

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

In May we did see some decent weather although it seems to have changed for the worse just in time for the extended bank holiday! In my conservatory, greenhouse, numerous types of cacti have flowered and plants such as Aloes and Haworthias and Gasterias are also in flower right now. I have been a bit neglectful with the watering and hope the plants haven't been too stressed out by this.

Announcements

On Saturday 9th June **Portsmouth** Branch BCSS will be holding their **Annual Summer Show** at St. Colmans Church Hall, St. Colmans Road, Cosham, Portsmouth. As always there will be a superb display of plants at the show, along with a large selection of plants for sale. Please make a special effort to visit the show and to support the event. We no longer hold a competitive show because the last couple that we organised attracted poor support, so this is a good opportunity to see the wonderful plants from members collections.

On Saturday 30th June the first **South West Cactus Mart** will take place at Portishead Youth Centre, 1 Harbour Road, Portishead, Bristol, BS20 7DD. A number of cactus nurseries and sellers will be in attendance, with a large selection of plants for sale. David Neville will be selling plants at this Cactus Mart, and has an empty seat in the car if anyone would like to go along for the day (and perhaps lend a hand with selling plants!)

Last month a number of our members visited the Open Day put on by Keith and Kathy Flanagan. The

weather held out and it turned out to be a very pleasant day. As before, they have a wonderful collection of plants and it was good to see so many in flower and of course for them to host us.

David has received some copies of the BCSS Information Pack which is now sent to new joiners – this is available for £2.50 and it contains useful cultivation information about specific groups of plants.

Last month I mentioned that the BCSS National Show will take place on 18th August and that Portsmouth will be organising a coach to this event. They have in fact got spare seats and are offering these to Southampton members free(!) on a first come first served basis. The coach would leave Cosham at 7am and return around 8pm. If you are interested in this, please have a word with David Neville, who will give you the Portsmouth contact details.

Last Month's Meeting

Cultivation & Propagation Workshop

David started off the evening by discussing how members had got on with growing the 2 plants that the branch had given out to members in May last year. At the time, they were in 2 inch pots, and you could see from the collection of plants on the front table that one year on, there was a huge variation in how the plants had grown.

We started with *Mammillaria albilanata*. David said that the ones that were in smaller pots did not look like they had been repotted and the plants were just about the same size or slightly larger than when given out. Others however were twice the original diameter. One that David picked out was much whiter and woollier than the others, with plenty of wool between the tubercles. This belonged to Chris Anderson and she confirmed that the plant had been grown in full sun. In contrast, Tom Radford's plant was slight larger but was paler and had more open tubercles and he confirmed that his plant was growing in more shade. David said that there could also be natural variations in each plant, despite them

all being bought at the same time and most likely coming from the same seed batch.

Chris said that her compost mix consisted of John Innes #3 mixed with Irish moss peat (20%) and washed grit (20%). She said that she left the peat out for the mesembs. David said that the pot felt heavy so it had been well watered. Chris said that she hadn't fed the plant at all. David picked up another tight spined plant which was slightly smaller and said that it must also have been grown in a well-lit greenhouse but perhaps the grower had been tight with the watering. He said that Chris's plant was at the size where it might offset - although some clones don't offset, this was around the size that the plant would think about it. Ivor said he had an example of this species one with 5-6 heads, but thought that it must have been damaged to cause this. David nicknamed another plant "Tufty" - this had even more wool and this might again be due to the natural variation between plants. This one had been grown in a greenhouse with bubble wrap.

Moving on to the second species handed out last year (*Echeveria lilacina*), there was an even greater variation between the plants. David said his own plant was suffering from lack of water - he had only started to water it in April. The assembled plants varied in colour with some being bluish pink and other being somewhat paler. The largest plant was 6-7 inches across. The shape of the flower stem on one of the plants was spindly, making him think the plant wasn't being grown in good light, but the owner said this was not the case. Someone else suggested that if you water the plants in the winter the plant will continue to grow but the lower light levels will affect the colouring and the shape slightly. Another plant had a slightly crooked main stem and this was caused by light only reaching it from one side.

