

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has continued with spells of cold and warm weather but I think there can be no doubt that temperatures are above average for the time of year.

The flower buds on *Brophyllum tubiflora* have started to open and the flowers are a nice shade of orange. I did consider bringing the plant in, but it is over three feet tall and even worse, growing in a tray of very untidy epiphyllums. I will however take some pictures of the flowers and put them up on our website. Other than that, I think the warm weather has confused many of our plants and I wonder how they'll react later in the year.

Announcements

A reminder (if you have not already done so!) to renew your annual membership of the Society. This can be done using the forms that were sent out with the December journal, or online via the BCSS website (<http://www.bcsc.org.uk>).

As you will probably be aware, Steven Hammer will be the speaker at our **March meeting**. The meeting has also been publicised by the Mesemb Study Group and early indications are that we will attract quite a few visitors from other branches, including our neighbours Portsmouth and Isle of Wight. If you have bought any of the books authored by Steven, you may want to bring them along to the meeting to have them autographed. Branch members should use the regular hall car park (off Hatherell Close) and park their cars close together to make maximum use of the car park space. Visitors will be asked to use

the main church car park whose entrance is round the corner, on West End Road. We would appreciate help from members on the evening to make sure everything goes smoothly!

Last Month's Meeting – Members' Evening

Last month's meeting consisted of a number of short talks by branch members. Some of the speakers used conventional slides and others used digital pictures - thanks are due to Colin and Lorraine for once again allowing us to use their Epoque ELX200A digital projector for the meeting.

Tom Radford

Tom Radford started off proceedings with some digital pictures covering various places and things. He referred to the Continental trips which were the subject of the talk by Doug Donaldson last November, and one of the places he has been to in recent years is Ernst Specks' nursery in Germany. This is one of the best continental nurseries, but Tom thinks quite a lot of the choice material seems to be collected from habitat. We saw a group of Monadeniums and Euphorbias, followed by a couple of reddish grafts of *Euphorbia abdelkuri*. The price tags indicated these were 38 Euros each (around £25) so they were not exactly cheap! A grafted *Euphorbia turbiniformis* was also priced at €38.

We moved on to Lakerweld, where a sign at the front of the establishment indicated they carried 100,000 plants in 2500 varieties. One side housed the owner's private collection, and on the opposite side were all the sale plants. There were some nice cacti and a few succulents here. Some of the plants were incredibly cheap – we saw a large barrel cactus (*Echinocereus grusonii*) which was around 18-24" across and priced at only €40 (£26). The only problem would be carrying it home!

Next were some shots of *Haemanthus albiflos* – he had bought this as a small bulb some years ago. Cok's in Holland, has an interesting collection of unusual plants, and we saw the large leaved variety

of *Haemanthus deformis* in a 4 inch pot, and also *Haemanthus humilis*. While there, Tom was given some bulbils which had formed in the seed heads. These little bulbs send out a green stem which then bends downwards and enters the soil, forming roots in the ground. The plantlet lives off the bulb for a while. Of the three bulbils he was given, one stem died, but the other two survived, and after four months, had formed a nice pair of leaves and were starting to make some progress.

Last year, in one of the *Plants of Interest* sessions, he had brought in a group of succulents, and one of these included a cutting (again from Cok's) of the large flowered variety of *Ceropegia ampliata*. At the time the flower buds were still forming, but later on, the flowers had opened, and he had taken some pictures to show us what the developed blooms looked like. The white flowers were quite large - 1 to 1½ inches long.

In the summer Tom had been to a bird watching trip to Argentina. They were quite high up in the mountains (2500 metres. or so) and temperatures were low (-5°C) first thing in the morning. This explained why a pictures of trees in the distance showed them to be white – they were actually covered in frost. Within a few hours, this would disappear. In the background, there were lots of tall cacti, growing on the mountainsides David Neville thought these might be *Trichocereus pasacana*.

Near the Bolivian border, they came across a lump of Tephrocactus, a metre across and growing in a crevice on a near-vertical surface. Higher up at the border, there were various plants scattered around. They encountered a slightly different Tephrocactus. Although it was the middle of winter, it was extremely dry, and at this height (4000m) it can get pretty cold at night. We saw some of the local inhabitants – a pair of vicunas! These are like little camels and they have extremely soft wool. They were hunted almost to extinction but are now protected and live in reserves.

West of Salta, they went into the Andes, heading towards Chile. At a height of 3000m. it was hot and sunny in the daytime but could get cold at night. We saw a nice line of three Cerei, each around 10-15 metres high. A woodpecker had built a nest at the top of one of them. Tom mentioned that the large columnar plants were easy to spot, but there were many smaller plants if you looked around.

