

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

We put our clocks forward just over a week ago, and there are signs of warmer weather, although it is too early to rule out cold weather. I did give the plants a good watering this last weekend and will do so again, as long as we have some sunny weather.

Announcements

The branch would like a volunteer from the membership who attends most of the monthly meetings to handle the sale of **raffle tickets** during the meetings. Right now the task is done by various people, but it would be better to be more organised about this. Please have a word with Dot or David if you think you can help.

Tony Grech became seriously ill mid-way through March and had a spell in hospital, although he was able to return home last week.

There are sheets on front table for people to register their interest for the various **branch visits** that will be held in the coming months. There are also sheets describing the classes that will be used for the mini-show in June.

If anyone wants to go to the Zone 9 convention in Hardwicke, Gloucestershire on Sunday 24th April 2016, please let me know – some of us will be going up, and there is a spare seat available. Tickets to the event cost £15 including catering.

Last Month's Meeting

Patagonia

Cliff started by showing some maps of the southern part of Chile and Argentina – both countries share land in the Patagonia region. The trip part consisted of himself, John Carr, Juan Acosta and Paul Klassen. They crossed over from Lonquén in Chile and headed for Uspallata in Argentina. Whilst in Chile, they found some *Alstroemerias* and *Eriosyce aurata*.

We saw a scene as they were going through a pass in the Andes, at an altitude of 1800-2000m. The roads there are good, the railways disappeared some time ago, and since there's a lot of commercial goods transported by road, they make sure the roads are good. The customs post was 50 miles inside Argentina. Roadworks can sometimes be a pain especially if long stretches are being repaired. They gradually descended into Argentina and the scenery spoke for itself – the volcanic terrain was absolutely amazing.

Inside Argentina, they found the endemic *Denmoza rhodacantha*. There is supposedly another species called *D. erythrocephala* but some consider it to just be another form of *D. rhodacantha*, and they found a few different forms. Most had already flowered, but they did find one still in flower. Some plants were up to 6 feet tall, and it can reach 10 feet. They didn't find any other cacti in this area. Near the town of Uspallata, they came across fantastic examples of *Eriosyce straussianus* growing amongst the bushes, with the bodies encased in spines - there was a large variation in spine colour and the plants were 3-4 inches across. In cultivation, the plants look different and the spines are nothing like as impressive. It was spring and mimulus were quite abundant here. Not many of *Maihuenia maihueniopsis* they came across during the trip were in flower - they were either too early or too late. A shot of *Maihueniopsis glomerata* had the Andes in the background. The ground here was just open boulder scree, probably an old river bed due to the stones. They found 8-10 plants of *Maihueniopsis clavarioides*, the biggest in size had 4 heads, there

were also some smaller plants which had more heads. This is one of the known localities for this species. A shot featured Paul Klaassen looking at some plants and Cliff mentioned that the area behind Paul was now a 2-lane major highway, so the habitat is under constant threat.

A flowering plant from the pea family was Hoffmannseggia. *Pterocactus gonjianii* grows with a persistent top growth but you can chop the top growths off and it will then form new top growths each year, thanks to the large tap root. They found *Maihueiopsis glomerata* again, and a different form of *Denmoza rhodacantha*, these plants had a conical top. There were no cacti growing on the plains, they were all growing in the rocks on the hillsides, perhaps the plants were more stable there. In the middle of nowhere, on a dirt track, they found a plaque to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth. Conditions were pretty stark around here - there is rainfall, but most of the vegetation - apart from the cacti - was dead or dying. On the flats at 14000-16000 feet, they came across a burrowing owl. These are small birds which always seem to operate in pairs and they take an interest in whatever you are doing.

