

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has been somewhat unpredictable during February, but it's nice to at least see the days getting longer. Spring is almost here and I've seen some nice fields of snowdrops. Other spring flowers should also soon start to make an appearance, although I have to say that for my daffodils, only a few leaf tips are visible.

If you have been keeping in touch with the news, you will have heard of the recent earthquake in Chile. The epicentre was about 200 miles south west of the capital of Santiago, but buildings have been destroyed over a very wide range and over one million houses appear to have been damaged. As we saw in the images at Angie's talk last month, many of the buildings in the smaller towns and villages are flimsy and would not have offered much protection.

Announcements

A reminder regarding **membership** of the society – if you haven't renewed yet, please do so. Renewal forms should have been included with the December Journal. If you have a debit or credit card, it is also possible to renew your membership online, by visiting: <https://www.cactus-mall.org/bcss/index.html>

Tony Grech has had some **keyrings** made using our branch badge design and these are available from the front table, for £2 each.

Northampton & Milton Keynes Branch will be holding their annual auction at Nether Heyford Village Hall, NN7 3LE, on Saturday 24th April 2010. Further details of how to submit plants for sale and how to get to the venue are posted at <http://northants.bcss.org.uk/auction/auction1.htm>

An early reminder that our **May** meeting will take the form of a Cultivation & Propagation Workshop. We'd like members to bring along lots of their plants for discussion or identification.

Do any members own a **gazebo** that we could borrow for use at our events at Whiteley and at the Sparsholt Countryside Day? The one we owned got damaged in a fire last year and we have yet to purchase a replacement. The size needs to be around 12-15 feet across. Please let David Neville know if you might be able to help.

Last Month's Meeting

Mark Jakins mentioned that the branch accounts for 2009 had now been prepared, and were available for the members to examine.

Chile, Now and Then

Last month, Angie Money from Portsmouth Branch gave us a talk which consisted of a slideshow of digital pictures, with some traditional panpipes music at the start and end. She mentioned that she had been to Chile three times - initially in June 2003 and November 2006. In October 2008, she decided to go back to places she had been before and see how things had changed compared to the earlier trips.

The trip started off in Pichidanguí. It was the first part of their first trip and they suffered a flat tyre and were also very tired. We saw *Eriosyce curvispina* growing flat as pancakes in the ground. Angie commented that there were no flowers and no new spines. We also saw *Neoporteria subgibbosa*. She is always fascinated by waves so she took lots of pictures of the sea. In 2003 they found *Eulychnia castanea* with flower buds - the plants were quite big. We also saw examples of *Eriosyce curvispina* which had been planted out by the locals, with succulents growing alongside. We saw some of the buds coming through the spines and a few flowers. There were also *Alstroemerias* which had presumably escaped from people's gardens. *Eriosyce chiloensis* had pink flowers. Next was a

black/yellow lizard which was about a foot long and which was very patient, allowing a good picture to be taken. We saw more *Eulychnias* and also a *Nolana* species with blue flowers. We also saw a picture of Paul Klaassen, Juan Acosta and Florencia Senoret - the latter being Chilean plant explorers who gave a talk at our branch last year. In 2008 they had not planned to stop at this location but the waves were more impressive so she stopped to take some new pictures. *Eulychnia castanea* was in bud and *Eriosyce chiloensis* had a magenta flower. A shot of the coastline showed that the houses were very close to the sea. Paul mentioned the sea water temperatures were around 10°C, due to the cold Humboldt current from the South Pole. They stayed there for about ½ an hour and we also saw a video clip of the waves, which gave a better idea of their size compared to the still pictures. We also had a shot of Cliff Thompson and Paul Klaassen posing and trying to look "cool". In this area, there were examples of *Calandrinia* plants which featured some colourful flowers.

