

Mammillaria Society Show, 2006

By Bill Keen

The show was held on 16th July, in conjunction with the BCSS Oxford Branch show. The venue, Langdale Hall in Witney, is a spacious one with convenient parking outside. On this occasion it proved to be none too large for the show, thanks to the large number of exhibits. Many of the classes, in both parts of the show, attracted a dozen or more entries, and it was a delight to see the array of magnificent plants on the crowded benches.

To the person engaged to judge the Mammillaria Society section of the show, it was apparent on first entering the hall that this was to be a demanding task. Closer inspection showed that the classes comprised a wide range of species, with little duplication, and that the plants were of a high quality.

The first two classes in the section, separated by pot-size limits, were for Coryphantha Group. The entries comprised a nice assortment of genera: Coryphantha, Escobaria, Acharagma, Cumarinia and Lepidocoryphantha, illustrating the diversity of the group. After examining the potential prizewinners for faults, and finding only a few minor blemishes at most, decisions were reached. For me, the outstanding entry was a fine specimen of *Coryphantha greenwoodii*. I have grown this species for many years and have found it extremely slow, but here was a large plant, capped with copious white wool and even displaying a couple of small off-sets.

The next class, the first of those designated for Mammillaria, contained ten entries again showing diversity and quality. One plant appeared to glow like a beacon, even from a considerable distance. It was labelled *M. centricirra*, normally considered synonymous with *M. magnimamma*, and was a particularly woolly form. Fortunately it happened to be in full flower with rings of bright pink flowers making an attractive contrast with the white wool and green tubercles. It deservedly won first prize and an Award of Merit. In second place came a fine *M. perbella* with eight heads, each of which was dividing dichotomously. Third place was occupied by a large specimen of *M. lenta*. Once the large wild-collected imports of some years ago had departed this life, it was rare to see seed-grown specimens larger than about 12 cm in diameter and the species acquired a reputation for being tricky at such sizes. This entry was about 22 cm in diameter and there was another of similar size in the class, so some growers have overcome the difficulty.

The next class was reserved for the 'giants', *M. bombycina* and *M. geminispina*. Often the judge is faced with several near-identical entries and has to search for the odd damaged stems to separate them, but in this case the outstanding entries were a fine specimen of *M. bombycina* and a *M. geminispina* of similar quality. After due consideration and inspection from all angles, the first prize went to the *M. bombycina*, a particularly stout-stemmed form bursting with vigour.

Following this class came another embracing *M. elongata*, *M. densispina* and similar species. Disappointingly, there were only four entries, three of them being *M. elongata*. Although these were well-grown specimens, deserving their places on the bench, I wondered what had become of the huge specimens of yester-year. Have they departed this life? Are they now so large, and their owners so aged and frail, that they cannot be transported to shows? Next door stood eleven entries in the class for *M. plumosa*, *M. schiedeana* and related species. I was surprised to find that the 'washing-up bowls' of *M. carme-nae* were notable by their absence: in fact the species was not represented. However, there was a nice assortment of *M. plumosa* and *M. schiedeana* vying for the prizecards. The largest specimen of *M. schiedeana* attracted attention. A large clump, it appeared to be splitting into two with part of the rootstock visible between the heads. A strange red growth, looking like a cross between an offset and a fruit, caught the eye. It would be interesting to hear from the owner at a later date how this turns out. The next class catered for *M. humboldtn* and *M. laui* and its varieties. With little to choose between the half-dozen entries in terms of condition, the two specimens of *M. humboldtii*, generally considered to be more difficult and slower in growth, edged out the competition to claim the first two places.

The next class, for members of subgenus Cochemiea, was for me the outstanding class in the show. Of the nine entries on display, five were in bloom or carrying dead flowers. How do their owners persuade them to perform - or is it a consequence of the hot summer we are enjoying? A beautifully grown flowering specimen of *M. setispina* was awarded first prize and an Award of Merit. Next door, the class for members of subgenus Dolichothele contained six entries ranging from a huge *M. longimamma*, which was awarded first prize, to smaller specimens of the other species. A couple of plants of *M. surculosa*, although well-grown, suffered by being over-vigorous. They were so tightly packed in their pots that offsets on the periphery of the clumps were squashed and the pots squeezed out of shape.

