

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has been very wet last month, but at least it's been comparatively mild. A couple of dahlias and some roses in my garden are still trying to flower, and there was also the unusual spectacle of an Azalea producing flowers in the middle of October! Elsewhere, trees have started to shed their leaves as the days draw in, and although we have not had any frosts yet, you get the feeling that they are just round the corner.

In my conservatory, a number of mesembs have continued to flower. Most striking at the moment are two plants of *Glottiphyllum pygmaeum*. Their large yellow flowers seem to last for weeks and weeks, and the flowers are open even if the skies are overcast.

A *Massonia pustulata* which I purchased from Terry Smale about a year ago has sent up a pair of new leaves. These are growing upwards and are rolled up in the shape of a cigar but I presume they will eventually unfold and lie flat on the ground. The plant shed its previous pair of leaves in the spring and I must admit I had wondered whether there was anything left underground, or whether it was going to be another addition to the list of "plants which I no longer have"!

Announcements

Next month is our AGM, and nomination forms for the committee posts are available on the front table. Our committee has been virtually unchanged for a long time, and indeed some

people are having to fulfil dual roles : we would really welcome some new faces!

As is usual, there will be no table show or library or plant sales at the AGM next month. However, please do remember to bring along some food for the American supper. There will also be a "bran tub" where members can exchange gifts. Further details of next month's meeting are given on the back page.

I am sad to report that Ray Jeffs, a speaker who had given several talks in our Zone, passed away on 29th October.

There will be a plant auction and sale of the late Rob Seward's plants on 14th November at Geoff Bowman's in Gloucester. (Geoff also holds the national Agave Collection). There are expected to be 50 auction lots and other fixed price items. Further details are due to be posted on :
<http://www.limax.co.uk/glosbcss/sale.htm>

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

People had brought in many plants for discussion during the main talk by Suzanne, but *Plants of Interest* consisted of only one item. Paul Maddison had brought along an orchid in flower. This was *Oncidium* "Sharry Baby" which had produced multi-branching flower spikes bearing dozens of red-brown flowers (about an inch across) with a white lip. The flowers had a chocolate / vanilla scent, and this cultivar is quite popular because of this characteristic.

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

Mesembs in the Flesh

The branch committee tries to produce as varied a programme as possible for our branch meetings. The occasional talks featuring plants (as against slides) and involving the audience, make a

welcome change, and are usually popular with the membership. Such a meeting was last month's excursion round the Mesembs, 'led' by Suzanne Mace. Unaware that Suzanne would also bring plants, Committee had put out a call for plenty of plants to be brought along, so we were almost over-furnished with plants to talk about. Consequently we really only covered about half of the genera on display.

The presentation rapidly developed into what became essentially a workshop, so Suzanne homed in first on the more difficult genera. First under the gaze were *Lithops*, considered to be typical of the public perception of succulents, and most succulent growers have some. A few of the species and varieties (e.g. *L. optica rubra*, *L. salicola* 'Malachite' and other green 'breaks') were discussed and passed around to enable closer inspection, but most audience interest was centred on cultivation, as there were many comments that flowering was late this year. Suzanne recommended John Innes compost with extra grit (a fairly heavy compost) which in her experience gave better growth. They do better if not disturbed too much, it is not necessary to repot often. Watering should be from May to October, or until flowering has finished, and should be onto the soil and not over the plant bodies.

In cultivation, the old leaves tend to accumulate and need to be removed to keep the plants in character, it was recommended that the old leaves should only be removed if easy to do so. Damping the old leaves greatly helps this cleaning - however, if a head is inadvertently removed, it can be re-rooted, preferably in the same pot, provided that the growing point (meristem) deep down between the leaves is not damaged. Then followed a diversionary discussion about how the dead leaves from these mesembs are removed or lost in the wild as one rarely sees more than the last dried pair on a habitat plant. For information, Cole's *Lithops* is the current reference, look for a new edition which includes many cultivars and hybrids.