Moving on to Los Hornos (Coquimbo), in 2003 they found lots of *Nolana* in flower. The plants looked nice and green and must have had plenty of water. Paul mentioned the daytime temperatures were around 20°C. In 2006, the greenery had gone but the plants still looked well and happy. They came across *Trichocereus chiloensis* ssp. *litoralis*. We saw a view of the village and also the restaurant they ate at. Angie mentioned her favourite plant was *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* with starry white flowers. The plant originates from Africa and Europe but has naturalized in the desert conditions. There was lots of rubbish around, such as plastic bags, remains of barbecues, and nappies. We also saw the mist caused by the early morning fog, called "Camanchaca" by the locals. In 2008 some of the greenery was back, but this time, the *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* was not in flower. The *Eulychnias* plants looked fine. *Copiapoa coquimbana* proved difficult to find. The village had extended – and along with the growing population, there is damage being done to the plants by grazing animals such as goats and donkeys. We saw *Eulychnia acida* in bud and these buds are quite different in appearance to that of any other cactus. The plants of *Copiapoa coquimbana* didn't look very good - they were very flat and yellowish in colour - either not getting enough water or ill.

Next they went to Huasco. In 2003 they found *Eriosyce villosa* with magenta flowers. Next door is a coal fired power plant and the plants in the surrounding area tend to be covered in a thin layer of dust/ash, and the plant bodies look grey instead of

green or brown. We saw pictures of Ian Woolnough, who had accompanied them on this trip. We also saw the large power station. A shot of some of the local houses showed they were rather flimsy and built like a stack of cards. They stayed at the hostel San Fernando. We also saw a view of a train marked "Ferroonor" which transports the coal to the power plant - mining of coal and copper is of economic importance to Chile. We saw some more examples of human pollution on the ground and there was also pollution also in the air. Paul mentioned that the situation with pollution out in the wild areas was similar in Bolivia and Peru, but Brazil was a bit better. The *Eulychnias* were starting to look grey because of the ash, but they did have flower buds.

Paul mentioned that on one of his Copiapoathon trips, in 2004, he was in this area and a rain fall had brought out white lilies which covered the hillsides. We saw a *Copiapoa fiedleriana* seedling next to an *Eriosyce*, and also a clump of *C. fiedleriana*. David Neville asked Angie if she had to lay on the ground to take these shots but Angie mentioned she didn't need to dirty her clothes, since she had a camera with a rotating screen. We saw one *Eulychnia* with open white flowers, along with a bee in the flower. There was another *Eulychnia* with a pylon in the background which prompted some comments about the relative sizes of these two objects! Another picture showed Paul, Cliff and the car they had rented that year. In 2008 they had a better view from their hostel, and we saw a picture of the extension which the owner had built. The village had now grown into a small town, however, there was a horrible haze over the area.

Now for something nicer - the National Park at the Pan De Azucar (Sugar Loaf Mountain) at Mirador. Before you get there, you have to climb up a little hill and they found some wonderful examples of *Copiapoa columna-alba*. This species had been described as solitary but here they found clumps of up to a dozen heads. The close-up photographs may have exaggerated the size of the plants, but nevertheless these were large plants which had grown into football sized clumps. Some were suffering from the cyanobacteria *nostoc*. She found a cristate plant with a crested head which was christened "Smiler" due to the yellow line of growth along the crest of the plant resembling a mouth. Some of the plants were a metre high and they were quite near the road.

There were also a few plants of *Copiapoa serpentisulcata* in this area. In 2008 she found the ledge, but where were the cacti? It turns out that she had forgotten the location and had to walk around

500m before she came across them. Some of the plants do die and we some of the carcasses. Paul mentioned there are no organisms to clear up dead plants so the remains persist for a long time. The plants should be green or yellow but they look grey if in trouble. There were plants over a metre tall leaning at angles but still somehow managing to remain upright. Paul said *Ferocactus* also lean into the sun. Even the tennis ball sized plants we saw would have been at least 20 years old. Responding to a question from the audience, Paul said that seedlings are not seen because they tend to remain under the ground for the first few years. He also mentioned that a couple of colleagues (Rudolf and Ricardo) had scraped away an area of 10 sq metres and found it contain a mat of roots from old plants. This suppresses seedlings, so they tend to be found at the edges of the population.

Angie eventually found "Smiler" but the mouth was not as yellow as before. Looking at the edge of the ledge, there was quite a drop of 800 metres. There were lovely big plants of *Eulychnia saint-pieana*. These did not have the white wool because the strong winds along the coast would have blown it away. They spent a couple of hours there. They came across a little desert fox and started feeding it their lunch. They'll eat anything – banana skins, cheese, crisps, biscuits - and this one approached them to within a metre. The foxes also survive by licking moisture off the plants. We saw more examples of *Copiapoa columna-alba* and there were more plants inland. We also saw some views of the coast and the islands off the shore.

