British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

After a long dry spell for several weeks, we finally had some rain over the last few days. My garden has looked parched but hopefully will recover soon.

Plants in the conservatory are still behind with their flowering, but there has been some more colour, with a plants from a few more genera such as Mammillarias and Gymnocalyciums having flowered recently. I really need to get round to some repotting as well – hard bodied plants such as *Haworthia truncata* and *Haworthia maughanii* are stretching their pots to the limit and look intent on setting themselves free!

Announcements

This coming Saturday**, Portsmouth** Branch will be holding their Summer **Cactus and Succulent Show**, at the Community Hall in Wickham (PO17 5AL) Our branch no longer puts on shows due to poor support, so this event is probably the best chance in this region to see a show with a full schedule of classes – please support it if you can.

I made a mistake in the last newsletter when listing the classes for the **June table show**. The correct classes (listed in our programme and website) were Parodia and Crassula, but I had mentioned Echinopsis and Aloe. Ivor has agreed to allow either groups of plants this month.

The **Branch Dinner** is provisionally scheduled to be held on Friday 25th June., and the venue will again be the Luzborough, Romsey. Please let David Neville know if you would like to attend.

In the middle of May, we took part in the **Sparsholt Countryside Day** and this proved to be a success. We had a good position on the site and there was good interest from the public throughout the day. This past weekend, we put on a display at **Whiteley.** The weather was awful on the first day, but somewhat better on the second day, and we again had a reasonable level of interest.

This is the time of the year when **Thompson & Morgan** have their half price seed sale (lasts a week or two). They have an extensive selection of seeds, probably the best in the country if not the world. There's a voucher for £5 off any T&M order in today's raffle.

Last month we tried the idea of having members wear **name labels** during the meeting, and this month there's a new set of stickers, hopefully with slightly better glue. The committee are in a group at the top and the other names are in alphabetical order. If your name is missing from the sheet of labels or I have misspelt it, please let me know.

Dot England mentioned to me that she has found a source of large bowls pans, but there is a minimum order quantity. If anyone needs large containers for their plants, please have a word with her.

Last Month's Meeting

Cultivation & Propagation Workshop

David Neville started off proceedings for the workshop by describing the agenda – we would have Bruce Beckerleg cover propagation, Ivor Biddlecombe cover seed sowing, and we also had a selection of plants for identification and problem plants. David said he also had a few topics which might be of general interest to members.

He started of with one of these topics – how did members cope with the cold weather last Winter? How did the plants survive, how did you keep your greenhouse warm and if so, what type of heating did you use? Also did anyone use temperature sensors or alarms? David also asked how many people

didn't heat their greenhouses and was surprised by the number of people who raised their hand.

Paul Klaassen said that since 2003 he has been growing his plants in sealed poly tunnels and last winter, he lost the majority of his plants, including all his Copiapoas. He was surprised that the Coryphanthas survived the best, along with a couple of large Soehrensias. Perhaps the plants had been weakened by the previous winter. Mark Jakins mentioned he had an aloe-haworthia hybrid which had been outside all winter and survived snow and everything else. Aloes and Haworthias would never experience these temperatures in South Africa but some like *Aloe aristata* are very tough. Richard White mentioned that his mother had been growing *Echeveria* cv."Perle von Nurnberg" and *Aloe aristata* outdoors, bedded in the ground. This winter, the Aloes survived but the Echeverias died.

David said that despite having survived for several years previously, a supposedly hardy Aloe of his died. His two *Agave americana* plants - one blue and the other variegated – are planted out and both survived, unmarked. He mentioned that the tougher agaves are from the northern part of the distribution - others from Southern Mexico or Central America are relatively tender. Ivor grows *Echeveria glauca* in a large bowl outdoors and he mentioned that the ones hanging down below the rim of the pot survived but some heads in the main centre of the bowl had died.

David said that he has one 8' x 12' greenhouse and in previous years he had kept this at 43°F, using a 2kWatt heater. However, this winter the same setup sometimes went below freezing. Tom Radford said that he lines his greenhouse with extra insulation and is able to use a 1kWatt setting. Tom also mentioned that most of the cacti seemed to prefer going down to 5°C or less – they don't like it too warm. He also grows Sarracenias, and these didn't like being in the heated greenhouse in the winter, they grew much better outside in the cold frame and seem to prefer occasional freezing temperatures and were doing even better this year.

Electricity is probably the best heat source, although Tony Grech uses paraffin. If the greenhouse is very well insulated then the stove can go out if the oxygen level goes too low. Paraffin also has the side-affect of producing moisture. David asked whether anyone used gas – he had heard stories that Caudiciform leaves are affected by fumes from the gas.

