

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Having previously stated that we had mild weather in October and November, I think it's fair to say that December and the early part of January have been more typical of winter, and there have been some very cold days along with sharp overnight frosts. At least there have been a fair number of bright and sunny days.

As far as plants doing something interesting, I did have some mesembs and crassulas in flower during December – and of course, some Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera*). I found a nice website offering cultivars of this in a large variety of colours at <http://www.schlumbergera.org>. The plants are priced in Euros - unfortunately, the recent collapse of the £ makes them a little more expensive than they were previously.

Announcements

Copies of the **Branch programme** and the **Zone 11 programme** for 2009 are available from the front table.

I'd also like to remind readers to renew their **BCSS membership**. The Journal which was sent out in December contained renewal forms, and you can also make a payment via the BCSS website. If you're not yet a member, please have a word with Margaret Corina, who will explain the benefits of being a member and will also provide you with a membership form.

Last Month's Meeting

Our **Chairman Peter Down** started December's AGM/Social meeting by mentioning that no Committee nomination forms had been received, so it was just as well that the existing committee had agreed to serve for another year.

He mentioned that he would like to see some younger people join the committee and that at the last branch committee meeting, he had stated that he was thinking of stepping down. He was persuaded to continue for another year and so was in effect serving a year's notice. He reminisced that he had been on the committee since the early days of the branch, having been the Branch Treasurer in 1960. So he had done a long stint, approaching almost 50 years!

As is traditional, Peter stated that we would receive reports from some of the key committee members and then he would briefly mention some of the other posts.

He started with his report as Chairman. At the end of last year we were getting worried about the falling attendances at our monthly meetings. Fortunately, that trend has changed in 2008 and we usually had around 30 or so members at meetings. We were also glad to see visitors from our neighbours, Portsmouth – Angie Money was representing them at our AGM this year. Peter mentioned that the highlight for him was the National Show. Apart from seeing lots of good plants on display and for sale, the best part was meeting up with old friends, many of whom he'd been on trips with (e.g. to the Continent).

He went on to say that it was a real privilege to be involved with the Committee that we have in Southampton - they give up a lot of their time for the branch. He also thanked all the members – there would be no point in organising meetings if no one came to them. And by buying raffle tickets, or refreshments or plants at our meetings, the members were helping to keep the branch going.

Peter also mentioned that some of the Committee are getting long in the tooth and it would be good to see some of our younger members take a role in running the branch. If he stands down next year, there will be a bit of a shuffle within the committee and some positions would become vacant. He ended by wishing everyone a peaceful Christmas and a good growing year.

Next, it was **Margaret Corina's** turn to speak to us, as **Branch Treasurer**. She handed out copies of the accounts prior to discussing the financial results and mentioned that only a few things needed to be said. We had made a surplus again. There had however been a problem at the Easter Show at Broadlands. The weather had been very cold and relatively few visitors came through the gates. We reduced our bill to the Show organizers, but they went bankrupt and the cheque they gave us bounced, causing us to lose £350. Philip Clemow questioned why the accounts showed the event as having made a profit, but Colin explained that it was normal practice to show the expected earnings from the event and then make a separate adjustment for the non-receipt of payment from the organizers.

Margaret mentioned that interest earned on our deposit account was very good but the figure will be lower in 2009 due to the recent cuts in interest rate. We also made a profit on the sale of pots – we disposed of our entire stock of pots during the year, so all that remains is some label marking pens. We also spent money on getting the new branch lapel badge made.

She thanked Colin and Lorraine for being our auditors. She also mentioned that they deserved extra thanks for allowing us to use their digital projector. The accounts were accepted and seconded. Peter thanked Margaret for her work in looking after branch finances – he mentioned that the statement for 1960 showed we had funds of £41 in that year – so times have certainly changed!

