

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Editorial

The last couple of weeks have seen unseasonably cold weather so the switch to British Summer Time this past weekend does seem ironic. My prediction a couple of months ago about spring being “just round the corner” has had to be put on hold but I am sure it has to come true soon!

I mentioned a while ago that I obtained seed from the BCSS seed list, and I also got quite a few types from the Haworthia Society. I have planted some of these and a few have already germinated. I intend to plant the rest within the next week or so.

### Announcements

The **branch accounts** for the year to September 2012 have been prepared by our accountants (thank you, Colin & Lorraine) and copies are available from the front table.

Next month is our **Cultivation Workshop** – please turn to the Forthcoming Events section for a list of the topics we intend to cover. We would also like members to bring in the *Echeveria lilacina* and *Mammillaria albilanata* plants which the branch handed out previously.

Jim Roskilly's home phone number has changed recently – slips with the new number are available from the front table.

### Last Month's Meeting

At the start of the meeting, Alice described some *Plants of Interest*. Since the talk was going to be on Madagascar, she had brought some *Ceropegias*.

*Ceropegia simonae* (green form) had been in flower most of the winter – she keeps it on a high shelf in her greenhouse. Despite the temperatures going down to 4°C, it has survived, because it is high up and, placed near the heater. However, because of this, it needs watering quite often.

A plant she had obtained within the last year was *Ceropegia arandii* – she wasn't sure how it would grow. Another species, *Ceropegia dichotoma*, had been bought as a couple of “stick” cuttings. She had stuck these into the soil and new growths had formed on both. The final plant was a new species just marked as *Ceropegia* “de nova”. She had bought this at a show last summer and was looking forward to see how it grew.

After this, Paul Klaassen spent a few minutes talking about publishing your own books. He goes away on many trips, and at places like the ELK Convention, it is nice to be able to share the experience with others. He uses a service by Blurb Smartbooks and it is quite easy to compile and create your own book using whatever pictures and text you wish to use. He toyed with this as a commercial venture, but it's not really viable if you intend to make a profit. However it is good for producing souvenirs. You can choose various formats such as soft back, small format, hard back and larger format. As an example of prices, the largest book he had brought along cost £100.01 including postage, and it consisted of 160 pages and 351 pictures. You are free to arrange the format of pictures and words as you wish. David commented how 5 books of that type would add up to the cost of a return flight to South Africa!

### Plants & Lemurs of Madagascar

Hazel Taylor started her talk by giving a brief background on Madagascar. It is one of the more exciting places she has visited in recent years, and on the front table were a collection of various books and guides about the country which she had brought along. Some of the books covered the lemurs and animals found in Madagascar, and she mentioned that although there were pictures of these in the talk, they have to be taken quickly as and when you get the chance and were not going to be the same

quality as you'd see on TV documentaries. She showed us a map showing the lower two thirds of the island, which covered the areas she visited. Madagascar is 700 miles tall and 275 miles wide and is about 2.5 times the land area of Great Britain - it is the 4<sup>th</sup> largest island on the planet.

She mentioned the main places they visited - they would start by flying out to the capital Antananarivo (called Tana for short) via Air France - Madagascar used to be a French colony. Then they would catch a plane to Tulear (Toliari), visit Ifaty and St Augustin Bay, then Isalo and the Berenty reserve (a famous tourist resort) and then onto Fort Dauphin (Taolagnaro). After visiting the Andohahela reserve, they went to the rain forest areas of Perinet and Andasibe which contrasted from the spiny deserts and littoral plains found at the earlier locations. The large number of climatic zones is what helps the island to be considered a biodiversity hotspot.

690 million years ago, 2 large land masses - one of which was effectively South America and Africa and the other being India and Europe/Asia - came together in a big crunch. As they merged, they formed Gondwanaland, and then pieces split off, creating the land masses we have today. Madagascar was close to the centre of Gondwanaland, the area being known as the Mozambique belt. The central massif of Madagascar is the remains of the Mozambique belt. Most of the geology of Madagascar is crystalline, caused by the heat and pressure when the land masses were rubbing into each other. Subsequently, layers of sediment arrived on the western side and these consisted of limestone, so overall the rocks are a mixture of crystalline, volcanic and limestone. When Gondwanaland started to break up, there were already some signs of life, so some on the island dates from that period. Other plants floated over from Africa or Asia and these species radiated and changed, forming the unique and diverse plants we now find there.

