

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Summer did finally make an appearance, with some warm days at the start of June. However the last couple of weeks can only be described as mixed. And as I finish off editing the newsletter on Monday, there is a rather heavy shower of hailstones outside!

I bought quite a few plants during the visit to Fresh Acres and also from our stand at the Southampton Festival. Well, the buying is the easy part! The new plants are either squeezed into spare places in between other plants or just sat on the floor in the conservatory. I really need to spend a couple of days rearranging things so that similar species are grouped together.

As for flowers, Lobivias, Echinopsis, Parodias and Gymnocalyciums have all done their bit in the past few weeks. A few Rebutias are about to start on a second flush of flowers, having already flowered in May and early June. Many Aloes and Haworthias are also in bloom.

Announcements

Several branch members took the opportunity to visit **Fresh Acres** during the open evening last month. I have written a short account of the visit in the "Snippets" section. It was certainly very tempting to buy everything in sight and I think most people ended up emerging with more plants than they might have envisaged!

David Kirkbright has sent out an e-mail reminder asking people who are thinking of attending the **BCSS International Convention** (due to be held in Loughborough in August 2006) to book within the next 3 weeks, so that he has an idea of the level of interest in the event. Further details including a list of proposed speakers can be found at: <http://www.bcsc.org.uk/convention.html>

Our display at the **Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum** in Ampfield was a success, and many of the visitors commented on our plant display and also enjoyed the opportunity to buy from a good selection of plants.

The **Southampton Festival** was held at the end of June and this year it only featured plants and a few crafts. Without the attraction of the large balloons, the number of visitors was well down on previous years and this inevitably affected our plant sales. However, there was good interest in our display and sale plants, and the stand was busy throughout both days.

The **Branch Annual Dinner** took place last Friday, and 15 people came along to the Clump Inn in Chilworth. The idea of splitting the group into two tables worked well, and we received better service than last time. I think everybody had a good time.

As mentioned last month, the **Open Day** due to be hosted by the Corinas on July 10th had to be cancelled because of plans for a street party on Shirley Avenue that day. A new date has been chosen and the event will now go ahead on Sunday August 7th. Maps are available from the front table.

Our next major event will be the **New Forest and Hampshire County Show** which will take place at the usual venue just outside Brockenhurst between 26th to 28th July. We have received a number of passes which will permit entry to the exhibitor car parks and the show - please contact Margaret Corina if you can help man the sales table during any of the three days.

Oxford Branch will be holding their Annual Show jointly with a show by the International Asclepiad Society on Sunday 17th July. at Langdale Hall, Witney. Show schedules and directions are available from David Corina.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

David Neville had brought along a group of plants that he grows on a high shelf in his greenhouse. These plants tend to be troublesome when grown along with other cacti and succulents so he waters these separately, and generally leaves them to their own devices.

He was pleased with his *Astrophytum asterias* which was over 4" in diameter. He had never grown it well in peat compost, but now it seemed to be doing better in John Innes compost. David mentioned that in the 1960s and 1970s it was common to see large specimens of this species (these were plants collected from habitat) but it was now very rare to see anything more than 5 or 6 inches across. The plants from the wild tended to be very flat and disc-like. David had also brought along an *Astrophytum asterias* hybrid which was around the same diameter as the species but slightly taller. David mentioned that most of the hybrids grow taller than the original species.

Echinocactus horizonthalonius is extremely widespread in the wild, which would suggest that it is easy to grow, but in practice it is a difficult plant to cultivate. It tends to remain solitary and is very slow-growing. One of the favourite plants in his collection was a variety of this species which he got around 20 years ago from Southfields. This plant had short oppressed spination and when he took it along to the Judges' course, many people failed to recognise it at all.

His plant of *Gymnocalycium cardenasianum* had average quality spines when young, but then the spines started to grow longer, eventually starting to encase the whole plant. He had grown this plant for 15 years and it was only a few inches across, so another slow grower. It remains solitary and can eventually reach football size.

Next was *Uebelmannia pectinifera* – this plant had strong roots coming out of the bottom of the pot, so he guessed that it was probably grafted onto *Trichocereus* stock. The plant had a dark

purple epidermis which contrasted well with the light edges of the ribs. There was lots of yellow wool around the growing point at the top of the plant, this was something he never used to see when the plant was grown under normal conditions with everything else.

