



A Summer View

(nearly post-Lockdown) - Robin Arnott

Welcome to the summer newsletter of Fife branch – again, not the way we expected to be ‘chatting’ to branch members but needs must! When we will meet again is still an open question but until then, an update on what has been happening.

Earlier in the year, our electronic AGM went ahead and a ‘thank you’ to all who responded. The following positions were filled: Chair, Robin Arnott; Vice-chair/Treasurer, Fraser Reddick; Secretary/Membership Secretary, Sheila Gibbs; with Val Boughtwood and Bryan Morris as committee members. We look forward to getting together (at some point) to plan an exciting programme for future activities.



Rebutia cv Eleanor

We missed seeing you all at our annual show in May and no doubt many of you would have been growing your plants to perfection on the chance the show might go ahead. Like me, you probably had the prize-winner sitting on your bench! The only downside this year was the weather – from the end of April it was cold and wet and the easterly winds brought a chill to the air. My greenhouse heating (I try not to let the temperature fall below 5°C) stayed on for most of May and flowering has come a little later than usual. Colour is now beginning to show and the blooms brighten up an otherwise dull scheme.

About seven years ago I bought three *Rebutia* cultivars from Southfield – all chosen because they

had the same name as my granddaughters. One plant, sadly, died on me and I have not been able to replace it but the other two – Eleanor and Jessica



Rebutia cv Jessica

never fail to provide a great show. Over the winter, I lost a few plants – due to old age or winter-conditions rather than (I like to think) incompetence on my part. In one or two cases, prompt remedial action led me to taking some cuttings and off-shoots and, fingers crossed, they will all ‘take’ and I can keep the plant going for a few more years. Cuttings can be tricky – you are supposed to let the cut callous over before placing it in compost and hoping it will root. I have had some varying success with that method but this



Lobivia ferox

year I am experimenting with hormone rooting powder to see if that improves matters – time will tell.

As you may know I bought Bill Christie's plants (coming up for two years ago) and last year many flowered. Two which did not but came into bloom this year were *Lobivia ferox* and *Weingartia trollii*.



Weingartia pulquinensis & trollii

About three years ago, I purchased a *Mammillaria lindsayi* from the BCSS show in Glasgow and managed to get it to bloom this year for the first time.

Another venture for me this year has been into seed-sowing. I sowed one or two last year and managed to grow on about three seedlings of *Mammillaria chioncephala*. Having been given a small, heated propagator for Christmas I went the whole hog and obtained seeds from the Mammillaria Society and the Mesem Study Group, as well as using some from my own plants and from friends. Results, so far, are mixed – some Conophytums, Lithops and Mammillarias have germinated along with the odd *Thelocactus* and *Epithelantha*.

For my seed sowing, I experimented with a number of different methods – my usual cactus compost,



Mammillaria lindsayi

cactus compost with vermiculite topping, pure vermiculite, pure seramis (clay granules) – all in the propagator, and some in cactus compost in the greenhouse with no added heat. The vermiculite

and seramis sowings germinated quickly but the seedlings had difficulty in being stable and growing on and the vermiculite topping seemed to develop a 'skin' which made it harder to water. The normal compost was slow in getting seeds to germinate and the greenhouse sowing was very slow and (at time of writing) had only produced two seedlings out of a large batch. However, I suspect all is not lost and it would not surprise me to see seedlings pop through over the next few weeks. It will be interesting to see if the greenhouse seedlings are hardier than the propagator ones. One thing I can be certain of and that is the show bench is safe for another few years.

Last year, I had summer with virtually no mealy bugs in sight – this year and it is a different story. Word must have gone round that there were rich pickings in my greenhouse! I tend not to use insecticides and have to rely on keen eye-sight (which is becoming a problem)



Snail damage

to spot the creatures. Eradication is either through picking them off with a pair of tweezers or a dab of methylated spirits on a small paintbrush. The meths seems to do the trick as it breaks down the waxy coating of the bugs and they turn a dark brown. Mealy bugs are not the only problem, though, and an infestation of snails wreaked havoc with some of the more tender plants as they munched their way through the succulent flesh.

During the year, we have been entertained by our weekly BCSS Zoom lectures (now on a fortnightly basis) and our monthly Zoom meetings with Glasgow branch. I hope you managed to catch some of these, as they have been highly interesting and taken us to parts of the world we have only ever read about. Fingers crossed and with vaccinations now taking effect, let us hope we can meet again in the not-too-distant future and swap plants, share chat and our stories of lockdown. Have a good summer and happy growing!

