

Project 'Lockdown' - Robin Arnott

At our AGM in January, I was looking forward to another exciting cactus year and stepping up to the role of Chairman, so ably filled by Alan these last seven years. We had our own show coming up in May and Nan and I had even arranged our summer holidays so that we would end up at the 'National' in Milton Keynes in early July, with the chance to see some truly amazing specimens. (I have been forbidden to buy any more plants!!)

That was not to be and come March we all found ourselves being 'locked down' to restrict the spread of the coronavirus. Like many others, I found myself in the 'shielding' category and confined to the house and garden. Nothing daunted I embarked on two cactus projects. The first was to respond to an Al Laus comment in CactusWorld seeking articles for the 'In my Greenhouse' slot in the magazine and he was kind enough to publish my article in the September issue. The second, since I would not be away from home all summer, was to photograph all my plants as they came into bloom. This was an exciting prospect as most years we would be away on holiday or visiting family during part of the flowering season and miss many of the wonderful blooms.

My collection had been significantly boosted a year past August when I had acquired the major part of Bill Christie's collection and I know that many members also benefited from some of his plants. The plants I held on to were mainly Lobivias and Sulcorebutias and what wonderful flowers they produce! Those, coupled with my own Astrophytums, Mammillarias and others gave wonderful flowers all summer. When that blaze of colour subsided, it was time for the



Lobivia maximilliana R202



Mammillaria hahniana

Conophytums to burst out, quickly followed by the Lithops and, as I write, some Ariocarpus have just come into bloom. A plant which I had bought about 5 years ago at a BCSS Glasgow branch show, *Lapidaria margaretae*, came into bloom for the first time in the autumn and joined a few other mesems showing flowers.

I also managed to write a small piece for 'Grapevine', the newsletter of Dalgety Bay Horticultural Society which seemed to go down well as the Chairman wants me to give a talk at one of their Friday evening meetings next March – all dependent on Covid, of course. Who knows, we might attract a few more members to the Society?

Photo: Robin Arnott

Having acquired some plants from Bill, I thought I had better find out a bit more about Lobivias and Sulcorebutias other than the scant knowledge I had that the name 'Lobivia' was an anagram of Bolivia! I had not fully appreciated the height at which these plants grew in the Andes, the climatic conditions they endured or the

relationship between Lobivias and Echinopsis. I have still a long way to go but my research was helped immeasurably by the weekly Zoom meetings which Ian Thwaites, BCSS Chairman, has organised and a talk on Sulcos from Martin Lowry at a Glasgow branch Zoom meeting, organised by Brian McDonough. Both Zoom enterprises have been excellent – with interesting topics delivered by (usually) great speakers. While these meetings have filled a gap, let us hope they finish soon so that we can get back to our regular face-to-face meetings again.

Have a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.
Robin

Conophytum tantillum ssp heleniae

Named after Helen van Heerde, who collected it in 1937 although it wasn't described until 34 years later, this subspecies is found in the North-West of South Africa close to the Namibian border, west of of the town of Umdaus. It grows in pans and crevices



Lithops marmorata

Described in 1922 by N.E. Brown and also comes from habitat in the North-West of South Africa around Springbok and Steinkopf near to the Namibian border. It is named for its marbled apex.

It has one recognised variety currently, *L. marmorata* v. *elisae*.

Lapidaria margaretae

Discovered in 1920 by Schwantes, the only species in this monotypic genus comes from Southern Namibia and Northern South Africa. It is sometimes placed in the genus *Argyroderma*.

It grows on the quartz plains and has evolved to resemble the shape and colour of the stones and pebbles there.



Problem Beasties - Bryan Morris

One of my successes this year has been the use of the following product (SB Plant Invigorator™). I first heard about this a couple of years ago from Kirsty Wilson, the former glasshouse curator at the St Andrews botanic gardens in Fife. Apparently they endorse its use as it's environmentally friendly and does not contain any toxic chemicals which could harm bees, birds or animals.

I had been having a bit of an issue with red spider mite on some of my plants and despite the use of the usual insecticides such as Provado, Resolva etc., I still had evidence of this rather troublesome pest.

I did check on the BCSS website forum before using this product to see if any other members have had any experience with it and several said it was quite good, so I decided it was worth a try.

