Essex
Succulent Review
Volume 51 Number 2 June 2014

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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of the on-line Essex Succulent Review. I have enjoyed putting it together, and I hope you will enjoy reading it.

If you would like to 'subscribe' (and have not already told me) just send an email to me at sheilacude@blueyonder.co.uk and I will add you to the subscription list.

An on-line 'subscription' is completely free. You will receive an email to notify you when the next issue is ready with, initially, a pdf file. Later I will send a link for you to download the file yourself. All issues will be archived at http://www.zone15.bcss.org.uk

For the present, for previous subscribers who do not have access to the internet, Eddy Harris will continue to produce and distribute a hard copy version, although please note that this will be in greyscale only. For details please contact Eddy at 49 Chestnut Glen, Hornchurch, Essex, RM12 4HL.

As many of you who read this will know Eddy Harris has done a sterling job of editing the Essex Succulent Review for many years, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his continuing help and support.

Essex **Succulent** Review

The Essex Succulent Review is published quarterly in March, June, September and December.

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Suggestions and contributions are always welcome. Please phone or email first.

Zone 15 Mini-convention

Sunday 9 March 2014

The annual Zone 15 Mini-convention was held at Capel Manor, the usual venue for Lea Valley Branch's meetings.

Two interesting and diverse tours had been arranged. Andy Young invited us to a private viewing of Steve Hammer's superb collection of South African plants. After a quick look at the slightly chaotic greenhouses (no need for any glass in the Californian sunshine) we admired a number of his fine plants. Andy pointed out that everything was grown on the top of the bench, no tucking a few shy and retiring haworthias underneath, and the plants all looked extremely well on this treatment.

Our next expedition was to the northern part of Mexico in the company of Paul Hoxey. The plants seen included a fascinating glimpse of *Astrophytum caput-medusae* almost hidden among the grass and undergrowth where it was growing. No wonder it was only discovered as recently as 2001.

Excellent plant sales were provided by Stuart Riley (Plantlife) see below, although we were not able to have our usual book sales this year as the date clashed with another event. Capel Manor produced its usual generous buffet and altogether the convention was a most enjoyable day.

Zone 15 Events June-August 2014

Saturday 7 June **11.00am–4.00pm**
Havering Branch Annual Show:
North Romford Community Centre, Colliers Row, Clockhouse Lane, Romford RM5 3QJ

Saturday 14 June **12noon–6.00pm**
Southend-on-Sea Branch Show:
United Reformed Church Hall, Kings Road, Leigh-on-Sea SS0 8PP

Saturday 5 July **10.30am–4.00pm**
Waltham Forest Branch Show:
Chingford Horticultural Hall, Larkshall Road, Chingford E4 6PE
Plant sales from 9.00am

Saturday 26 July **11.00am–4.00pm**
Zone 15 Annual Show
Bushukan Bonsai Nursery, Lower Road, Hockley, Essex SS5 5NL

Also of interest, might be the near-by **Zone 6 Annual Show**.

Saturday 7 June **10.30am-4.00pm**
Pirton Village Hall, High Street, Pirton, near Hitchin, SG5 3PS

Acanthocalycium violaceum
(Lobivia spiniflora)

by John Grourk

Acanthocalycium violaceum can grow to be some 60cm tall and 15cm in diameter. This means mine is still a 'baby' at only 8.5cm tall and 10cm in diameter. It is growing up rapidly though, having got some 2cm taller and added another 2cm in diameter over the past year.

I have had the plant for about two years and it flowered for the first time in 2013 with a flush of six flowers in June, followed by two more in August. Then, in September 2013, it produced a further 13 flowers, shown here.

Unfortunately, as with most plants in this group, the flowers only lasted for about three days. After this, the flowers resembled a candle-like shape with the violet colour remaining for some time.

Above: A violaceum in John's collection, and Above right: the beautiful flowers Photos: John Grourk

A violaceum will not normally flower until it is at least four years old, and it must have bright sunlight to encourage flowering. The blooms will close up when the sun goes in, and also at night. Although my plant was kept in a bright conservatory I still placed it outside in full sun whenever possible. During the summer period I watered roughly every three weeks and added a high potassium feed on three occasions. I do not water from October onwards, and give a cool period during the winter to encourage flowering next year. ■

What's in a name?

In 'The New Cactus Lexicon' 2006 *Acanthocalycium violaceum* became *Echinopsis spiniflora*. In 'The New Cactus Lexicon Illustrations' 2013, the genus Lobivia is reinstated (minus some of its previous members) and so *E spiniflora* became *Lobivia spiniflora*. Editor

Do you have a plant of which you are particularly proud?

Perhaps it flowered for the first time this year, or has done exceptionally well.

If so I would like to feature it in the Essex Succulent Review. Please let me have some details, together with pictures (contact details on page 2).