On the table were two plants with a piece of paper next to them saying "names please". David thought the first of these was an Euphorbia hybrid (*E. bupleurifolia* x *E. meloformis*). He and Paul Klaassen agreed that the second plant was probably *Copiopoa humilis*.

David went on to describe some more plants, which had been brought along by Tony Grech. First was a houseplant with colourful red and yellow flowers which goes under the common name "Parrot Plant". Sometimes labelled *Impatiens congoense*, the plant is actually *I. niarniamensis*. David said it was a wonderful indicator of red spider, white fly or thrips since these pests are drawn to it like a magnet! David mentioned there are some *Impatiens* with caudexes, for example *I. tuberosa*, but they do require more moisture than other pachycaul succulents.

Next was *Opuntia clavarioides*. David said that this strange looking plant with short stubby stems is hard to grow to any size, and any large plant which you see are undoubtedly grafted. It is a slow grower, seeming to spend most of its time growing an underground root. The flowers tend to be in shades of cream, green or brown..

The final plant was an example of the "Totem pole" cactus, or to use its proper name, *Lophocereus schottii* v. *monstrosus*. This plant grows tall stems which are characteristically knobbly. David said it is not freely available or propagated, so it's a bit of an achievement to find one these days. It is slow growing and sometimes grows as a single stem – this can be made to branch and offset by cutting off the top, if you're feeling brave. This particular specimen was quite stout so David thought it must be a cutting. Tony said he had obtained it from Holly Gate. David said that the monstrose form grows strange deformed flowers but Tony said he had seen a picture of a nice flower in a book.

Thanks are due to David Neville for providing the following write up of last month's talk.

Cacti in Northern Mexico – Part 1

The speaker at the June Branch meeting was Terry Smale, who had travelled down from Surrey to present his lecture "Cacti in northern Mexico, Part 1".

Terry explained that he and his wife Jennifer had visited Mexico in 1986 with a number of other enthusiasts. Their trip began in Monterrey, where they arrived by plane. Terry pointed out that Mexico comprises two large and well-known mountain ranges – the Sierra Madre Occidentale (which mainly comprises acid rocks and terrain) and the Sierra Madre Orientale (which is limestone based) which lies close to Monterrey.

The basic route of the trip was to head from Monterrey as far south as Matehuala, taking in as many different places and habitats as possible on the way. Succulent plants (including cacti, of course) are the dominant vegetation in most parts of Mexico, so it is not hard to find cacti to look at on any journey, although finding particular species would prove very difficult unless you knew where to look. Some research had been undertaken in advance of the trip so that they were able to see more species than they might otherwise have done.

Terry began by showing some of the Hispanic buildings in the town of Monterrey. Typically, in the centre of the town, there was a large plaza around which were various civic buildings such as the town hall, along with churches etc. In the centre of the plaza was the obligatory large fountain with sculptures etc. Members of the audience commented that the buildings and the fountain were very reminiscent of others they had seen in Spanish-influenced towns and cities both in Mexico and elsewhere.

Moving on to the main subject for the evening, Terry showed some plants growing in the region of the Huasteca canyon. Here we saw very impressive rocks with vertical strata, clearly exposed during some sort of seismic movements millions of years ago. *Opuntia leptocaulis* grew here, with thin pencil-like stems; amazingly there was a birds' nest amid the deadly tangle of spiny branches. Also growing here was a stinging *Jatropha*; there are various species of this genus that are armed with vicious stinging hairs, and most can be found growing alongside cacti. The

severity of the sting varies from one to another, but all are certainly worth looking out for and avoiding! Hechtias and other bromeliads grew here, and Terry commented that they can frequently be found growing in association with cacti in Mexico and elsewhere. They bear very strong thorns on their leaf edges and can be just as defensive and dangerous as many of the cacti.

We saw a slide of a flowering root parasite, possibly an *Orobanche* (or at least aesthetically very similar to one). These organisms grow unseen underground on the roots of other plants, being visible above ground only when they flower. Other cacti here included impressive clumps of *Echinocereus stramineus*, which produces wonderful large flowers, and plants of the much smaller growing *E. reichenbachii armatus*. Also *Lophophora williamsii*, a plant which is very exciting to see in the wild, but which in fact is very widespread from north to south. A favourite plant in cultivation, we saw *Agave victoria-reginae* growing on steep and inaccessible cliffs. Terry observed that most were unreachable and that they were clearly safe from the hands of illegal collectors.