One of the best plants was the result of competition between Mark and Sue, and it was Sue's plant which stood out - it was large, and nice and flat with a pinky tinge David said it was amazing to think that this was the result of just one year's growing. Sue said she was growing it on the top shelf and she had repotted the plant three times. A similar plant which she kept in a small pot had remained small. The mix that she and Mark used consisted of 2 parts John Innes with 1 part of a mix of coarse cornish grit and sharp sand. Mark's plant was smaller and he said his had been grown a bit harder. Sue mentioned that she does talk to her plants so perhaps this was an important factor! Also she uses clay pots and one member of the audience wondered whether this allowed more oxygen to get

to the roots. Against that of course is that the fact that plants in clay pots need a lot more watering.

David picked up one plant which he said seemed to be suffering from a lack of light - it was growing well, but the leaves were all open and the stem had grown tall. This plant was indeed being grown under the bench. Another plant looked pale and green rather than pink and Paul admitted he was growing it indoors. David suggested he ask Sue if she wanted to swap plants! David mentioned that we all tend to try and grow too many different plants instead of concentrating on growing a smaller number really well. The results for plants that were potted on regularly and well fed were clear to see. He asked the members to continue growing the plants - we'd ask for them to be brought in again sometime in the future.

The next session was on seed raising. Ivor started by saying that it had been a very bad year for his seed raising efforts, with very few seeds from his earlier plantings coming up. However, batches of seeds sown later on in the year (in the same compost mix) had fared better, so the compost was not the culprit. With alpine seeds (*Lewisia*), he had placed the seed in a poly bag with some grit and left it in the fridge for 2 months. Out of 7 different *Lewisias*, 4 came up and it was possible that the others may still come up later. Two techniques that are worth mentioning here are scarification and stratification. With the former, the outer part of the seed is cut or scratched with a file or a knife, and this allows moisture to reach the inner part of the seed. With the latter, the seed is subjected to a period of low temperatures and this makes the seed think that winter has arrived, and in the next season, it will germinate. Ivor mentioned that mixed *Sempervivum* seed he had obtained from the Alpine society had done well this year, coming up like mustard and cress, whereas he had had poor results in previous years.

Next he showed us a young lithops which had grown 3 heads instead of the normal pair - it had done this for two years in a row. David said it would eventually revert to normal growth. He also mentioned *Opuntia pachypus* - he had been trying to root a flower bud in vermiculite, but nothing had happened so was now going to try a gritty soil mix. David said this was a good way of propagating this plant since it's rare to find this on sale. Ivor also pointed out the seed growing display that we used at our displays and shows - this showed the type of soil used and the various stages involved in planting seeds. His seed mix consisted of John Innes compost that had been sieved through a quarter-inch sieve, mixed with 1/3rd of grit. Sieving the soil made it easier to separate the roots of the plants once they

had grown. Once sown, 3 small pots would fit in a poly bag with a zip seal, and this created a mini-greenhouse which allowed moisture to recirculate. Bruce Beckerleg said he too used the plastic bag method. He has also used glass over a seed tray – although this allows one to monitor progress closely, the seedlings can dry out if you're not careful and this can damage them. Paul mentioned some bags aren't as good as others. Ivor showed us some other plants he had been growing, including *Cheiridopsis denticulata* and the purple form of *Lithops salicola* (cv. "Sato's Violet").

David noticed a pot with some "cocktail onions" and he asked whose this was. Tom Radford said it was actually bulbils of *Haemanthus albiflos*. If you pollinate the flowers of this species, it eventually forms red "berries" – leave these until they ripen and then plant on the surface of some compost. You will eventually see a little green shoot emerge, and this will hunt down into the soil and a plant eventually forms. The bulbil provides a supply of food to the growing plant. This is actually quite similar to how *Clivia* seeds germinate. Some other seedlings of *Haemanthus* were a year and a half old, and another pot contained *Eucomis* seedlings which were 6 weeks old. He grows these out in his garden and finds them to be hardy even though they are reckoned to be tender.