Monsters

by Chris Coombes

OK I'll admit it. I like things that are a little different, a bit weird even. I love those one-offs that stand out from the crowd and shout, 'Look at me; I don't conform and really couldn't give a damn about being pointed at and ridiculed. I'm going to do things my way'

As a kid I used to watch horror films. The more outrageous the monsters were, the better I loved them. Some things never change and my love for all things strange followed me into the cactus and succulent world where I have acquired a nice collection of oddballs.

For those of a nervous disposition, and to the purists within the hobby, I urge you to look away now for in this, the first of several articles on the oddities of the succulent kingdom, I would like to share with you some of my favourite types of monsters.

This rare example in my collection is split 50:50 and can't decide whether to inhibit its spines or not! It is possibly a chimera or perhaps schizophrenic!

So what actually is a monstrose plant? According to the botanical dictionary it is a plant that 'shows a loss of symmetry and is lacking a single dominant linear apex'. It is also said that they exhibit 'negative features such as the reduction or loss of parts (including leaves, spines and ribs)'.

What does all of this actually mean? Well, the apical bud (sometimes known as the terminal bud) is the main growth point of the plant. Within this is the meristem, where countless chemical actions are taking place which lead to the plant producing a set number of ribs, a certain spine formation and all of its other features, each dictated by its genetic blueprint. These are honed to perfection by previous generations, so that the plant is perfectly adapted to survive in its home environment. This bud also suppresses the growth points below it so that it can keep this control (known as apical dominance).

Fig 4: Lobivia sp

A monstrose plant results when a genetical glitch takes place and the blueprint is altered. The exact cause is still unknown so, despite sending a man to the moon and splitting the atom, the best scientists in the world have so far been beaten by these monstrous! That is one of the reasons I find them so fascinating.

When the apical dominance is lost, many more growth points will try to take over, the result of which is a much disorganised plant with multiple heads, (Fig 1).

Some monstrose plants manage to keep control of a single growth point but produce certain other negative features. These include stunted growth, loss or reduction of ribs, losing the ability to flower and spine suppression, (Fig 2). Surely a contender for the most negative features on one plant must be the monstrose form of *Lophocereus schottii,* (Fig 3), which has lost all its spines, the ribs are reduced to random knobbly lumps on the stem and it is incapable producing any functional flowers!

Each of these negative growth anomalies takes the plant away from its perfected blueprint and makes it less able to cope with the rigours of its environment, thus nearly all of these plants quickly perish in habitat.

But at times these plants like to mock our definitions. Whenever we try to categorise them they do something a bit different, and have been known to produce more vigorous growth, longer spines, (Fig 4) and many extra ribs and flowers, (Fig 5).

Fig 5: Mam painteri

Fig 1: Cereus repandus

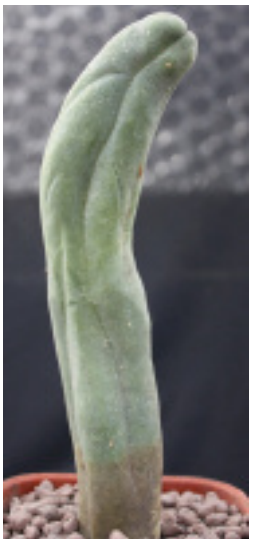


Fig 2: Trichocereus bridgesii inermis (T lageniformis)

Fig 3: Lophocereus schottii (Pachycereus schottii)

Monsters continued

Possibly the winner of the 'weirdest looking' award would be one of my favourites *Mammillaria bocasana* 'Fred'.

There are so many diverse clones of this, some very dissimilar to each other, and a few showing much differentiation on just a single plant

These pictures show some of the weird and wonderful forms available.

Several different forms of 'Fred' including a crested specimen

Left: a form which produces numerous small heads

Right: the form known as 'red coral'

Had enough of the cacti? Well the succulents can look just as hideous as well. A few misplaced genes in *Sinocrassula yunnanensis* leaves it looking like a giant sea slug! (Fig 6). And even the simple form of the *Lithops* is not immune from change, (Fig 7).

If seeds are collected from monstrose plants the result is that we end up with a very much higher percentage of monstrose seedlings, usually between 5% and 67% depending on the species. Unfortunately the germination rates are generally very low.

Fig 7: Lithops sp

Spiral torsion

There are times however when some sort of consistency is achieved within this group of weirdos and several plants are affected by the same anomaly. Such an event is spiral torsion.