They found *Opuntia sulphurea* and also *Tephrocactus articulatus* which falls to bits with slight contact. *Echinopsis leucantha* also grows in northern Argentina and can grow to 6 feet in the north but is smaller here. It produces a long white flower. Some of the plants had fierce spination. A long distance shot showed the red fruit of an Ephedra. *Trichocereus candicans* had produced magnificent flowers 9-10 inches across, and bigger plants seemed to produce bigger flowers. There were many Compositae here and they were predominantly yellow. They also came across a stressed specimen of *Maihueiopsis patagonica* and a medley of annuals, including plants from the Malvaceae. They came across *Maihueiopsis patagonica* again - it is extensive and has a huge range - but it's not very common when you do find it. A dam creates water, fishing and power all in one place, and they found some plants around the dam, with *T. candicans* and *D. rhodacantha* growing together. When the dam was created, many of the cacti originally growing there were lost, but a telephoto shot showed a fair number of cacti growing on the opposite shore. Some these plants looked like *Cleistocactus* but they were a white-spined form of *Denmoza rhodacantha*, and the stocky plants looked quite different from the others seen earlier. David Neville said you sometimes see yellow-spined plants amongst the red-spined seedlings of *Denmoza*. The other side of the dam can't be accessed by road any more, but they saw an

Eriosyce straussiana and a small *Denmoza*. The terrain shows signs of volcanism, with outcrops and fissures pushed through the plains.

Near the town of Malargue, a species of *Oenothera* had a yellow flower. They found 3 very stressed *Denmoza rhodacantha* seedlings growing in a crevice. Ants are very industrious and we also saw a 2 inch long beetle. They were now at a higher altitude, and there was Pampas grass growing here. They also saw a pair of geese. The scenery was colourful, with uplifted and tilted volcanic ash deposited over many millions of years resulting in a mixture of colours. They found a tiny oxalis and also encountered some rosulate violas. The latter are stunning things - he's tried to grow them from collected seed but didn't get any germination. The flowers were 6-7 mm across. They dug up the oxalis plant and found it had just a thin stringy root some 4 inches long. They saw a miniature-flowered mimulus - and in an area 10 feet wide where there was some seepage of water, plants were growing there like there was no tomorrow. This trip was in December, which is springtime. They found *Maihueiopsis darwinii* in flower - the flower colour varies from pale yellow to red. The flowers are pollinated by small black bees which fly around much faster than our domestic honey bees. Another rosulate viola had a 5mm flower. Some of the structures on the leaves are amazing, some of the leaves had glassy clear growths on the end of the leaves. Growing in open boulder plain, some of the flowers were having difficulty getting through the spines. There were dozens of the oxalis and a few violas growing in a general area.

They found *D. rhodacantha* and *T. candicans* again - and where these grow, there seem to be no opuntoids. On a link road between towns, they only saw one bus during the whole day. The terrain here was mudstone outcrops and sandstone features, with rock sculptures having been carved out by erosion and the wind. With *Pterocactus tuberosus*, the stems are annual growths used for to produce flowers and seed. All the plants here were growing alongside the road, where the earth had been disturbed by road construction. He did collect some seed and managed to germinate it. They also dug around one plant, and after reaching 15 inches down, the root was still growing down. A few miles further on, they found *D. rhodacantha* and *T. candicans* again and they stopped to take some pictures. It was spring and the snowmelt off the Andes filled the riverbeds. They found an *Austrocactus*, and although he was not sure of the species, *A. bertinii* is supposed to be the one found here - but it is probably one very variable species. He used to collect fossils when young and

was interested to find oysters and ammonites in the limestone.