David Neville brought up one item relating to the forthcoming Easter Show at Broadlands. Despite us having suffered a loss at that show in 2008 due to non-payment, we have decided to trust the same organizer for 2009's event. Over the past 12 years, we have done very well financially with the shows at Broadlands, so we felt it was worth backing him at least once more. Peter mentioned the weather should be better because Easter was going to be later in the year. Also, the show format would be different, with a funfair and various other ideas to attract families, so hopefully attendances will be better than they were in 2008.

Putting on her secretary's hat, Margaret said that Peter's report had covered most of what she had said in her written report. Peter mentioned that at this time of the year, things do tend to get hectic for Margaret, with her multiple roles. Apart from trying to finalise the accounts, there's also the need to organize the branch programme (which David Neville helps with). Margaret mentioned there's also the Christmas mail-out, where we post newsletters and the programme cards to all members who do not attend our monthly meetings. Margaret mentioned that our membership was healthy, with a total of around 70 members. Peter asked for a round of applause for the Secretary. Most branches have separate people doing the Treasurer and Secretary roles, and he hoped this could be arranged for next year.

Peter thanked Ivor Biddlecombe for being the Display Manager. Peter explained the change in title from Show Manager to Display manager was due to the fact that we don't do shows any more. The halls cost a lot to rent, and the shows are not that well supported. Ivor has to load his car (and often, his brother's too) with all the staging material and he also brings along many of the display plants. Peter thanked Ivor for everything he's done for the branch for so many years.

Plant sales are handled by Bruce Beckerleg. He handles a lot of money during the public events and Peter thanked him for that, and also for providing lots of interesting plants for plant sales and the public displays, and for entering the monthly table shows. Bruce commented that this month's table show was much more attractive than normal – since the tables which normally hold the show plants were covered with lots of plates of food!

The role of newsletter editor and maintaining the branch website was handled by me. Peter mentioned that our newsletter is the envy of many branches, and speakers who see the write-up of their talk in our newsletter are usually quite impressed. Another achievement this year was to get the branch badge done. Despite some conflicting views in the committee, it had turned out well. I mentioned that the website is the means for many of the newer members to find us. Apart from various pictures of cacti and succulents, the branch programme and past editions of the newsletters are also up there.

Peter mentioned that Jim Roskilly looked after publicity. It's Jim's job to hassle the local newspapers and radio to try and get us some mentions. Jim mentioned that the Echo normally

lists out meetings although they hadn't mentioned us this month!

Peter moved on to the Branch Library. Philip Clemow retired from the committee last year, and Dot England took over the role of Librarian. We have plenty of good books, but the income from them in 2008 was just £14. Dot was keen to see more people use the library and at the last committee meeting, the lending charge structure was discussed and it was agreed to bring the fee down to a common figure for all the books. Peter mentioned that we have an amazing library, and in the future we will try and review some of the books from time to time so that members are reminded of what's available there.

Peter went on to cover the remaining tasks performed by committee or other branch members. June Purseglove was thanked for handling the raffle each month. Thanks were also due to Glenn Finn and his family. Glenn does the refreshments at the monthly meetings and his family members often help out. Glenn said that he would like to thank all those who had helped him, especially by covering for him on occasions when he hadn't been able to attend the meetings.

David Neville proposed thanks for our Vice-Chairman, Geoff Card. He is always a stalwart presence at our shows. Margaret mentioned there was one person we hadn't thanked yet – and that was Peter himself - for everything he does to keep the meetings running smoothly and also at the committee. Geoff suggested we also thank Tony Grech for running around and getting the signatures of attendees at meetings each month. It helps to know how many people come along to our meetings each month.

Peter thanked everyone present for supporting the meetings by buying refreshments, plants etc. People also bring plants along and make donations of raffle prizes. David Neville added that we should all be proud of the branch. It is one of the healthiest and wealthiest. Even though we are rather isolated by our position on the South coast, we have one of the largest regular attendances in the country - many branches are down to 10-20 people at most. We make a decent profit from the events so don't have to charge members to attend the meetings, and we have a regular newsletter. Through the hard work of the committee and the members, we are in good shape. Speakers are also likely to come and talk if they know there will be a decent turnout.

