

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather in December seems to be a continuation of the pattern from November – a few frosty nights, but generally milder than one might expect for the time of year.

The plants which I mentioned in last month's newsletter (*Clivia caulescens* and *Aloe* cv. 'Lizard Lips') are still flowering. One advantage of winter flowerers is that their blooms do tend to last longer than they might in the hot summer months.

Announcements

The **2005 Branch Programme** card is available from the front table. The **Zone 11 Programme** should also now be available.

It's also the time of the year to renew your society membership. Renewal forms are usually sent out with the December Journal, which is due to be posted to members any day now. If you own a credit or debit card, you can also renew your subscription online, by visiting the main BCSS website: <http://www.bcss.org.uk>

Last Month's Meeting

David Corina started by mentioning that at the January meeting, we would try and use an LCD projector. So if anyone had any digital pictures they wanted to show, just bring them along to the meeting on a recordable CD. We would also have the ordinary projector, if people wanted to show normal slides.

Peter Down started off the AGM by stating that 2004 had been an amazing year, thanks to our 50th anniversary. In March, the birthday meeting was followed closely by the Anniversary Convention, which attracted over a hundred people from all over the country. At this event we had talks from Ernst Specks and Graham Charles, and plants sales from a number of nurseries.

At Easter, we took part in the spring Garden Show at Broadlands. Various members helped out with the prickly potting, and by the end of the two days, we had helped over 400 children pot up a plant of their choice. In addition, several thousand people had been through our marquee. In May, we took part in the Whiteley Shopping Outlet's Garden Event. This event was a new venture for us but we attracted good interest and sold a reasonable number of plants across the three days.

Our stand at the Southampton Festival was another success due to the hard work of the committee, as was the display at the New Forest Show. In August, several members attended the BCSS National Show at the Springfields Exhibition Centre in Spalding. It was a marvellous show with some excellent plant sales and those who went met loads of friends associated with our hobby.

At the end of 2003, we were a bit worried when Richard White left for Cardiff, but Margaret and David agreed to step in and take on the Secretary's responsibilities. They have done a great job. Peter thanked all the committee members for their efforts.

Peter then invited Margaret Corina to give the treasurer's report. Margaret handed out summary sheets of the accounts and mentioned that a full set was available if anyone wanted more detail.

The important figure was the trading profit of £814 for the year. Every single thing we've done during the year has made money. As a result, our accumulated fund stands at £5758 so the branch is doing very well. During the year, we bought some new assets: a book for the library, some new

trophies, large signs to advertise our shows, a laser pointer for speakers to use, and a gazebo which was required for use at Whiteley.

Margaret proceeded to thank those people who had assisted the branch in some way during the year. Linda and Roger Labbett and Mrs Corbin had donated plants for sale, and Margaret Price had sent a cash donation. Bruce Beckerleg had donated some back cloths and Peter Down donated a new trophy. Thanks were also due to Colin and Lorraine Bielckus for auditing the books for us, June Purseglove for selling raffle tickets at the monthly meetings, and to several people who brought in donations for the raffle.

For the prickly potting, Geoff Card and David Neville donated pots, while Ivor Biddlecombe and Philip Clemow donated cuttings. Ivor's seed packing efforts deserved a special mention – during the year, we sold a record 875 packets of seed. Since most of this seed is donated by branch members, this activity brings in a lot of revenue for the branch. Ivor reminded everyone that he would appreciate receiving seed in any quantity, large or small.

David Neville queried the depreciation shown in the accounts. Margaret answered that we depreciate all assets by 15%, although this is probably not accurate for the books, many of which rise in value when out of print. The accounts do include a statement to the effect that the value of the books in our library is higher than the figure shown in the balance sheet.

Next, David Corina said a few words, in his role as branch Secretary. He mentioned that he was partly to blame for the extra work created by the new events we attended in 2004, but these events had been successful and we have been re-invited to them for 2005. Currently we have 60 members, of which around half attend our monthly meetings. David thanked Mark and Rebecca for hosting an Open Day, and Vinay for getting the Branch website up and running. He also thanked David and Vinay for handing e-mail communication for the branch.

Peter Down mentioned that there were no new nominations for the committee, but fortunately all of the current committee were willing to stay on in their roles. He proposed to re-elect the committee, and this motion was carried.