At Tulear, they visited the Arboretum d'Antsokay, set up by Petignat. It was a good way to start and see some of the local plants in a cultivated setting and with name labels. There was a lovely chameleon - *Furcifer verrucosa* - his body was a grey colour to match his surroundings. There were also the spiny stems of *Stapelianthus pilosus*. At Miasy village, they came across a large banyan tree - there were dozens of trunk-like roots but it was all actually one plant. The hammerkop is a type of large crow. They also came across *Pachypodium geayi*.

Next morning they went to the spiny forest area near Ifaty, labelled as PK32. This was a relatively untouched area, which is rare because in many parts,

the vegetation has been stripped. Madagascar is an incredibly poor country, with wages being around £1/month. People can't afford to buy fuel, and so they burn plants to make charcoal. In this area they came across a wonderful boabab tree, *Adansonia rubrostipa*. It is hard to know how old these are, and even the guides were probably guessing, but it was likely to be 100s of years old. A fruit was visible on the upper branches.

*Didierea madagascariensis* has flailing stems and is called the octopus tree, and it was wonderful to see it in its own habitat. We saw a close up of the leaves and the wrinkled stem - several leaves emerge from one point and the plant is well-spined. There were several large specimens here, it was rare to see them looking so well. Sometimes the locals use them to make fences. Next was an even older *Adansonia rubrostipa* which bore more fruits. We saw a close up of the branching part, and this also revealed little parasites stuck onto the tree. Hazel mentioned that the plant is really a herb and not a proper tree, so it wrinkles where the branches bend. Another close-up showed the reddish and stippled texture of the bark. A lizard in the next picture was well camouflaged. We also saw one of the charcoal burning pits. A problem they have is that there is no clay on the island to seal the sides, so the pits are inefficient, and the wood around the edges is charred and has to be thrown away.

There are many types of bird to be seen, and we saw weaver bird nests. *Aloe vaombe* is a tree aloe. There were also *Opuntia* cacti here - these of course are not endemic. They can be invasive, but here they had not spread. They are planted decoratively or used to mark boundaries. A typical sight in Madagascar is a horse/ox drawn cart. Many of the roads are dirt roads and not asphalted, and people get around by walking. They also have very severe rains, and at times the mud roads become unusable - so you do have to pick the right time to visit.

They came across another large charcoal burning pit, and more examples of *Didierea madagascariensis*. In front of this was a large silvery leaved tree. This was in a very arid area. Hazel asked the audience for a possible name and Eucalyptus was suggested - Hazel said that Eucalyptus was grown in other parts of Madagascar but not here. This was actually *Euphorbia stenaclada*, and much bigger than the little plants we attempt to grow. Another chameleon was the same species as we had seen before, but this time it was a greenish colour. A tree of *Chadsia grevei* was covered in orange flowers, and we saw a close up of the curved flowers. Another example of *Didierea madagascariensis* was in flower and might have

been a local variant – it had spines sticking straight of the stem – usually they are on a short stalk. A Commiphora had peeling bark – it is part of the oozing sap/Frankincense family. We grow them in small pots but as you can see they can grow into large trees.

We saw a beach view from the Hotel Le Paradisier at Ifaty. You do see some funny things, and Hazel burst into laughter as she recalled a scene where villagers were washing a pig in the sea. Their rooms were a way from the dining room, and the path was lit with little lamps. She was surprised to find night jars sitting along this path. Another *Pachypodium geayi* had a double trunk and also bore fruits – it was a very large plant overall. A very old *Adansonia rubrostipa* is known as the “coffee pot” because it had a growth on the side which resembled a handle. It was thought to be 1200 years old and was more than 50 feet in height. As they were walking around, they saw what appeared to be feathery white flowers on a branch. Closer examination showed these to be nymphs of the flatid leaf bug, *Phromnia rosea*. They were absolutely stationery on the stem. Hazel commented how every day of the trip was like this, where you saw something amazing or unexpected. She made the whole coach stop to take a picture of *Aloe vaombe* in flower.

