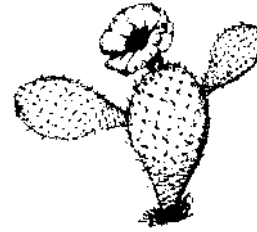




Jack Kelley's
Jatropha berlandieri
Photo by Sydney Kelley

The Cactus Patch



Opuntia basilaris var. treleasei

Volume 10 **January 2007** Number 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BAKERSFIELD CACTUS & SUCCULENT SOCIETY

This Month's Program

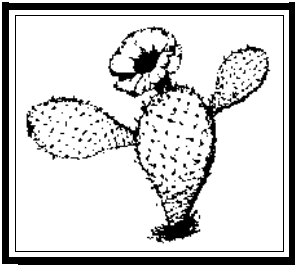
Copiapoa and Other Cacti of Chile

Presented by **Rob Skillin**

Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, Jan 9
Olive Drive Church,
5500 Olive drive
at **6:30 PM**
(West of 99 freeway
on corner of Olive drive &
Victor street)

**Have you
paid your
dues for
2007?**



The Cactus Patch

Volume 10 Number 1
January 2007

The Cactus Patch is the official publication of the Bakersfield Cactus & Succulent Society (BCSS) of Bakersfield, California. Meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at the times and places noted within.
GUEST ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

2007 Officers

President – Ed Colley
Vice-President – Jerry Garrison
Treasurer - Maynard Moe
Secretary – Anne Lee
Editors - Stephen Cooley
Linda Cooley

2007 Directors

CSSA Representative - open
Past President – Vonne Zdenek

2007 Chairpersons

Hospitality - Bill McDonald
Librarian – Rose Mary Maguire
Field Trips – Lynn McDonald
Historian – open
Show & Sale – open

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A Message from Your New President



Welcome to all new members. As a member of the Bakersfield Cactus and Succulent Society for many years, I still find it to be a rewarding experience.

Thank you for voting me in as the new President for 2007.

I have always been interested in cactus and succulents, actually all my life.

When I came to Bakersfield, I met Rob Skillin, one of the founders of our Club, and I was so glad that there was a place where we could meet and enjoy talking about how to care and grow cactus and succulents.

As you know we have a "Show and Sale" that often brings new people to our doors, because they like what they see.

Personally, I have about 150 cactus and succulents, that are growing, because of the raffle we have at each meetings.

The Clubs goals are to have fun at meaningful meetings and field trips.

My pledge this year is to encourage lost members to attend our meetings.

Ed Colley,
President

December 12, 2006



We had our ninth (probably since we started the BCSS in 1997) annual Christmas potluck and silent auction at last month's meeting. Ed, Jerry and Maynard purchased several nice plants at Nick's nursery in Cambria for the auction. About two-dozen members brought a great selection of food and, as always, there were main dishes, salads and desserts even though it was a true "pot luck" with no planning. Thanks to Bill for bringing the drinks.



After the meal, we had a lively auction. Thanks to Lynn, Sidney, Anne, and others for donating interesting things (pink flamingos, Wind Wolves barbed wire, a great Euphorbia, cactus sink strainer, pots, clicking magnets, and others) for the auction. Many members went home with nice plants and other items. Everyone had a great time.

[Thanks to Maynard for writing this!]

A Surfeit of Cinema A Letter From Bruce

We have enough films to choose from even though not all US films reach here (and we are still not allowed in one multiplex). We also have TV films (But usually not great) and the weekly film club. On top of this, Alliance Francaise (French Alliance) had a week of documentaries followed by a week of regular films. On 22 Nov. we watched "Darwin's Nightmare", a documentary about the Nile Perch which were added to Lake Victoria (and decimated the local fish) and the guns which were flown down from the Soviet Union in exchange. They missed the fact that smoking these large fish (previously fish were sun dried) caused loss of tree cover, erosion, marshes and an increase in bilharzia. This was in



The "Captain" teaching segaba" (a one stringed violin) at Music Camp.

the textbook we used at San Joaquin Valley College when I taught there eight years ago. In addition, the film was badly edited, very dark and needed subtitles even for the English. The title is misleading as Darwin had nothing to do with introducing the fish even if it did lead to the survival of the "fittest". Incidentally, at the University of Malawi we took students to Lake Malawi each year to study fish related to the ones being lost in Lake Victoria. These Tilapia (aka St Peter's Fish & available in US supermarkets) and relatives make a great study in speciation. We also included them in the High School biology syllabus instead of Darwin's finches.