What happens here is that the cortex of the plant (several layers of cells just below the epidermis which contains, among other things, the chloroplasts used in photosynthesis) wants to grow more quickly than the axis (the centre section). Of course it cannot break away and overtake the rest of the plant so the only way it can achieve this faster

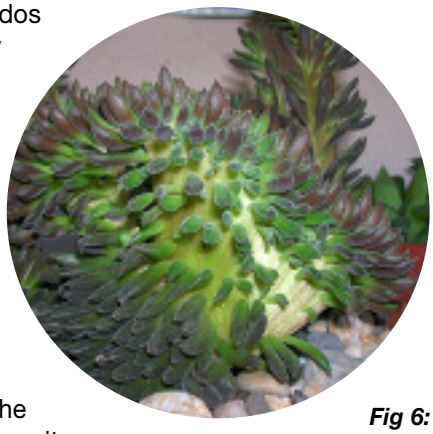


Fig 6: Sinocrassula yunnanensis

growth is to take a more circular route to its destination (like most taxi drivers I know). However by doing this it twists the remainder of the body around with it and produces a wonderful spiral shaped plant, (Figs 8 and 9 and page 1). They are not fussy, and will quite happily twist in either a clockwise or anticlockwise direction. The greater the differentiation between the growth rates of the two areas of the plant, the tighter the spirals will be.

Although this is more noticeable on the faster growing column like plants there are also examples of the globular cacti being affected. These seem to be very much in the minority, but I am unsure whether this is because these plants are simply not as susceptible to this effect, or that they are weeded out in the nurseries because at first glance they appear to be diseased, (Fig 10).

Proliferation

Now I am going to start cheating a little. This final group of plants is not strictly monstrose but, in my defence, they are always labelled as such by the nurseries, so I think I can get away with it.

Fig 11: Proliferated Astrophytum myriostigma quadricostatum

It has been discovered that proliferation is caused not by means of a genetical glitch but by a mycoplasma (an infectious body combining features of both bacteria and viruses). This is further proved when grafting an infected plant, as the stock will become proliferated too.

A plant produces two particular substances of interest in this case, cytokinins and auxins. The balance of these help to inhibit the growth of the lateral buds so that only the main growth points are dominant. What the mycoplasma does is switch this ability off, allowing every possible growth point to erupt. The result of this is chaos, (Fig 11). Sadly because of the amount of energy the plant is expending in making all of this extra growth it rarely has any left for flower production.

Cultivation

So you have taken your first big step towards insanity and have decided to snare yourself a monster. Maybe it was just to frighten the kids away from the rest of the collection, but never mind. The question is what do you do with it? Does it need caging, or can it be treated like any other plant?

Well the answer is maybe and no. The cage is optional but mostly, I think, these plants need a slightly different growing regime compared to a normal plant of the species.

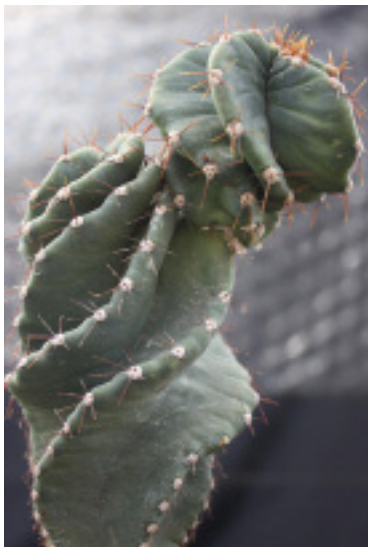


Fig 8: Spiral cereus forbesii (C hankeanus)

In general, all of these plants are more sensitive and touchy, which is really not surprising. Plants have evolved to grow at certain rates, in their own particular shapes and sizes for a reason, and mutated plants that grow differently are very likely to be less well-adapted and disadvantaged when grown in similar conditions to their original environments. Some growers often find they have to grow their plants a bit 'harder' (water and feed even less than usual) as the abnormal tissues are more likely to split if grown too quickly and become infected, or simply rot, due to their physical changes from the ordinary.

Slugs and snails can be much more of a problem as they love the spineless bodies of some, and mealy bugs adore all of the extra hiding places that they are offered as the result of disorganised growth. Regular sprays of systemic insecticides (or dunking in something more environmentally friendly) are needed to control the latter.

Fig 9: Spiral cereus sp

My final word on this is simply to watch your monster. It won't bite, usually. As with the other plants in your collection it will typically show you when it is not happy and steps can be taken (not towards the bin, I thought I had won you over) to adjust its care so that, hopefully, the two of you can go on and live a long and happy life together. ■

Fig 10: Spiral Notocactus uebelmannianus (Parodia crassigibba)

A brief history of the genus Mammillaria
and species Mammillaria mammillaris
by Charles Staples, CSSA Historian

The genus *Mammillaria* is a part of the family *Cactaceae* and was first described by Adrian Hardy Haworth (1768–1833) in 1812. He was an English gardener, amateur botanist and entomologist, who studied natural history all his life. He was the leading English authority of his time on succulent plants and became a Fellow of the Linnaean Society in 1798.

The name *Mammillaria* is derived from the Latin '*mamilla*' (meaning nipple or teat) which refers to the tubercles of the plant. These tubercles are very pronounced in the species *Mammillaria longimamma* A.P. de Candolle 1828.