Going inland towards Ifaty, they came across areas of different vegetation. *Kalanchoe linearifolia* had red flowers without which it would have been hard to separate from the other vegetation. *Alluadia comosa* is a member of the Didierea family. They had to walk inland since all the plants near the road had been taken. At Andranovory, they came across the painted tombs of important members of the Masikoro tribe - the sides had been painted with events from the person’s life. Here they also found a magnificent plant of *Adansonia za*, with a couple of people standing next to it for scale – it must have been 60 or 70 feet tall and the age has been estimated as 2000 years. David Neville mentioned that “za” was the shortest species name of any succulent. A lizard from the Phelsuma family was about 4 inches long.

The Zombitse national park was on the way to Ifaty. Here they found *Pachypodium lamerei* growing in its natural habitat. We also saw a green lizard and a species of Anagraecum orchid with typical white flowers – these are pollinated by moths. They also found a rather furry *Rhipsalis baccifera* – there are various arboreal and terrestrial variants of this on the island. They also got their first view of the Isalo national park, where you find *Aloe isaloensis*. Hazel said the rock tombs of the Baro people are kept here – they pack the bones into a box halfway up the

cliff, and then repack them into smaller boxes and take them further up the cliff. Amazingly, for such an arid area, they found *Droseras* (sundews) here. There must be some water seeping through from an underground stream.

The party set off for the walk through Isalo, to find the “piscine naturelle”. A close up of the Tapia tree (*Uapaca bojeri*) showed its yellow fruits. These are edible when ripe, however the plant carries a mixture of new and old fruits and you can’t tell them apart so you have to wait for them to fall off. Next was a highlight of the whole trip – finding plants of *Pachypodium rosulatum* v *gracilis* in perfect condition. There were a lot of them, and many were in flower. Some were nestling in grass, which looked dry, although the pachypodiums were in growth. Based on the size, some of them must be decades old. The substrate consisted of sheet rock and rocky outcrops, probably of limestone. An aloe found here was difficult to identify without flowers. A dead-looking twig was *Cynanchum macrolobum*, an asclepiad which is described in Rauh’s book on Madagascar. A close up of the stem showed that it had a knobbly look, but in cultivation it has smooth green stems. They also found plants of *Kalanchoe beharensis* about a foot tall.

We saw a view of the rocks and the plains stretching away and Hazel commented that if you explored here, you would probably find many new species. The terrain was quite rocky with little soil present. They also found *Pachypodium rosulatum* v. *rosulatum* which has a green caudex. It was growing halfway down a cliff edge, and difficult to photograph. Some of the rock formations consisted of pillars. They eventually found the natural swimming pool, and it was just like an oasis – amazing to find such a place in this arid area. They went down and had a swim. We also saw an “I was there” shot of her admiring a large *P. rosulatum*.

Next we saw some Radiator tortoises – these were pets kept at their hotel in Isalo. In the evenings the staff collected these up to their overnight quarters. Their species name is *Geochelone (Astrochelys) radiata*. In the wild, they eat xerosicyos leaves, but opuntia pads are fine in captivity. They also came across *Bismarckia nobilis* – the Bismarckia palm with seeds on it. David said these are very popular in cultivation. We also saw a termite mound, followed by a rather basic brick-making factory. Hazel mentioned that this reminded her of the Madagascar consulate in London, which is sited in a terraced house – you have to pay in cash and you get your visa printed on a laser printer. Next were some cows with a prominent hump in their back – these are “Zebu”. The meat from these was what they had

for dinner on most nights and she suggested that you should have it well done.

