

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

March 2011



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

vvshah@clara.co.uk
(023) 80261989

Editorial	1
Announcements	1
Last Month's Meeting	1
Plants of Interest	1
Tresco - Abbey Gardens	1
Table Show Results	6
Forthcoming Events	6
Next Month's Meeting	6

Editorial

In the past three weeks, I've seen several signs that Spring is almost here, with both snowdrops and daffodils in flower. The weather is going through a changeable phase and although there was a sign of warmer weather at the weekend, I did also find a layer of sleet on the car on Sunday! I have yet to water any of my cacti or succulents but assuming that temperatures do not take a turn for the worse, I will probably give them their first drink of the year this coming weekend.

Announcements

If you haven't done so yet, please **renew your BCSS membership** – this can be done using the form supplied with the December Journal, or online via the BCSS website. Doing so right away will avoid delays in the receipt of the March Journal.

Now, some advance notice of a **Convention** to be organised by Reading & Basingstoke Branch on Sunday 31st July, to celebrate **the 90th birthday** of their branch member and former BCSS President **Gordon Rowley**. The Convention will be held at Swallowfield Parish Hall, Swallowfield, Reading, RG7 1QX and the doors open at 10:00am. The speakers will be Graham Charles, Len Newton and Nigel Taylor plus a short presentation from Gordon himself. Plant, book and pot sales will be available. Details from: www.reading-and-basingstoke-bcss.co.uk

Admission is by ticket only at £20, to include morning and afternoon refreshments and a buffet lunch. It is expected that the event will quickly sell out once these details are announced in the March Journal, so David Neville will ask at today's meeting whether you plan to attend.

The society has ended up with surplus seed and so the seed distributor is making the following offer :

30 packets of seed (his choice) for £4.00 + £1 postage (UK). Orders should be sent to Jeff Capel, 9 Aspen Close, Berrydale, Northampton NN3 5HS. Make cheques payable to BCSS. Alternatively add an extra 50p and pay via PayPal on the BCSS website: <http://www.bcss.org.uk/seedpayment.php> However you order, ensure you include your name, delivery address and membership number.

Some sad news: **Bill Weightman** finally lost his battle with cancer and passed away a week ago. Bill spoke at our branch many years ago, and he had a close association with John Pilbeam, having taken many of the plant pictures which illustrated John's earlier books.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Ivor Biddlecombe had brought in one plant he wanted to talk about – it was a Copiapoa which had inadvertently got a soaking through the winter. The plant looked OK, but he suggested it might be the last time you saw it. Paul Klaassen mentioned that on his last trip to Chile, he saw Copiapoas standing in mud because of exceptionally heavy rainfalls.

Tresco - Abbey Gardens

Our speaker in February was one of our own members - Ben Turner. He mentioned that he was used to sitting in the audience and listening to others, but today he was going to talk about Tresco, one of the Isles of Scilly. He asked if anyone had been there, and a few people put their hands up. In the year 2000, he had won a scholarship to work in the gardens there, as part of a National Diploma course. This proved to be a life-changing experience for him, and got him interested in Mediterranean plants.

Tresco is unique in many ways. It has a history stretching back to pre-historic times, with evidence of Neolithic burial chambers. In Roman times, a small colony was established there and apparently they introduced rabbits who ran wild. In the 12th

Century, Benedictine monks from Tavistock settled and built the Priory of St Nicholas. There is a wonderful harmony that exists on Tresco and it is very spiritual. Most importantly, it enjoys a very mild climate thanks to the Gulf Stream.

Prior to 1830, the island was impoverished and over populated. It was dangerous on the islands and also for ships passing by, due to the shallow seas. Salvaging from the wrecks was an occupation for some. For this reason you see evidence from the ships in the gardens, such as ship's figureheads. In 1834, Hertfordshire landowner Augustus Smith left the trappings of aristocracy and took out a 99 year lease from the Duchy of Cornwall. He initially lived on St. Mary's and then moved to Tresco. He built Tresco Abbey in the shadow of the Benedictine Priory and it is now the family home of the Dorian Smiths. Robert Dorian Smith is the current lease owner - apart from St Mary's, the other islands are owned by the Duchy. Augustus was an industrious chap and he reformed the islands. He sent half the population back to the mainland, and set up compulsory education, with a fee of 1d to attend school and 2d if you didn't! He realised the unique microclimate on the island and set up the early parts of the gardens.