The regular films began on the 24th with "Little Senegal", a

story of a man from Senegal who follows the slave routes to find family in New York. Following that we watched "Trees" which starts with a terrific panorama of baobabs in Madagascar. Although it does have some aloes and other succulents (and a snow scene in the California redwoods), it is rather a hodge podge of unrelated scenes.

There were lots more films, but I won't bore you with all of them.

It hasn't been all movies. On the 16th there was an art opening at Thapong Artists and our friend Margaret Taylor had done a number of tree portraits. Saturday the 18th we went to a house warming for David Slater who is retiring and opening a music business. The choir, Maitisong Festival and Music Camp will be limping from now on. Speaking of the Choir, they did a production of Mikado on the 23rd. Polly & I skipped that one as I feel the Mikado is culturally insensitive. They proved it by dressing all the school girls in British type uniforms and when asked about this said, "That's the way it's usually done in England". (Possibly because it is mainly done by such school girls.) It was at least helped a bit by having "MaRamotswe" (played by the Minister of Health Prof. Sheila Tlou) explaining the story.

On the 3rd of Dec. we went to the annual Bird Club birthday brunch at the McColloughs'. It was too hot for much birding, but Doreen (who's actual birthday is the 3rd) did lay out an interesting trail of feathers and questions. (What is the national bird of Guatemala? I got that one right.) The next day the annual Music Camp began in Kanye at the new Education Centre (a real white elephant), but we didn't go down until



Kalanchoe thyrsiflora at Kanye

Wednesday when they had open house for sponsors. It felt weird to be an onlooker rather than a participant. To make it a "working"

trip, I looked around in the bush nearby. I found *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora*, a plant which is common in Lesotho but which I had not seen in Botswana (except for the one specimen in the herbarium).

That Saturday we went to the museum in Mafikeng in South Africa where I got copies of their exhibit on the Zeederberg coaches for use in our old building which was a coach stop. (Incidentally, these stage coaches are identical with those of the US southwest as they were made by the same company!) We then went back up to Kanye where we stayed in an air-conditioned room at RIIC [Rural Industries Innovation Centre]. (It is hot!! right now.) That evening we went to the final concert and party at the music camp. It was sad to say farewell and realize we will not be here next December. Next day we returned to Gaborone.

We are now well into the Holiday season (although we won't go far), but more of that in the next letter.

I received an interesting book recently- another tree book by Marthinus Steyn. This time it is "Albizia - southern Africa" (published by the author, soutsteyn@absamail.co.za). This is a genus of trees related to Acacias but without thorns. Unfortunately they are not succulent. Again, it is well illustrated with all plant parts shown and has good distribution maps as well as uses. My help is acknowledged. Unfortunately the language map is a bit scrambled. (For a better map one should refer to his previous book on Commiphoras.)

News flash - I just read the Southern Times from Windhoek, Namibia 17-23 Dec.) which headlines an outbreak of an unknown disease killing fish along the Zambezi. It lists "bream" (another name for Tilapia) among those fish affected. It is unknown whether this affects humans, but advises not eating the fish. This would be a pity as Tilapia is my favorite fish.

Incidentally, the Setswana name for fish is Thlape and the southernmost Batswana are the Bathlaping or People of the Fish as they are near the Gariep (Orange) River and lived off of fish rather than cattle.

Bruce J. Hargreaves

JANUARY'S PROGRAM

Copiapoa and Other Cacti of Chile

presented by Rob Skillin

Copiapoa is a genus of slow growing, globular cacti that grow in the coastal and Atacama deserts of Chile. Some are solitary while others form huge mounds. Some are small while others are columnar. Though mature specimens can be locally abundant in their native habitat, they are never seen in cultivation. Cultivated plants tend to be puny in comparison with those in the wild. This is what makes Chile a great place to visit for the cactus enthusiast.