They had time to visit the Antsokay arboretum again and saw the Sakalava weaver bird on its nest. At St. Augustin's bay, they found *Euphorbia enclocarda*. A xerosicyos vine had reddish tendrils. *Delonix pumila* had formed a massive tree with attractive yellow flowers. A closeup showed that the petals are quite small and the yellow colour is actually due to the stamens and pollen. At the airport, while they were waiting for their next flight, she managed to photograph *Nephila madagascariensis* – the golden orb weaver spider – which makes an enormous web.

Next was a very rare palm - *Neodypsis decaryi* – the leaves grow on three sides of the trunk. This was followed by *Kalanchoe tubiflora*. In cultivation these are rampant, but in habitat they don't seem to have colonised everything as you might expect. Moving to the transitional forest areas, where the western dry forest meets the eastern wet forest, they came across the amazing sight of many plants of *Alluadia procera* in flower. Apparently, they were very lucky – their guide told them that at the same time in the previous year, none were in flower. The flowers atop the stems made them look like drum sticks. A close up of the stems of the Alluadia showed they have beautiful bark, very small spines and individual leaves rather than pairs. These plants are dioecious and so have different male and female flowers. We also saw *Aloe suzannae*, and *Cissus quadrangularis* – the latter has tendrils and is a member of the vine family. We also saw our first lemurs - *Lemur catta*, the ring tailed lemur and Verreaux's sifaka, a white-haired lemur, sitting in a tree.

After the mid-meeting break we carried on at the Berenty reserve and saw a group of Verreaux's sifaka lemurs, with white tails. There was a large group of *Kalanchoe hildebrandtii*, all standing upright. It was the dry season and we saw the locals collecting buckets of water from a river, carrying it back to fill a large tank mounted on wheels. There was another shot of a couple of Verreaux's sifaka which were tame enough to walk towards them. We also saw a wasp's nest in a tree, and a female red fronted brown lemur - the males have slightly different colouring. Hazel showed a map of the Berenty reserve and this indicated how it was hemmed in, with commercial sisal fields on both sides. They also saw a nocturnal lemur and more Verreaux's sifaka, sitting in trees including a mother and baby. They also saw ring-tailed lemurs which seemed to be accustomed to humans. They came across more specimens of *Adansonia za*, standing like two sentinels, followed by a thicket of *Didierea*

*trollii*. These were in flower, and all the flowers were on one side of the stem, facing away from the sun. *Alluadia ascendens* was another plant with inflorescences at the end of the stems - and notches in the leaves. *Alluadia dumosa* is quite unusual in that the grey-brown stems bear no leaves. *Xerosicyos perrieri* had smaller leaves than the other xerosicyos we had seen before.

We saw the nest of a flycatcher, and the white footed lemur. There were larger examples of *Didierea trollii* plants, whose spiny stems had turned into thick trunks, like trees. They passed the sisal plantation and saw the white sisal strands left out to dry on strips resembling washing lines. They saw an *Uncarina* with a yellow flower – it forms spiky fruit with barbs, which look like a sputnik - indeed the locals use these to trap rats. We saw pictures of the tuber as well. There was also an *Alluadia* whose leaves appeared to have been nibbled by something.

At the Andohahela reserve, there was some similarity in the terrain with the rocks at Isalo. We saw a *Kalanchoe* in flower, and lizards identified as *Oplurus saxicola* and *O. quadrimaculatus*. They also found *Aloe divaricata* and a terrestrial version of *Rhipsalis baccifera*, with some berries. *Aloe helenae* has recurving leaves. At a river at Andohahela, they saw a harrier hawk, followed by *Xerosicyos dangui* in flower. We also saw a shot of their tour leader, Paul Harmes. A hole in the nest signified an ant's nest – apparently, the ants allow a snake to live amongst them, and if times get hard, then the ants will kill the snake and eat it!

This area was more humid, and they saw impressive bracket fungi, with orange and also white forms. Another *Rhipsalis baccifera* had smooth stems and a white translucent berry. Here, you could see the nature of the forest was quite different from the spiny forests. They came across a *Typhonodorum* plant and an *Angraecum* orchid with white flowers. The main exports of Madagascar include prawns and vanilla, and the latter is actually produced from the seed pods of the Vanilla orchid. They also found another *Rhipsalis* with very spiny stems (*R. baccifera* ssp. *horrida*?). *Crateva obovata* has spidery flowers.