David said that having heating is one thing, but he had been stressed out because of worry about the heating failing or the fuse blowing. He had taken to sleeping with his curtains open, checking for the red light on the heaters. Mark Roberts from Portsmouth has an alarm system in place and David said this went off when one of the plastic heaters caught fire and failed in the greenhouse, depositing black soot over many of the plants. Perhaps cheap plastic heaters are not designed for continuous running. Greenhouse fan heaters are similar in design to indoor heaters, except they are less likely to rust. Mark Jakins though that everything in a garden centre is meant to fall to bits so that you go there to buy more things. Alice said she has a weather station with a remote sensor so she can check the external temperature from inside the house. These units tend to support up to three sensors but typically only come supplied with one. Paul Klaassen had bought 3 of these (from Lidl) but found that they interfered with each other. Maplin Electronics sell some more sophisticated units where the user can set the temperature at which an alarm goes off. It is best for these sensors to be battery powered since mains powered units would stop working if there was a power cut.

David said he had some paraffin heaters as a backup if the electricity did fail. Dot England said she had tubular heaters with fans which helped to circulate the heat. David said he leaves the fans on all the time - air movement is important and this prevents cold spots building up. Some makes of fan heater allow the fan to run continuously even if the heater is off. Alice said she used a computer fan, and Adrian mentioned he used a small computer fan (the type fitted to the processor) in his propagator.

We moved on to propagation, with Bruce Beckerleg, who started by showing us an assortment of tools which were useful for this activity. First were a couple of knives, and one of these was the type that can be extended and retracted – these have sharp blades which can be snapped off in segments and which are also easily to replace. He also had a set of pot tongs – these were useful when a plant need to be held down while it was being cut, and also for handling prickly cuttings.

Bruce started by taking the top off a columnar plant. Mark Jakins mentioned that he was inspired the last time Bruce did one of these practical demonstrations, and he had repeated it in front of some school children – who went oooh and aaah when the plants were cut and were talking about cucumbers for ages. After cutting off the top piece, Bruce said it was advisable to trim the edge of the

cutting – this chamfer counteracts the drying when it goes concave. Just leave the cutting in a semi-shaded position for 2-3 weeks before planting or leave it even longer and roots may appear. He used a standard compost mix containing John Innes and grit, with some peat mixed in. A person from the audience asked whether anything special needed to be done to stop the cutting from toppling over. Bruce admitted he doesn't do anything special. Ivor suggested using a clay pot or supporting the pot within another deeper pot.

Next under the knife was a succulent - *Euphorbia abdelkuri*. This was growing on a graft but it can grow on its own roots too. Bruce cut the top off and we saw the white sap ooze out. He had a cup of water ready to place the top section in, to try and stop too much loss of liquid. The white sap is an irritant and poisonous, so you should be careful not to get it on your hands or face. As it happens, this sort of cutting won't root since the vascular bundles are all on the outside of the stem. So why had he cut the top off? Bruce explained that by beheading the plant, it would now form offsets and these would be capable of being cut and being potted on. With some of the stick Euphorbias, like *Euphorbia milii* – one should plant the cutting in moist compost and water it right away. However, with the thicker Euphorbias, he wouldn't risk this – he would let the wound callous over and possibly wait several months before planting it in sandy compost.

In response to a question from the audience, the best time of the year to take these cuttings was in the growing season – probably May and June were best. If you cut things in the winter, they can rot off. Cacti are somewhat easier and can be done at any time, but again the summer is easier.

Next was *Mammillaria dodsonii*. David Neville thought the plant was almost a show quality plant so he wondered what Bruce was going to it. Bruce said that he had got this plant 10 years ago from Southfields and in his view, it was at the age where it could go pear shaped at any time, so it was worth propagating it before that happened. After taking the plant out of the pot, Bruce cut off one of the lower offsets. He didn't like the shape of the base of the offset, so cut it down to form a convex base. Based on reputation, this plant was likely to be touchy so he would wait 2 weeks before trying to root it. Plants like *M. humboldtii* have very small offsets and these might dehydrate before they root. David said Mammillarias in general are quite good at producing aerial roots. Bruce mentioned he had a *Neoporteria laniceps* which had lost its roots in the winter - he just left it on the shelf all winter and now it's formed some roots and ready for potting up. The compost he uses is a peat base with John Innes with rather more grit than his normal mix. He also uses a peat and perlite mix sometimes.

Euphorbia cylindrifolia ssp. *tuberifera* won't form a caudex from a cutting, but some will e.g. *Anacampseros rhodesica*. David said this was rare and extremely choice and there was huge demand for it - Bruce said it was very easy to propagate and wondered whether he should be sharing his secrets with us. The technique is to take the longest stems you can find and cut them as close to the base as possible. Then he takes his usually gritty compost, adds a later of silver sand at the top and then sticks the stems in. He uses this for anything that's small and tricky. He then places the cuttings in full sun and waters once a week (twice a week in warm weather). He did some experiments by taking cuttings at the start of April, May and June. April was disappointing but the end of May or start of June had the best success rate – with up to 90% of the cuttings rooting. The cuttings will make a small caudex in the first year. *A. alstonii* has a larger caudex, but the stems are short, so it's harder to get a piece big enough to root. It is also possible to propagate *A. alstonii* by chopping up the caudex, ensuring that there are some roots on each piece.

