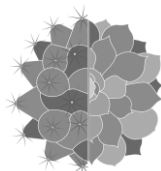


# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Branch Secretary

David Neville  
6 Parkville Road  
Swaythling  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO16 2JA  
davnev@btopenworld.com  
(023) 80551173 or  
07974 191354

### Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah  
29 Heathlands Road  
Eastleigh  
Hampshire  
SO53 1GU  
sotonbess@gmail.com  
(023) 80261989

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## Editorial

Christmas and the New Year are behind us now and the days are already beginning to get longer. Of course, the worst weather of winter is probably still ahead of us, but it has been relatively mild (and wet) over the past month. The fact that the weather is so mild does mean that it tempting to give some of the plants in our collection some water but this isn't a good idea since temperatures can drop quite quickly and plants would not get their proper rest.

## Last Month's Meeting

Before we started the main meeting, David mentioned he had an announcement to make. And it was not going to be a nice start – he had told us a couple of meetings ago that one of our members, Mike Mansbridge, who used to attend our monthly meetings regularly, had been diagnosed with cancer, and we had known that it was at a stage where he would not recover. However, his condition worsened quite suddenly and he passed away last Sunday. David mentioned that Mike Hill and Robin Caddy had visited Mike recently.

Adrian welcomed everyone who was present, and he mentioned we had a couple of apologies of absence. Glenn Finn's father had passed away just a couple of days earlier and so Glenn was not here today. And Adrian also mentioned that Ian Acton had told him that he would not be at the AGM.

### 2023 AGM

Adrian started off the AGM and said that our President Peter Down wanted to say a few words. Peter said that on behalf of all the members, he thanked all the committee for their work. And he also thanked the people who bring plants for sale and support branch activities by buying raffle

tickets. Peter also mentioned that next year would be the branch's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

David Neville said that for those who didn't know, Peter was a founder member of the branch back in 1954. He used to knock on the doors of anyone who had a cactus plant in their window or conservatory, and he also put an advert in the Echo newspaper mentioning that a local branch was going to be set up. David said that Peter has been in attendance for almost all of the meetings, although he was also busy doing national service in the early days. His BCSS membership number is a number is a 4-digit one! He encouraged the committee to think of a way of celebrating the anniversary in 2024.

Adrian proceeded to discuss his report as Branch Chairman. He had submitted a written report which was in the December newsletter, and he mentioned that we had lost some members of our committee in recent years (Ivor and Tony had passed away and Bruce's health meant he couldn't attend meetings) so we did elect three members to the committee a year ago, to try and get some of the newer members on board. He himself was going to be stepping down now, and sadly we will also be losing Amelia following her house move. We've held one committee meeting during the year but there has also been quite a lot of discussion via email. In the committee meeting that we did hold, three people used Zoom to attend the meeting "virtually" and Cath helped to set that up and it seemed a workable solution for those who could not attend in person. He was sorry that he was stepping down but he wouldn't stop attending meetings - he has learnt a lot and was glad to have meet many interesting people. The meetings that we have had have included presentations from our own members and those have been very good and of course we also try and invite speakers from outside. There have also been a few new members at our monthly meetings and the meeting attendances seem to be around 20 to 25 for most of the meetings, and although that is lower than before the pandemic, it is still buoyant compared to other branches, and the speakers who visit us often comment on this.

Adrian quipped that he was sure that people don't just come to the meetings because we offer free

refreshments during the meetings. Finally he thanked everybody on the committee and he singled out David Neville for a special mention because of all the work he does to keep the branch running and heading in the right direction.

As Adrian ended, Richard proposed a vote of thanks for the excellent service that Adrian has provided to the branch over the years.

Adrian ended by wishing everyone all the best and he wished everyone a happy and prosperous and peaceful new year. Going forwards, he hoped to be here for a good proportion of the meetings. He proceeded to hand over to David.

David said he hadn't yet got a complete programme of events for next year, this is something we normally try and arrange to hand out to the membership at each AGM. He mentioned that the number of speakers on the BCSS list of speakers has plummeted by around 75% since the start of the pandemic, and it is now quite difficult to find people willing to come out and speak to us. Many of the speakers stopped travelling and giving talks, and of course the members are also getting older each year, and many don't like driving late at night. We meet mid-week which means that a speaker might need to take time off work if they have a significant distance to travel. We have tried to come up with some other ideas for our meetings, to reduce the reliance on the external speakers. And, usually when we have self-generated meetings, they tend to be just as popular as the meetings where we do have a visiting speaker. We already have a cultivation and propagation evening and the plant focus meeting and he has been thinking of having a new meeting format where people present their 10-12 "favourite" plants and talk about them. It will be nice to see some plants in the flesh and we would probably only need 4 volunteers to hold this type of meeting.