As the AGM drew to a close, it was time to award the trophies for the Table Show. Tony Grech won the Challenge Cup, and Jim Roskilly won the Anniversary Paperweight. Jean Burnay won the Ladies Cup. Bruce Beckerleg won the remaining two cups – the Bangor Cup (named after the location of our previous meeting hall) and the Gateway Vase – which was perhaps named due to Southampton being a gateway. With the formalities over, it was time for everyone to enjoy the food and drink on offer!

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Lithops - Literally Stone Plants

The name Lithops is derived from the Greek word 'lithos' which means stone and 'opsis meaning face-like. The local Afrikaans name of "beeskloutjies" comes from a different source, and means cows' hooves.

Lithops closely mimic both the size and colour of the gravel in which they grow. The tap root is contractile, and pulls the plant body down into the ground during the dry season when the plants are at rest. This ensures that the dormant plants become exceedingly difficult to find, historically by grazing animals and, latterly, by succulent collectors. Either will soon remove non-conforming specimens, although for different purposes. Searching for Lithops in habitat takes patience - a lot of patience - and recourse to a hands and knees posture. This is a salutary experience indeed!

Such effective camouflage means that the flowers must be conspicuously visible, usually shiny white or bright yellow, in order to attract pollinating insects. The location of the plants is then revealed to predators, and they become exceedingly vulnerable. Personally, I have never seen a plant in habitat which had more than two heads. Contrast this with the multi-headed specimens in cultivation.

Unfortunately a new threat has emerged to plants in habitat. They are being removed wholesale by locals, who become very skilled at spotting them, and transported to markets in parts of Africa where they do not occur. Here they are sold for a very small price as love tokens. Who can guess at the symbolism?

Ian Acton

Jim Roskilly sent me this poem which was recently featured on the Submariners' Association's website.

Do You Just Belong?

Are you an active member
the kind that would be missed?
Or are you just contented
That your name is on the list

Do you attend the meetings
And mingle with the lot?
Or do you just stay away
And criticise and knock?

Do you take an active part
To help the show along
Or are you satisfied
The kind that just belong?

Do you ever go and visit
Or call on a member who is sick
Or leave the work to just a few
And then call them a Clique?

Think this over fellow member
You know the right from wrong
Be an active member
And do not just belong.

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on February 3rd and will feature our own David Neville, who will be talking about the Exotic Gardens of Monaco. This well known garden also does much work on research and propagation of rare species.

The February table show will consist of the **Rebutia** group (cacti) and the **Echeveria** subgroup (succulents). Please note that you can submit more than one entry in any of the classes.

The Rebutia group includes *Rebutia*, *Aylostera*, *Cintia*, *Cylindrorebutia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Mediolobivia*, *Neorebutia*, *Setirebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*.

The Echeveria subgroup includes *Echeveria*, *Cremnophila*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Hasseanthus*, *Oliveranthus*, *Pachyphytum*, *Stylophyllum*, *Tacitus*, *Thompsonella* and *Urbinia*.

Forthcoming Events

Fri 16 th	Jan	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction & Members' Slides
Sat 17 th	Jan	Portsmouth	"Chile Now and Then" – Angie Money
Mon 19 th	Jan	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue)
Tue 3 rd	Feb	Southampton	'Jardin Exotique, Monaco' – David Neville
Fri 20 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	no meeting
Sat 21 st	Feb	Portsmouth	"Weed & Belen 89/90" – Suzanne & Tony Mace
Tue 3 rd	Mar	Southampton	Travels in Southern Patagonia' – Anna & Martin Sheader
Fri 20 th	Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' slides
Sat 21 st	Mar	Portsmouth	A Visit to Kiel - Tom Radford
Tue 31 st	Mar	Southampton	Round and About - Eddy Harris

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