The next two classes catered for multi-headed plants, the first in unlimited size pots and the other in pots not greater than 18 cm. The first class attracted seven-teen entries and the one that impressed me most was a huge clump of *M. frailea-na*. This is not an easy

species to grow and I felt that the owner who had produced such a large unblemished specimen deserved a great deal of credit. The entry was awarded first prize and the BCSS Diploma for the best plant in the Mammillaria Society show. Second prize was awarded to an attractive clump of *M. microcarpa* (= *M. grahamii*) literally smothered in flowers. I recall seeing the same plant in full bloom at an earlier show. With such a large entry, several beautiful plants failed to win a prizecard, though they would probably have been rewarded in an average branch show. These included a multi-headed clump of *M. guelzowiana* and another fine flowering specimen of *M. setispina*.

The limited pot-size class for two plants attracted ten fine entries. Most impressive was the large clump of *M. potisii* in the first prize winning entry. Again there were excellent entries that failed to win a prizecard. Among these, an entry comprising *M. aureilanata* and *M. zephyranthoides*, both multi-headed, and another comprising a beautiful *M. albicans* paired with *M. patonii*, had this judge drooling.

The next two classes catered for single-headed plants, the second class being re-stricted to pot sizes not greater than 18 cm. In the first class were found some venerable plants, clearly of great age but in excellent condition. First prize went to *M. gigantea*, second prize to *M. chionocephala* and third prize to a plant of *M. hahniana* fully 30 cm tall and 23 cm in diameter. Others among the ten entries were impressive: I particularly admired a fine *M. heyderi* ssp. *hemisphaerica*.

Outstanding in the class for two single-headed plants was an entry comprising *M. mystax* with multiple rings of dead flowers paired with *M. zephyranthoides* with dead flowers and fruits. This took first prize, with second prize going to a large *M. hahniana* paired with *M. chionocephala*.

The next class called for a group of three plants in pots not exceeding 14 cm. With thirteen entries and a wide range of species to assess, decision-making was difficult. In some cases two outstanding plants were let down by a third that was not quite of the same quality. Eventually I selected my first prize winner: an entry comprising a large *M. coahuilensis* with several offsets, a handsome clump of *M. crucigera* and a nice *M. theresae*. In second place came a group of clustering plants, *M. blossfeldiana*, *M. crucigera* and *M. slevanii* (= *M. albicans*).

The class for four plants, with a pot-size limit of 10 cm, contained some superb examples of small-growing species. In particular, there were several beautiful plants of *M. herrerae*, a four-headed cluster of *M. magallanii* and a fine clump of *M. hemandezii*. As always, judging involved searching the plants for minor faults to narrow the field and then finding a nice 'set' of immaculate plants. In this case the winning entry included lovely plants of *M. aureilanata* and *M. solisioides*, a multi-headed *M. herrerae* and a twin-headed *M. pectinifera*.

The class for cristates attracted only two entries. Although these were healthy well-grown specimens, I wondered at the absence of the huge plants of such species as *M. elongata* that used to be a mainstay of the cristate class.

The final two classes were designated for the Thelocactus Group. The unlimited pot-size class attracted thirteen entries representing a fair cross-section of the genus *Thelocactus*. First prize and an Award of Merit were earned by a magnificent *T. rinconensis* about 23 cm in diameter and the largest I have encountered. A multi-headed clump of *T. hexaedrophorus* ssp. *lloydii* came a close second.

The class for two plants in pots not exceeding 16 cm contained some evenly matched entries. The first prize was awarded to a pairing of *T. bteiri* with *T. hexaedrophorus*.

I felt that the overall standard of the show was exceptionally high. The quality of the plants presented was a magnificent advertisement for the Mammillaria Society. Oxford Branch is to be congratulated on their organisation, and the exhibitors on their skill. It will be difficult to surpass the show in future years.