Our speaker (and long-time member) Rob Skillin did just that a few years ago. Those who know Rob know that this presentation will be filled with incredible photography as well as knowledgeable discourse.

Other Succulents that we will see include *Eulychnia*, *Eriosyce*, *Neoperteria*, *Trichocereus*, *Oxalis*, *Dioscorea*, and *Euphorbia*. We've heard talks about Chile before, but this country is well worth another look.



Rob Skillin climbs a mountain in the Atacama desert in search of Cacti



Hoodia Fever Takes a Toll On Rare Plant

The southern African succulent, which is said to suppress hunger, faces danger in the wild.

By Robyn Dixon L.A. Times Staff Writer
robyn.dixon@latimes.com

[Thanks to Andy Honig for sending this.

This article from the Los Angeles Times can be seen online at:
www.latimes.com/news/printedition/la-fg-hoodia26dec26,1,791270.story]

December 26, 2006

MARIENTAL, NAMIBIA — When fully grown, the plant resembles something from "The Day of the Triffids" or some other science-fiction creation: a squat succulent with thick, spiky arms, purple fleshy petals and seedpods like rhino horns.

Hoodia gordonii is no beauty, but this humble plant is Africa's latest cash crop, priced almost like a narcotic at \$40 an ounce. The plant, which grows wild in the Kalahari Desert of southern Africa, was once used by indigenous tribes to suppress hunger and thirst when hunting. Now it's such a darling of the international dieting industry that Googling "hoodia" calls up about 12 million responses.

The demand is so hot that wild supplies have been severely compromised and smuggling is rife, and farmers in southern Africa are trying to get in on the game.

"You start doing the sums: It's too good to be true. You want to throw your calculator away. It's an impossible phenomenon," hoodia farmer Dougal Bassingthwaight said.

(continued on page 10)

With international giant Unilever licensed to commercialize hoodia and international demand far outstripping supply, there's a mad race on to get plants to the market.

Bassingthwaighte, 65, who is farming hoodia with his son, Kirk, has 130,000 seedlings being planted out from his nursery, where they begin as tiny green sprouts, to his fields. In about two years, when he plans to harvest them, each is likely to weigh about 4 pounds. He hopes to have a million plants next year.

But the explosion of interest has not only put enormous pressure on the rare plant — listed as an endangered species by international treaty — it also puts intense pressure on an embryonic market that could be a boon for Africans if it could grow at a natural and sustainable pace.

The craze for hoodia seems to bring out the worst in people. Tiny as it is, the industry is rife with fierce, competitive secrecy, quack products and illegal harvesting. Next, authorities in crime-ridden South Africa fear, comes the inevitable interest of organized gangsters.

Whether hoodia works as a diet aid has not been scientifically proved. Pills and capsules claiming to contain hoodia are widely available in the United States online and at stores that sell herbal supplements. Such products are largely exempt from the U.S. government regulations that require drugs to be tested for safety and effectiveness before being sold.

But Bassingthwaighte says he has no doubt.

"I grew up with it. I actually ate it as a kid. I know the stuff works," he said. As a farm boy he often walked or rode in the heat to other farms. "And people said, 'Eat this. It will take away your hunger and thirst.' And it did."

Back then, it never occurred to anyone to farm the plant.

Three types contain the active ingredient P57: *Hoodia gordonii*, the most common, which has a bitter taste; the similar-looking *Hoodia currorii*; and *Hoodia officinalis*, a smaller and rarer plant, preferred by indigenous Namibian tribes because it's sweeter. Bassingthwaighte sees the last as having potential as a salad vegetable.

South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research identified P57 and patented it in 1996, later licensing British firm Phytopharm to develop and commercialize it. The council argues that anyone who sells hoodia as a weight-reduction product outside that license would infringe

on the patent. In 1998, Pfizer signed a deal to develop the product but withdrew in 2003; a year later, Unilever entered a licensing deal with Phytopharm. Under pressure from lawyers representing members of the San tribe of southern Africa, Phytopharm later signed a royalty deal with them.