Spelling of the genus name was a problem in the early 1800s. Author Ludwig Reichenbach (1793–1879) used the spelling 'Mamillaria' in 1827, while authors John Torrey (1796–1873) and Asa Gray (1810–1888) came up with the spelling 'Mammilaria' in 1840. Various authors have used these two spellings over the years; however, the accepted spelling for this genus is '*Mammillaria*' (with two ms and two ls).

Unknown to Haworth in 1812, a John Stackhouse (1742–1819) had previously used the name *Mammillaria* for a genus of algae in 1809. According to strict taxonomic rules the algae genus takes precedence for the *Mammillaria* name. It is interesting to note that cactologists Nathaniel Lord Britton (1859–1934) and Joseph Nelson Rose (1862–1928) were familiar with the algae problem over the name *Mammillaria*, and by following the strict rules of priority came up with a new name, '*Neomammillaria*', in 1923 to take its place for the cactus plant genus.

However, since Stackhouse's algae name never came into actual use, the International Botanical Congress of 1930 decided to conserve Haworth's *Mammillaria* name under the family *Cactaceae*. (What a sigh of relief that must have been at the time for people who did not like the change to *Neomammillaria*.)

In his book 'The Cactus Family' (2001), Edward Frederick Anderson (1932–2001) gives the following as synonyms of the genus *Mammillaria*:

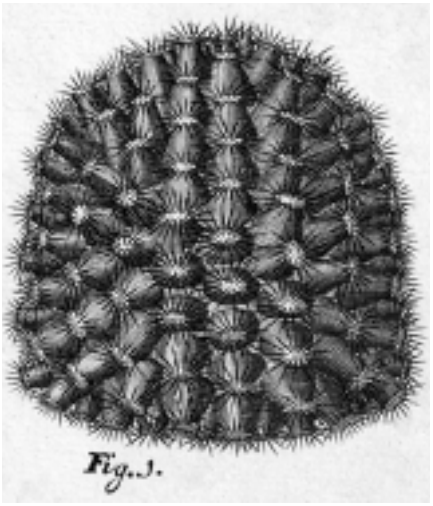
Cactus Linnaeus 1753
Bartschella Britton & Rose 1923
Dolichothele Britton & Rose 1923
Mamillopsis Britton & Rose 1923
Neomammillaria Britton & Rose 1923
Phellosperma Britton & Rose 1923
Solisia Britton & Rose 1923
Chilita Orcutt 1926
Porfiria Boedeker 1926
Krainzia Backeberg 1938
Ebnerella Buxbaum 1951
Oehmea Buxbaum 1951
Leptocladodia Buxbaum 1951
Pseudomammillaria Buxbaum 1951

It is apparent that Britton & Rose split out a number of mammillarias due to the shape of the plant or the colour of the flower, as did Buxbaum. You may recognise some of the names. A further genus, *Cochemiea*, is now part of *Mammillaria* but *Mammilloydia* is recognised as a separate distinct genus. (As per New Cactus Lexicon 2006 & 2013 – Editor)

Mammillaria mammillaris

This plant has an interesting history. It was evidently the first known species of the genus and the only one known to Carolus Linnaeus (1707–1778) according to Britton & Rose. It was earlier described and illustrated in a 1697 book by Johannes Commelijn (1620–1692), published after his death by his nephew, Caspar Commelijn (1667–1731). The illustrated plate was from a coloured drawing by Maria Moninckx (1673–1757) and has been used by numerous books over the last 300 years.

David Hunt (1938–) tells us in his 1987 book 'A New Review of Mammillaria Names' that *Mammillaria mammillaris* was well-known in Europe by the end of the 17th century and that it was described in the book 'Phytographia' (1691) by Leonard Plukenet (1641–1706). He further states that the illustration may have been drawn from a plant in the famous garden of Henry Compton (1632–1713) at Fulham. Since Compton exchanged a lot of material with the European Dutch gardens of the time, it is thought that this cactus plant came from the Dutch island of Curacao in the Netherlands Antilles of the West Indies in the Caribbean Sea off the coast of Venezuela, South America.



Mammillaria mammillaris – illustration from Phytographia (1691) by Leonard Plukenet.

Linnaeus, when setting up his binomial nomenclature system of plant names in his 1753 book, 'Species Plantarum', gave this plant the species name *Cactus mammillaris*. His description of the plant was '*Cactus subrotundus tectus tuberculis ovatis barbatis*' meaning 'the nearly round cactus covered with ovate, bearded tubercles'. That description would fit a number of *Mammillaria* species today; however, in 1753 Linnaeus' description would be appropriate since it was the only cactus he knew of at the time with that shape.

