

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Yet another month has passed by rapidly, and it does feel like we have entered spring – nice to see new growth all over the garden. The weather has certainly warmed up but we've had relatively few days of sunshine, so flowers are hard to spot in my conservatory. Some Echeverias and Graptopetalums are in bloom, as is *Mammillaria perez delarosae*. The latter is a single headed plant which is 4 inches tall; I can see the remains of last year's flowers at the 2 inch mark. At the start of March I bought some Easter cacti (*Rhipsalidopsis*), with flower colours of white, red, orange-red and magenta and these went on to produce a wonderful show of flowers during the last 4 weeks. These plants prefer acidic soil conditions, which is why watering with our hard tap water will kill them off within a year or two. Consequently, regular repotting is advisable for these plants, and their relations, the Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera*).

During March, I had a surprise trip to Tucson, Arizona, to troubleshoot a problem on a product developed by IBM Hursley but which was being tested at IBM Tucson. Unfortunately there was little opportunity to do any significant sightseeing out there but I did manage short trips to 'A' Mountain and to the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum. Apparently Tucson has had a wet winter; indeed there was heavy rain on the Saturday that I was there, and it was good to see all the plants looking relatively lush. Many of the

opuntias were forming flower buds. One thing I learnt was that the Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) whose image so typifies Arizona only started growing in this region around 10,000 years ago.

While working on this newsletter over the weekend, I used Microsoft's Windows Update facility to download 5 "critical" updates to my desktop machine. The next time I booted my PC, it froze while booting into Windows 98 and the keyboard and mouse were completely unusable. I then had to go through the rather painful exercise of disabling groups of programs in my startup group and restarting the PC several times in "Safe Mode" to try and figure out which program(s) had wrecked the PC. Subsequent searches on the Internet confirmed that some other W98/WinMe users have also had issues with an update (KB891711) issued by Microsoft. It is rather worrying when a trusted organisation renders more harm to your PC than the viruses it's trying to protect you from

Announcements

By now, members should have received copies of the December 2004 and March 2005 **Society Journals**. Subscription forms were sent out with both editions, please do make sure you renew your membership as soon as possible. If you have misplaced the form, or are a new member, you can also subscribe via the Internet (follow the link from www.bcss.org.uk). The Calendar of Events was supposed to have been mailed with the March Journal but an email from David Kirkbright suggests that many members did not receive a copy. If you did not, please let our branch secretary know.

At the March committee meeting, dates were suggested for a **Branch Dinner** and also an **Open Day** in the summer. The dinner is likely to be held at the Clump Inn, Chilworth on the evening of Friday 1st July. And Margaret and David Corina are thinking of hosting an open day on Sunday, 10th July. Further details of these events will be published in due course.

A quick look at *Forthcoming Events* (on the back page of the newsletter) shows that we do have a lot of events planned in the coming months. Hopefully some of you will be able to venture out and support some of the Branch displays.

The **Flower and Garden Show** at Broadlands, Romsey over the Easter period went well. We had planned to cater for 500 children with “Prickly potting” and reached this target on the afternoon of the third day. As usual, it was rewarding to see the smiles on the children’s faces after they had potted up a plant of their choice. We had 6 or 7 members help with this activity, and this kept most people’s workload at reasonable levels. The weather during the show was not fantastic but at least it didn’t rain. It seemed like overall attendance for the show matched or perhaps slightly exceeded that of the previous year. Thanks are due to all those who helped out at the show.

Last Month’s Meeting

Plants of Interest

Philip Clemow started by stating that he had bought along plants which were flowering in his collection. First was *Delosperma harazianum*, whose pink flowers were still open at this late hour. Philip mentioned that a reference book which he had consulted stated that the flowers closed at night and that it was a summer flowering plant.

Next was an *Othonna* which he had purchased from Ernst Specks at last year’s Anniversary Convention. The plant had grown very well although because of its unusual growing season, it was due to shed its leaves soon. Jim Roskilly mentioned that his plant had grown nothing like as well and was still tiny.

Philip said his *Crassula argentea* was in flower but it was too large and heavy to lift so he had not brought it along. However some other *Crassulas* in flower were *Crassula mollis*; from the Yemen and bearing tiny flowers, and a plant marked *Crassula tecta*. The illustration of this species in the *Crassula* book had slightly different leaves and Philip suspected that his plant might be a hybrid. The final plant was *Crassula* x Jade Necklace which had flowers all over the plant. This is one of the hybrids of *C. perfoliata* v. *falcata* and Philip pointed to a diagram in the *Crassula* book which showed all the hybrids

created from this species - C x Buddha’s Temple being another rather nice cross.