The next adventure was on a bird watching trip in Ethiopia. After showing us a picture of a large rosette plant, Tom asked the audience what they

thought it was. The next slide was supposed to serve as a clue - it featured a blue garden lobelia. The rosette plant was in fact a giant lobelia. Similar plants grow on Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro. This plant, *Lobelia rynchopetalum*, only grows at altitude. At 4000m, it was quite wet and cold. The plants grow to various sizes. People have tried collecting seeds and small plants but they just won't grow in cultivation. In habitat, the plants produce a flower stem and then die after forming offsets around the base.

Still in Ethiopia, we saw a “desirable” residence and a more wealthy person's house – both made from mud but one with a thatched roof and the other with a corrugated roof. They used euphorbia stems as natural fences but he wasn't sure whether these plants were native. The next shot showed a couple of blue throated bee-eaters, sitting next to each other. There were also variegated plants of Agave Americana growing here – presumably the plants had been brought in for decoration but had taken hold in the wild. This particular clump was 10 metres long!

The final plant was *Eucomis bicolor*. He had been growing it in the greenhouse but decided to put it out in the garden after having checked that it is frost hardy. The plant had thrown up flower spikes and had grown 14 heads, so it had done really well. No slide show is complete with a sunset, and Tom ended with a shot of the setting sun playing on a red hill in Argentina.

Derek Prior

Next were some digital pictures taken by Derek Prior. We started with a purple/yellow flowered Streptocarpus which he had been grown from seed in 15 months. We also saw a couple of other varieties – deep red with white and purple with veins in the throat. Next was another generiad - a lavender flowered Chirita which was around three years old. This was followed by the peruvian daffodil, *Ismene festalis* which has white flowers with very long back petals. A pink Nerine was growing in the garden, and there were also a couple of shots of a pure-white Nerine. We also saw a couple of african violets and a red cactus-flowered geranium and a Sansevieria in flower.

Next we saw some mesembs – a doubled headed Pleiosplios had produced a total of 7 flowers, and a Faucaria had produced 6 yellow flowers which showed up well against the dark green bodies. We also saw a Fenestraria with a white flower and a Conophytum with a pink flower which had

remained solitary for ages until finally subdividing this year. A Christmas cactus cv. 'Gold Charm' had pinkish-yellow flowers. The flower colour is sensitive to temperature, and the pink colouring does not form if the plant is allowed to bud at higher temperatures.

We saw the unusual *Massonia pustulata* in bud and Derek said the plant eventually opened with 8 individual white flowers. The plant had also formed 2 offsets in the pot. Next was *Massonia bractea* with 5 flowers. This had longer bristles on the leaves. A *Stapelia hirsuta* was flowering with a long haired magenta flower, and Derek said the plant had been grown from seed and was 5 years old. *Orbea variegata* had a nice flower, intricately marked in brown and yellow. Next was a perennial plant (related to the aster) whose name I did not catch but whose flowers had fringed petals in a nice lilac colour.

Next was a collection of 5 brightly colour day lilies, including one which was almost pure white. We also saw a pink double flowered daffodil. Growing outside in the garden were plants of *Eucomis* in 7" pots, and which were in flower. *Ornithogalum dubium* had a nice spike of orange flowers. Next was a magenta flowered *Sulcorebutia* with short curly white spines, and several shots of a couple of pastel pink / lilac *Echinopsis* hybrids. *Coryphantha elephantidens* had a magenta flower with slender petals and the plant was in good condition, showing wool in the areoles. We also saw the pink/yellow flowered *Notocactus roseoluteus*.

There were a couple of shots of a Schick hybrid *Echinopsis* dubbed "Rhubarb and Custard" – it had yellow flowers tipped in pink, and we also saw *Leuchtenbergia principis*, with yellow flowers emerging from the crown of the plant. *Parodia leninghausii* had two silky golden yellow flowers which completely hid the plant body when viewed from top. We also saw a yellow flowered *Parodia* with 4 flowers, and a *Frailea* which was flowering after 3 years from seed. The yellow flowers on this rarely open fully. This was followed by an orange/red flowered *Rebutia*, *Mammillaria hahniana* with silky long hair and a complete ring of magenta flowers, and a magenta flowered *Gymnocalycium*.

Next, we saw a couple of general shots of Derek's greenhouse, showing quite a range of plants and very little space on the floor! We then saw two orchids (a phalaenopsis and a odontoglossum) a pink double flowered hellebore (the Christmas rose) and a shot of a his greenhouse with snow falling.