A brief history of the genus Mammillaria continued

When a taxonomist decides to set up a new generic name, this person also adds a specific epithet which together is referred to as the ‘type’ of the genus. Haworth did this by making *M simplex* the 'type' of the genus. As late as 1983 the International Botanical Congress decided that *M simplex* was an illegitimate name for Linnaeus' *C mammillaris* and conserved *C mammillaris* as the type of the genus. What this means is that the earliest specific epithet (in this case 'mammillaris') for that particular plant species must be retained even when a taxonomist splits out a group of plants into another genus. For historical purposes *M simplex* becomes an illegitimate name and is generally listed as a synonym of *M mammillaris*.

Mammillaria mammillaris flowering for the first time at about three years old. The plant is not difficult to grow, but is not often seen in collections, possibly because it is not all that interesting, with small flowers and unremarkable spination. Photo: Tony Roberts

Credit for describing *M mammillaris* goes to Gustav Karl Wilhelm Hermann Karsten (1817–1908) who described the species name in 1882.

Distribution of this plant is from Curacao and neighbouring islands of the Netherlands Antilles, the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, Tobago, and Venezuela. It is generally found on limestone hills and/or outcrops in these tropical sites.

Since Haworth's *M simplex* did not survive the name game, does any other *Mammillaria* species of his survive? I do not know how many Mammillaria species he named in 1812, but I found two of them that are still with us (according to Anderson`s book ‘The Cactus Family’): *M discolor* and *M prolifera*. There are also two that he named in 1824 *M geminispina* and *M magnimamma*. ■

References:

Britton, N L & Rose, J N (1923) *The Cactaceae, Vol 4*.

Craig, R T (1945) *The Mammillaria Handbook*.

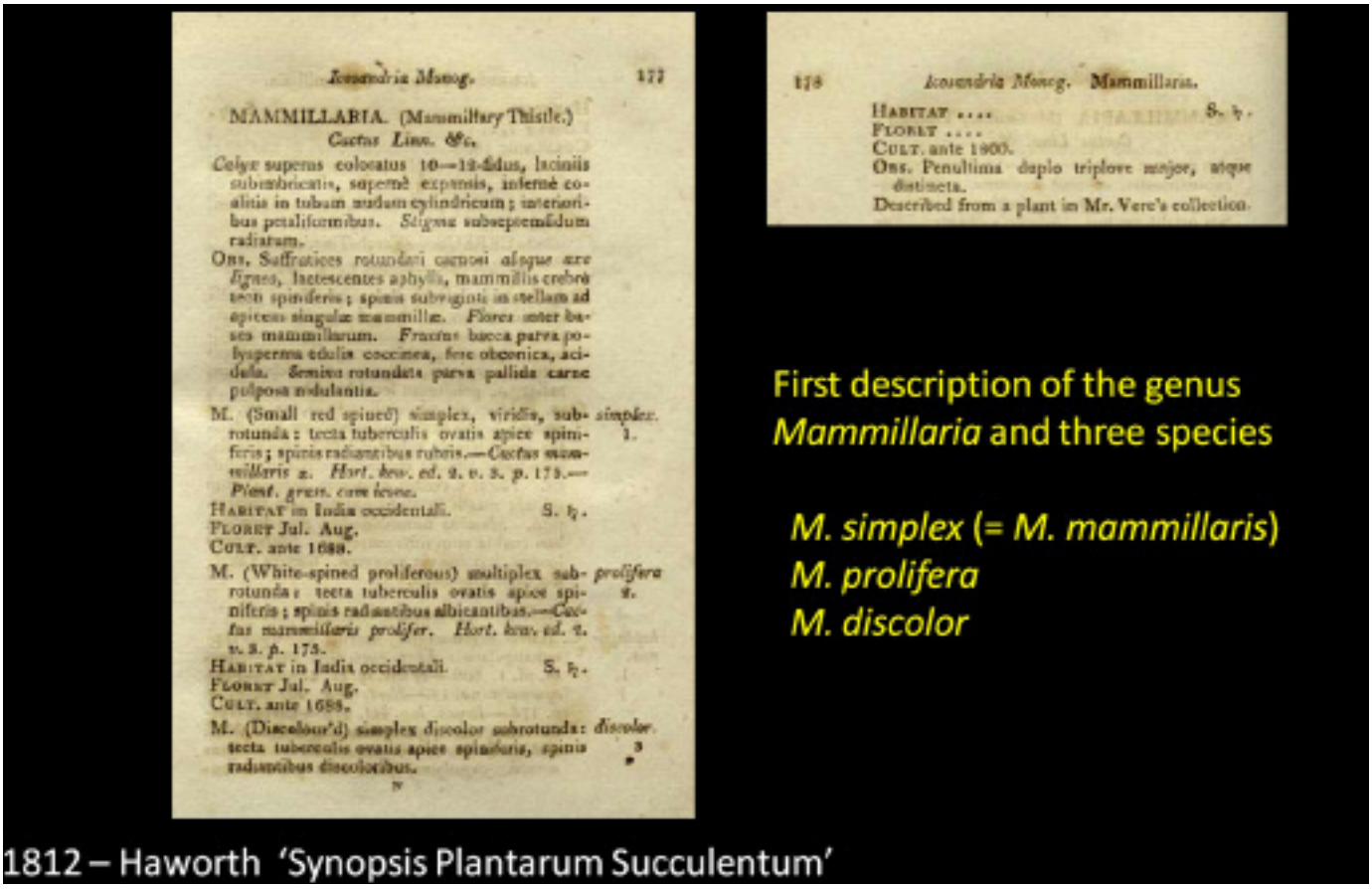
Pilbeam, J W (1981) *Mammillaria, A Collector's Guide.*

