

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has finally started to warm up, but May was cooler than normal. One effect of this is that any flowers which bloomed tended to last longer. Several of my cacti have put on a good show (Rebutias, Mammillarias, Gymnocalyciums) and some of these are still in flower. They are now being joined by some of the later flowering cacti such as Echinopsis and Lobivia.

Other than that, I have run into the usual problem that repotting tends to bring – there's hardly any space to put the plants anywhere once they have been divided or moved into larger pots!

Announcements

The **Southampton Festival** will take place on Southampton Common during the weekend of 1st – 2nd July. The branch will be organising a display and sales table, and there will also be a cactus and succulent show. Help from branch members to man the sales table and keep an eye over the display and show plants, and to talk to the public would be greatly appreciated.

The **Branch Dinner** will be held at the Clump Inn on Friday 7th July, at 7:30pm for a 8:00pm start. Please let Margaret or David Corina know if you would like to attend so that we can confirm numbers.

A new event needs to be added to your branch programme - the Branch will be staging a display at the **Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum** in Ampfield on the weekend of 12-13th August.

We have received notification from **Ball Colegrave** (seed growers) that they will be hosting a Garden Party on the weekend of 5-6th August. Their brochure claims spectacular trial grounds (12 acres), patio displays and large displays of hanging baskets and containers, and there will also be tours and demonstrations. Entry is £5 (less if booked in advance). Further details are available on the front table.

Three members of High Wycombe branch (in Buckinghamshire) will be opening their collections to BCSS members on Saturday 9th July. Further information on this is available from the front table.

Last Month's Meeting

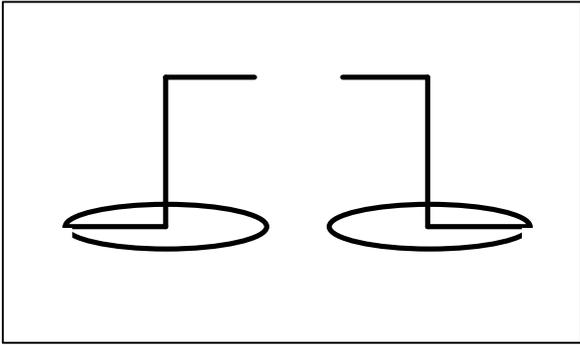
Cultivation Evening

Peter started off the meeting with agenda for the evening. Glenn Finn would talk about repotting, Ivor Biddlecombe would discuss seed sowing and Bruce Beckerleg would demonstrate propagation. David Corina and David Neville would round off the evening and help identify any unnamed plants or discuss "problem" plants which had been brought along.

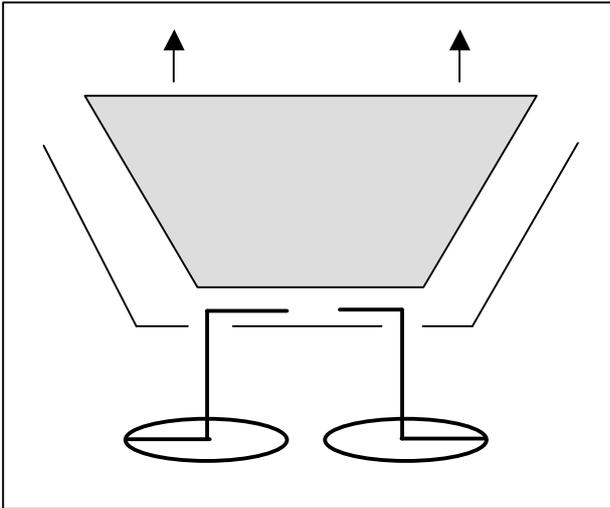
Repotting – Glenn Finn

Glenn started with the uncontentious statement that some plants are easy and some are difficult to repot. With small plants, one can usually squeeze the side of the pots (if they are made of plastic!) to loosen the plant. But with bigger plants or clay pots, it becomes more difficult - and with vicious plants, more dangerous. He preferred not to touch the plant if at all possible, and he also didn't want the plant to touch him.

He had invented a special tool which had been christened the "cobra". These were made from metal bent into the appropriate shape (see following diagram). The bottom circle acts as a stabiliser, and the flat part can be inserted into one of the bottom drainage holes in the pot, taking care to avoid any roots if they are visible



Then by pushing down on the pot, the plant is pushed upwards, and it should emerge with the root ball mostly intact.