We saw some polyanthus/primula plants, including one with rose-shaped yellow blooms. This was followed by a white and pink flowered amaryllis, some snowdrops, and the last picture featured the heart of a poinsettia, showing the deep red leaf bracts.

David Neville

The next presenter was David Neville, with some slides taken from his last trip to South Africa (in 2005), where he had been accompanied by Margaret and David Corina.

They were heading for a site in the little Karoo to see a rare and restricted mesemb. They had parked the car on a dirt road, and 6-10 feet from the roadside, they came across some *Euphorbias*, including *Euphorbia susannae*, there were about a dozen multi-headed plants here. They had been given a list of things to expect (provided by Derek Tribble and others). A picture of the terrain included a barbed wire fence which is used to contain sheep and ostriches in farms. In the foreground of another picture, we saw some clumps of the mesemb they were looking for - *Muiria hortense*. This is rarely seen in collections – it appears to grow in just 3 or 4 patches in one farm and no where else. It will grow from seed, but is very slow and very temperamental. There was masses of regeneration going on but there were no other plants growing in this patch of multicolored rock. The plants did have numerous dried seed heads but all were dried and decayed and the seeds must have washed out some time ago. All the plants were in good condition, and did not appear to have been damaged by either sheep or birds.

Driving along, they stopped to picture an *Aloe* in flower. It was a single stem rosette, around 2-3 feet in size. They continued to a place called Kliprand, although signposted it consisted just of a few scruffy houses and a church and a cemetery and not much else. They were looking for another choice succulent. Along the way they found tiny heads of *Crassula coralline*, just a few millimetres across. The soil was smooth but cracked, suggesting this location may occasionally flood. They looked around and also found a woolly *anacampseros*, a couple of inches in diameter.

After much searching of the ground, David Corina started whistling, and they had found what they were looking for. The plant was sunken in the soil and only a few silvery stems were visible – this was the plant they were looking for – *Avonia quinaria*, formerly known as *Anacampseros alstonii*. The

flower buds were starting to form and some of the clumps were 8-10 inches wide so must have been many decades old. John Lavranos first discovered this region many years ago and many plants have probably been collected but there were still several tens of fairly good size growing here in the white quartz terrain.

On another day they had another long trip looking for *Lapidaria margaretae* which also grows in quartz outcrops. It is slow growing and choice, and very difficult to find, since it blends in so well. David Corina spotted the first one and once your eyes were trained, more became visible. A six-headed plant is about as big as you see in cultivation. The plant is quite widespread, and even in the wild, the old leaves build up. He also found another plant growing in larger quartz pieces – the clumps were a foot across and this as later identified as a species of *Schwantesia*.

There was one more plant they were very keen to see – *Pachypodium namaquanum* – also referred to as the half-men. They had seen silhouettes of the plants along some of the drive but they went to a specific farm which contains a concentration of the plants, not visible from the roadside. They were let in and started exploring the hillside, where there was evidence of heavy grazing by sheep and goats. They saw one or two plants dotted around. After a twenty minute steep climb, they found a large colony of the plants. They were losing their leaves and were in flower and most were heavily in bud or flowering. Most were taller than 6 feet and sadly there was no sign of regeneration here. The plants do not typically branch, but many had been previously damaged (due to grazing animals?) and were throwing up multiple stems. Some of the shots of the scenery here were beautiful.

Glenn Finn

Next was Glenn Finn with some slides taken a few years ago. The first group covered the branch's 50th Anniversary. We had pictures of people putting the chairs out and the various people who helped during the day, including Ivor acting as the foreman. We had to cater for 111 people that day, and the kitchen staff consisted of Laura, Denise, Margaret and Janet.

We also saw the collection of plants on sale by Ernst Specks and Mark Roberts recognised a plant which he wanted to buy but which Ernst did not want to sell on the day! Gordon Rowley was present in one of his final tasks as Society president, and we saw him talking to Graham Charles, presenting Peter Down with a Robert Holt award and cutting the

birthday cake, which everybody had a slice of. We also saw Sonia, Emily and Penelope helping sell raffle tickets and at the end, Ivor having a moment's rest!

The next set of pictures were taken at the Balloon and Flower festival 6 years ago. We saw various members of the committee, although David Neville was unable to recognise himself with a short haircut. At Romsey, we saw Emily standing between two "bats" on stilts, and a shot of Derek helping in the marquee. We also saw Glenn posing with a large snake! Back home and we saw the effect of letting a *Stapelia* seed pod open and scatter its wind-powered seeds every where! The final shot was of a *Neoporteria* seedling which had germinated whilst still in the seed pod!