South Africa is the only African country exporting hoodia legally. Paul Gildenhuys of the Western Cape Conservation Authority said the amount of hoodia exported to Europe and the United States under permit from that province more than doubled in the last year from 22 tons to 49, raising suspicions that significant smuggling was going on. He said there were reports of hoodia flowing through Western Cape province from other parts of South Africa or other countries.

"The problem with the industry is that people are all trying to get their part of the cake," he said. "They actually try to guard their information jealously. And a lot of people try to run each other down. They will say, 'Don't buy anything from Mr. X because he's a smuggler. Buy from me.' But there's nothing to prove that it's true."

To the northwest, in Namibia, the growing demand has led to widespread smuggling that has endangered wild plants.

"This smuggling is a huge concern because it's undermining the whole industry," Bassingthwaighte said. "They were coming across and smuggling hoodia before we woke up to it. When our local indigenous people realized this thing was of value, they started ripping the plants up in the wild."

Some in Namibia hope that if the market is brought under control, the hoodia craze could benefit the country's poor. Others fear that commercial farmers and giants such as Unilever could clean up while poor communities are paid a pittance for manual labor on hoodia farms.

"We do see it as a very real opportunity to give a source of income to some of the poorest people in Namibia," said Steve Carr, coordinator of a succulent cultivation project being carried out by Namibia's National Botanical Research Institute, which is part of a working group helping indigenous people farm hoodia.

"It's an irony. It could be a way for people who feel they are overweight to help people who face a daily struggle to put something in their stomachs."

But he said the market was being damaged by the many products on the

U.S. market that were not pure hoodia.

"We're concerned that the initiative to provide an income to some of the poorest, marginalized groups could be undermined before it even gets off the ground," Carr said.

Carr believes the high prices in the market are unsustainable and may come down as the market develops.

"We don't have an inherent concern about high prices. What we're concerned about is high prices being driven by people who are operating illegally and who don't give a damn for conservation of the plant," he said. "We do think there's a bubble and that the price will drop and that people who show they have a high-quality product will get a long-term benefit."

Bassingthwaighte set up the Hoodia Growers Assn. of Namibia to protect farmers' interests and get other farmers on board to try to meet public demand with a quality product before the hoodia craze evaporates.

Hoodia seeds germinate easily, but the plants are difficult to keep alive organically with no pesticides or sprays.

"No one can tell you why one grows beautifully and the other one doesn't," Bassingthwaighte's wife, Bobbie, said as the family inspected seedlings. "It's like human beings."

"It's very difficult to grow, period," Dougal Bassingthwaighte said. "Bacteria is a problem, fungus is a problem. It seems vulnerable to all kinds of baboons, ground mice and lizards which eat it."

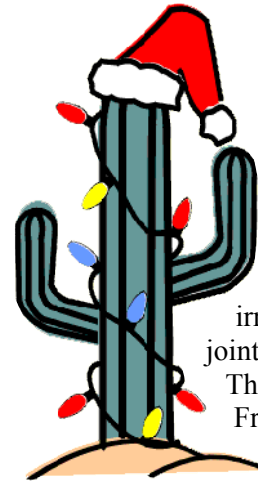
The seeds explode from their pods in a puff of delicate fluff. Small socks are placed over the hornlike pods to capture the seeds, giving the plants an even more bizarre appearance, as if a colony of elves had hung out their stockings to dry. The socks are later emptied and each seed handpicked from the fluff.

Bassingthwaighte hopes to get an export license and believes he will be able to sell about 4,800 pounds of dried hoodia powder a year. So far, his operation is small. But gazing tenderly over his tiny seedlings, he dreams of a day when hoodia plants stretch in every direction toward the horizon, tilting their horns at the bright Kalahari sky.