After the tea break Bruce reminded us that the sap of Euphorbias is poisonous – and if you get it on your hands, do wash it off. Some people are also allergic to the sap. Paul Klaassen mentioned there is an Aeonium (*A. lindleyi*) which is supposed to be an antidote to the sap.

Leaf cuttings can be used for plants such as Echeveria. You can of course just take off the top and root it, but if you want lots of plants or are trying to get rid of a mealy bug infestation, then just take off some leaves, let them lie on some sandy compost and they will form roots and a little offset at the base of the leaf. Bruce illustrated this with "one he'd done earlier". There are some Echeverias which don't root easily, for example, *Echeveria subrigida*. However, if you use a knife and cut off a piece of the stem attached to the leaf, then the success rate improves greatly. This is easiest at the bottom of the stem where you can get at the stem more easily. Just lay these leaves on sand. There's no easy way to determine which Echeverias are easy to propagate so one has to refer to published literature such as John Pilbeam's book. Bruce also mentioned that the clones vary and some plants propagate more easily than others with the same name.

With *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis*, you would normally try and root an entire rosette, but it is capable of rooting from a single leaf and he showed us an example of this. With Haworthias, propagation by seed takes a while, so you can cut up the plant He showed us a *Haworthia bolusii* which already had two heads and this could be converted into 4 or 5 plants by slicing vertically through the plant, ensuring that the central crown of the plant was in each piece, along with some root. This would be planted right away, with the cut part above the compost. Bruce showed us the plant of *Haworthia aranea* which he had applied this treatment to (2 years ago) - two of the cuttings had produced double rosettes. Typically you get 3 out of 4 cuttings taking. With this, Bruce ended his demonstration to a round of applause from the audience.

David then started a discussion on fertiliser. Most of the books on cacti recommend applying a low nitrogen high potash fertiliser in weak dilutions once or twice a year, but David said this information was misguided. Chempak #3 is the traditional feed for cacti, but he showed us Chempak #8 which has a 20:20:20 composition and makes the plants grow better. He said ideally plants should be repotted every year, but when you can't, do make sure you provide some feed, and this can be at full strength. Any fertiliser such as Phostrogen and MiracleGro can be used. He had bought the Chempak at Warwicks in Wickham, and Arturi's in Allington Lane also stock it. Apparently Chempak have been bought out by Thompson & Morgan so the brand should continue being available. Another option is to use slow-release granules – you can get 3 month and 6 month types and the latter was recommended.

Moving on to compost, David showed a couple of very healthy plants he had had bought in Holland – an *Echinocereus rigidissimus* ssp. *rubrispina*, and *Mammillaria candida*. These were growing in peat with no grit or perlite. His conclusion was that you should not worry about the growing medium – you just need to make sure that your watering and feeding regime is matched with the compost. Someone asked how do you get a plant which is growing in peat out of the peat? This is usually very difficult since if the roots are fibrous, the roots will be damaged when you attempt to tear off the peat. Paul Klaassen said he has switched from peat to no peat and back again, and David agreed that none of the peat substitutes were very good. Ben Turner asked what would happen in 10 years time – all the main political parties are committed to peat free horticulture by 2020. David was skeptical about this becoming a reality.

David then went on identify some of the plants which had been brought in. First was a *Mammillaria gracilis*, this occurs in two forms which are fairly distinct. Next was *Stenocactus crispatus*. Stenocactus is one of the most difficult genus for identification and even botanist Nigel Taylor gave up so he said you could call the plant anything you liked and no-one would argue. Next was a Haworthia-like plant with stiff spiky leaves and this was likely to be in the related genus Astroloba. Next was *Rebutia euanthema*. A sulcorebutia with yellow flowers had hardly any spines on the new growth and looked a bit strange. This was followed by a *Gymnocalycium mostii,* a chunky Matucana, *Adromichus poellnitzianus* (which has hairy stems) *Neoporteria (Eriosyce) subgibbosa*, an Aloinopsis (a mesemb), a Echeveria hybrid, a Cheiridopsis, a Carruanthus, *Mammillaria zeilmanniana* alba, *Mammillaria cowperae* (*Mammillaria moelleriana*), an Opuntia (Puna), a Gasteria (possibly verrucosa) and another Gasteria with angled leaves which might be *G. croucheri*. Next was a hybrid of Aloe aristata and something else, followed by some sort of a Compositae / Senecio which Ben had got from Holly Gate. There were some agaves, but David said they were too young to be identified. One of the remaining plants was a Notocactus/parodia and a Haworthia marked with a location might be *H. bolusii*.