Tony Grech

The final speaker was Tony Grech, who had taken approximately a hundred digital photographs of his plants. Unfortunately my cassette recorder failed to flip over to the second side – so I have no record of what David Neville was saying. I still have the pictures on my computer - so I will have to rack my brains and do the write up next month.

Vinay Shah

Table Show results

There were 13 entries in the table show at the January meeting.

	Cacti – Neoporteria and Copiapoa Groups	Succulents – Adromischus Subgroup
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Copiapoa longistaminea	(1) B Beckerleg Crassula susanae
	(2) –	(2) J Roskilly Adrom. halesowensis
	(3) –	(3) P Clemow Crassula portulacea
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Neoporteria villosa	(1) B Beckerleg Adromischus marianae
	(2) P Clemow Neoporteria villosa	(2) P Clemow Crassula cv "Jade Necklace"
	(3) J Roskilly Copiapoa laui (cristate)	(3) J Roskilly Adromischus hemisphericus

Ivor Biddlecombe

Committee meeting

A branch committee meeting was held on 15th January.

We now have some space for library books to be stored at the meeting hall, but will need to purchase padlocks with enough spare keys since the cupboard will be shared with other hall users.

The branch increased its membership last year and we currently have 71 members.

Arrangements for the March meeting and visit of Steven Hammer were discussed. Our branch website would be updated to provide instructions and maps to assist visitors who want to attend this meeting.

Since we will not have a branch meeting in April, arrangements for the Spring Show at Broadlands (7th-9th April, setup on the 6th) will be discussed at the March branch meeting and the March committee meeting.

Later in the year, we'll try to encourage a couple of members to hold some open days in the summer months.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

The little secret of the world's biggest flower

The world's largest flower has been revealed by molecular analysis to have evolved almost 80 times in size to become today's stinking, 15lb mega-bloom. Although this transformation took tens of millions of years, such an evolutionary spurt is still one of the most dramatic size changes ever reported.

If humans were to undergo a comparable growth, an average man would end up 146 metres tall, the height of the Great Pyramid of Giza. Rafflesia got its name because it was first discovered in the Sumatran rain forest 180 years ago by Sir Stamford Raffles.

But American botanists report today in the journal *Science* that although typically a full metre across, with a bud the size of a basketball, it evolved from a family of plants whose blossoms are tiny. Rafflesia is unusual in several ways: It has a carcass-like appearance, reeks of decaying flesh, and in some cases emits heat, much like a recently killed animal. These traits help the flower attract the carrion flies which pollinate it.

Because Rafflesia lacks the genes most commonly used to trace plant ancestry, the scientists had to delve deeper into its genomes, looking at some 11500 "letters" of DNA. This determined that the giant flower's closest relatives are in the Euphorbiaceae family, many of which have blossoms just a few millimetres in diameter.

"The massive increase in flower size could never have been deduced my conventional methods," says Charles Davis, the team's leader from Harvard. "While it is surprising to find this giant plant evolved from a family typified by much smaller blossoms, it's frankly been difficult to imagine it fitting neatly into any plant family. Many had refused to even speculate on where this botanical outlier might fit into the tree of life."

As for why these big blooms blossomed, Davis

speculated that there was probably a very strong selective pressure to do so at the start of the plant's evolutionary process. "An increase in surface area would help to radiate the smell further distances, and be a very effective visual 'stop sign' for the carrion in the vicinity."

*Roger Highfield,
Daily Telegraph, 12th January 2007*

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on March 6th, and will feature a talk by Steven Hammer on Conophytums.

Based in California, Steven is the world's foremost authority on this genus and we are very privileged to have him as a speaker. This event has been advertised by the Mesemb Study Group so expect a higher turnout than normal! Tony Mace will also be present and if you wish to save postage costs on BCSS publications, please order these in advance from Tony. There will also be a variety of plant sellers at the meeting.

There will be no table show at the March meeting.

Forthcoming Events

Fri 16 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Sat 17 th	Feb	Portsmouth	"Arizona Adventure – Part 1" – Alan Phipps
Tue 6 th	Mar	Southampton	"Conophytums" – Steven Hammer
Fri 16 th	Mar	Isle of Wight	"India Revisited" – Doug Donaldson
Sat 17 th	Mar	Portsmouth	"Haworthias in Habitat & Cultivation" – Derek Tribble
Mon 19 th	Mar	Southampton	Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue)
Tue 3 rd	Apr	Southampton	No Meeting – hall unavailable
Sat 7 th	Apr–	Romsey	Display & Plant Sales at Spring Flower and Garden Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Sat 9 th	Apr		

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