Next, we moved to a couple of groups of seedlings from Mark. These were plants of *Aloe plicatilis*, grown from society seed and just over a year old. Not a bad return for 40p! Both sets of seedlings were doing well, but the two trays illustrated how plants, given a bit more root run and also grown at a slightly warmer temperature (6-7°C min. versus 3°C min.) had grown larger. David mentioned that Cliff Thompson had been searching for this plant since it is rarely offered for sale. Another plant which Mark had grown was *Mammillaria (Mammilopsis) senilis* and this was from self-set seed - sown in 2010, the plants had been pricked out last year and were doing well. He mentioned that using pea shingle on the surface of the compost reduces the need for watering and keeps green moss at bay.

Alice had brought along several pots of different *Anacampseros* seedlings which she had raised from her own seeds. These were about a year old and were beginning to resemble the parent plants. David said some looked a little dry and probably needed a drink. Bruce had brought along a couple of pots of *Haworthia truncata* seedlings. One pot had around 10 plants and the other had just one or two. He explained that both pots had started off with the same number of seeds from the same batch, and growing conditions were identical so it just shows

how variable results can sometimes be. David Neville said that if he planted seeds late, things didn't come up as well – excess heat can inhibit germination. In the days when he used to grow lots of plants from seed, he used to sow in January and February and used to get good results. Bruce mentioned that he had sown *Dudleya britonii* and these had sulked for a long while and eventually came up when temperatures had moderated. David said that *Echeverias* (which are related to *Dudleya*) grow at high altitudes and like moist and cool conditions.

We then moved on to Geoff Card who showed us some of the *Gasterias* he had been growing. He likes this family of plants and mentioned that he grows them mainly under the bench. A hybrid called *Gasteria* "Royal Prince" was around three years old and dark green. One obtained from Holland was *Gasteria Ernestii-rushcii*. *Gasterias* can be propagated from almost any part of a leaf cutting and Geoff show how two young offsets had formed from a *Gasteria excelsa* leaf which had been planted vertically into the soil – this had taken 18-24 months so it can be a slow process – just make sure you let the leaf's cut end dry off before you plant it. Next was one of Margaret Corina's unnamed ex-plants. *Gasteria armstrongii x glauca* had thin leaves and looked different from either parent. The next couple of plants were unnamed plants that he had bought in Holland just because he liked their appearance. Another unnamed variety was a cross between *Gasteria* and *Haworthia* and it had red leaves regardless of whether he grew it on the bench or underneath. However the latest leaf growing from the centre was green so he was keen to see how this would develop. *Gasteria baylissiana x excelsa* was another unusual cross – David said these were very different parents. Geoff ended with a couple of unnamed *Gasterias* which originated from Japan where there is a lot of interest in growing unusual and variegated clones.

After the break we started with a discussion about composts. Dot mentioned that at Wisley, she had found a book called "Growing South African Succulents" by Ian Oliver, who is curator of the Karoo Desert National Botanical Garden. The book contained many different mixes although many of them consisted of the same basic constituents. He recommended adding a lot of sand to the mixes, and she said that Ed Storms' book also recommend this for South African succulents in his book on *Lithops*. She did have problems with using perlite though – sometimes mistaking it for mealy bug!

Ivor said he mixed slow release fertiliser and bonemeal (one tablespoon in ½ gallon of compost)

into his soil when repotting lithops and conophytums, and he felt this helped a little. David summarised by saying that there were a great number of different preferences out there but the majority of people used John Innes and grit.

Next was Ciprian who had brought along a lot of different samples of grit and stones – he said that everywhere he goes, he looks for stone and how easily it breaks. One of his plants was decorated with granite chips from Rumania – his daughter had perhaps gone a little overboard with some of the bigger stones placed around-the neck of the plant.

He has used pure pumice for mesembes and found that Lapidaria had rooted very quickly. David agreed that plants do grow well in pumice. Ciprian said he gets the pumice from Germany – here it is more expensive and can cost £30 for a bag. He also had a Czech grower's mix – this person has one of the best collections of Ariocarpus in Europe. Since the soil is inert, the plants would need to be fed. Next was a mix of 7 different stones, from Rumania- this cost around £3-£4 for a 25kg bag. The person who started the business selling this has been growing plants for 20 years, and he has some amazing plants. He also showed another mix from the Czech Republic. David said it was all very well trying these different mixes but we really needed some trials of how they performed.