Next in line was *Conophytum*, which has somewhat displaced *Lithops* in the popularity stakes (could that be because there are lots more of them?) General opinion was that most conophytums were easier than lithops to cultivate. If one includes *Ophthalmophyllum* within *Conophytum* then there are many more body forms, flower colours and types, as some conos are night flowering with relatively small starry flowers but are highly scented. The night

flowerers thus do not cross with the majority which are brasher day flowering species. The larger species (*C. pearsonii* types) were discussed first, as these tend to be the commonest ones in our collections (and the easiest to grow). Conos generally are to be found in rock crevices in the wild, often shaded for part of the day, and consequently do not need such heat or bright light as do *Lithops*, in fact it is easy to 'cook' them. Suzanne also recommended good air movement.

While dormant they can be kept under the staging, and certainly *C. stephanii* does better in subdued light all year. Watering starts with the appearance of the new bodies (which is normally later than for *Lithops*) and can be continued through to December. We were advised to give one watering around March to tide them over and prevent too much shrivelling during dormancy. Ophthalmophyllums will in fact pick up moisture from the air [and I find that they do not really go to sleep in my conditions- DLC]. Most conos are easily accommodated in smaller pots, and in a JI-based compost do not need frequent feeding. Discussion of individual species again progressed little beyond the weird blob of green protoplasm known as *C. burgeri*, always a single head in the wild.

Reference material here is the books by Steve Hammer (The Genus Conophytum, Dumpling and his Wife). General books on Mesembs abound, particular mention was made of Mesembs of the World (several well-known contributors) and Vygies (Jaarsveld & Pienaar). Both books having good and bad points, and there is great fun weaving your way round all the name changes of recent years!

In the second half we managed to move on to the other groups of mesembs, after a number of individual discussions on the 'usual problems' of scorching and slug damage. October is the time of year most of the mesembs are coming into growth, for example *Cheiridopsis peculiaris* and many others which sport but two new pairs of leaves each year. One genus which has a small caudex is *Sphalmanthus (Phyllobolus)*, which is dormant through the summer and is a winter grower (and apparently will take lots of water while in growth.) Others coming into growth include *Mitrophyllum grande* (often needs a helping hand to remove sheaths) with large yellow flowers, and *Monilaria*, bead-like stems and pairs of long upright leaves. These signal their desire for water by droopy leaves (some comment was made here about Viagra!). Closely

related are *Dicrocaulon* and *Sceletium*, where the leaf remains protect the growing point. Another plant with a sort of caudex is *Mestoklema tuberosum*, which can make a large, deep rooting plant, but has rather uninteresting small flowers.

Several genera have species ranging considerably in size, and as greenhouse space is at a premium, some smaller ones were considered. Of the *Odontophorus*, *O. nanus* and similar are the best ones, and *Cheiridopsis crassa/pillansii* keep compact. *C. denticulata* can get quite large and make impressive plants, but need frequent tidying to keep neat. Many mesembs do get leggy and woody in time (cue for a brief discussion on the lifespan of the plants - we are all aware that often our plants in cultivation get much larger, and probably live longer, than those in habitat) and Suzanne's advice was to repot and sink the plant down and support the stems at ground level.

Not everybody is keen on *Glottiphyllum*, as they can get large, but we had a good word for them this time - put them on a high shelf and they will colour up better and flower well. They do have large flowers - even if they are all yellow!

More difficult is *Dinteranthus*, but they do stay compact. There are some cultivars in the genus but the most desirable is *D. pole-evansii*, which needs very good drainage. *Ruschia* and *Delosperma* are commoner plants, many of the latter genus are hardy; of the former *R. pulvinaris* is fun on account of its 'weird shape' (Suzanne's words). Others in the two genera can get big. *Titanopsis*, *Alionopsis/Nananthus* are also winter growers, compact and nearly all are attractive plants. If you are really short of space, try some from *Rhinephyllum* or *Chasmatophyllum*, nearly all small plants but some species can spread rapidly. Back to choice plants, the monotypic *Lapidaria margaretae* is slow growing and attractively shaped, as are most of the smaller, choice gibbaeums, such as *G. neobrownii* - but beware of slugs!

At this point we ran out of time, leaving the remaining genera to be covered perhaps in a future meeting. Suzanne and branch members were thanked for bringing along a wide selection of plants - if yours were not discussed, bring them next time!

David Corina

Table Show – October

There were 17 entries in the October table show.