At Las Lomitas, they came across more foxes who seemed hungrier. They visited the same area in 2006 and nothing had changed. There were still foxes around, but they seemed more shy. A bird with a grey head and green wings was probably some sort of finch. There were plants of *Eulychnia saint-pieana* and *Eulychnia iquiquensis*. On the coast, we saw a view of the town of Esmeralda. On the cliff tops, there were fog nets to collect moisture from the air. Visiting the same area in 2008,, they saw another finch and more foxes - some shy and some braver. It was a nice sunny day, in contrast to 2003 when it had been foggy, on both the 2006 and 2008 trips, the views were a lot clearer. Paul mentioned that the key to the genus *Eulychnia* uses the form of the flower buds and fruits, and also the wool to determine the species, and plants with white wool are one species and brown wool another. However, here they found plants with both colours of wool on the same plant. We saw *Trichocereus chiloensis* and an *Eulychnia* with white buds.

In this area was a rather tricky T-junction at the top of a cliff - as you approach it, you have to know exactly when to hit the brakes, otherwise you'll end up going over the edge of the cliff! We saw a video of their approach to the junction. After the break we saw them approaching the T-junction from a different direction – this was in 2006. We saw more examples of *Copiapoa columna-alba*. They were close to Taltal and found *C. columna-alba* everywhere, and did find some seedlings here. We saw the welcome sign to the Pan De Azucar National Park. *Copiapoa melanohystris* had different spines but is basically same as *C. columna-alba*. The plants were widespread and on the hillsides and in the gullies. We saw plants a foot tall as well as little ones which were tennis-ball sized and had fresh spination. The fog does reach here and we saw lichen on some of the plants. They again came across *Eulychnia saint-pieana* with the striking white flower buds. Most of the plants .were too tall for her to photograph properly but she managed to find some where she could take a close up of the large white flower and we saw the internal arrangement of stamens and also some sort of bee inside the flower. She found plants with brown buds and also golden buds, followed by more pictures of *C. columna-alba* pictures. They reached the T-junction and eventually headed for Taltal, where they stayed for a while.

We saw some pictures of the town of Taltal, including the church (Iglesia San Francisco), the sea front and a plaza. The town seemed nicely maintained. Growing in some of the gardens were plants such as bougainvilleas. In May 2007, the church burnt down because of an electrical fault, and Angie showed us some information and pictures she had found on the Internet. Being built from wood, the church was destroyed totally - the local fire station was next to the church and that also burnt down. During their 2008 trip, they found the church had been replaced by a wooden hut. Although there are some designs for a replacement it may take a while to raise the necessary funds. We saw some more pictures of Taltal - a mass of electricity and phone wires running across the street and also a street cleaner. Angie said the changes in this town between 2003 and 2008 showed that the standard of living had improved.

Heading north from Taltal, they came across a shrine at Papos. A side view showed the side of the road was secured by old drums filled with concrete. In 2006, a new road had been cut through the mountains so the road to the shrine was now bypassed, and one could now park safely when going to see the shrine. The plants they found in this

region had not changed much in the 5 years. In 2003, they had no sunshine and had been trying to find *Copiapoa humilis* which is supposed to exist here. This species is one of the few Copiapoas that looks the same in the wild as it does in cultivation. The plants seemed to be getting enough humidity although they did not see any flowers. Plants of *Eulychnia iquiquensis* in this area were weather beaten. They also found *Eriosyce paucicostata* in flower – the plants were very spiny and the biggest plant was about a foot tall. There were some yellow flowered annual plants and these were attracting lots of little black insects. Angie found they also loved her orange fleece and she was soon covered with the insects. Another nearby flowering plant had a nice flower and looked like some sort of geranium.