Tom Radford then took over the floor. He had recently been to Namibia - mainly for bird watching - but he did take some time off to see the famous *Welwitschia* plants, which are amongst the oldest plants on our planet. He had taken a number of photographs and had brought these in to show to our members. The first of these featured miles and miles of sand. Just inland from Walvis Bay there’s a park where quite a few *Welwitschias* can be found.

Some of the largest plants were reckoned to be over a thousand years old. The plant forms just two leaves which continue to grow but which tend to fray at the leaf ends. The leaves do grow wider as the plants age. There are male and female plants, with the females bearing cones and the males having the flowers. There were numbers of small seedlings around the mature plants but in cultivation the plant is very difficult. Tom said he had managed to grow them from seed, but they die when you try and transplant them. The desert in this region is very dry but the plants do get moisture from the sea mists. Some other plants he spotted were *Aloe dichotoma*, which had formed trees some 10 feet high.

Thanks are due to Peter Down for providing the following write-up of last month’s meeting.

Cacti - North to South

David Lambie explained that the title of his talk related to cacti that he liked, from habitats stretching from mid Canada, through the U.S.A., Mexico, northern South America, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, right to Patagonia at the very south of South America.

We started off with a dwarf *Opuntia* which survives the harsh winters of Canada by having small pads and therefore keeping close to the ground. It had attractive typical *Opuntia* flowers. *Coryphantha vivipara* was next, because of the vast range of habitat, many thousands of miles, several forms have evolved; they are small and worth growing.

Next we dropped down to the Grand Canyon, not into it! Two sorts of *Echinocereus* grow here; the types with widely spaced areoles and sprawling body stems and those with tightly packed areoles and neat pectinate spines on compact bodies, e.g.

E. pectinatus. Echinocereus have beautiful flowers but the sprawling sorts need a lot of room, usually more than most of us want to give to one plant.

Sclerocactus also grow in this area - these are interesting spiny plants which are a real challenge to grow, although some do survive if grafted. The temperature in this area and the southern states varies a great deal from winter to summer, making it difficult for us in the U.K. to give them similar growing conditions. Another difficult cactus from this area is *Mammillaria tetrancistra*.

South again, to Arizona and the famous giant *Carnegiea gigantea* (Saguaro) of the old cowboy films. The Americans like to shoot things(!), so many roadside saguaros have bullet holes in them, as well as woodpecker holes and owl nests, so many are damaged. *Lophocereus schottii* is another cereus-formed plant from here, but is often only grown in its monstrose form (totem pole cactus) in the UK.

Over the Rio Grande into Mexico, we were shown some lovely Ferocacti e.g. *F. acanthodes* which may flower for us once it is a foot tall (30cm). Next was a *F. hamatacanthus*, a form David called *senilis*. Most of the Ferocacti are very attractive plants, but with 2 or 3 exceptions we need a great deal of patience to grow a flowering size plant. We saw more Echinocereus, a sprawling *E. viereckii* with lovely 'pink purple' flowers and then the very pretty form of *E. rigidissimus*, long known as Lau 088 but now known as *E. rigidissimus* ssp. *rubrispinus*. This has beautiful red and pink spines varying in shade with the annual growth. '*E. bristolii*' was a similarly compact species of obvious interest to a grower from Bristol.

In Mexico, which is the country with the greatest number of cactus species in the world (Bolivia is the next), we were shown some little gems, the golf-ball like *Epithelantha micromeris* with tall thin red seed pods, and *Lophophora williamsii* with its high drug content used in many of the Mexican Indians' ceremonies. David is keen on Turbinicarpus so showed some *T. valdezianus*, which has suffered many names over the years, but is a super plant and flowers as a small seedling. *T. beguinii* is another worthwhile plant which has also had lots of name changes. Next a couple of Mammillaria from the hundreds of species one can choose from. *M. lasiacantha* is another golf ball cactus which can get covered in small striped flowers, and then the large flowered

M. guelzowiana with beautiful purple flowers and a form 'splendens' with paler flowers. *M. (formerly Mammillopsis) senilis* was next - usually it has red flowers but this one had white blooms.

A detour to the Baja California peninsula showed us another couple of mammillarias and an *Opuntia californica rosea* with yellow flowers. Off to the east of Mexico we saw some very big *Echinocactus grusonii*, which are becoming extinct in habitat due to flooding caused by dams; they are now grown commercially by the millions in the Canary Islands, for the European market. *Ferocactus macrodiscus* was shown and this can be flowered in a 5" pot if you are lucky. *Astrophytum ornatum* was next, these can get quite tall with great age in habitat.

Now off to the jungles of South America to see some epiphytic cacti. First a member of the Disocacti, a genera which now encompasses several of the old genera and is used in hybridising to get some of the lovely Epiphyllums (if you like that sort of thing). *Heliocereus speciosus* with its iridescent flowers with a blue to white sheen on them was one of these. Several epiphyllums hybrids were seen - x 'Holly Wells' and x 'Canadian Ruffles' were a couple.