- (1999) *Mammillaria*.

Hunt, D R (1987) *A New Review of Mammillaria Names*.

Anderson, E F (2001) *The Cactus Family.*

Haworth named three species in 1812 as shown below in the relevant page and a half of his original descriptions.



Two plants flowering
in 2012/2013

by Philip Greswell

Euphorbia radyeri and *Tunilla hintonii longispina brevispina (Tunilla corrugata)* have flowered prolifically since my move to Lincolnshire. It is not entirely clear why, as can be seen from the following cultural information, but I put it down primarily to better light and ventilation

Euphorbia radyeri

Previously named *Euphorbia caerulescens*, this South African *Euphorbia* has been in my collection for 50 years

Euphorbia radyeri Photo: Philip Greswell

and in the early summer of 2012 it flowered spectacularly well for the first time. It had flowered once before, a couple of years ago, but was not nearly as prolific.

It is easy to keep and is very hardy to 40F/4.5C or even lower. Some years it does not grow, though it is not clear just why.

In the Autumn of 2011 I moved to Lincolnshire where light levels are much better. The following winter of 2011/2012 was extremely cold and much longer than normal and, when it flowered in 2012, it was not a good summer. A re-potting in 2011 may also have helped. One nurseryman informed me he had discovered these euphorbias like plenty of root room

During last year's good summer it did not grow nor did it flower, so whatever made it flower in 2012 is still a mystery. Though it could be attributed to the move, it is not clear as to what aspect triggered the flowering. It remained in the same position in the greenhouse. Other euphorbias I put outside in the spring, *E dentoni*, *horrida, mammillaris* and *polygona*, though not from the same groups, have grown and flowered well during the spring and summer when outside in the garden. I have now put *E radyeri* outside to see if this will make it grow and flower again but it is as yet too early to see whether it will do so.

Tunilla hintonii longispina brevispina (T corrugata)

This is native to Aguas Negras, San Juan, Argentina. I have had these plants, which came originally from René Geisler, for ten or more years. They previously grew in a small unheated greenhouse on my allotment in London. Ventilation was not good because I kept the greenhouse door locked to prevent theft. In the spring and summer it was very hot and in winter the temperature dropped well below freezing. Light levels would have been quite good.

They had occasional flowers, but nothing compared to this. The winter of 2012/2013 was very cold and even longer that the previous winter, with no sun. The previous summer was poor with little sun. The greenhouse is kept at 40F/4.5C. This year it has been mild and the winter was warm and shorter and it is flowering prolifically again along with other '*Tephrocacti*', so it would seem that fresh air may be the governing factor

What made them flower?

One of the biggest changes I made when I came to Lincolnshire was to give as much ventilation as possible. If the air felt stuffy in the greenhouse I left the vents open, even on quite cold nights in early spring, hoping the fresh air would help with the CAM mechanism whereby the

Two plants flowering continued

plants breath at night. The fresh air may also have helped them have better photosynthesis during the day.

Many collectors here told me last year that they had more flower than normal on their cacti, even after a cold winter which lasted a few weeks longer than usual with freezing easterly winds. The longer winter may have induced the plants to produce more flowers than usual, keen to do so after such a long period of cold and dormancy. So, perhaps the long period of cold at 40F/4.5C contributed, but I feel it is the improved ventilation which helped to initiate the enhanced flower of the *Tunilla* and other cacti as well as the good light. Other *Tunilla* and *Maihueniopsis* species also flowered prolifically, the former throughout the spring and well in to August last year and are again flowering this spring. Other cacti have flowered for the first time also. ■

Tunilla hintonii longispina brevispina (Tunilla corrugata)
Photo: Philip Greswell

The 16th Waltham Forest Cactus Crawl 27–30 March 2014

by John Watmough

Thursday

Your correspondent and Martin Doorbar rise unbelievably early and take themselves and Martin's daughters' toy chest to Chingford. They find most of the travellers already there and their cars in the process of being packed like sardines next to the Horticultural Hall. We are delighted when an excellent Motts of Aylesbury coach arrives, bearing our indispensable guide Nicky and our incomparable driver Trevor (who used to sell greenhouses to the great and the good, and sometimes even to cactus growers.) Stirling is not with us this year and Joyce allocates the seats according to her own arcane character evaluations. Stuart Riley, a new boy, is given the back seat so that he can stretch his legs down the aisle. Only there is no back seat, just a tall and narrow can (as the Americans picturesquely call it) where Stuart refuses to sit.