Everywhere you go, the roads can be subject to animal traffic jams, consisting of sheep, goats, or horses. In this case, the animals were being moved from pasture to pasture. *Argylia bustillosii* had yellow flowers with dark throats. Another little rosulate viola had fantastic leaf patterns. A lupin-like flower was an *Adesmia*. They went up a valley and found huge mounds of *Maihuenia patagonica* – these are different to *M. poeppigii*, which grows flat to the ground. Some of the clumps were 5 metres across and Cliff thought they might develop like a fairy ring after centuries of growth – indeed there was grass growing in the centre of some of the mounds. Colourful flowers included *Calandrinia* and a member of the Malvaceae. There were signs of new life everywhere, and we saw a young pony. A *Pterocactus* growing underneath boulders was identified as *P. fischeri*. Yet another form of *Austrocactus* with golden spines had a light pink flower bud – the plant was 6-7 inches tall and was solitary. Another *P. fischeri* had dark rich purple buds but the flowers were not open. The backdrop showed the Andes were still with them, but they made good time on the roads. A low growing flower was *Lobelia oligophylla*. A bird was identified as a lapwing (pewit).

“No matter where you are – you are being watched” was a reference to a young boy on his bike who was watching them. They came across a flock/herd consisting of 300-400 sheep and goats – the sheep eat all the green vegetation, and the goats eat the rest! A plant he couldn’t name was identified by Martin as a *Junelia*, which is part of the *Verbena* family. Another flowering plant had tubular white flowers. The leaves on the *Junelia* were amazing and dense, and some of the shrubs had 100s or 1000s of flowers on them. A borage with blue flowers (possibly *Echium vulgare*) was probably an introduced plant. An *Austrocactus* plant was pretty and had nice flowers, but he wasn’t sure of the species – this was still a solitary headed plant. Another escaped plant was a pink flowered rose. *Maihuenia poeppigii* always grows flat to the ground, and sometimes the plants can be covered in grit and sand. They found more rosulate violas - and one had plain leaves with a clear margin. These were growing on an open flat scree area. David Neville commented that it was a shame they are hard to grow in cultivation – they would be very popular! Butterflies are difficult to photograph - but one happened to settle just in front of him. We saw more *Calandrinias* and also *Calceolarias*. John Carr knew their specific names. They also came across a

nice big clump of a felty-leaved plant but all the flowers had been eaten.

They were travelling along the road at 60km/h when Juan Acosta said “stop!” He had managed to spot something high on a ledge, through tinted windows. It was a large *Austrocactus* but it was remarkable how he had managed to spot it. A sign outside a shop in a town said “baby goats available, alive or dead”. Pictures of lenticular clouds caused by the spiralling air currents from the mountains interfering with the moisture showed why they are sometimes mistaken for UFOs. With *Austrocactus dusenii* apart from one large plants, all the others were solitary heads. There were more flowering *Compositae* plants here. An *Austrocactus* had lost its protective shrub. There were fields and fields of huge clumps of yellow *Grindelia*.

Then a scene which was absolutely something else – a forest of *Araucaria araucana* (monkey puzzle) trees. It was difficult to age these since they have a pithy core, but of the plants may be a few hundred years old. They found a few more alpine and a red flowered *Mimulus cupreus*. There were also yellow orchids (*Chloraea alpina*), more *Calceolarias*, and huge clumps of *Azorellas*, some were 5m across. A yellow flower on a shrub was probably *Berberis empetrifolia*. The large leaved *Gunnera tinctoria* is similar to *G. manicata* – the cones look the same. A lupin like flower was *Lathyrus magellanicus*. There were some *fungii* which were 9 inches tall.

They arrived at a villa in *Paihuenia* – and asked if the restaurant was open? The owner said “it can be - tell me what you want” and he went off and got it while they did their plant hunting. This was a holiday resort beside a lake, and they were there out of season. The *Chloerea* orchid is a bizarre species – it is capable of growing in woods and also right out in the open. He photographed another beetle, again 2 inches long. *Oxalis adenophylla* had nice foliage and flowers, and he obtained some seed and hoped they’ll come up. A “snowberry” was a *Gaultheria* with white berries. Looking around you could see the snow line. They were taken by a guide to see more of the rosulate violas on a plateau - but when they got there, their path was obstructed by a very muddy stream and they couldn’t take the risk of trying to cross, as they only had one car - so went to another ridge where they found more alpine and more rosulate violas. You could see how much grit has been thrown onto the rosettes. An anemone was *A. multifilis*. Another rosulate viola had a plain leaf and the hairs were on the flower itself. A mound-forming plant was a member of the carrot family. A viola flower was recognisably similar to the plants we grow in our gardens. In the distance, a plume of

white near the top of a volcano was not signs of activity but just wind-blown snow.