One of the speakers he had planned to book for April was Stephen White, who has a Plant Heritage National Collection of Aeoniums, and Peter lives nearby in Bishopstoke, but unfortunately he told David that he is not giving talks any more, so David said he still has some gaps to fill in the programme. He is also looking for someone to speak to us in February, and because of the possibility of bad weather he normally chooses someone local - he was planning to invite Cliff Thompson to come and talk to us, but Cliff had been on a trip to Argentina so David has not yet been able to confirm this.

If anyone has any ideas of how to increase the attendance at our meetings, please let David know. Many members don't attend our meetings at all and

some only come for a couple of meetings. Lennie said that one member he knew stopped coming to our meetings because of the time of our meeting, because she works, it was difficult to attend. David said that Glenn comes in straight from work (or has to go on a late shift after the meeting) so he is aware that it can cause a problem for some members. Having a meeting at the weekend would be difficult because people are often doing other things, but Portsmouth and Isle of Wight both hold their meetings on a Saturday. So do other branches like Havering, Gloucester, Surrey, Bristol, Reading, and Woking.

I asked whether we could consider holding one meeting on a different day of the week or at a different time, to allow people who can't attend the current meeting time to come along but David felt that would be confusing. Others did suggest holding a trip or a visit somewhere and seeing if people would join in with that. Paul Maddison asked if we have internet access at the hall (we don't, but some members have a mobile phone and could set up a local hotspot), to allow people who can't come to join a meeting using Zoom. Ben is another person who works and he has a long distance to travel to get to the meeting. David mentioned some branches have stopped having meetings in August, and Portsmouth and Reading are two of the branches who do this - although for us, our attendance in August is not any different from the other months. Portsmouth have also decided to not have a meeting in December any more. Tom mentioned that there are some branches who have switched to doing Zoom meetings for part of their calendar, and the BCSS also have a monthly zoom meeting which used to clash with our meeting, but this is due to move to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month.

Adrian suggested we move on to the third of the main officer's reports. Alice had intended to submit something for inclusion in the newsletter but she hadn't sent this to me. David had spoken to her and said she is in a difficult situation at present because she is self-employed, and her husband works in Southampton and she can't leave home until he reaches home. She has missed a number of meetings this year and said she is happy to carry on as treasurer, but she will have trouble getting to meetings for the foreseeable future. She hasn't got a balance sheet ready but hopes to have this done by the new year. If anyone else in the branch would like to take over, she is willing to hand over the reins. Doing the accounts is not very complicated and it's been made easier in recent times because we no longer charge for catering or plant sales commission, or any library fees. No one present at the meeting seemed to be biting at the bit.

Adrian invited comments from the rest of the committee members, if they wanted to say anything. Richard said as Librarian, he had not submitted a report since we don't charge for use of the library any more. Borrowing has continued at a fairly low level, but a lot of people do browse the books without borrowing anything so perhaps the usefulness of the library is under-represented. We did buy a new book last year, which is the Italian Society's book on Aeoniums. He said he would finish with a literary quotation from W H Auden – "We are here on earth to help others - why on earth the others are here for, I don't know."

Ben handled Plant Sales after Bruce's retirement and he said he had submitted a report which was included in the December newsletter. It had been a strong year, and we had 11 different members bring in plants for sale, and Ben also handles the sales for the visiting speakers. Over the year, we had total sales of £900, which is pretty good, considering that our plants are priced at the low range of the spectrum. He said that we need to thank Ian Acton - he came to 8 meetings and he hands all money from his plant sales back to the branch, and this year he raised £154 for the branch. Ian brings along a choice selection of species of both cacti and succulents. He's been supporting the branch for many years and we did give him a bottle of Scotch whisky before. Ben thanked everyone who does bring the plants for sale and it's one of the big draws for our meetings, we can always see a good number of people looking through the plants at each meeting.

With catering, David mentioned that for all of the cakes offered each month and also the milk for the tea and coffee, Glenn buys these supplies and donates them to the branch - even though we could well afford to pay him, he refuses to accept any money. We should think of a way of thanking him for what he does for us.