Euphorbia francoisii v *crassicaulis*

This plant, from the collection of the late Peter Ellis, flowered on my east-facing windowsill for the first time for me and has since produced a new leaf, always a relief.

This variety differs from the type species by having a thicker stem, is minimally branched and is covered with light, ochre-coloured, bristly stipules. In habitat it grows in the dry *Didieria* forest of the south-west Madagascar.



Euphorbia meloformis

I like the colouring and shape of this plant. Native to the eastern cape of South Africa it is often lumped with *Euphorbia valida*, although some consider the lack of persistent peduncles and tendency to be spineless enough to separate the two species.

It has separate male and female plants although a double-headed plant has been found near Port Elizabeth with both heads sharing the same taproot with one head male and the other female - put it in the curiosity category.

Agave lophantha

Also known as *Agave univittata*, this is the cultivar known under the 'quadricolor' name for obvious reasons. I don't have many Agave as they grow too large for my space but this attractive plant is worthy of that space. It is relatively small at the moment but should be worth the space even when it gets larger.

The type species is native to Texas and the Mexican states of Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Veracruz and Puebla.



Rebutia sp. (Aylostera)

Bryan J Morris Fife BCSS (2021)

Rebutia is a genus of flowering plants in the family Cactaceae, native to Bolivia and Argentina. They are generally small, colourful cacti, globular in form, which freely produce flowers that are relatively large in relation to the body. They have no distinctive ribs, but do have regularly arranged small tubercles.

The *Rebutia* featured is one I obtained from a collection across in Ayr that was being split up a few years ago. At that time the plant was a bit neglected, this was not due to the previous owner's ability as a grower, but sadly due to their ill health.

I always feel it's an honour to get a plant from an enthusiast and someone who has spent many happy years looking after it and growing it to the best of their ability, and hope that I too can look after it as well as they have.

The plant seemed a bit reluctant to adjust to its new home on the east coast and showed no signs of growth in its first few years under my care. So last March during the first lock down I decided it was time to give it a bit of TLC and repot it along with a new BEF bowl and a splendid black plastic label!

My usual mix is about 50% John Innes (JI) No2 with 40% grit, 5% molar clay and 5% coir. I had been advised by one of our members who has been growing *Rebutia* species for several years, that he uses some John Innes ericaceous compost in his mix, so I decided it was worth a go.

I used 25% (JI) No2 and 25% (JI) ericaceous compost with the rest made up from the usual ingredients.

The plant was then moved out of the conservatory and into my small green house where it spent the



last winter with minimal heat and covered with fleece when very low temperatures or frost had been forecast. The results this year have been excellent with the plant showing signs of new growth and providing me with a spectacular display of beautiful bright red blooms. It's never going to be a show worthy plant but it's one of the favourites in my collection.



I'm not too sure of the sub species or variant, so if anyone could provide any suggestions, I would be grateful for the feedback.



Variation in *Echinocereus pentalophus* by Alan Weepers

Two plants from the same species showing variation in both the flower and stem. The one on the left has short, compact stems measuring 20mm by 100mm while the right hand plant measures 20mm by 300mm and has a white centre to the flower



The Porch is my Greenhouse

I grow my Cacti and Succulents in a Glass roofed porch size 9ft X 5ft 3". Currently I have 92 plants plus seedlings. A few cacti and the remainder being *Lithops*, *Dinteranthus*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Lapidaria*,



Pleiospilos, *Graptopetallum* plus a couple of *Echeveria*.

This year I started my seed sowing in January (perhaps too early) but am pleased overall with the results. I use a simple Sinclair 8W propagator and now have 25 *Lithops karasmontana* *Lericheana* seedlings, 20

Lithops herreri, 4 *Lithops verruculosa* (Rose of Texas), 4 *Lithops optica*, 192 *Dinteranthus vanzylii* De Rust - thank you MSG - , 5 *Gibbaeum velutinum* and 25 *Astrophytum myriostigma*. All watered from the bottom using rain water from a water butt.



My main interest is now in MESEMBS and have a growing collection of 17 species of *Lithops*.