	Cacti – Gymnocalycium Group	Succulents – Mesembs (excl. Lithops)
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe G. schickendantzii	(1) I Biddlecombe Ophthalmophyllum praesectum
	(2) G Finn G. saglionis	(2) J Roskilly Conophytum bilobum
	(3) B Beckerleg G. hybopleurum	(3) P Clemow Cylindrophyllum tugwelliae
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe G. mihanovichii	(1) I Biddlecombe Alionopsis rubrolineata
	(2) B Beckerleg G. gibbosum	(2) B Beckerleg Conophytum sp. (Steinkopf)
	(3) G Finn G. moserianum	(3) J Roskilly Conophytum stephanii

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Interesting Websites

A couple of members have mentioned to me that they visited our branch's website and found the content interesting. It's good to hear that the site is meeting with general approval. It has already proven to be a good form of publicity for our branch. I will eventually get round to adding a page with links to other useful or interesting websites. In the meantime, here are some sites which I think you might find interesting.

www.cactus-mall.com/

This is the famed online "Cactus Mall" run by Tony Mace. There is a wealth of information and hundreds of links to other websites. It's well worth a visit, just to see how much information on our hobby is available out there! The links are grouped in sensible categories which makes it easier to try and find the information you might have been looking for.

www.deserttropicals.com/Plants

I use this site to check the spellings of species names and it seems to use the latest accepted nomenclature and also lists synonyms. Most of

the common genera, especially cacti, are covered quite well. The site does have pictures of the listed plants (sometimes quality is OK, sometimes not so good) and also lists locality data.

www.mesembs.de

This is a site hosted in Germany and run by Achim Hecktheuer. It has lots of information and pictures of lithops and other mesembs. The site includes pictures from his collection and maps showing the distribution of the various species.

www.haworthia.com/Species/Haworthia.htm

This is an excellent site for lovers of Haworthias – the photographs are of excellent quality and there are often several of the same species, which helps to show the different variations possible within a species.

www.dvtribble.demon.co.uk/home.htm

This is Derek Tribble's web site. It contains lots of information and pictures of a genus which he finds very interesting, namely Adromischus. Part of the site is designed almost like a book, where you can go from one page to the next.

www.succulent-plant.com/home.html

This is Richard Hodgkiss's award winning site which contains a wealth of information. It even has a photograph of a monthly pinup(!) – a plant, I hasten to add! The site would probably take months to explore fully, but a quick glance revealed information on genera such as Asclepiads, Haworthias, Peperomias and Sempervivum.

www.cichlidrecipe.com/orchids/galleries.asp

This is a link to a non-succulent site, but I thought I'd include it anyway since it contains excellent high quality photographs of a large number of named orchids. I found it very useful to be able to check the appearance and colour of a particular species or hybrid.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of 2004 will be held on December 7th. This will be our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the **Christmas Social**. After receiving some reports from this year's Committee and choosing the Committee for next year, we'll get on with the real business of enjoying some food and drink and chatting with fellow branch members.

Drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do remember to bring along some items of food for the buffet table.

There will also be a "bran tub" lucky-dip. Simply bring along a wrapped present (suggested value is £2 or therabouts) and place it into the tub at the start of the meeting. Later in the evening you'll get a chance to take a present out of the tub. If you're the last person to draw from the tub, we'll have to hope that the present you pull out is different from the one which you put in!

In order to give the Committee members a chance to participate in the festivities, there will be no plant sales, sundries sales, table show or library at the December meeting. (Although Philip will be willing to accept back any library books which you wish to return).

Finally, for Committee members, a reminder that there is a committee meeting on the 15th of November. **Please bring along your annual reports** so that these can be included in the December newsletter. Any format (handwritten, typewritten, or as a file on floppy disk) is acceptable.

Forthcoming Events

Mon	15 th	Nov	Southampton	Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue
Fri	19 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	"South American Cacti for Flowers" – Peter Down
Sat	20 th	Nov	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting
Sat	4 th	Dec	Portsmouth	Christmas Social / American Supper
Tue	7 th	Dec	Southampton	AGM and Christmas Social / American Supper
Fri	17 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	AGM and Christmas Social / American Supper

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