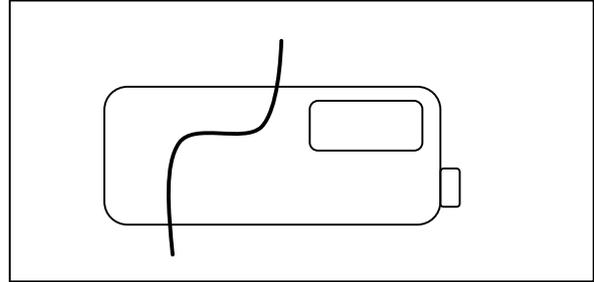


Having removed the plant, it is a good idea to check the condition of the roots and also to look for any pests. Glenn performed these actions on the first of his subjects for the evening, a *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum*.

Having removed the plant from its old container, it's time to choose a new pot. In most cases, if the plant has been growing well, the new container will be larger than the previous one. Glenn proceeded to pour some gravel for drainage into the base of the pot, and then used the old pot to help judge where to position the plant in the new pot. Holding the old pot in place, compost can be poured down the sides between the outer pot and the inner pot and then the old pot can be removed and the plant dropped into place. There was a question from the audience about how do you get the soil to hold its shape? Ivor said if the compost was slightly moist, this should be OK.

The scoop that Glenn used to handle the gravel was made from an old milk bottle. The following diagram shows that by cutting off the lower part of the bottle, you can make a useful scoop with the

original handle serving to act as the handle for the scoop. Glenn explained that he had made several of these and had even gone as far as modifying them so as to have different versions for square or round lipped pots!



Glenn then started preparing a second plant (a *Mammillaria*) for repotting. This plant was larger and he used a larger "cobra" to remove it from its pot. He also wanted to change the height of the plant, placing it perhaps $\frac{1}{2}$ inch lower than its position in the old pot. Sometimes it is also worth leaving the plant a little proud since over the course of the year the soil can dry out and the plant will settle down. The remaining operations were similar to that for the first plant. With all this repotting, he said he would need to double the size of his greenhouse – did anyone else in the audience have the same problem? While pouring in the soil, some of it ended up on the plant. Glenn mentioned that a small brush can be used to clean up afterwards – or you can just wait for the soil to dry and then blow it off.

Now for some tips on handling bigger plants which often need more thought and care. Previously he had repotted a large *Echinocereus engelmannii* and this time it was the turn of a two headed *Echinocactus grusonii*. He asked for some estimates from the audience on how long it would take to repot the plant in front of them. "Ten minutes" and "nine minutes" were mentioned when David Neville asked "Why minutes? I was thinking more of seconds!" Some more realistic targets were volunteered and Glenn eventually accepted 5 minutes as a reasonable challenge. He also said that if he did it in less time, he was expecting a trophy describing him as the "fastest repotter in the South". If he went over 5 minutes then he would make the teas at halftime!

The first step was to take the plant out of its existing pot, using an even larger sets of cobras. It was a bit of struggle and David Neville said the hall was so quiet "you could hear a spine drop". The plant was hard to get out of the old pot prompting David Neville to joke that he didn't have any trouble getting his plants out since they

didn't have any roots! Glenn then placed the plant in the centre of a harness made of overlapping strings which allowed the plant to be lifted into the new pot without touching it. To add to all the fun, a minute through this tricky manoeuvre, his mobile phone went off! This distraction had to just be ignored. Eventually Glenn finished with just 2 seconds to go - although someone did point out that the label was not in the pot yet! The harness strings were cut above the soil - any segments left in the soil would rot away eventually.

Commenting on the difficulties in getting the plant out of the pot, he mentioned that he does keep gloves and newspapers handy just in case.

Ivor Biddlecombe – seed sowing

Ivor started by referring to the *Euphorbia obesa* seedlings which he had brought along last year – they had all etiolated initially but had then gone on to form normal plants. The same thing had happened with a second batch of seeds – they germinated within 2 days and then within a week they had become etiolated. At the start of this year, he found a spare pack of seed and tried a different approach, using pure vermiculite as the potting medium. He put this into a pot, put the seeds in and covered with a further thin layer of vermiculite. He then left the pot on a windowsill over a radiator, with temperatures of 60°C most of the time. These seeds germinated without any etiolation and he felt that big seeds do better in vermiculite rather than soil. The seeds also come out easily when you needed to prick them out.

His *Euphorbia* “farm” consists of various plants obtained mainly from David. He had around a dozen plants now, and since this species is dioecious, some were males and others were females. To tell them apart requires careful examination of the tiny flowers.