Growing on flat terrain was *Mammillaria heyderi* (possibly the variety *meiacantha*), and *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* (formerly known as *Hamatocactus*) which is another very widespread plant in Mexico, with impressively long and strong spination. *Echinocereus enneacanthus* is a large growing, sprawling species which is difficult to find room for in a small greenhouse, but in its natural environs it covers lots of ground and produces stunning flowers. Smaller growing, tending to remain solitary unless damaged, is *Mammillaria melanocentra* which is restricted to this area.

Terry showed various *Coryphanthas* that they encountered, but these plants are mostly very difficult to accurately identify. To make matters worse, they tend to look quite different in cultivation than they do in the wild.

While staying in Saltillo the group explored a road that led to a place called Hipolito. Here we saw another favourite in collections, *Thelocactus bicolor*. Terry explained that this is another widespread plant in the wild, occurring in Texas, and southwards through various parts of Mexico. He said that the northernmost forms tend to be more columnar and spiny than those that occur further south in the distribution area. We were shown *Mammillaria pottsii*, a small and rarely

grown species. It has slender stems and tiny flowers and is not at all easy to grow well. Altogether a more vicious plant is *Opuntia tunicata*. The spines on this species are strong and straw coloured and they are covered in a stiff sheath which is shed if you knock against the plant, embedding itself in your skin!

West of Saltillo we saw a small, sprawling species of Verbena, looking very much like some of the plants that we grow in hanging baskets during the summer months. *Echinocactus horizonthalonius* grew here, and this is one of the choicest of cacti in collections, although notoriously temperamental in cultivation. Nearby grew another Coryphantha, possibly *C. difficilis*. *Astrophytum capricorne* was difficult to spot, for the dense twisting spination made it look more like a shrub or a collection of grass and twigs. *Epithelantha micromeris* can also be difficult to find in habitat, since it is often tiny, but here some of the plants were large and multi-headed, growing in clumps which were several inches across.

Coryphantha poselgeriana is one of the more distinctive species, and this grows in flatter areas. It is a very striking species, but is not commonly seen in collections. Another uncommon plant, which is also very difficult to grow, is *Echinomastus mapimiensis*. *Coryphantha macromeris* is much easier, and we saw pictures of plants growing in large fairy rings; clearly the oldest heads in the centre of the clump die out, but the plant continues to spread outwards. Most Coryphanthas have yellow flowers but *C. macromeris* has purple flowers.

Opuntia moelleri is a low-growing, sprawling species which is sometimes seen in cultivation. *Mammillaria lasiacantha* is even more low-growing, for the tiny heads are almost buried in the ground and frequently all one can see is the top of the plant which is level to the surface of the ground. This is a miniature, slow growing species. Difficult to find for a different reason is *Wilcoxia (Echinocereus) poselgeri*: the older stems of this species look just like twigs and sticks, and since this species seems always to grow in the shade of shrubs it is well hidden from view unless it happens to be in flower.

Mammillaria is one of the most widespread of genera in Mexico. We saw plants of *M. formosa* in various localities and it tends to vary somewhat, and also *M. chionocephala* which produces wonderful rings of tufty wool around the

shoulder of the plant. Frequently seen growing on the stems of shrubs and trees was *Tillandsia recurvata*, one of the so-called air plants. This is also seen growing on phone lines and overhead power cables, and has to be removed periodically by the authorities in order to prevent collapse or breakage of the cables because of their weight.

At a higher altitude in pine woodland we saw an unidentified species of *Stenocactus*. These are perhaps the most difficult of all cacti to reliably identify and few people are brave enough to even guess at names for most of them! Also here we saw *Gymnocactus beguinii*, another small growing, choice species, along with *Thelocactus bueckii*.

North of Matehuala Terry showed a very impressive stand of yuccas, looking almost like a forest. This is a group of plants that most people find difficult to identify, although there have been books published in recent years that should make the job a little easier. Many of the yuccas are not hardy in the UK, but in the wild they make magnificent plants. Nearby grew *Glandulicactus (Sclerocactus) uncinatus*, a species which can produce remarkably long central spines. We also saw large plants of *Ariocarpus retusus*. Although Ariocarpus are considered choice and rare in cultivation, this species is very widespread and numerous in Mexico. Another choice plant is *Turbincarpus valdezianus*; this is one of the smallest growing of all the cacti and is difficult to find in habitat, although there were some clumps a few inches across.