We are all happy and about to start eating our packed lunches when Eddy finds he has forgotten his passport. He rejects a crash course in Albanian in favour of unpacking his car from the pound and driving home to get it. So we are a little bit late getting to the Brentwood Road to pick up the Essex contingent plus, we hope, Eddy. No Essex jokes this year. Instead Norman Tate (whose own head is ornamented by the sort of tea-cosy that elderly monarchists knit for the Queen) picks on Mark Plumer to be the recipient of back-of-the-bus abuse for the rest of the trip. Admittedly Mark is sitting in Stirling's usual seat. Also, he is sporting a Fatboy Kim haircut and kilt-length sawn-offs, which, since he has just moved to Edinburgh, make him the butt (!) of all the jibes that Englishmen hope will offend the Scots.

All aboard now, including Eddy. Nothing else can go wrong and we hit the frog and toad (Stirling is present in spirit) to Ashford. Oh dear! There is a two-mile tailback to the Dartford Crossing. A lorry has demolished one of the tollbooths. So, no stopping between here and Rob Wellens's place beyond the turnip field in the Dutch boondocks. Haworthia-lovers very excited, others (a minority on these trips) hang round the coffee jug and mutter miserable comments involving Glyphosate.

Trevor spirits us to the excellent Postillion Hotel in Dordrecht. It seems that we left so much grit in it last year that it is cheaper to rebuild it in faux-marble than to clean it out. Only the lifts are unchanged. The bar serves a choice between Heineken and Heineken. A central tap claiming to deliver 'Urtyp Pilsener' (think about it) is not connected but, the barman assures us, would, if it were working, be connected to the Heineken barrel by a T-junction. John Jackson announces Heineken on the management. Hooray! We settle down for a welcome dinner, soup or salad, meat or fish, and compulsory ice-cream. Your weary correspondent slips away to a place that even Heineken cannot reach.

Friday

So it must be Germany. My readers know the route to Piltz by now, so there is no need to describe the journey. The only incident of note is that, as we cross the German border on the Cologne autobahn, there is a mighty big bang. Front passengers report that the coach is struck by a Panzergrenade, but I think it was really a Kartoffel. Even so, the windscreen is cracked across its entire width.

New members have been advised to make their purchases in Piltz quickly, then spend as much time as possible in Georg's magnificent private collection. They are suitably awestruck. John winkles everybody out, as usual, and we set off for Specks at Golfcart.

Plants at Rob Wellens' Succulent Tissue Culture
Photo: David Traish

There is no sign of Stirling in Specks. It has been imagined that he is chained to a bench with his fingernails cracked and dried with crushed pumice. So, disappointed, his friends play a trick on him. They provide a mooli or similar exotic vegetable, pot it up in Vesuvius special, and suborn Ernst into labelling it with a €350 price tag. Ernst obviously thinks this is funny, but it is doubtful if Stirling does when he is asked to pay for it. As usual, our people buy things that they never knew they wanted because they have never heard of them. And we want to make sure that there is nothing left for the Scottish trip. But some malcontents (no doubt cactus growers) reckon that Ernst and Marita could sell much more if the coach party were well refreshed with exotic distillates beforehand. Well, you are reading it here first, Ernst.

Not far to Ingo Breuer's establishment with the rolling tables. This is where experienced visitors hang about on the periphery, while keen handicappers crush the pelvises of the previously fit so as to limit their chances of getting the best plants at subsequent nurseries. Those of a more delicate nature, such as your correspondent, discover a new ice-cream parlour, selling huge tubfuls cheap, just by Ingo's entrance. On the journey back to Dordrecht the pleasure of insulting Mark conflicts with the discomforts of indigestion and sugar-rush.

Back at the hotel there is such a hideous din that it seems that the whole hotel has been built into a loudspeaker. Apparently it is a teeny-boppers' fun night. Unbelievably some of our members, pathetically imagining that they are still attractive to teenage girls ('No, cheeky, it isn't embalming fluid, it's insecticide'), attempt to penetrate to the origins of this pandemonium, but they are chased away by some bouncers whose description is unwholesomely zoological.

Saturday

This is the day for doing the rounds of the Dutch nurseries. It is also the day when our ladies of culture, Annie, Brenda and Mary, disappear on their traditional cultural trip. But this year's culture consists of shopping in The Hague and sampling pastries and ice-cream.