There was a seed tray of the *obesa* seedlings ones that he had grown last year and he also illustrated the difference between pricking out plants and leaving them growing in a crowd. Although seedlings initially seem to like each others company, they eventually start competing and so pricking them out can double or triple their growth. He also mentioned that these seedlings were not touched by snails which went for other seedlings. The patterns on the seedlings were still developing but there already some nice-looking ones with alternative dark green and light green striping. He mentioned that he now had about 200 *obesa* seedlings on the go!

Ivor said he had also been mixing vermiculite into his seed potting mix. It seems to help break up the soil and the seedlings come out more easily. His mix consists of 3 pots of soil, 1 pot of grit and 1/3rd pot of vermiculite. If the seeds are planted in pure vermiculite, then some feed is necessary soon after the seeds germinate since there is no nourishment in the vermiculite.

When sowing bedding plant seeds, he puts a layer of vermiculite at the top. This seems to keep the seeds moist, and yet allows the light in. The vermiculite flakes are very light and can be pushed aside easily by the seed. When sowing seeds, vermiculite seems to be better than perlite, which tends to float around when watered.

Responding to a question on how he pollinated the *obesa* plants, he said he used a small brush and just transferred the pollen daily. David Neville said he didn't have success with a brush and so just rubs the flowers together by holding the plants against each other. Margaret Corina said that paint brushes made from plastic fibres do not seem to work as well as brushes made from hair.

This prompted the next question - how do you catch the seed? The seeds use a trigger mechanism to help them disperse some distance from the parent plant. Ivor said he makes a square tent using some nylon stocking and places this over the plant. This helps to trap the seeds. Margaret mentioned that exploding *Jatropha* seeds can make quite a noise and Peter Down recounted a story from one of his South American trips - Brian Bates had put some *Jatropha* seeds in his pockets and had forgotten about them. Two days later, he had a strange sensation in his pockets!

Finally, last year, Ivor had handed out a packet of seeds to all the members. Only a couple of people had brought in the seedlings grown from these seeds, but there was quite a variety of different species and some of the seedlings had got to about a centimetre across.

Bruce Beckerleg - propagation

After the break, Bruce took the stage to discuss propagation. He first went through a list of the tools that he keeps at hand. A kitchen knife, an extendible craft knife (these are very sharp) and some tongs to hold spiny plants. Scissors for general hacking, tweezers and a pointed plant label also come in useful.

His growing medium for cuttings consists of a mix of equal parts of grit, John Innes and peat and lays this out in seed trays. If he thinks the plants are tricky then he will sometimes mix in some sharp sand.

He started with a *Lobivia* hybrid. He took of some offsets and some of these already had their own root system. This was really cheating really.

Copiapoa krainziana is a choice species which is difficult to get hold of. This plant was one he had got in 1983 from Toobees and it had been a nice show plant, but 2-3 years ago it marked up and had started to go downhill from there. His plan was to cut off some of the side shoots and start these off as new plants. Using a combination of cutting and breaking, he ended up with an offset with a large wound. Ideally one needs to take a bit more care and keep the wound as small as possible. David Corina suggested the use of an electric carving knife!

Bruce said that if he cut the top off the main central stem it may form a few more offsets. If the wounds are small, he leaves the cutting for a week or so for the wound to heal. However if the wound is large or the plant is tricky (like a *Copiapoa*) then he leaves it for several weeks. He mentioned that he had taken three offsets from the same plant last year, and he showed us the first, which had developed reasonably. Another cutting was making slow progress, and the third had disappeared. Asked at which point he watered the soil, he said he doesn't plant the cuttings until they're ready and then waters normally after that. Sometimes he will take extra care and wait for signs of roots.

Ivor suggested it was also possible to put cuttings into an empty pot – many plants are capable of forming roots without any soil. Genera such as *Echeverias* and *Crassulas* do this particularly well. David Neville mentioned that not everything roots by itself, but amongst cacti, *Mammillaria* is one genus that is likely to do so.

Bruce said that for him, cuttings grow well in seed trays – he waters once a week and this leaves enough time for the trays to dry out before the next watering. When preparing cuttings for grafting stock, he suggested the use of a sharp knife. Some people also taper the cut end of the scion (the top section). Rubber bands can be used to hold the cutting in place.

Cuttings of *Opuntias* are very easy – just cut or break off a pad, let the wound heal and place the

pad in sandy compost. If you want even more plants then the pad can even be cut into sections before being planted.