South of Matehuala Terry showed a group of flowering *Cephalocereus senilis*, but they are not from this region and had been planted there. At nearby La Bonita we saw *Turbincarpus polaskii*, another of the miniature cacti which is difficult to find unless one knows where to look. Terry encountered a rattlesnake here, but fortunately it was sleepy and slow. His advice was to make as much noise as possible when clambering around rocks and other places where snakes might be hiding, so that they know you are coming and will get out of the way!

The final sequence of slides were taken in a very famous and well known area, on the road from Matehuala through Doctor Arroyo and Aramberri. Here we saw *Echinocereus pentaloophus*, another of the sprawling but beautifully flowered members of this popular genus. The white spined *Mammillaria candida* grows here, but this is another widespread plant that can be seen

elsewhere. Also here was *Mammillaria magnimamma*, a species that produces very large clumps with age, and *Opuntia stenopetala*, an unusual species with small orange flowers. Terry was lucky to find *Turbincarpus macrochele* growing here, tiny and hidden from view apart from the flowers, which hailed their presence. This is a rich area, and we also saw a large 4-headed plant of *Thelocactus saussieri*, along with specimens of *Thelo. hexaedrophorus*, magnificently colourful plants of *Ferocactus pilosus*, *Echinocereus pectinatus*, and a crested plant of *Mammillaria formosa*. Cristate plants are rare in the wild and to find any at all is very lucky.

Close to Aramberri we saw slides of the plants that are most famous from this area, a population of *Ariocarpus retusus* that has been named 'confusus' in the literature. This species usually produces pale yellow flowers, but in this population the flowers are various shades of pink and purple! The tubercles on these plants tend to be longer and more slender than those of *A. retusus* elsewhere, and this has led to speculation in the part that these plants could be hybrids with the similar-looking *Ariocarpus trigonus*, although that species produces golden yellow flowers, so that still doesn't account for the flower colour here! Terry dismissed the view that these could be hybrids with *A. trigonus*.

David Corina, who chaired the meeting, thanked Terry for the excellent talk and for the wide range of plants that we enjoyed seeing during the evening. Needless to say, the audience responded with keen applause, and we look forward to hearing Part 2 of the talk some time in the future.

David Neville

Table Show – June

There were 16 entries in the June table show.

	Cacti – Parodia Group	Succulents – Crassula Group
Open	(1) G Finn Parodia sp.	(1) B Beckerleg Echeveria sp.
	(2) B Beckerleg Parodia subterranea	(2) J Roskillly Crassula sp.
	(3) P Clemow Parodia culpinensis	(3) P Clemow Crassula sp.
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Parodia andreae	(1) B Beckerleg Adromischus marianae
	(2) G Finn Parodia sp.	(2) J Roskillly Crassula sp.
	(3) P Clemow Parodia comarapana	(3) J Roskillly Adromischus phillipsiae

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Visit to Fresh Acres

Three cars from our branch travelled to Fresh Acres for their Open Evening, and I was a passenger with David Neville. We left just after 5pm, expecting hold-ups and a battle through the traffic along Winchester Road and on the M27 since it was the middle of the rush hour. However, we encountered little congestion on the motorway and arrived some 20 minutes early.

Fresh Acres consists of a number of greenhouses growing a variety of plants, and one of the greenhouses is dedicated to cacti and succulents. It's hard to convey a scale of the operation, but the greenhouse was very large and there were many tens of thousands of plants in there.

The staging consisted of sliding table tops, which had to be moved in gangs in order to create a walkway if you wanted to see plants at the far end. This arrangement allows for efficient use of the growing space, but it does mean that care needs to be taken if there are a lot of people roving around in the greenhouse.

In my view, there are two big advantages in visiting a nursery. Firstly, since the plants are grown in bulk, there are many examples of each type, and you can pick out a specific favourite from this large selection. This allows you to pick out a plant with better flowers, or spines, or body shape. In my case I found a couple of nicely patterned examples of *Agave victoria-reginae*.

Secondly, the plants are priced by pot size rather than plant size. Since in a random collection of seedlings a few will always manage to establish themselves more successfully, this means it was possible to pick out some bargain plants which were still in small pots but which really ought to have been in pots two or three sizes larger.

Hardly any of the plants were labelled, so you did have to know what you were buying. However, in most cases, the plants were recognisable. The plants were also packed close together, so expect to emerge with a few wounds unless suitably protected. Tweezers would have been handy!