At one place, they found locals collecting sacks of seeds and it turned out that these were seeds being collected for the Millennium seed bank – it was strange to wander around in this wilderness and see signs mentioning Wakehurst Place! There was also a section marked "Test de Germination" where presumably they were testing the seed viability.

While they were having lunch, they saw some lovely ring tailed lemurs including babies. These had much better (lusher) tails than the ones they had seen before; apparently the previous ones have toxins in their diet which aren't good for them. We also saw one with its tail held in the classic question mark pose. Next we saw the carnivorous plant *Nepenthes madagascariensis* – it had orange and yellow pitchers.

They came across a still for producing camphor oil, and we also saw the camphor plant itself. This was followed by shots of a normal fern and a tree fern. Hazel mentioned it was around here that they had some difficulties with their guides, who seemed to have no idea of the time or distance to go and see things – everything was described as being just a minute or a metre away, and what was claimed to be a “short” boat ride actually took 20 minutes. Next they caught sight of the largest of the lemurs, *Indri indri* - this is also the most endangered. There are only two reserves left and the animals just cannot survive in captivity. Hazel played a sound recording of their eerie calls and suggested that perhaps their mournful sounds indicated their sad future.

At Perinet Reserve, a secondary forest has been created by the planting of eucalyptus and pine forests. We also saw green pill bugs which are related to millipedes - these were surprisingly large at 3-4 inches long. A large tree boa was coiled up, this reminded her of an incident at one of the hotels where they stayed, with the staff suddenly running around in great alarm. It turned out that a snake had got into one of the kitchen cupboards. Paul Harnes knew it wasn't dangerous and dealt with it - otherwise it probably would have been killed.

We saw insect nymphs arranged themselves on the bark of a tree, forming interesting geometric patterns. This was followed by an orchid, and the flowers of *Rhipsalis baccifera*, this plant having smooth stems. The Greater dwarf lemur was spotted, this is a nocturnal species. We also saw a shot taken by torchlight of a large insect which was a mole cricket. They caught sight of another Indri. We also saw the processionary caterpillar – birds eat them, so they move down the stem of the tree and then climb upwards in the evening when they are less likely to be found by the birds. We saw a shot of a Kalanchoe growing halfway up a tree, and a black-and-white ruffed lemur - this has a black tail. Altogether they saw 12 of the 42 lemur species. The talk ended with a shot of the party at the end of their trip, heading back for a meal after a long day.

Vinay Shah

## Table Show Results

There were 15 entries in the March table show.

	<b>Cacti – Echinocactus</b>	<b>Succulents – Agave</b>
Open	(1) D Neville Echinocactus platyacanthus	(1) J Roskilly Agave titanota
	(2) B Beckerleg Echinocactus sp.	(2) T Radford Nolina recurvata
	(3) -	(3) T Radford Calibanus hookeri
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Ferocactus fordii	(1) B Beckerleg Agave potatorum
	(2) D Neville Ferocactus macrodiscus	(2) I Biddlecombe Agave patonii
	(3) -	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held at Dot's on 20<sup>th</sup> March.

The financial results to September had been prepared by our auditors and these were discussed. We had made a small profit for the year, but profits from our external events and displays have reduced. Ideally we would like takings from the monthly meetings (raffle, plant sales and refreshments) cover the cost of the hall and the speaker but right now we are falling short, and in 2013 we may fall further behind because our hall rent is due to increase by £1/hour.

Dot mentioned that she was willing to host an open evening in the summer, on Saturday June 8<sup>th</sup>. Arrangements for the Sparsholt show in May were discussed briefly.

Two new books on Agaves are due to be published this year, and we will purchase one of these for the library, after reviewing their content.

The Branch's 60th anniversary will occur in 2014, and we will discuss how to celebrate this during subsequent committee meetings. For our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, we held a convention at a hall in Nursling which attracted over 90 people from all around the country.