Mammillaria saboe forms small clumps and these can be cut down the middle. Leave the sections for a few days to let the cuts heal. Individual heads are more difficult to root, unless roots have already formed. *Mammillaria humboldtii* is harder since it dehydrates easily. Bruce said it was best to leave cuttings of this for a day or two, and then keep it nice and humid under a plastic cup. After 6-7 weeks it will produce some roots and can be potted up in the usual way. Tom Radford mentioned that he had propagated stapeliads using a similar technique, without any rotting.

If plants such as *Crassulas* or *Echeverias* get leggy, then it is possible to cut off the heads and use these as cuttings. The old plant (without the head) may also form offsets or plantlets. With these genera, you can also take leaves off and they will root fairly easily. As an example, with *Echeveria* 'Perle von Nurnberg' you can keep the cut rosettes in an empty pot, and also place leaves on the soil - the latter should produce little plantlets. Bruce had prepared some leaves earlier but thought he had probably left them too long – new plantlets had formed but the old leaves had dehydrated too much.

With another *Echeveria*, Bruce mentioned that if you pull leaves off any old how, you may not get many successful plants from these cuttings. However, if you prepare the cutting with a sliver of stem still attached to the leaf, then the chances of the cutting being successful are improved greatly. This is a tricky operation since it's easy to slice through the whole stem when taking the cuttings, but it is worthwhile - more than half the leaf cuttings should go on to produce plants.

Adromischus are easy to propagate by just pulling off the leaves. They have small joints so the cut section is relatively small and they can be planted right away, or perhaps one can wait for a few roots to form. In some cases, roots can form on a leaf while still on the parent plant and this makes the whole process even easier.

Gasterias can be propagated from offsets, but if you have a nice plant and want more plants in a hurry, you can pull off the leaves from the side of the parent plant. These can then be chopped into smaller pieces, and once planted it is possible to get plantlets from each segment. If you have a *Haworthia*, some can be propagated from offsets

or leaf cuttings. However, with a soft leaved example such as *H. arenea*), you can carefully cut through the heart of the plant, forming four quarters. Each section will go on to develop into a normal plant. A member of the audience asked whether Agave could be propagated in the same way? The answer was no - Agaves can only be propagated from offsets or seeds.

Bruce's plant of *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis* had gone a bit funny and he felt it was worth restarting it. One can just pull lumps or offsets off the plant and can root these in a very sandy mixture. If you want a lot of plants, it can be propagated from individual leaves but in this case he would be careful with the watering and leave the cuttings alone for a few days.

Anacampseros rhodesica forms a caudex but tends to die off when it gets to a certain size so it is worth propagating from stem cuttings. Indeed, if he had not done this previously, then he wouldn't have had any plants left. Try and find a larger bodied stem since these have a better chance of surviving. Then just put them in the mixture with sand on top. Water straight away. If you get it right, you might achieve a 50% success rate, if not then should still get 10%. In terms of timing, July is a little too late, and March and April are too early and cold, so May to June is the best time for this species. You can also take stem cuttings for *Anacampseros alstonii* but it is more difficult, and you may be better off cutting the caudex into pieces. *A. comptonii* can also be propagated with cuttings. He did 10 last year and 4 plants survived through the winter – the lack of light or the cold might have accounted for the ones which didn't make it.

The last species Bruce discussed was *Euphorbia milli*. Euphorbias exude a milky sap when cut and this may drain liquid from the cutting. After talking to someone at Freshacres, he said that the technique suggested was to plant the cuttings right away and to keep the soil moist. David Neville mentioned that John Pilbeam roots Euphorbia cuttings in water. Bruce also mentioned that if you do take a cutting, try and take it from a joint – these seem to do better than those taken with a cut across the stem – the latter seem to have a tendency to die off.

David Neville + David Corina - identification

The two Davids rounded off the evening by helping to identify unnamed plants which had been brought in.

First was a tall stem which was obviously a *Senecio*, but no one was sure of the species, although it was not *S. stapeliformis*. The next plant was identified as *Rhipsalis pilocarpa* which has insignificant white flowers and then goes on to form red berries.

The next plant was a *Melocactus* but David Neville said it was hard to tell them apart when they are young. These plants required a minimum night time temperature of 10°C, and David said that extra ribs start to form when the plant reaches maturity and is about to form the cephalium.

Next was a *Fockea edulis*. This plant comes from South Africa and Namibia. It eventually forms a large caudex the size of a football, and when larger, the foliage grows perennially.