Tresco is probably the only garden to have its own heliport. Helicopters fly in from Penzance (Eastern Green) and these go to Tresco and St. Mary's. It's quite an experience to go over on the Russian Sikorsky helicopter – but it's not cheap (currently around £100 for a day return). The flight time is some 20 minutes. Going by ferry from Penzance is also possible, but this takes up to 3½ hours. In the summer, the heliport doubles up as the cricket green. Cricket is one of the most important sports on the island, as is gig rowing.

We saw a front view of the garden's main entrance (this has since been repositioned), with plants growing up all over the entrance arch. Parts of the garden are built on the ruins of the St. Nicholas priory - Augustus had been told it was good luck to build on the site of the old ruins, and overall it's been a great success and worked out very well.

We saw Aeoniums growing on the Abbey arch, and Ben believed this was *Aenoium cuneatum* which grows like a weed on the island, in the same manner as houseleeks (*Sempervivum*) but of course it is more tender. The plant comes from the Canary Islands. The Abbey was originally used as a burial ground up to the 18th century, until a church was established. One of the main issues for Augustus was shelter – the island is lashed around by the

winds and one of his means to establish protection was to plant hedges, using *Quercus ilex*, the evergreen oak. We saw views looking back from the middle terrace. Ben mentioned there are three terraces – the lower terrace is more shady and houses Australian/New Zealand plants and those from cooler climates. The middle terrace contains typical Mediterranean plants and those from Mexico, and South America. The top terrace is free draining and receives lots of sun – this contains some of the South African plants such as Protea, and Restio.

The new Abbey is built next to the old Priory. It is quite unique in having an old ship's bridge connect the Abbey to the hermitage on the other side of the cliff. When building on the island, stone was cut from the cliffs and this left a perfect area for growing succulents; now known as the Succulent Cliff. The bridge came from the Schiller, a German passenger vessel which ran aground in 1875. There are stories which say the Germans didn't bomb the islands as a mark of respect to the Schiller. There are many other such stories and legends - in the 18th Century, the admiral of HMS Firebrand washed ashore at St. Mary's and was relieved of his gold by a local lass. Ben also mentioned that Jesus was reputed to have visited the islands, but he wasn't sure about this tale's authenticity.

We saw the long flower spike of *Furcraea longaeava* which is related to Agaves. Augustus had many connections and links with the intrepid sailors and boatmen of the day who used to stop off at the islands, and he did deals with them to bring back plants from overseas. Ben showed pictures of the containers and barrels used to bring the plants back to England. These days, plants can be moved across the world in a matter of days, but it was a very different story in those days. Tresco can be said to enjoy a Mediterranean climate, and there 5 such zones in the world – the Mediterranean basin, the Western Cape of South Africa, the Western region of Australia, Chile and California.

The gardens are bisected by various avenues – the “Long Walk” goes from East to West and the “Lighthouse walk” is from North to South. We saw the wonderful shelter hedges of evergreen Oak established by Augustus and these were some 70-80 feet tall. One of the rites of passage - an initiation for young gardeners - was to have to cut the top of these hedges. Luckily he had no fear of heights. Next we saw some bedding, which was composed of *Chlorophytum comosum*, the spider plant. These plants were chopped down in winter but they came up again in the spring. From the audience, Ian Acton

said he had also grown this outdoors. At the top of the Lighthouse Walk is "Father Neptune" a weathered ship's figurehead and the guardian of the garden. We saw a shot of several plants and it was hard to believe you were in England, when you saw plants such as *Phoenix canariensis* and *Sophora microphylla* from New Zealand growing in the open.