The great uncultured, meanwhile, head for those square miles of Holland south of the Hague that are glazed over. We arrive first at Jan Westeijn's wholesale nursery next to the radish factory. Westeijn's dog greets us with a large wooden arrow in its mouth bearing the legend 'Way Out'. We do not take the hint, but scour the premises for Jan's rejects, which means any plant that is not exactly identical to the hundreds of others on its bench. Your correspondent finds a variegated *Lophophora* and is rather shocked to be charged the extortionate price of three euros. Even Trevor has to make two attempts at getting his 42-footer out of Westeijn's alley.

Next is Van der Linden's. It still exists, in spite of persistent rumours that a new city is going to be built on the site. Some folks keep an eye on James Gold to make sure he does not buy anything that will not fit under the coach; some watch Barry Phipps because if he gets lost it will take six men on bicycles to find him; and others run behind Eddy because he can sniff out *Lithops* the way a pig can sniff out truffles. Van der Linden has some novelty cacti that have been sprayed with luminous paint in lurid colours. Eddy is annoyed because half a dozen *Lithops* have been accidentally flecked with it.

As purchases fill the underside of the coach, Trevor remains more inscrutable than a Chinese poker champion.

Third on the day's itinerary is Cok's. Cok stands by the door to welcome us, and your correspondent is frankly surprised to hear some of our party address him thus: 'Wotcher Cornelius!' Apparently Cornelius is his given name, and 'Cok' relates to something his mother said when he was new-born. Cok is asked about a rumour that he is retiring. He says he retires in 1992 from his capsicum business and has no intention of giving up his succulent nursery. The trouble with Cok's customer-does-it-himself labelling system is that Ine on the cash desk does not believe the customers' labels and has to rush backwards and forwards into the sales greenhouse to check them.

It is half-an-hour's run to Two Shovels at Lexmond. The cognoscente, with elbows bared, battle their way to the 'Special Corner', where at least the prices are special.

Cactus Crawl continued

But the cactus fanatics have not seen a proper cactus since yesterday morning and are mad to spend their money. Some very large cacti are seen being hauled out. Even after everybody has paid for their plants we have to wait half an hour for the coach because Nicky and Trevor have taken it to look for ice-cream. Even so, bonhomie is swiftly restored as we depart as we aim amusing, but by now unoriginal, insults at Mark.

Back at the hotel there is plenty of time to pack the plants and ensure that the rooms are thoroughly gritted. At dinner, Eddy thanks Nicky and Trevor, then everybody thanks John and Joyce for the free beer – and for the Cactus Crawl, come to think of it. Traditionally the diehards retire to the bar to pool their euroshrapnel and exchange it for pig's ear. (Stirling, you are not forgotten.) Then, boracic lint, down to their last *ngultrum*, they are swept out of the bar at two-o'-clock which is really three-o'-clock.

Sunday

There is no hurry, which is just as well since some of our unfortunates have reset the alarms on their blackberries to adjust for Central European Summer Time, which is sad because their electronic devices do that automatically. So those who have gone to bed at two, which is really three, are woken at half past six which is really half past five. The coach is not packed with quite the usual brisk enthusiasm. Also, luggage is segregated from baggage and Brentwood is segregated from Chingford, making a far-from-foolproof four-way division. Martin's toy chest is dwarfed by some cardboard boxes.

Anyway, Trevor takes us on an unhurried journey southwards. We stop at a Belgian motorway service station for lunch and ice-cream, then call in at the chocolate shop for much bigger ice-creams. Nothing can go wrong.

Mammillaria boelderliana

Mammillaria lasiacantha

Eriosyce sp

They don't have to be covered in flowers to look interesting

But – at British immigration our coach is found to be radioactive. Klaxons go off and we are made to drive twice round the car park. We are rechecked but we are still radioactive. We tell Mark that it is all the fault of his Korean barber and make irrelevant comments about rubber gloves. But when we are severally and individually scanned with a Geiger counter it turns out that it is Andy McBride who is a menace to public safety. It appears that he has inadvertently touched one of Van der Linden's novelty cacti. That this could be detected from outside the coach is remarkable. We must remember not to bring any enriched uranium back with us next year.

However, the half hour taken up with this kerfuffle is half an hour not spent in the horrible passenger terminal (terminal for horrible passengers) at Calais. So we are quickly loaded on to the train, and nothing else can go wrong.

Ha Ha! The police have closed the M20 at Junction 9, just north of Ashford. All the traffic has to come off the motorway, which is a painfully slow process. Cleverly our navigator takes us via the A251 to Faversham to pick up the M2 into London. And Faversham is precisely where John Child wants to go anyway, so he gets home early.

John Jackson thanks everybody for being such good company, but he does not repeat his usual mantra: 'See you on next year's trip – if there is one.' Let us hope there is! ■

Left:: Some fine plants seen during the Crawl.
Photos: David Traish