They found another population of *Austrocactus* – this was a different form, the plants were clumping and were in flower. They also found a purple pea flower which was an *Adesmia* (possibly *parviflora*). The ice hadn't long melted and there were some ducks paddling in a lake. On the shore, there were rosulate violas growing, and these must be annuals. Another flowering plant was identified by Martin as *Satureja* (summer savory). They found *Pterocactus australis* - and these were different from the forms he had seen before. A picture of a dug-up plant showed how the plant has a large underground tuber. The top part is the flowering/fruitlet part, it can be destroyed by the winter weather or eaten by animals and in the following spring, the tuber can put out new stems. They also found a *cristate P. australis*.

Continuing after the mid meeting break, they had stopped for a look around the flat terrain. They found a beautiful *Maihuenia patagonica* trying to flower. Cliff mentioned that localised sandstorm squalls can quickly develop and you just have to stop and duck. A beautiful "triffid" was *Carduus nutans* - the nodding thistle. The bloom was 4-5 inches across and it was stunning. Another *austrocactus* with yellow stigma lobes was perhaps *Austrocactus gracilis*. A beetle 2.5 inches long had to be picked up twice to get a good picture - it kept on running away! They found more *Austrocactus*, with different body forms. Also here was European broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) – this non-endemic is causing a problems because it's taking over and wiping out native plants.

The only time they got caught up in some rain was when they were near a dense forest. They found an endemic Bamboo. The rivers were full of water from the Andes snow melt. Right in the middle of nowhere, they came across a notice about a old lava flow at El Escorial – Cliff supposed that only half a dozen people and 2 million sheep had probably read the notice. A telephoto shot caught a pretty tree in flower. They found *Gunnera tinctoria* again. Driving conditions here were like driving on teflon – it was wet volcanic ash on top of mud. A bird they spotted was a black faced ibis. Somebody in the hotel opposite had decorated an *Araucaria* for Christmas - well it was the only conifer there. In this region, the scenery, the erosion and the geology and the volcanic impact was just fantastic. A huge volcanic plug was 300m high. They had the odd snow storm, which was quite spectacular, but most of the time, the temperatures were around 10°C.

Buddleja globosa is the only one *Buddleja* they found. There were masses of lupins and it was amazing when they were waving in the breeze – they were at an altitude of 2500m here. We saw examples of the broom subsuming the local vegetation. It was cold, wet and windy, and they didn't find any cacti so they just enjoyed a couple of days of scenic viewing. There were more signs of spring – a duck or goose with some babies, a flamingo and a couple of swans. A pretty viola could not be identified. Another verbena had pink flowers, and there were plants from the Compositae and also the Rose family, and more Calceolarias. A dark hairy caterpillar was just wandering around. The scenery was enthralling, and there were more interesting cloud formations.

They came across some lichens and also the nymph of some moth. It was some 3 inches long so would probably form a huge insect. A *Maihuenia* was growing very low to the ground, it was windy and cold here. Another *Azorella* had minute rosettes and tiny flowers. A view showed the flats leading up to the foothills, and we saw some more lenticular clouds formations. They now made their foray across the continent, and drove around 600km along the foothills. *Sisyrinchium macrocarpum* has yellow flowers, and a plant with pale purple flowers was a member of the Geraneaceae (due to the seed pods). *Phacelia secunda* has clusters of flowers, and there were masses of Calceolarias here. *Austrocactus bertinii* was growing in a classic habitat of dry shrubby scrub and with a sandy gritty substrate. The high winds fill the flowers up with grit. These ones had purple stigma lobes. A mound forming plant was not an *Azorella* but a *Nassauvia*. Cliff said the sudden dust squalls which occur here can be quite painful if you wander around in shorts and T-shirts as he tends to do. The roads are quite good and they made several hundred km in 6 hours. The scenery continued to impress, a huge amount of volcanism must formed these ash layers, leaving some phenomenal roadside cliffs.