On to Rhipsalis, a whole variety of stem shapes and many covered with small but beautifully formed flowers, *R. grandiflora* and *R. cereuscula* were two. Rhipsalis have the disadvantage of being hanging trailing plants so are often difficult to house in our greenhouses as they don't like full sun. We were told that many of them have *neotony*, that is, the adult body form retains the form of the juvenile growth. We learn something new every day!

Rhipsalis horrida is the most widely scattered species throughout the world. There then followed some discussion as to how this had occurred and several suggestions came up, how had new world plants got to so many places in the old world. Continuing with epiphytes we saw *Hatiora herminiae* and *Rhipsalidopsis rosea* with many pink flowers and a *Hatiora* with red edged stems, then an Epiphyllum with stems like a long extended oak leaf.

Next up to the Andes in Bolivia, a country rich in cacti. Sulcorebutia which only grow in this country were represented by *S. tarijensis* with red flowers and *S. menessii* with yellow ones. David told us he has a coldframe in which he

overwinters some of his high altitude plants. He likes Rebutia so he showed *R. fusca* with red blooms and *R. heliosa* with very attractive stems and long flowers. Another was *R. narvaecensis* with pale pink blooms.

Over the Andes to Chile, and to the very dry deserts there. *Copiapoa dealbata* and *cinerascens* were found here and 'fields' of columnar copiapos, *C. cinerea* ssp. *columna-alba* were a wonderful sight. Then the small *C. humilis* which is easy to grow and flower. In Chile we saw *Neoporteria napina* with large red seedpods, a small *N. odieri* with neat spination and *N. taltalensis* with a full head of bloom. This species is very variable and has lots of names for different forms. Now a couple of novelties, *Pygmaocereus bylesianus* and *Setiechinopsis mirabilis* both small plants putting a good floral display We were shown some hybrids between *Chamaecereus*, *Lobivia* and *Echinopsis* with a range of flower colours.

Now to the southern tip of the continent to see *Austrocactus patagonicus*, *Maihuernia poeppigii* the most southerly cacti, these are related to *Opuntias* and the *Maihuernias* have little awl shaped basic leaves, like many *Opuntias*.

After reaching the far south David did a quick recap of his journey showing us a few of the plants seen on this multi thousand mile journey. It was the first time we have had a talk covering such a vast area and it was very interesting.

Peter Down.

Table Show – March

These are the winning entries in the March table show.

	Cacti – Rebutia Group	Succulents – Echeveria Subgroup
Open	(1) P Clemow <i>Sulcorebutia</i> sp. nova	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Echeveria lilacina</i>
	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Rebutia hoffmanniana</i>	(2) J Roskilly <i>Echeveria FO42</i>
	(3) -	(3) J Roskilly <i>Echeveria lindsayana</i>
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Weingartia riograndensis</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Echeveria lauii</i>
	(2) P Clemow <i>Sulcorebutia tuberculata</i>	(2) P Clemow <i>Echeveria shaviana</i>
	(3) P Clemow <i>Weingartia erinacea</i>	(3) J Roskilly <i>Echeveria</i> sp. (Zaragosa)

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch meeting was held at the Corina's on March 14th.

Preparations for the Easter Flower and Garden Show at Broadlands were discussed. It was also confirmed that we would be participating in two events in June – a display at Hilliers Arboretum and a show and display at the Southampton Festival. Show entry fees for the latter were 50p per class, but the prize money was quite generous for 1st, 2nd and 3rd (£5, £3 and £2 respectively). The closing date for entries was 20th June.

A date for the Branch Dinner of 1st July was suggested. Although we had received slow service at the Clump Inn on our visit there last year, we decided that the location of this venue was well suited to all our members so we'd give this restaurant another chance.

After failing to reach agreement on the material for the Branch Logo Shirts and also bearing in mind the restricted colour choice for these shirts, it was decided not to proceed with the order for shirts.

David and Margaret Corina mentioned that they were thinking of holding an Open Day on Sunday the 10th of July.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Below is an article from one of the national newspapers which Ivor Biddlecombe passed on to me:

Say it with a Cactus

Anyone planning to give their long-term love a bunch of red roses on Valentine's Day should think again. Experts say a prickly cactus plant would be far more appropriate.

They believe that the British often get their gifts for the most romantic day of the year horribly wrong. So they have come up with the definitive guide to blooms without the bloomers.

The traditional red rose only works for new couples whose love is still in the budding stage, according to research for Marks & Spencer.

“At the start of your relationship, when everything rosy, a red rose is the perfect choice,” said Simon Pearson of M & S. “But when the romance has well and truly gone and you've survived many seasons together and couldn't live without each other, the gift of a cactus shows off your sense of humour but also demonstrates that you can cope with all that life brings.”

