supposed to make of the nine ladies dancing? Their entertainment value soon wore off I can assure you!

As I dreaded, trudging in over the fields, there came another eight milkmaids and their wretched ruminants.

The ladies and the maids were pleased to see each other and greeted one another, just like old friends. As if they knew what was to follow. Of course the removal van was what immediately

followed,containing the gold rings of the day and the various flying fowls in types and quantities all previously enumerated and known to you, you cold-hearted man.

I had run out of stored food for my unwelcome guests. Desperate times you gave me and they called on my ingenuity for desperate remedies. Then the penny dropped.

I converted the gold rings to cash (very handy the present high price of gold) and I served pigeon and chicken pie all round. Plucking 16 doves and 10 hens (I saved the remaining hens for the eggs!) was time consuming but therapeutic and watching the maids and ladies practise their culinary skills and enjoying, or otherwise, the results both relieved the tensions within and partly satisfied my well motivated revenge.

Now I was getting your message and before more ridiculous dancers or old fashioned agricultural servants appeared I had been on the phone and found placements by way of free labour in local dairy farms and keep fit academies while the cattle went to market. I hope you can cope with the wages that will no doubt be demanded, I am keeping the proceeds of sale!


Of all the useless gifts so far foisted on me the ten chinless Hooray Henrys that toddled up to my door and indulged in aristocratic leapfrog must take the biscuit. Well in fact they took a good deal more but as some of them brought their shotguns the accommodation difficulties with the assorted birdlife that inevitably followed were considerably eased. They seemed to get on remarkably well with the remaining ladies and milkmaids too.


On the eleventh day you clearly thought that the dancers and the leapers lacked direction and eleven pipers happily blowing their fanfares were needed to further encourage them.

There was some disagreement between the musicians and the bouncy baronets as to the newcomers' relationships with the maids etc. In short they disturbed the peace enough for the police to attend for the third time that day and I am accused of maintaining a disorderly house. My neighbours clapped as the rozzers hauled me away. I cannot blame them. Christmas has been almost as tormented for them as it was for me, thanks to the noisy and now licentious conduct of those you have wished on me.


Finally on Day 12 I knew most of what was coming but the sound of a pipe band marching to the accompaniment of twelve drummers with acrobatic aristocracy and all the rest of the aforementioned did something for my shattered moral. It determined me to throw the biggest party my district has known since the Silver Jubilee! Plenty of grub.

Part of my deal with the cattle market required the return of one in 20 prepared carcasses and those birds that did not see it coming were added to the fare along with the vegetables kindly donated by farmer guests who wanted to say thanks for the cheap and skillful labour of the milkmaids; who as it turns out were good all-round agricultural lasses.

Now I have said goodbye to the milling throng of madcap performers,wishing them well in their careers as carnival artists.

The RSPCA have taken charge of the surviving swans and the local pet shop, having reopened after the holiday, purchased the calling birds. The few remaining French hens and geese are still laying and are welcome to stay for now, but are destined for the table when they go off lay. The turtle doves have joined a flock thereof I discovered not too far away (google is useful is it not) and the partridges that remained have flown the coop.

The cows have gone to the grateful farmers or the slaughterhouse and most of the ladies and milkmaids have gone with the drummers,the loony lords or the randy pipers with those that remained dispersed looking for other employment.

The gold rings are all sold and have gone someway towards repairing my relationships with the neighbours and paying my lawyer for defending me in the upcoming prosecutions.

Maybe I will start an orchard with the 12 trees.

What the Law can do to me now pales into insignificance compared to the deliberate persecution you inflicted and so I fear it not.

I wonder what I can give you for your birthday!

Your once loving friend

*Elaine*