Two disasters have befallen the gardens. In January 1987, a prolonged period of cold weather led to the loss of 80% of the plants in the garden. There was a major effort to restock the gardens by obtaining plants from various other gardens in the UK and the Continent, and Kew. The next was a hurricane in 1989 where many of the tall plants being grown for shelter were damaged by gales; apart from the oak (*Quercus ilex*), the Monterey cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa* were also being grown. We saw a Roman altar which had been discovered down a well in St. Mary's. Lampranthus grows well and the island had its own selected variety. The Mediterranean garden was established after the hurricane. This garden is a work of art and in the centre we saw a "Shell House" – this was an elaborate mural of shells from around the island and further afield (they also have property in Barbados), created by Lucy Dorian Smith who was an artist. Being on an island, the gardeners have to deal with rain and we saw one of the young gardeners Alistair modelling a set of Fishermen's oilskins – when it rains, it really does rain! We also saw Ben with a group of visitors – there are a number of guided tours and sometimes they get an influx from cruise ships which stop by.

Now to see some of the plants. Ben mentioned that he would cover a large variety of plants, and go through them in alphabetical order. Aeoniums are rife across the garden and also the island, some of the plants having escaped. We saw an *Aeonium arboreum* type with wonderful big heads, the very popular *A. arboreum* 'Schwarzkopf' with dark heads and a small *A. cuneatum*. These do very well, and in the banks in the amphitheatres, they were growing like a weed and had filled the whole bank. Most Aeoniums are monocarpic and we saw *A. tabuliforme* growing on vertical surfaces tucked into the walls. Another monocarpic species is *Aeonium nobile* which was doing well, growing in the shingle and through the Mytex weed control fabric – it has a fabulous orange/red inflorescence.

Next was a geophyte – the term covers plants which are not quite succulent, but consist of a bulb/corm/tuber. This was Agapanthus, from South Africa. These grow like weeds and grow all over the

island down to the heliport. There are some wonderful colours amongst the hybrids and you can also get white flowers which are more expensive than the blue forms. One of the money spinners in the garden (other than tourism) is the cut flower trades. Early narcissus are very popular at Covent Garden and they can flower as early as October, but this trade has all but gone. However, agapanthus is still harvested, and we saw pictures of how the gardeners got up at 5am, went to the sand dunes at the South edge of the island and harvested the naturally established agapanthus. The cut flower spikes are carefully laid out and sent for packing, and boxed up by 9am, ready to be put on the first helicopter out. On the mainland, they are put on a train and would reach Covent Garden that same afternoon.

Now for true succulents – including his favourites - Agaves and Aloes. Some of the agaves here grow immense since they love the free draining soil and the climate. We saw *Agave ferox*, *A. variegata marginata* and *A. guiengola*. Being monocarpic they eventually flower and then die. We saw the flower spike of *A. ferox*, with a young pup growing at the side of the parent plant. It was amazing to get this to flower in Britain! Agaves are architectural plants with their form and leaf structure. We also saw an *Agave ferox* fountain, made from bronze and designed by Tom Leaper. It was a wonderful feature in the octagonal pool in the Mediterranean garden. Moving on to Aloes, *Aloe striatula* produces impressive yellow flower spikes. It has some cold tolerance and you can get away with growing it in some mainland gardens. Another geophyte is *Amaryllis belladonna*. The leaves come up in the spring and then die down, to be followed by wonderful spikes bearing pink flowers. Anigozanthos is the Kangaroos paw, an Australian native. We saw hybrids and a variety of *A. manglesii*. These had wonderful multicoloured flowers.

Araucaria heterophylla is the Norfolk Island pine and it is closely related to the Monkey Puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*) and the Wollemi pine which also goes under the name of the dinosaur tree. This was thought to be extinct, but was rediscovered in a remote gorge in the Blue mountains near Sydney in 1994. It is not completely hardy but it makes a wonderful structural tree and an ideal indoor Christmas tree. In habitat, it came close to extinction because passing ships used to cut the trees down since they made perfect ship's masts.