The temperature had been 5°C when they left and it was now 33°C in the car - thank goodness for air conditioning! Cliff watched another hapless ½ inch long ant struggling with a flower bud for several minutes. They were very near the Atlantic coast, and were finding cacti again. *Gymnocalycium gibbosum* ssp. *chubutense* is the most southerly of the Gymnos. And they found it just growing in the sandy soil right on the coast. It was a healthy population, there were lots of plants here and they were producing lots of seed. An *Austrocactus bertinii* would have been hard to spot if it had not been in flower – the flower had a beautiful purple stigma lobe. Some of the gymno plants were drawn down

into the soil and covered in dust, so hard to spot. A black and white patterned insect was a visitor on someone's coat. There were lots of seedlings here – and the plants were growing in pure sand. Another Compositae growing here had yellow/orange flowers. At the Atlantic coast, they found *Austrocactus* growing along the sea shore. They found a couple of the *Gymnocalycium*s in flower, but most had flowered and had produced seed pods – the white flowers were 3.5 to 4 inch across. A mesemb invader was *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*. A bird on the coast was an Oyster catcher. The *Austrocactus* were also covered in seeds – he collected some of this and has managed to germinate it and has got some plants. You have got to know where to look for the plants - the bushes tend to be where the plants survive.

Next we saw a Magellan penguins – there is a huge colony here and it's doing really well. The birds are protected and you are obliged to give way to them. It was very hot on the day, and the chicks and adults were suffering. A picture of an unhatched egg also featured a chick in the background. The penguin chicks were around a couple of weeks old. He photographed a lizard and there were also guanacos in the reserve. A chick which had died from heat exhaustion was being scavenged by a seagull. The land was pock marked with burrows. Any shade is welcome and many of the birds were standing *under* the observation platform. There was an entry point into the water and they stood and watched for a while, there did not appear to be any sealions or killer whales around. Brown skuas are big birds with an 8 feet wingspan, and they are bigger than the penguins – they too would take the chicks, given a chance. David asked if the smell was comparable to the penguins in South Africa and Cliff said no, the guano was dried out so the smell wasn't too bad. He saw a crested Tinamou, a Guanaco and also the lesser Rhea, which is one of three species on the continent. He found just one plant of the red flowered form of *Maihueiopsis darwinii*. *Maihueiopsis poeppigii* was growing above ground level because it was growing in a rock, alongside an *Azorella*. They found more of the *Gymnocalycium*s and also some more *Pterocactus australis* – these did vary from one plant to the next. He also caught the backside of a hastily retreating Armadillo – they never stand, do they.

After quite a long sojourn down the coast, they came across a river gorge - and a cristate *Gymnocalycium gibbosum*, with a metal tool left behind by someone - it made them wonder if they had disturbed someone about to dig the plant up. These plants and seed pods looked different from the other chubetense they had seen before. The crest

on another cristate specimen was 34 inches long. There were around 150 plants here and the population included the 2 beautiful cristates. This area was couple of acres – and there were no other cacti here at all. The clumps looked quite old. The terrain was general area rock scree and every plant was covered in seeds. Most of the time, *Gymno* seed pods are tall and conical and split up the side - but these pods were rounded and had split along the base – he wondered if this was just a local variation? There were some wonderful plants here, including a 10 inch tall plant.