The next plant was a *Mammillaria* which had a band of brown growth followed by normal green growth. The top section was also going brown. The colouring seemed to only affect the tips of the tubercles. The damage occurred at the end of last summer. It could possibly have been red spider but it was unlikely to be scorch since it was present all the way around the plant. David Corina thought it could be a cultivation issue and if so, it might grow out. He didn't think it would spread to other plants.

An *Astrophytum* (from Derek Prior) had a hard lump on one rib and there seemed to be black tar around the edge of this growth. David Neville said he had seen something similar before, on plants in Portsmouth. He advised that the plant should be disposed of, since it might spread.

Another plant which had been brought in was *Matucana madisoniorum*. This comes from Brazil and it is sensitive to the cold so nearly always marks up. It is quite rare to find plants which have got to a reasonable size without being marked, so the grower had done well with this particular specimen.

The final plant was a *Gymnocalycium*. The plant seemed to have elongated and it should not have been that tall. It had possibly been damaged by red spider and the Davids did not think that it was fungal. Perhaps the plant was not getting enough light. Ivor said he had once grown a seedling which had grown tall whereas all the other seedlings had been normal so perhaps something was wrong in the genes of the plant. David Neville felt the best thing to do was to cut the plant at the taper point, leave for the wound to heal over 3-4 weeks, and then place on compost and wait for it to

re-root in the way Bruce had shown earlier. He also advised giving the plant a good watering beforehand so that plant was turgid.

The meeting ended with everyone agreeing that they had seen something of interest. David Neville said that having watched Bruce attack the cuttings he'd now see him in a new light, as 'Bruce the butcher'!

Vinay Shah

Branch Committee Meeting

A Branch Committee meeting was held at the Corinas on 22nd May.

Past events were discussed. We had a successful event at Broadlands over Easter and we made a good profit. We were paid for 500 prickly potting packs but we actually gave out 576 plants, and these extras do eat into our profits. However, the committee as a whole felt that handing out the extra plants was something the branch can afford.

The Whiteley Village weekend was disappointing with a low level of interest, and it was hoped that if the event was held next year, it would revert to later in the month.

A date has been agreed for the display at Hillers Arboretum. A search for alternative venues for the branch dinner had not come up with any new ideas so it was agreed to go ahead at the Clump Inn on 7th July.

At Broadlands, the Bonsai tent had some nice

illustrated banners, and we will investigate whether we can get similar ones for use at our shows.

Freshacres will be holding their Open Day on the evening of August 14th.

Designs for a new branch lapel badge are being developed and these will be put forward to the members in due course.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 4th July and will feature Ian Woolnaugh, talking about "Cacti in Flower".

The July table Show will consist of the **Echinopsis** group (cacti) and the **Aloe** group (succulents). Please note that members are allowed to submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Echinopsis group contains *Echinopsis*, *Lobivia*, *Acanthocalycium*, *Acantholobivia*, *Chamaecereus*, *Helianthocereus*, *Hymenorebutia*, *Leucostele*, *Mila*, *Neolobivia*, *Pseudoechinopsis*, *Pseudolobivia*, *Pygmaecereus*, *Reicheocactus*, *Setiechinopsis*, *Soehrensia* and *Trichocereus*.

The Aloe group contains *Aloe*, *Bulbine*, *Chamaealoe*, *Guillauminia* and *Lomatophyllum*.

Forthcoming Events

Tue	6 th	Jun	Southampton	"Rebutias & Sulcos" – John Pilbeam
Sat	17 th	Jun	Portsmouth	"Madagascar '93" – David Kirkbright
Fri	23 rd	Jun	Isle of Wight	"Succulent Humour" – John Watmough
Sat	1 st	Jul	Southampton	Display + Show @ Southampton Festival, The Common
Sun	2 nd	Jul		
Tue	4 th	Jul	Southampton	"Cacti in Flower" – Ian Woolnough
Fri	7 th	Jul	Southampton	Branch Annual Dinner @ The Clump Inn, Chilworth (7:30pm)
Sat	15 th	Jul	Portsmouth	"Cacti in Northern Mexico – Part 1" – Terry Smale
Fri	21 st	Jul	Isle of Wight	"6000 Miles around South West U.S.A" – Cliff Thompson
Tue	25 th	Jul	New Forest	Display and Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu	27 th	Jul		
Tue	1 st	Aug	Southampton	"Cacti in Northern Mexico – Part 2" – Terry Smale

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