Peter proceeded to describe some of the tasks performed by committee members in more detail.

Ivor Biddlecombe was Shows Secretary and apart from the previous reference to supplying packing seeds for sale, there was a lot of effort before and after each show – bringing plants, arranging the tables and classes, and clearing up at the end.

Bruce Beckerleg looks after plant sales, and along with David Neville he brings along a good selection of plants for sale at meetings and other events. Tallying the money and working out the commissions due to members was a big job after each show since there are usually hundred of labels to count and several hundred pounds to account for.

David Corina looks after Pots and Sundries. Peter mentioned that we are quite lucky in the range of items offered, although this does require a lot of storage space at the Corina home!

Talking about storage, our meeting hall does not have anywhere to store the library books, and as a result, the books are split into three crates, which different people look after and bring along to each meeting. During the year, several new members joined the branch and this probably explains the increased borrowing of books.

Vinay Shah looked after the website and also the newsletter. Peter mentioned that he gets round to several branches and our newsletter is as good as any other, he hasn't seen any better examples. As usual, the editor would appreciate contributions of snippets or articles that you think might be of general interest. Vinay was also working on the Anniversary CD for the convention and this would hopefully be available soon.

Jim Roskilly is our Publicity Officer. The Romsey Advertiser tends to be a reliable voice for us, and other articles in local papers have helped to make us more conspicuous.

Glenn Finn had volunteered for the post of Catering Manager, and his efforts (along with help from the rest of the Finn family) were brilliant at the Anniversary convention. David Neville has been unfortunate with his health recently, and he also has to cope with editing the National BCSS Journal. We are very grateful and lucky to have him in our branch. Geoff Card represents the New Forest Branch which amalgamated with us last year. Colin and Lorraine Bielckus do a brilliant job of auditing our books. Peter thanked everyone for their efforts.

Next it was time to hand out the trophies for the overall winners of the monthly Table Shows. Ivor has been disappointed that only a few people bother to enter, and that the same people tend to win the trophies each year. This was discussed at length during the last committee meeting and Ivor said he would continue to bring his plants but will not claim any points, in an effort to get others to win the trophies. Also we would allow more than one entry in a class.

For 2004, Ivor won the trophies for highest points in the Open section (cacti) and Open section (succulents), and also Intermediate section (succulents). Bruce won the Intermediate section for cacti. No prizes were awarded for the novice classes due to a lack of entries.

Peter called the AGM to an end and wished everyone a peaceful Christmas and New Year, and successful growing in 2005. He mentioned that on the front table, there were a couple of scrap books which covered the 50 years of the branch, from the start to the present day. The books contained a number of pictures of current members looking somewhat younger! He had also brought along 4 albums of stamps which featured cacti and succulents. Countries which didn't have any native cacti or succulents still issue some interesting stamps featuring these plant.

Just as Peter was about to ask everyone to start helping themselves to the food, David Corina stood up and mentioned that there was one more semi-formal piece of business. He handed me a small gold-wrapped box which I presented to Peter - it was a copy of the Anniversary CD which Peter had enquired about earlier! Margaret also proceeded present me with a gold medal (a chocolate Kruggerand, I hasten to add) for undertaking all the work leading up to the production of the CD. Each member present was also given a copy of the CD, and these would also be posted to branch members and others who had been present at the Convention.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Below is an article (published in the Daily Express on 16th December 2004) which Ivor Biddlecombe passed on to me:

The Cactus Diet

Slimming experts had new advice for overweight people last night: Let them eat cactus. Scientists believe a plant used for thousands of years by

African tribesmen to stave off hunger on long hunting trips could be the answer to fighting the flab. They claim that the appetite-suppressing properties of a taste-less white powder extracted from the hoodia cactus is the ultimate weight-loss food.

Shares in the firm behind the discovery, Phytopharm, soared after it agreed a deal that could see the diet aid on supermarket shelves within three years. Its partner, the food giant Unilever, wants to use the cactus extract in its SlimFast range as either a drink or a snack. More than one billion adults around the globe are overweight and at least 300 million are clinically obese. Under the terms of a £21million deal with the British scientists and the South African government, the San bushmen of the Kalahari desert are entitled to a share of the profits.