A picture of Juan in the car showed him looking through the seed he had collected. - was separating the seed from the pod). Some large mounds were an *Azorella*. An *Austrocactus* was probably *Austrocactus bertinii*, based on the locality. *Burkhardtia* also looks like an *Azorella*. They now headed towards the Andes and were at a latitude of 34° degrees south. They found more *Pterocactus* in the foothills of the mountains. They found alpines again and the temperatures were cooler. *Pterocactus hickenii* is probably not annually deciduous, some have 4-5 joints on the stems, and this can't be one year's growth. A plant with large seed pods was a member of the pea family. They found more *Calceolaria* again. An *Austrocactus* species might have been *A. coxii* and a bee was impaled on one of the spines. It was growing right on the edge of some thorny shrubs, along with *Pterocactus australis*. There were multiple heads growing alongside and it seemed these were detached heads which had rooted rather than seedlings. A dug-up plant showed the large tap root. A wonderful plant with attractive flowers and felty leaves was a member of the Pea family. The weather got cold again and we saw a goose. Something bright growing on beech trees was not a fruit but a type of fungus - *Cyttaria hariotii* ("indian bread"). These grow up to grapefruit size and are edible although there's not much taste to them. A large sculpture outside a farm indicated it was a cherry farm. Large tracts of land have been put aside for fruit farming, and it's a central European climate. Finally he got to see the flower of the interesting plant he had not been able to identify earlier – it was *Hypochaeris incana* which is related to dandelion. fantastic flower. A low growing plant had yellow seed pods which from a distance looked like flowers. We saw *Pterocactus hickenii* again with a flower which had light brown to dark brown/purple shades.

They saw more *Junelia* (verbena) and another *Pterocactus hickenii* with a russet brown flower and a purple stigma in the centre. Another low growing plant had 10000s of flowers and was amazing. Another verbena was scented. There were more

examples of *P. hickenii*. The plants were growing in sand here. An *Austrocactus* was growing under a shrub and had a pink flower with a purple stigma. Was it a different species or *dusenii*? We saw some different types of grass, some tipped in green, some in red. The blurry pictures were due to the high winds and this was confirmed by a road sign showing a bent palm tree (instead of a windsock). An *ipomea* had pale pink flowers. Another wonderful shrub had yellow flowers, Martin thought it was a *Senecio*. 6 foot tall grass waving in the wind was wonderful, but couldn't really be captured on a still picture. They found more *P. hickenii* again. A miniature *Alstroemeria patagonica* featured just the flower, the foliage had not emerged yet. Another plant was a member of the *Malvaceae*. *Maihuenia poeppigii* had a slight pink coloration to the flower. *P. hickenii* was also found with a pale flower – it does vary a lot. A plant featured multiple joints, which must be more than just one year's growth.

On their second-but-last day, they came across a colourful group of Lupin plants – it looked as if someone's thrown a packet of Sutton's seed in the roadside. Across an alpine lake he saw a white shape which he thought could be a glacier, but closer inspection showed it to be a town! They made their back up the foothills to go through the pass and we saw some more shots of the scenery and geology, including another lava plug. This pass was at low altitude - 1320m and the signs said "Thanks for being in Argentina" and "Welcome to Chile". He borrowed a sunset slide to end the talk.

Cliff said he took 7000 pictures in the 3.5 weeks they were there, and he had shown us around 700 of them. It was a fantastic trip, and he hopes to be able to do it again someday.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 21 entries in the March table show, and 2 entries for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – Opuntia	Succulents – Haworthia
Open	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Opuntia invicta</i>	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Haworthia bolusii</i>
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Opuntia molfinoi</i>	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Haworthia parksiana</i>
	(3) G Penrose <i>Puna bonnieae</i>	(3) I Biddlecombe <i>Haworthia fasciata</i>
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Opuntia invicta</i>	(1) G Penrose <i>Haworthia scabra</i>
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Opuntia geometricans</i>	(2) G Penrose <i>Haworthia badia</i> cv 'Chocolate'
	(3) G Penrose <i>Tacinga inamoena</i>	(3) B Beckerleg <i>Haworthia maughanii</i>

Cacti/Succulent in Flower
(1) A Mant <i>Aloe longistyla</i>
(2) B Beckerleg <i>Aloe madecassa</i>
(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee was held on 9th March.