The meeting was running out of time, so we didn't get a chance to see Ivor's seed raising demonstration apart from him describing an Ariocarpus seedling which at 3 years old was tiny, and smaller than other seedlings which were just a few months old. Ivor said the packs of seeds on the table were free to anyone who wanted them, and people could make a donation towards these if they wished to.

Moving onto problem plants, Ben had brought in a Brighamia (a hawaiian succulent). This came from Copenhagen Botanical Garden – he got it home and slowly all the leaves turned yellow and fell off. David said this was best grown as a house plant - Paul Shirley in Holland grows lots with Ceropegias and Hoyas. It is loved by red spider which is drawn to it like a magnet. A *Carnegiea gigantea* with brown patches may have been damaged by plants around it. Another plant had been eaten in the middle and this might be caused by the caterpillars of the Tortrix moth. David said the triangular reddish-brown moths were a terrible pest. Some of the other plants were just starved and some water and feed might revive them. Stenocactus have an extrafloral nectary gland which them attracts black mould. An *Echinoactus grusonii* which had been healthy in September had become badly marked

over the winter, and David said it would take a long time to grown out the mark Similar sized plants can be bought in Europe for 10 or so Euros.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 22 entries in the table show at the May meeting.

	Cacti – Opuntia Group	**Succulents – Haworthia & Gasteria Group**
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Opuntia invicta	(1) T Grech Gasteria bicolor
	(2) T Grech Opuntia vestita	(2) T Grech Gasteria batesiana
	(3) -	(3) B Beckerleg Gasteria liliputana
Intermediate	(1) T Grech Opuntia microdasys	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia sordida
	(2) T Grech Opuntia microdasys	(2) T Radford Haworthia sp.
	(3) T Grech Opuntia microdasys	(3) T Radford Haworthia truncata

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held on 17th May at St Winfrid's Church in Totton.

Mark Jakins mentioned that some cheques issued by the branch several months ago had not yet been cashed. We would follow up to see whether the recipients needed to be issued with replacements.

Recent branch meetings were discussed. The Gasteria talk by Derek Tribble was a mixture of live plants and slides, and went well. For the Cultivation Workshop in May, we actually ran out of time to discuss all the topics that had been planned. It was encouraging to see plenty of audience participation, and several members commented that this had been one of the best meetings they had attended.

We took part in the Sparsholt Countryside Day and this proved to be a success. We had been given a good position on the site and the event seems a good one for us to attend in future years. Preparations for our stand at the Whiteley Garden Market were discussed.

The use of "name" stickers at branch meetings was discussed briefly. The glue on the stickers used at the May meeting was weak, so we would find some labels with stronger glue for use in the future.

Dot mentioned that the library has accumulated some surplus books, and she intended to sell these off to members.

A date for the Branch dinner was selected (25th June). The Luzborough was felt to be in a convenient location and the service we've had there in the past has been reasonable, so it was chosen again.

David mentioned that he had been in touch with the organisers of the New Forest Show. The arrangements inside the horticultural marquee were being changed and there was some doubt about whether we would be allocated space this year – we should learn more at the start of June. We would continue to pursue the possibility of having a stand at the Romsey Show in September.

VInay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 6th July and will feature a talk from Alan Phipps titled "Arizona Adventure". I found Arizona is one of the most interesting of the US states to visit, and it is certainly a good location for fantastic scenery and lots of large cacti, inclduing the Saguaro.

The July table show will consist of the **Echinopsis group** (cacti) and the **Aloe group** (succulents). Please note that you can submit more than one entry in any of the classes.

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

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

Forthcoming Events

Sat 5th Jun	Portsmouth	Summer Show @ Wickham Community Hall, Dairymoor, Wickham
Sat 12th Jun	Isle of Wight	"Morro Do Chapeau, Brazil" - John Hughes
Sat 19th Jun	Portsmouth	"Southern Peru" – Cliff Thompson
Fri 25th Jun	Romsey	Annual Branch Dinner @ The Luzborough, SO51 9AA
Tue 6th Jul	Southampton	Arizona Adventure - Alan Phipps
Sat 10th Jul	Isle of Wight	"What I did last winter 3" - Paul Klaassen
Sat 17th Jul	Portsmouth	"What I did last winter" - Paul Klaassen
Tue 27th Jul-Thu 29th	New Forest	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Sat 31st Jul	Southampton	Display/Plant Sales @ Solent Fuchsia Show, Community Hall, Titchfield
Tue 3rd Aug	Southampton	Southern Peru – Cliff Thompson
Sat 14th Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening at John & Claudia Roberts
Sat 21st Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting

Branch website: http://www.southampton.bcss.org.uk