In the fog zone above Papos, you could feel the wetness in the air, even in the middle of the day. Water was dripping off the lichen and the fog meant you couldn't see where you were going. They found *Copiapoa humilis* here, which is its type locality. Another picture showed a ring of *Copiapoa humilis* plants - the mother must have died, but younger offsets had started to grow in a ring around the original plant. There's a large difference between the mature and younger plants. Plants of *Eulychnia iquiquensis* were covered in lichen. The fog was so thick that they couldn't even see their car, and relied on the 1st person to get back and open the door and use the beeping from the car as a beacon. In subsequent visits, they managed to see the area in sunshine and found more plants. Some of the habitat is fenced off into protected areas. *Trichocereus* plants were also covered in lichen, and they again came across *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*. In the clear weather, they could now see the edge of the hill - and it was a long way down.

They found plants of *Copiapoa humilis* and *Eriosyce paucicostata* and these looked a lot healthier than last time. They found young plants as well as older ones. In some cases, if the main head gets eaten by animals (e.g. guanaco) then new offsets grow from the remains of the dying stem. They also found a large 3-headed *E. paucicostata* with the heads being 50cm long. They looked at some of the *Eulychnias* near the path – these were huge plants but there were no flower buds on the them. We saw close ups of insects covered in pollen and the red-edged leaves of *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* which had coloured up in the sunshine.

Heading further north, they encountered donkeys in the middle of the road. They were looking for *Copiapoa cinerea*. The plants were growing next to the seaside and there were also some young ones

growing out of cracks in the rocks. There were quite a few cristates in this field, and also a monstrose example. This area was quite green. In some areas the young plants were dense enough that you had to watch out not to step on them. There were plants growing only 50 metres from the road. The terrain on the hills was rocky and you needed good shoes to keep your footing. At Hurtado, they found *Trichocereus chiloensis* with enormous spines and loads of flowers. The spines were several inches long. The next photo showed a brown grasshopper - Angie said she could hear many more but this was the only one she actually saw. Food supplies are scarce and we saw examples of flower petals which had been eaten by beetles. It was very dry here but the trees seemed to be doing OK. There were lots of *Trichocereus* plants here and they also found examples of *Eriosyce aurata* some 50cm tall.

A spiny *Trichocereus* had slightly curved spines. They found *Eriosyce eriosyzoides* with some seed pods on the plant. The seeds can remain for quite a while, until they are eaten or dispersed by the elements. More examples of *Eriosyce aurata* were about 2 feet, and they finally found one in flower, with small reddish flowers. Young examples of *E. aurata* look very different from the mature plants. They could see examples of *E. aurata* everywhere and the spination varied considerably from black to gold and colours in between. They also came across a nice *alstroemeria* with pink flowers. This area was quite tricky to walk on - the pieces of slate were quite unstable. It was a really nice landscape, with all the *E. aurata* dotted around. We also saw *Puya berteroniana*, with its striking turquoise flowers with orange stigmas. A plant of *Eriosyce eriosyzoides* didn't look too well. Angie ended her talk with some music and scenes taken from along the Southern edge of the Elqui Valley, as they drove past hillsides covered with what appeared to be thousands of plants of *Trichocereus*,

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 6th of April and will feature a talk from Derek Tribble on Gasterias. These tough plants are much underrated and there are some nice varieties available these days, so hopefully we'll learn a bit more about them.

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*, *Aylosteria*, *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*.

A reminder for Committee members that a **committee meeting** is due to be held in March. The date originally selected was 15th March, but David Neville will not be available on that day – so a new date will be chosen at today's branch meeting.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 13 th Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Mon 15 th Mar	Southampton	Committee Meeting - to be rescheduled (St Winfrid's Church (Salisbury Road, Totton, SO40 3JA ?)
Sat 20 th Mar	Portsmouth	"Cactus Plants Tame & Wild" - Alan Phipps
Tue 6 th Apr	Southampton	Growable Gasterias - Derek Tribble
Sat 10 th Apr	Isle of Wight	"India Na Doug" - Doug Donaldson
Sat 17 th Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Sale
Tue 4 th May	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sat 8 th May	Isle of Wight	"Southern Peru" – Cliff Thompson
Sat 15 th May	Portsmouth	"Travels in Southern Patagonia" - Martin & Anna-Liisa Sheader
Sat 29 th May-	Whiteley	Display / Plant Sales @ Whiteley Village nr J9 M27
Sun 30 th		

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