The drug's commercial potential was spotted by Cambridge-based Phytopharm's founder Dr Richard Dixey, who said: "An extract like this which has the potential to make you feel full is likely to be a huge benefit in low calorie food." Trials were found to cut the number of calories taken in by 1,000 per day, after volunteers had taken the extract for two weeks.

But Daily Express columnist Dr Rosemary Leonard warned that previous appetite suppressants had done more harm than good. "I would urge extreme caution until we have seen the results of extensive clinical tests on this extract, I certainly wouldn't raise anybody's hopes," she said.

The proportion of obese Britons has trebled in 20 years, with 30,000 premature obesity-related deaths every year, said Professor Ian Campbell of the National Obesity Forum. "The fact that Unilever is getting involved is very interesting because they will research this substance and establish it as a reputable product," he said.

Hoodia succulents, known to the bushmen as ghaap, are found in the driest areas of southern Africa. They grow up to seven feet tall and live for up to 20 years. Their fleshy, finger-like stems are peeled and chewed by hunters preparing to spend days without food in the region's harshest conditions. The bushmen are able to store fat when food is plentiful to sustain them in harder times.

Daily Express

Commemorative CD

By now, all those who attended the AGM at the end of last year or who received the Christmas mailing will have received a copy of the Commemorative CD produced to mark the Branch's 50th Anniversary. [If you haven't got the CD, please have a word with Margaret Corina.]

The idea of producing the CD was brought up at one of the branch committee meetings following the Convention. Several people had taken digital pictures and it was felt we could collect these pictures together and put them on a CD.

In the ensuing months, work was done by various people to organise the photos, editing the brightness / contrast / tint of the images as necessary and also in identifying the people in the photographs. Not all the photos were perfect, but we decided to include as many as possible for completeness. There was also space on the CD to allow inclusion of the photos which I took during the 2004 National Show.

At the November committee meeting, it was agreed that we should attempt to get the CD ready for the 2004 AGM. I was already half-prepared for this (in terms of having purchased blank CD's and jewel cases) but now it really was time to finalise the design of the CD!

An initial design of the jewel case inserts and the CD contents was reviewed by Margaret and David Corina and David Neville. This was very useful - various typos were fixed and a few more names of people and plants were identified.

The moment of going into full production was a very nervous one. I was about to create one hundred copies of the master CD, and any mistakes or errors at this stage could have been

embarrassing and/or costly! Luckily nothing went wrong. Printing the surface of each CD took a total of 9 hours (each CD had to be individually aligned and hand-fed into a special inkjet printer) and writing the data to the CDs took a further 5 hours, using 2 CD-writers operating in parallel. The final task was for Margaret and David to cut the jewel case inserts and to place the CDs inside the cases.

Many thanks to all those who contributed and helped with this project!

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on 1st February, and will feature Curt Lamberth who will present a talk on "Habitats".

The February table Show will consist of the **Echinocactus** group (cacti) and the **Agave** group (succulents). Please note that as from this year, you are allowed to submit more than one entry in any of the classes.

The Echinocactus group includes *Echinocactus*, *Ferocactus*, *Homalocephala*, and *Leuchtenbergia*.

The Agac group includes *Agave*, *Beaucarnea*, *Beschorneria*, *Calibanus*, *Dasylyrion*, *Dracaena*, *Furcraea*, *Hesperaloe*, *Manfreda*, *Nolina*, *Samuela* and *Yucca*.

A reminder for committee members that a committee meeting will be held on the 17th of January.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 15 th	Jan	Portsmouth	"Argentina" – Peter Down
Mon 17 th	Jan	Southampton	Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue
Fri 21 st	Jan	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction and Members' Slides
Tue 1 st	Feb	Southampton	"Habitats" – Curt Lamberth
Fri 18 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz and Members' Talk
Sat 19 th	Feb	Portsmouth	"Stones of the Desert" – Jonathan Clark
Tue 1 st	Mar	Southampton	"Cacti, North to South" – David Lambie
Sun 13 th	Mar	Basingstoke	Convention & Mini-Mart, Viables Craft Centre, Basingstoke

Branch website: <http://www.southampton.bcsc.org.uk>