If the event is held again, I would certainly advise anyone who wants to build up an “instant” collection to go along. Be prepared to be overwhelmed and to emerge with a large number of plants!

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next branch meeting will be held on August 2nd and will feature David Kirkbright (BCSS Treasurer) who will give a talk on Madagascar. By virtue of its separation from the main African continent many millions of years ago, this island possesses some unique and interesting plants.

The August table Show will feature the **Mammillaria** group (cacti) and the **Euphorbia** 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 Mammillaria group contains *Mammillaria*, *Bartschella*, *Cochemiea*, *Dolichothele*, *Krainzia*, *Leptocladodia*, *Mamillopsis*, *Mammilloxydia*, *Oehmea*, *Phellosperma*, *Porfiria*, *Pseudo-mammillaria* and *Solisia*.

The Euphorbia group only contains *Euphorbia*.

A reminder for **committee members** that a Branch Committee meeting is due to be held at the Corinas' on 18th July.

Forthcoming Events

Fri 15 th	Jul	Isle of Wight	“Alpines in Chile” – John Hughes
Sat 16 th	Jul	Portsmouth	“Galivanting in Northern Argentina/Chile” – Malcolm Pym
Sun 17 th	Jul	Oxford	Oxford Branch Show + 3 rd International Asclepiad Show Langdale Hall, Witney, Oxfordshire
Mon 18 th	Jul	Southampton	Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue
Tue 26 th	Jul	New Forest	Display and Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 28 th	Jul		
Tue 2 nd	Aug	Southampton	“Madagascar 1993” – David Kirkbright
Sun 7 th	Aug	Southampton	Members Open Day @ The Corinas, 79 Shirley Avenue
Fri 19 th	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open House @ Robin & Joan Goodredge's
Sat 20 th	Aug	Romsey	Zone 11 Show + plant sales @ Summer Garden Show Broadlands, Romsey
Sun 21 st	Aug	Romsey	Display + plant sales @ Summer Garden Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Tue 6 th	Sep	Southampton	“South American Cacti” – Paul Klaassen
Fri 16 th	Sep	Isle of Wight	“Deserts of the South-West USA” – Malcolm Pym
Sat 17 th	Sep	Portsmouth	“Mesembryanthemums” – Suzanne Mace

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

Show Results (Southampton Festival, 25-26th June 2005)

Class	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
11 – Any Cactus	D Neville	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe
12 – 1 Mammillaria	B Beckerleg	D Neville	I Biddlecombe
13 – 2 Rebutias 5"	B Beckerleg	P Clemow	I Biddlecombe
14 – 2 Echinocerei 5"	P Clemow	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe
15 – 2 Mammillarias 5"	I Biddlecombe	A Grech	P Clemow
16 – 2 Gymnocalyciums 5"	I Biddlecombe	P Clemow	B Beckerleg
17 – 2 Astrophytums	I Biddlecombe	P Clemow	B Beckerleg
18 – 2 Echinopsis	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe	
19 – 2 Thelocacti	I Biddlecombe	P Clemow	B Beckerleg
20 – 2 Parodias	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe	J Roskilly
21 – 2 Opuntias	I Biddlecombe	D Neville	
22 – 4 cacti	D Neville	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe
23 – 6 cacti	B Beckerleg	I Biddlecombe	J Roskilly
24 – 1 cactus (under 16s)	R Courtney	V Roskilly-Pearson	
25 – 6 succulents	B Beckerleg	J Roskilly	I Biddlecombe
26 – 4 succulents	B Beckerleg	D Neville	I Biddlecombe
27 – 2 Mesembs	I Biddlecombe	B Beckerleg	D Neville
28 – 2 Crassulas	I Biddlecombe	B Beckerleg	J Roskilly
29 – 2 Euphorbias	I Biddlecombe	D & M Corina	
30 – 2 Haworthias	I Biddlecombe	D Neville	B Beckerleg
31 – 1 Agave or Aloe	D Neville	J Roskilly	I Biddlecombe
32 – Any succulent	D Neville	I Biddlecombe	J Roskilly
33 – 1 succulent (under 16s)	V Roskilly-Pearson		

Winner of 50th Anniversary Trophy for Cacti Ivor Biddlecombe
 Winner of 50th Anniversary Trophy for Succulents Ivor Biddlecombe

Best Cactus in Show (Ariocarpus retusus) David Neville
 Best Succulent in Show (Dorstenia gigas) David Neville