The branch would be sponsoring some classes in the National Show.

Following the departure of Sue Wilson, Richard White had been appointed as Branch Librarian.

Dirty pots at displays.

The monthly raffle was discussed, and it was agreed that it would be better if we could get someone to do this regularly.

Ivor would appreciate it if people used legible plant name labels for the table shows. If you don't know the name of a plant you bringin, just ask one of the committee and we can try and identify the plant for you.

Recent meetings and forthcoming events were discussed. The turnout from our own branch for the Zone Quiz in November was again disappointing, and we struggled to put a team together, although we did have visitors from the other zones which helped to make the numbers up.

The mini show was due to be held in June and David would check to see that the schedule of 10 classes was consistent with the new Handbook of Shows.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Cactus hunting in Amsterdam

Last month I reported my recent discovery of the attractions of flying from Southampton Airport, just 5 minutes by car from my house, with none of the hassles of driving to Gatwick or Heathrow.

A look at scheduled flights to Amsterdam for just over £40 each way led me to book a 4-day trip to the Dutch capital a few weeks ago. Although I have visited Holland many times over the years, I had never been to Amsterdam, and although it doesn't sound like the best place to go to see cacti I did manage to find one worthwhile public collection to visit.

Having enjoyed the usual tourist attractions of the maze of shopping streets, the guided canal tours, the bizarre red light district and the vast number of bars and restaurants I decided it was time to see some plants. Amsterdam is quite a small, compact city, and whenever feasible I chose to walk around so that I could enjoy and savour the wonderful architecture and atmosphere of this distinctive European city.

My hotel was just off Dam Square in the centre of town, and I discovered that there was a 'floating flower market' just a mile or so away, so off I set on foot. Set on Singel canal, Bloemenmarkt consists of dozens of stalls specializing in cut flowers, plants, bulbs and other horticultural items. It was founded in 1862 and, unsurprisingly, is the only floating flower market in the world. It is a relic of the days when all of the plants and bulbs from the Dutch fields were brought into the city by barge. I spent a happy hour or so browsing the displays and did see quite a lot of cacti and succulents for sale, although nothing remotely unusual or interesting.

Across the other side of town, but less than an hours leisurely walk away, lies Hortus Botanicus, an interesting garden that is well worth a visit. Founded in 1638, over 100 years before Kew

Gardens in London, this is one of the oldest botanical establishments in the world. Incredibly this small botanic garden is well within the city limits, sitting alongside one of the many canals, and surrounded by numerous homes and businesses. It was originally a herbal garden, set up for doctors and apothecaries to help battle the Black Death – this is a similar start to Kew, which was initially a small physic garden. Hortus Botanicus's initial collection was amassed during the 17th century through plants and seeds brought back by traders of the East India Company for use as medicines and for their possibilities for commerce. A single coffee plant, *Coffea arabica*, in Hortus's collection reportedly served as the parent for the entire coffee culture in Central and South America. Likewise, two small potted oil palms brought back from Mauritius produced seeds after six years, and these were propagated throughout all of south-east Asia, becoming a major source of revenue in the Dutch East Indies and in Indonesia.

Upon arrival and having paid the modest entry fee I was distracted by the tempting offerings of the cafe situated in the old (1875) Orangery building, and as a reward for my trek across town I treated myself to a large slice of Dutch apple cake with cream. The outdoor plantings were generally dormant and uninteresting, as one would expect in northern Europe in mid February, although there were some very impressive and clearly ancient specimen trees dotted around, and snowdrops of various types were providing a glorious display. The Palm House dates back to 1912 and it is a very impressive and imposing structure, housing a good collection of palms and cycads. Striking too is the hexagonal Pavilion, dating back to the late 1600s!