Banksia grandis is a member of the Proteaceae, and the genus is named after Joseph Banks who

discovered the plants at Botany Bay. They have a quite incredible flower, which is unlike the South African proteas. *Beschorneria yuccoides* is relatively hardy and has a wonderful inflorescence – it is related to the agaves. There was quite an incredible coloration on the flower, with combinations of green and red. *Senecio repanda* is now known as *Brachyglottis repanda* and the slightly furry leaves can be used as toilet paper if you are caught short in the garden. Brugmansia goes under the name of “Angels Trumpets” and we saw *Brugmansia sanguinea*. The plant is considered lethal - it contains a narcotic like LSD and locals in South America have been known to fall asleep near it and not wake up. Another geophyte is *Canna indica* which is also grown on the mainland. *Crassula coccinea* is a wonderful plant not seen much in cultivation these days. It has spectacular red flowers and grows like a weed on Tresco – but for him it didn't survive that long in cultivation on the mainland. *Crinum moorei* has a wonder big flower spike but is not as hardy as *Amaryllis belladonna*.

Continuing after the mid meeting break, we saw the Australian tree fern, *Cyathea medullaris*. It has bigger fronds than Dicksonia which comes from New Zealand. *Cordyline indivisa* is larger leaved and more tender than *Cordyline australis* and Gardener Roy Lancaster grows it at his home in Chandlers Ford. *Dicksonia antarctica* is the Tasmanian tree fern and is available from garden centres. The Maori have a lot of symbology and the unfurling frond is known as the koru – it is their symbol for the regeneration of nature.

Tresco has a number of friendly weeds - *Echium pininana* from Madeira and the Canary islands is rife through the island and has spread everywhere. It was quite a popular subject on the mainland until we had some really cold winters. It just seeds everywhere in the cracks in the driveway and guttering, and forms 15-20 feet violet- blue flower spikes. *Echium wildpretii* from Tenerife is slightly smaller but just as attractive as *E. pininana* – it has bright red flower spikes against silvery foliage. It tends to be biennial but dies after flowering and produces a lot of seed. Ericas grow amongst the Fynbos in South Africa and we saw *E. cerinthoides*. They are highly endemic to South Africa and often found in a limited distribution. This was endangered but has been re-introduced in good numbers. Another weed is *Erigeron karvinskianus* which is a type of daisy and which seeds down everywhere. *Erythrina crista-galli* is from South America and also known as the coral tree because of its incredible waxy red flowers which grow on long flower spikes. He has got an example of this through the last

couple of winters with some protection. The plant forms a large caudex.

Eucomis come from South Africa and we saw a couple of different species – *E. bicolor* and *E. comosa* which has long leaves and fairly tall flower spikes. Eucalyptus is another very prolific plant, and Tresco holds one of the National collections. *Eucalyptus paucifolia* ssp. *niphophila* (the ghost gum) has beautiful bark which is pale and smooth. It is hardy and can be grown in Hampshire and there's a large one at Sparsholt. Alice Jankovec said she had to have one taken out of the garden because it was leaning over. In their habitat in Australia, the roots go deeper due to the drier conditions. In Tresco these trees need to be topped to avoid them from getting too tall and toppling over in the strong winds. Of course cutting them back tends to encourage more vigorous growth!

Moving on to Euphorbia, we saw *E. mellifera* (the honey spurge) which was a good example of a nice shrubby plant. The succulent Euphorbias grow well in Tresco and we saw a planting featuring *E. ingens* and *E. horrida* and the like. People know the sap of Euphorbias is an irritant, and Ben told a story of how a trekker in the veldt had terrible toothache and a native poured Euphorbia sap into the chap's gum – after a few minutes of agony the sap burnt through the gum and killed the nerve, curing the toothache. This is not recommended!

Ochagavia carnea is a Chilean bromeliad with a pink inflorescence and is often confused with *Fasciata bicolor* which has a blue inflorescence in the centre with wonderful red leaves round the outside. *Furcraea longaevea* and *F. parmentieri* hail from Mexico. They are related to Agaves and flower at end of their life. When he was on the island, they had their best ever recorded flowering with 120 plants flowering across the island. The flower spikes were huge and compared well to the hedging's height of 70 feet. The sulphurous yellow flower is very elaborate and the plant is very easy to propagate since it produces little bulbils which fall down by the 100s or 1000s. He brought some of these back and all grew but they didn't survive the recent harsh winters.