David also mentioned the newsletter and branch website. The newsletter each month does take me a couple of days of effort since I make a recording at each meeting, but I need to listen to the full recording and compare with my hand-written notes and then also look up and check all the plant names which were mentioned. This is not straightforward since everyone has different accents and the names aren't always fully intelligible. Anyway doing this job has taught me quite a lot about all sorts of plants given the varied selection of speakers we have had over the years, and I do refer to a lot of different websites for reference purposes. I did tell David that at one meeting, I was willing to host a live internet session where I can show people what sort of useful websites there are out there, and David said that I

should mention this in advance to give our members a chance to tell me about what cacti and succulent websites they consider to be useful and that would be worth sharing with our members.

Running the website is more straightforward. David provides with a write up for each talk ahead of time and this is published on the website, to give people an idea about the speaker and the meeting content. The website does contain a listing of all our library books (including the ones that might not be on display) as well as downloadable PDFs of each of the monthly newsletters going back a couple of decades. The website format does not use the standard BCSS template and David said I should take a look at the Manchester BCSS website since that has a lot of content (more than ours) and it does use the new format, which is based around Wordpress. Paul Madisson mentioned he couldn't access our website when using Firefox if he specified the full URL but it did work if he left off part of the URL – he had reported this to the hosters and Richard and I asked him to pass us more details so that we could investigate further.

We moved on to discussing the choice of committee for 2024. With Adrian standing down, we needed a new chairman and **Cathryn Quick** had volunteered for this role - chair / chairperson is her preferred title. **Jane Williams** was willing to continue being the vice chair. For Secretary, no one was willing to put their name forward so **David Neville** would continue. For Treasurer, David feels it may be time to find a replace for Alice for the reasons stated previously and it may be prudent to ask this at the January meeting when more people will be in attendance but **Alice Jankovec** will continue for now. For the newsletter/website I (**Vinay Shah**) was willing to continue doing those tasks. For Librarian, Richard White did want to step down since his mother is now 95 years old and increasingly frail - **Mike Hill** has agreed to join the committee and take on that role, and Mike and Richard had discussed what the job entails earlier today. Catering will continue to be handled by **Glenn Finn**, and **Ben Turner** is happy to carry on with plant sales.

With publicity, Amelia Herbert is standing down and we have no nominations but Lennie said he had taken on the Facebook page from Alice some time ago. Richard White will continue on the committee without a specific role and both **Lennie Kwan** and **Richard White** were re-appointed. We still have a vacancy and David had talked to **Andrew Rooke** and he was willing to join the committee. He lives in Christchurch so might not attend committee meetings, but he is a regular attendee at our branch meetings.

For auditors, we need to check if Colin and Lorraine Bielckus are willing to perform this role, once they had done our accounts for the current year. David had also noted the need to discuss whether an assistant treasurer who is able to attend meetings could handle taking in cash receipts and paying the speakers etc. He wondered whether Cath would be willing to do this role and she said yes, she was willing. The person would need to be a signatory on our bank account.

Ben asked if we would be doing shows again, going forwards. David said the New Forest Show is held mid-week and without Ivor and Bruce it would be difficult. We also need a large collection of display-sized plants. A small show might be somewhat easier. Shows also tend to make a profit and that doesn't help in terms of reducing our cash surplus. In the first weekend in May, there is the Gardener's World Show which is hosted at Beaulieu Motor Museum and we might get an invite to that. Amelia had been there once and said it was a waste of time, but we won't be charged any costs if we represent the society and the AGS may be there. Lennie asked whether we could perhaps do a combined show with Portsmouth or the Mammillaria Society?

For the January meeting, we will have talks by our own speakers and so far David had volunteers in the form of Ben, Cath, Tom Radford and Mike Hill (on Sinningias). Paul Maddison said he could do something but his talk was actually best suited for the month of April. David said he also needed someone to help with loading the different presentations onto a windows laptop and Ben agreed to handle this.

With this the AGM came to a close and we could tuck into the food which was arranged along the side of the hall.

*Vinay Shah*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **February 6<sup>th</sup>** and the title of the talk and the speaker are due to be confirmed by David Neville. Because of the possibility of bad weather, we try and find a local speaker and David would try and see if Cliff Thompson from Portsmouth Branch was free to speak to us on that occasion. An email will be sent and the website will be updated as soon as possible.

David is also finalising the plans for the talks for the rest of 2024, and the branch website will be updated as soon as possible with the titles of those meetings.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Isle of Wight	Show and Tell. Bring along a plant and tell us all about it
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Portsmouth	Turbinicarpus (Julian Cooke)
Tue 6 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Southampton	details to be confirmed. (check branch website)
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Isle of Wight	Conservation
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Feb	Portsmouth	Bring your unnamed plants for ID

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

Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/southamptonbcsc>