A more recent addition (1993) is the large 3-climate hothouse; this is a strikingly modern architect-designed glasshouse with 3 distinct climate zones – Tropical, Subtropical and Desert. The tropical and subtropical parts of the collection contain many eye-catching plants and the hot, humid atmosphere in the jungle area was very appealing when compared to the cold February temperatures outside! Beautiful displays of orchids and a large collection of cycads particularly caught my eye as I wandered around, heading towards the smallest of the 3 zones, the Desert area. There were fewer plants here than I had anticipated, but nonetheless there was a reasonable representation of succulent plants from around the world, planted in geographically themed raised beds. Of particular note was a large *Aloe dichotoma* (the Quiver Tree or Kokerboom from S Africa and Namibia), large pachypodiums from Madagascar, and mature specimen aloes and agaves. I spent quite a while here, enjoying the peace and quiet,

quite a contrast to the bustling streets of Amsterdam. There were numerous other plants worthy of attention, and I took quite a number of photographs which will provide a useful 'filler' if we need them at any future meetings.

I found Hortus Botanicus to be an interesting and welcome surprise in the middle of Amsterdam, and I would recommend a visit to anyone who happens to visit this most unusual and historic capital in the future. And I can also wholeheartedly recommend the Dutch apple cake too!

David Neville

Roffey Brothers - John Innes Compost

At one of our meetings last year a number of branch members recommended the John Innes composts produced by a company called Roffey Brothers based in Throop Road, Bournemouth. I recently contacted the company to arrange the purchase of some compost, and discovered that they are no longer based in Bournemouth, and that the company is now located in New Milton.

It appears to be a somewhat complicated situation, because the Roffey Brother products are offered for sale by HH and DE Drew, which seems to be part of W. G. Higgs, housed in the yard of New Milton Sand and Ballast! (New Milton Sand and Ballast, Caird Avenue, New Milton BH25 5PX, next to Tesco.) Sadly, I also discovered that the company will no longer be making their own John Innes composts, and that they will be manufactured by a

third party. Although they will still offer John Innes branded as Roffey Brothers, from what I could determine, I think that the product will be the same as the Wessex brand of composts.

Let's hope that the quality remains as good..... any updates over the coming months of the quality of Roffeys or Wessex John Innes composts will be welcomed!

David Neville

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 3rd of May and will feature Suzanne Mace who will talk about "Succulents other than Mesembs". No doubt Suzanne will be accompanied by husband Tony.

The May Table Show will consist of **3 Cacti** (cacti) and **3 Succulents** (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 table show classes use the classifications from the *Guide to Shows 10th Edition* (contact me if you don't have a copy of this).

Forthcoming Events

Sat 9 th Apr	Isle of Wight	Succulent Survivors in my Greenhouse (David Traish)
Sat 16 th Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Auction
Tue 3 rd May	Southampton	Succulents other than Mesembs (Suzanne Mace)
Sat 14 th May	Isle of Wight	Mexico: Autumn in the Sierra Madre Orientale (Cliff Thompson)
Sat 14 th May	Southampton	Branch visit to Havering Cactus Mart, Romford, Essex RM5 3QJ
Sat 21 st May	Portsmouth	Ariocarpus (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 21 st May	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College (Countryside Day)
Tue 4 th Jun	Portsmouth	Summer Show at St. Colman's Church Hall, Cosham, PO6 2JJ
Tue 7 th Jun	Southampton	Branch Mini Show & Judging Explained
Sat 11 th Jun	Isle of Wight	Asclepiads (Slide Show, prepared by the late Chris Moore)
Sat 12 th Jun	Southampton	Branch visit to Lullingstone Castle Gardens Kent DA4 0JA
Sat 18 th Jun	Portsmouth	Our Mammillarias (Kathy Flanagan)
Sun 19 th Jun	Southampton	Summer Garden Party & Open Day, hosted by Dot England
Tue 5 th Jul	Southampton	Southern California (David Minnion)

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

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