Mr Pearson said there were different flowers for virtually every stage of a relationship. For couples who have been together for up to a year, he suggested a dramatic orange tiger lily as a symbol of unstinting passion. Longer than a year, and white roses rather than red represent a purer kind of love.

After five years, when things need reinvigorating, orchids would send out the right psychological message of strength of relationship.

Separate research from the Post Office reveals that while women love to receive flowers, being sent them at work isn't romantic — it is just embarrassing.

The following text is taken from a recent letter which Michael Yates sent to Margaret Corina:

News from Maine

Early winter saw the demise of *Pseudolithos migiurtinus* and I am uncertain whether that was due to under or over watering. I have had a *Tylecodon paniculata* for a number of years; it is a winter grower and has become rather long and spindly so I amputated it at about two inches from the base last autumn. It appeared as if I had been too severe but after Christmas two shoots appeared and a third is just poking through.

Two years ago I bought some seeds from South Africa and two successes are *Commiphora mossambicensis* which, at present, appear to be just sticks stuck into pots. They have been through one dormant season and did quite well last summer. The second is *Othonna carnosa*; I have tried to grow othonnas before and have had no success with getting them to flower. I was pleased this autumn when one blossom appeared so I will now reward it by putting it into a larger pot this spring.

Vinay very kindly sent some Clivia seeds, I think, to judge how patient a person I am: it will take about four years before they will flower! I germinated them in a closed plastic bag and transplanted into a small trough. About eight have survived and are looking quite healthy. The next test will be to transplant them into pots which, I understand, is not easy to do.

It must have been last winter when we were in a local pizza restaurant when I saw a large mass of what was definitely some sort of crassula. Well, I thought, I am sure no one would miss just a small piece. So, I nipped off a couple of inches and, you know, no one would have had any idea that I had removed a sample! Anyway, the cutting took root easily and the plant is now bushing out well. It is, by the way, *Crassula lycopodioides* and it certainly looks like the lycopodium we have growing in the wild just a few feet from the house.

I've taken a fancy to plants in the *Euphorbia milii* group (perhaps because they are easy to grow and can withstand some neglect). In my collection are *E. milii* 'Lemon Drop' which is now a couple of feet tall and does very well stuck into the ground for the summer. *E. milii* 'Imperatum' is rather new for me and took a while to recover from its [too] slow postal journey from Tucson; it now is

in flower. Just for the past two winters I have been giving *E. gottlebei* some water and it has stayed blooming even after all of the leaves have dropped. It also flowers profusely during the summer. Finally *E. sakarahensis*, which is also new, has now recovered from its journey from the Wild West. It appears that if I keep these plants watered and fertilised they stay in flower and do not appear to be the worse for it.

Next Month's Meeting

Our next branch meeting will be held on the 3rd of May. This year, instead of a mini-show, we'll be holding a cultivation evening, with three or four sessions which are likely to be of interest to everyone. If you have any problem plants or any which require identification, please bring them along to the meeting.

Because of the nature of the meeting, there will be no table show at the May meeting.

Forthcoming Events

Sun	10 th	Apr	Crawley	Derek Desborough Mem. Lecture (D Bowdery / J Pilbeam) @ Crawley RHS Hall
Fri	15 th	Apr	Isle of Wight	"Mesembryanthemums" – Eddy Harris
Sat	16 th	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring & Buy Sale
Tue	3 rd	May	Southampton	Cultivation Evening
Mon	9 th	May	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Fri	13 th	May	Isle of Wight	Pre-show preparations @ Peter Collard's
Sat	21 st	May	Portsmouth	"Three Men and a Condor, Part 1" – Eddy Harris
Sat	28 th	May-	Whitely	Display and Plant Sales @ Garden Market, Whitely Outlet
Mon	30 th	May		Shopping Centre (J9 of M27)
Sat	4 th	Jun	Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight Branch Annual Show – Church Hall, Town Lane Newport
Sat	4 th	Jun	Portsmouth	Summer Show – Wickham Comm. Hall, Dairy Moor, Wickham
Tue	7 th	Jun	Southampton	"Cacti in Northern Mexico - Part 1" – Terry Smale
Sat	11 th	Jun-	Ampfield	Display and Plant Sales @ Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum, Ampfield
Sun	12 th	Jun		
Fri	17 th	Jun	Isle of Wight	"Succulents around Vanrhynsdorp" – Derek Tribble
Sat	18 th	Jun	Portsmouth	"Anacampseros and Avonia" – Derek Tribble
Sat	25 th	Jun-	Southampton	Display and Plant Sales @ Southampton Festival,
Sun	26 th	Jun		The Common, Southampton

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