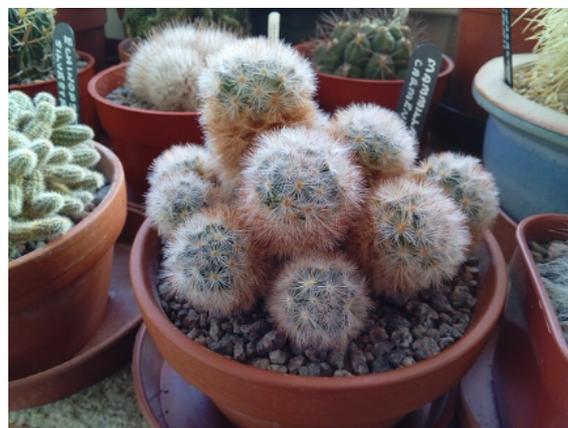
It's not a cheap product, some local garden centres are charging about £19.00, however it comes in concentrated form and a 500ml bottle makes up about 60 litres of mix. It's an insecticidal soap with an added growth hormone. More of a control and preventative method rather than a specific poison. This is sprayed onto the affected plant at controlled intervals, usually every two to three weeks, which effectively suffocates the mites and provides a protective layer which prevents them from settling on the plant.

After a few weeks my Opuntias (fig1) seem to show a remarkable improvement in appearance and perked up significantly.



(fig1) *Opuntia vestita cristata*

Also one of my Mammillarias (fig2) purchased from Stan at Craig House Cacti at the Dundee Flower and Food Festival, which stubbornly refused to grow under my care, started to show some signs of improvement.



(fig2) *Mammillaria carmenae*

It's definitely been a worthwhile addition to my armoury against the dreaded red spider mite and mealy bug, and if used in conjunction with one of the other sprays or soil drenches, it does seem to work. So it's worth a go if you have a bit of a problem with beasties in your collection.

Bryan J Morris Fife BCSS (2020)



Photo: Jim Gibbs

Uebelmannia pectinifera

This plant needs a bit more care than most, coming from the Minas Gerais province of Brazil in the south-east of the country. The province has some of the highest mountains in Brazil and although this plant grows at reasonable altitude it is safer to ensure that we keep the temperature above 10°C. I keep mine indoors on the windowsill.



Mammillaria carmenae



Mammillaria glassii ascensionis



Mammillaria tropica



Mammillaria hahniana

Spring and Summer 2020 for the BCSS (Fife Branch) - Jim & Sheila Gibbs

Like many Societies, the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has changed our lives for this spring and summer and now beyond.

As you can imagine, it has caused a lot of difficulties for both our branch and the national society. The inability to hold our branch meetings meant we haven't seen our friends, missing the fellowship, discussions and help that are always available at our meetings and, of course, the cancellation of the Dundee Flower and Food Festival lost us our only real chance to meet with the public.

Restrictions have fluctuated and there is a lot of uncertainty about resuming and deciding when it will be safe to do so.

At a national level, we had to cancel our National Show held every four years, our normal National AGM and Trustees meetings necessary to guide the Society.

However, as with many problems there are upsides. Having to stay at home meant much more time than usual to look after our plants, and this was echoed across our members in the branch and wider. Helped by some of the best spring and early summer weather in many years, the plants responded to the benefit of the extra repotting and care by having good growth and the best flowering for a long time. Greenhouses were (probably) tidier than they have ever been. Having the extra time to concentrate on the plants has meant we could keep closer to the best cultivation and growing practices.

With the lack of personal contact, communication is even more important with members. Like many societies we discovered Zoom, the video communications software, offering us the ability to stream live talks, hold meetings and chat with members. As you may have seen, the national

society provides weekly live talks which has allowed us to access both international and national speakers usually unavailable to the majority of

branches. More informal meetings closer to the normal branch meetings are being hosted by Glasgow branches and are open to all Scottish members so that we can keep in contact with friends across the five Scottish branches. Zoom also made it possible for us to hold the National AGM, opening this up to many people that would

normally have trouble travelling, and a number of successful Trustee meetings.