Plant of the Month

Christmas Cacti

By L. M. Moe



The holiday cacti (Thanksgiving Cactus, Christmas Cactus, Easter Cactus, Crab Cactus, Lobster Cactus) are in the genus *Schlumbergera* (formerly called *Zygocactus*). The six species of *Schlumbergera* are Brazilian epiphytic cacti with irregular, hummingbird pollinated flowers and jointed flat stems that have sharply pointed margins. The genus is named after Frédéric Schlumberger, a French cactus collector from the 19th century.

The Thanksgiving cactus is *Schlumbergera truncata* and blooms in the fall.

The Christmas cactus, often called *Schlumbergera bridgesii*, is actually a hybrid between *Schlumbergera truncata* and *S. russelliana*, first bred about 150 years ago in England. It blooms in the winter when the days are short. Easter cactus is *Schlumbergera gaertneri* and blooms in the spring when the days are becoming longer. There are now over 200 cultivars of holiday cacti; one even has yellow flowers when grown in cold temperatures that become red when grown in warmer temperatures. They are especially popular in Holland and Denmark, where millions are sold annually.

Holiday cacti can be propagated quite easily by removing a single segment and planting it in slightly sandy soil. They should be kept in a well-lit area (but not direct sunlight) and the soil should be kept moist. The cutting should begin showing signs of growth after two or three weeks.

Because Holiday cacti are epiphytic cacti, they grow best in containers with moist, well-drained soil, although they will need less water when not in bloom. They thrive in bright, indirect light but it is best to void the direct sun of a western window. These plants can be taken outside during the summer months, but place them in the shade or partial shade to avoid sunburn.



THE SUCCULENT GARDEN AT CAL STATE

December, 2006

We had a good workday in December. We did a test patch of the "soil cement" for the pathway and I am happy to report that it worked just fine! It is nice and hard and looks like the existing dirt. It wasn't too hard to do and I think we can get a group organized to do it in an organized way.

The garden continues to look good, even through this chilly December weather.

Our next workday is the first Sunday of January, which is January 7. We will meet out there at 9:00 am, unless it is pouring down rain. I'm not sure yet just what we will be doing. It will most likely depend on the weather. Maybe we will be able to do more soil cement or at least get the project organized to do in February. I hope to see you there!

linda cooley



FIELD TRIPS

WIND WOLVES PRESERVE

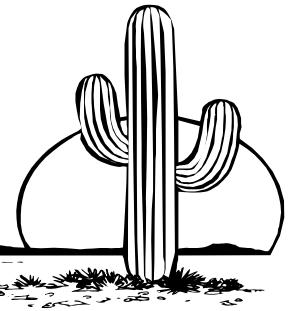
Work party dates: Jan 15, Feb 10, Mar 10, Apr 14, May 12, June 9.

SAN LUIS OBISPO BOTANICAL GARDEN

Let's think about planning a trip to SLOB.

Lynn McDonald

UPCOMING EVENTS



BAKERSFIELD CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY EVENTS

Jan 7 Garden Workday at Cal State

Jan 9 BCSS Meeting 6:30pm Olive Drive Church

Speaker: Rob Skillin

Program: Copiapoa and Other Cacti of Chile

Feb 4 Garden Workday at Cal State

Feb 13 BCSS Meeting 6:30pm Olive Drive Church

Speaker: Stephen Cooley

Mar 13 BCSS Meeting 6:30pm Olive Drive Church

Speaker: Mark Muradian

Program: Northern Argentina

OTHER CACTUS AND SUCCULENT EVENTS

May 25-30 CSSA 32nd Annual Convention. Seattle Airport Doubletree.

Membership in the Bakersfield Cactus & Succulent Society costs \$10 per year for an individual and only \$15 a year for a family. This extraordinarily reasonable price not only includes twelve issues of The Cactus Patch but entitles you to participate in club field trips to far-off (out-of-town) and exotic places (more exotic than Bakersfield). You will also receive a nifty name tag that will be your ticket to a members only plant raffle. All this is in addition to the wonderful programs and people at the meetings. To become a member contact:

Maynard Moe, treasurer

Lithops44@bak.rr.com

contact the editors for more information

Stephen Cooley

thecactuspatch@bak.rr.com

Linda Cooley