Another weed is *Geranium maderense*, which forms flower heads a couple of feet across. The dead leaves act as a support for the flower heads, so don't remove them. Another South African native is *Greyia sutherlandii*, which comes from Natal. It has red bottle-brush flowers. *Gunnera magellanica* is from South America and it has huge leaves which in the right conditions can grow to several feet across.

Another geophyte of interest is the red-flowered *Haemanthus coccineus*. It flowers in autumn before the leaves form. The ginger lily, *Hedychium densiflorum* is also a geophyte, and we saw a cultivar called "Assam Orange". It can survive on the mainland with a winter mulch. *H. gardnerianum* has various forms with flowers in pure white, cream and orange. Ipomea is a climber which on the mainland is grown as an annual. *Isoplexis canariensis* has attractive spires of flowers and is known as the Canary Foxglove. It is not as hardy as the true foxglove and isn't a biennial either. The Chilean wine palm *Jubaea chilensis* is almost extinct in Chile because the fermented stem of the trunk is used to make a popular alcoholic beverage. It is almost hardy but not quite. Kniphofia is a popular garden plant with upright flower spikes.

Next was *Lachenalia aloides* "Nelsonii" which has yellow flowers. Ben mentioned he was a member of the South African Bulb Group, and he found that growing succulents and bulbs seems to go hand in hand. Lampranthus produces a riot of colour but it is a bit of a weed. It loves the sunny position against the granite. We saw some specific Tresco hybrids, including one called "Tresco Apricot". Leptospermum is also known as the teatree and is used a lot in cosmetics. It makes a great garden plant. *Leucadendron argenteum* needs a lot of exposure to grow well, and it grows right up to the beach. The seed has to be exposed to smoke to allow better germination. We saw another *Leucadendron* hybrid called "Safari Sunset". *Leucospermum cordifolium* – the sugar bush – is adored by the birds. The rocket pin cushion – *Leucospermum reflexum* – produces tall flowering stems as high as 15-20 feet- the blazing orange/red flowers look like a firework, and the wonderful grey foliage looks like trailing smoke.

A plant with beautiful orange bark which also produces lots of white flowers is *Luma apiculata*. It is in the same family as myrtle and also goes under the name *Mrytus luma*. *Magnolia campbellii* was best viewed from the top terrace, to see the pink flowers. Ben also showed a view looking out to sea and some of the other islands, such as Samson, St, Agnes, St Mary's, Bryher and St. Martin's. From South Africa, *Melianthus major* has clusters of red flowers. It was growing next to *Crocasmia* "Lucifer" which has deep red flowers and is very hardy. *Metrosideros excelsa* comes from New Zealand and is known as the New Zealand Christmas tree. It flowers in our winter and comes from the North Island. It has bright red flowers and outdoors, the plants do get pretty big and look quite a sight, smothered in red – it also forms aerial roots.

Musa basjoo is the Japanese hardy banana. There were also sterile bananas, which are the ones grown commercially for banana production. Narcissus used to be important commercially up to the 1970s, and we saw *Narcissus nobilis* which can flower in October or November. *Passiflora x exoniensis* is a passion flower cross with red/magenta flowers and it can just about tolerate freezing temperatures. Another plant for big leaves is *Paulownia tomentosa*, the foxglove tree. If you pollard or stool (prune) the plants you don't get flowers - but you do get massive leaves.

Pelargoniums are popular in succulent collections and we saw an example of the hybrid "Splendide". Pelargoniums are also used as bedding and we saw plants laid out in the pattern of a Union Jack. Sometimes other plants such as Petunias are used for the display. Phormiums are architectural plants from New Zealand and we saw a cultivar called "Maori Sunset". We also saw a Chilean bamboo, Chusquea.

The king protea *Protea cyanoides* is found growing on the slopes of Table Mountain, in the Cape. *Protea nerifolia* also does well on the top terrace and flowers from September/October onwards. *Puya chilensis* is just as imposing as the better known *Puya raimondii*. It is very well established on the top terrace and produces massive flower spikes. Ben mentioned that there were stories whereby Andean sheep wander into the thickets and get trapped in the sharp leaves and end up providing a slow release fertiliser for the plants. In the autumn, the islands are plagued by "twitchers" (birdwatchers). The islands are on a significant migratory course, so you see a lot of unusual birds. The puyas are pollinated by blackbirds who end up getting yellow heads from all the pollen and this can fool some of the birdwatchers!