Vinay Shah

## Bookworm Corner

Welcome back to Bookworm Corner!

Well I hope you all enjoyed the excellent talk on Madagascar by Hazel Taylor last month. This month we are travelling across to the America's to hear about the cacti equivalent of Marmite, the love it or hate it opuntia! I must admit we are totally split in our household, Mark collects them and I do not (with the exception of one cristate).

I am unable to resist the temptation to share the news of my other main interest that is dog showing. My beautiful 2 year old Norwegian Elkhound bitch 'Rosie' won her class at the world famous Crufts show last month, winning a lovely red rosette that is on proud display on the mantelpiece at home. Some of you may have even spotted on television the elkhound winning 4<sup>th</sup> place in the hound group, which was my boy Teal's granddad!

### 'ENJOYED THE LECTURE? THEN ENJOY THE BOOK!'

#### March

Books in the library that should be of interest to anyone inspired by Hazel Taylor's presentation are 'Aloes for greenhouse and indoor cultivation' (Noble W.C.); 'Aloes, The definitive guide' (Carter S. et al.); 'The Aloes of Tropical Africa and Madagascar' (Reynolds G.); 'Didiereaceae' (Rowley G.); 'The Succulent Euphorbias – an introduction' (Brewerton D.V.); 'Euphorbia Volumes 1 to 10' and 'Pachypodium and Adenium – Cactus File Handbook 5' (Rowley G.).

#### April

Tony Roberts will be giving us an interesting talk on small opuntia. Unfortunately we do not have any genera specific books in the library. However, we do have plenty of encyclopaedias and general

interest books that include the opuntia. A variety of opuntia species are discussed in many of these books, for example 'Cactus and Succulents' (Mace T & S), 'The Illustrated Reference on Cacti & Succulents Volumes 1, 4 & 5' (Lamb E & B), 'The Cactus Family' (Anderson F) and 'The New Cactus Lexicon' (Hunt D et al). Look out for these in the Featured Book Corner!

Sue Wilson

## Next Month's Meeting

The May meeting will take the form of a cultivation and propagation workshop. The topics we plan to discuss are as follows: Winter problems and spring watering, Seed propagation under lights, Biological pest control and general pest control, The cultivation of Notocactus, Applying vinegar to acidify water.

You are also welcome to bring along problem plants or those which need identification. Finally, please bring in your plants of *Mammillaria albilanata* and *Echeveria lilacina* which the branch handed out a couple of years ago, so that we can see how everyone's plants are doing – do label them so that they don't get mixed up with someone else's plants.

The May table Show will consist of the **Opuntia** group (cacti) and the **Haworthia & Gasteria** groups (succulents). Please note that members can submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Opuntia group contains *Opuntia*, *Airampoa*, *Austrocylindropuntia*, *Brasiliopuntia*, *Consolea*, *Corynopuntia*, *Cumulopuntia*, *Cylindropuntia*, *Grusonia*, *Maihuenia*, *Maihueniopsis*, *Marenopuntia*, *Micropuntia*, *Nopalea*, *Pereskia*, *Pereskiopsis*, *Pterocactus*, *Puna*, *Quiabentia*, *Rhodocactus*, *Tacinga*, *Tephrocactus* and *Tunilla*.

The Haworthia and Gasteria groups contain *Haworthia*, *Astroloba*, *Chortolirion*, *Poellnitzia* and *Gasteria*.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat	13 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Isle of Wight	"Nature in Close-Up" - Colin Haygarth
Sat	20 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Auction
Tue	7 <sup>th</sup>	May	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sat	11 <sup>th</sup>	May	Isle of Wight	Brazil part 3 (Bahia) (Cliff Thompson)
Sat	18 <sup>th</sup>	May	Portsmouth	Brazil Part 2 (Cliff Thompson)
Sat	18 <sup>th</sup>	May	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College (Countryside Day)
Sun	1 <sup>st</sup>	Jun	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Summer Show @ St Colman's Church Hall, Cosham
Tue	4 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Southampton	Mammillarias in Flower (Chris Davies)

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