I have tried a number of substrates for my seedlings and the most successful to date has been a Bonsai cutting mix which is 30% crushed lava rock, + 30% pumice + 30% Akadama plus 10% Zeolite. (This can be purchased from Beecham Bonsai in 1 litre bags).

I have included a few pics of Cacti in flower and two of *Lithops* and *Dinteranthus* seedlings.



Photos and Text by Colin Hay



As the porch faces South East, temperatures each day over the last 10 days up until 1pm have been far too high. On Sunday 6 June it was 40°C at 7.45am!

Seed Propagation Experiment

This year I decided it was high time to try growing some plants from seed again. I had been encouraged by the BCSS discussions and focus on conservation along with the recent issues of importing established plants from nurseries in the European Union.

However due to the late arrival of the December BCSS journal and its seed list, my subsequent application for some seeds was rejected in its entirety as everything had already sold out. A bit disappointing, however after hearing my plight, Robin and Colin both very kindly offered me a few packets of *Mammillaria* and *Mesemb* seeds. This made the experiment all the more interesting by having a few other Fife branch members who were also trying some experiments to share the experience with.

Along with the supplied *Mammillaria* seeds, I still had a couple of packets of old *Lithops* and *Lapidaria* seeds from a previous year, so I thought I would see if they were still viable, and if any would germinate.

To start the process I decided to test a new substrate mix which was suggested on the Manchester BCSS website of a 50/50 mix of John Innes No2 and molar clay. However the only source of molar clay or clay granules I could get was from Euro car parts in Dundee. They sell it as a fluid spill absorption media. It is mentioned and recommended on the BCSS forum, so I thought I would give it a go. The only issue I can see is that it does exactly what it is supposed to do, and absorbs so much fluid that you are left with substrate which resembles the consistency of porridge!



Photos and Text by Bryan Morris

The seeds were sown on the 23rd February with half sown in the above mix and the rest in a 50/50 mix of sieved and sterilised John Innes No2, and 4mm granite grit in BEF 2 inch square pots. These were then sealed in zip lock bags and placed in a Stewart variable temp 50w propagator set to 21°C.



Substrate mix



Sealed zip lock bags



Stewart variable temp propagator

The *Lithops* and *Lapidaria* seeds germinated on the 4th March, with no signs of the *Mammillaria* seeds having germinated as yet. However there were signs of mould or fungus in some of the pots and I wonder if some of them had actually germinated, and then succumbed to 'damping off' disease. This was despite me having sterilised the substrate and pots. The substrate mix was sterilised in the kitchen microwave! Please don't tell my wife I did this!

About a week after germination I started to gradually open the zip lock bags to allow a bit more air in and after another couple of weeks removed the pots from the unsealed bags.



Lithops hallii seedlings at 15 days old

An interesting development is the *Lithops* grown in the 50/50 mix of John Innes 2 and molar clay have started to pull themselves down and upright into the substrate, whereas the ones in the mix with granite grit are on their side and a bit distorted. So in the long term, the clay granule mix has the edge!

I have now top dressed the pots with some fine grit to help prop the seedlings up. I had been advised to use silver sand for this, however in the past when I have used this type of medium, the sand formed an impenetrable crust which stops any water getting through.



Lithops julii seedlings at 4 month's old



Lapidaria margaretae seedlings at 4 month's old

Unfortunately I have had very limited success with getting any of my *Mammillaria* seedlings to germinate with only a few having shown any signs of growth. So I decided to try a different approach, and moved them out of the propagator and into a different position on a sunny window sill with more direct light and a bit more direct heat. A few more have now started to germinate, so I shall see how they develop in due course.

To date – my *Lithops* and *Lapidaria* seedlings are still growing well. The pots get watered once a week by sitting them in a tray of water for a few minutes to allow them to soak up enough fluid to keep them hydrated without saturating the substrate. They sit in the shade in my conservatory which gives enough light without being in full sun to prevent scorching.

Trichocereus terscheckii in Argentina



Another photograph 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. The species this time is another *Trichocereus*, the very similar *T. terscheckii* which grows at lower altitudes, up to 2000m. It produces white blooms which are three inches long, and appear laterally. The blooms become round fruit which is bluish green in colour. The plant has been harvested for its wood and is used for art and crafts and has also been recorded to be used for medicinal practices.

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 Society Zoom talks on the first and third Tuesdays of the month and remember that we have the Scottish Zoom meeting hosted by Glasgow Branch on the first Thursday of the month to keep in touch.