Restio are reed-like plants from the South African Fynbos and we saw an example in *Rhodocoma gigantea*. *Senecio glastifolius* is considered another weed and is effectively a type of groundsel – it can form huge plants. *Strelitzia reginae* "Mandela" Gold" was originally called "Kirstenboch Gold" and it is a yellow form of the normal reginae. The genus is named after Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz who was King George III's wife and a great benefactor of Kew.

A plant with big leaves is *Tetrapanax papifera* from Taiwan. *Thalia dealbata* is not a carnivorous plant but the flowers seem to trap flies. Another geophyte is *Tigridia pavonia*, the peacock flower. Each flower is beautifully marked but only opens for a day. The

Chinese fan palm *Trachycarpus fortunei* is well worth having in your garden. *Woodwardia radicans* is from Madeira and is also known as the chainlink fern. It is not that hardy. On the other hand, *Yucca gloriosa* is tough as old boots. It is reliable on the mainland and is one of the most cold-hardy succulents. Finally, we ended with *Zantedeschia aethiopica* "Green Goddess" which forms elegant spathes of flowers. With this, Ben ended his tour of exotic and unusual plants from all around the world.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 13 entries in the table show at the February meeting.

	Cacti Neoporteria Copiapoa	- and Succulents - Adromischus
Open	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Copiapoa longistaminea</i>	(1) J Roskilly <i>Adromischus cooperi</i>
	(2) T Smith <i>Copiapoa humilis</i>	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Crassula susannae</i>
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) T Smith <i>Copiapoa laui</i>	(1) J Roskilly <i>Adromischus cooperi</i>
	(2) T Smith <i>Copiapoa barquitensis</i>	(2) J Burnay <i>Adromischus keilhackii</i>
	(3) T Smith <i>Neoporteria laniceps</i>	(3) B Beckerleg <i>Adromischus marianae</i> fa. <i>herrei</i>

Ivor Biddlecombe

Next Month's Meeting

The April meeting will be held on 5th April and will be a continuation of the Cultivation & Propagation Workshop which we held last year and where we ran out of time to discuss all the topics. If you have any problems plants or which are posing cultivation issues – or those that require identification – do bring them along so that our experts can take a look and offer some advice.

The April Table Show will consist of the **Rebutia** Group (cacti) and the **Echeveria** Subgroup (succulents). Please note that you are allowed multiple entries in any of the classes.

The Rebutia group includes *Rebutia*, *Aylostera*, *Cintia*, *Cylindrorebutia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Mediolobivia*, *Neorebutia*, *Setirebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*.

The Echeveria subgroup includes *Echeveria*, *Cremnophila*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Hasseanthus*, *Oliveranthus*, *Pachyphytum*, *Stylophyllum*, *Tacitus*, *Thompsonella* and *Urbinia*.

A committee meeting was due to be held on the 21st of March, but this needs to be rescheduled because some members will be away. David will notify us of a new date at today's meeting.

Forthcoming Events

Sat	12 th	Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz and Member's Talks
Sat	19 th	Mar	Portsmouth	"A Trip to Mesa Gardens" - Ralph Martin
Mon	21 st	Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting – to be rescheduled
Tue	5 th	Apr	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sat	9 th	Apr	Isle of Wight	"Nature in Close-Up" - Colin Haygarth
Sat	16 th	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Sale
Sun	1 st	May	Portsmouth	Display / Plant Sales @ Bishops Waltham Garden Fair
Tue	3 rd	May	Southampton	"Bolivia" - Peter Down
Sat	14 th	May	Isle of Wight	"Brazil" - Cliff Thompson
Sat	14 th	May	Sparsholt	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College (Countryside Day)
Sat	21 st	May	Portsmouth	"Gasterias in the Flesh" - Tony Roberts

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