In place of the National Show we arranged a Virtual National Show where members submitted

photographs of their plants to be judged. This proved very successful, encouraging entries from many members who would not normally be able to attend the Show held in the south of England. While the idea of all these electronic talks, meetings and show was to ensure that everyone was kept in touch with the Society as much as possible while face to face meetings were not possible, they have proved so successful that, while they will not in any way replace 'normal' meetings, it is almost certain that they will be integrated into

programmes once normal service is resumed as they provide additional opportunities for people to interact and take part. The national meetings, for instance, have given the opportunity of chatting in real time with members from many distant countries including USA, Bolivia, India and Norway amongst others with the member from India joining us at 2am his time. With only five branches in Scotland, it also gives those more distant members the opportunity to take part.



Echinocereus coccineus

Photo: Jim Gibbs



Eriosyce senilis

Photo: Jim Gibbs

Growing without a Greenhouse

Photos and Text by Colin Hay

More and more of us are growing plants on windowsills, conservatories and porches. It is often asked whether cacti and succulents can be grown successfully this way and here Colin proves just how

I have been growing cacti and succulents for 2 - 3 years. The majority are all grown on a table in my front porch with a few on the windowsill.

The porch gets the sun in the morning and to date, the plants get enough light to keep them healthy. In the winter months, the temperature rarely falls below 5 degrees C. One of the main priorities in keeping them



healthy, is to understand their soil and watering needs. In my 2 years membership of the BCSS, I have learned from fellow members much about the best soil to use, advice on watering and minor pest control.

My Thanksgiving Cacti (*Schleumbergera Truncata*) are grown in the kitchen on a South facing windowsill and am rewarded each year with many flowers around late November, early December.



To keep some of the succulents happy, and flowering, they are fed more often than the cacti with a suitable fertiliser at half the recommended strength two or three times a year and to date, I have been pleased with their growth and overall results.



***Trichocereus pasacana* in Argentina**



After concentrating on our own plants grown in Scotland, and in part prompted by one of the recent BCSS talks on Argentina, it is perhaps fitting to finish with plants in habitat in Argentina. The photograph was taken by our late President of the branch, Mary Sellars, during one of her trips to see the plants that meant so much to her. These spectacular *Trichocereus pasacana* are so much part of the landscape with the other *Trichocereus* species. Very similar is *T. terscheckii* which grows at lower altitudes, up to 2000m where *T. pasacana* takes over. We are not likely to grow these ourselves, at least not to these sizes so it is good that others allow us to experience such a spectacular view.

Next BCSS Zoom Meetings

Topic: Al Laius – African Adventures

Date and time: Tuesday 15 December 2020 at 7:30 PM (GMT)

Meeting ID: 860 0600 1902

Passcode: bcss

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86006001902?pwd=OUxLOG1YYXFGRDI0SIQ2U0IGZIRxUT09>

Topic: Cactus and Succulent Christmas Party.

Date and Time: Tuesday 22 December 2020 at 7:30 PM GMT

Meeting ID: 884 1979 2275

Passcode: bcss

Join Zoom Meeting <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88419792275?pwd=eDBQMIB6d0xDTGIOWhhRWV0YmIBdz09>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are considering using Mailchimp, the same delivery process used to deliver the Society's monthly Enews, for the weekly emails that you receive with information about the BCSS Zoom meetings on a Tuesday evening. This would allow us a bit more freedom with the layout and make it a bit nicer to read and easier to perhaps include a picture or two and a bit more information.

It will just appear as an email and shouldn't cause any problems but if anyone has any objections please contact Sheila (s.c.gibbs@btinternet.com) and let her know.

AGM 2021

It is almost certain that we will not be able to hold the Branch AGM in its usual format in January. The committee considered a couple of options for this and decided that the most inclusive method is to circulate the various reports - Chairman, Treasurer and Membership Secretary - by email at the beginning of January and ask for the members' approval for these and the committee elections. All committee members have indicated that they are happy to stand again but if there are any further nominations for the posts please could you send them to the Branch secretary before the beginning of January.

We hope that you have enjoyed this newsletter. Although there are some optimistic indicators that we might be getting some improvement in the current situation, it is still not clear when we might be able to resume our normal meetings and activities. In the meantime we have the Tuesday Zoom talks and remember that we have the Scottish Zoom meeting hosted by Glasgow Branch on the first Thursday of the month to keep in touch.

*Have a Merry Christmas
and a Good New Year*