David said some growers use Akadama which is a bonsai mix, but this hard to get and also pricey. He suggested Tesco's low dust lightweight cat litter was a good alternative to pumice (other types of cat-litter are NOT suitable). It comes from Denmark, and is slightly perfumed of lavender, but this soon disappears. It costs around £3 for a 10 litre bag. Stirling Baker grows his Haworthias in pure pumice and it is also good for difficult cacti too. He said his mixes were made from John Innes, cat litter, cornish grit (he prefers the sharp grit as it seems to be better than round grit), perlite and also potting grit. Vermiculite is used more for propagation and perlite is suitable for general growing, and it is actually cheaper than grit now. For sale plants, he uses peat and perlite. John Innes varies a lot and it is hard to find a good and reliable source. Ben said he used the Wessex brand. Roffey Brothers used to make a good John Innes mix, but they went bust and the name has since been taken over by someone else, but the new compost is not as good. David said that Pets at Home also have a good type of cat litter if you want to buy in larger quantities than the Tesco type mentioned earlier. Charlie mentioned that Akadama is imported from Japan and supplies were disrupted, causing prices to increase. David said he has also tried using Westlands multipurpose compost mixed

with John Innes and he suggested not to bother – it contains too much fibre and straw and wasn't suitable for small plants. For difficult plants, his mix was 1 part John Innes, 1 part potting grit, 1 part cornish grit, 1 part perlite and 1 part cat litter.

Ben said his mix consisted of 2 parts multi-purpose compost, 2 parts John Innes #3 and then grit or gritty sand. David said that the number after the John Innes type doesn't really matter - 3 is the highest feed strength, but after a couple of months, all the feed will be gone anyway. Bruce mentioned a mix (not sure if this was Miracle Gro) consisting of 70% multi-purpose peat, 23% perlite and 7% vermiculite with added fertiliser. Another mix used was 40% grit, 30% John Innes and 30% multi-purpose peat compost with added fertiliser.

The final session of the evening was a discussion of cristate and monstrose plants, chaired by Ben. He said he was doing a bit of research on cristate plants – their variety and why they grow like this, and he thanked everyone for the plants they had brought in, especially Peter Down for his amazing collection. Ben said there were many reasons for the cresting - it could be genetic, or the plant might have sustained damage including frost. The apical growing point splits into many growing points and the plant grows sideways instead of upwards – a Cleistocactus on the table was a good example. Damage from insects such as aphids and thrips was also a possible trigger.

In terms of literature, there wasn't much out there, but Gordon Rowley's *Teratopia - The World of Cristate and Variegated Succulents* was a good read. The New Zealand Cactus society also had some brief information on their website. Ben said that cristate examples of Mammillaria and Parodia were relatively easily available and also easy to grow, with no extra care needed. The cristate form of *Espositoa ritteri* is quite attractive and it was on a graft. *Mammillaria wildii* was another example. Other plant genera can also exhibit strange growth, fasciation being one example. David said it was much rarer in monocots compared to dicots. Ben said it was also temperature related. A cristate *Euphorbia obesa* looked weird and we also saw *Aeonimum tabuliforme*. One of the problems with cristates is that as they grow on all sides, eventually the plant bodies can push against the soil and they can push themselves off the ground as they get bigger – eventually leading to death. Growing on a graft reduces this possibility. We also saw a cristate Echeveria

Moving on to monstrose plants, *Lophocereus schottii* and *Cereus peruvianus* are two of the more famous examples. David said the Lophocereus is

especially sought after – it looks like a melting candle, with protuberances all over the stem. In a monstrose plant, the fasciation breaks out all over the plant, not just the growing point. There are hundreds and thousands of different examples of cristate plants, and David said that if you visit the large nurseries in Holland where they grow large batches of seedlings, you will often find a few cristate plants growing amongst the normal plants. Bruce mentioned that out of a batch of 5 *Parodia mutabilis* seedlings, 2 were cristate. David Neville said there was a place in the Anza Borrego desert in California where in an area of around ½km there are dozens of cristate ferocacti – and yet away from this spot you’ll find hardly any examples. Sometimes the plants revert and Alice’s columnar plant illustrated this with some cristate growths and other normal growths. Ben mentioned that natural radiation was another possible source of mutations, and indeed Robert Wellens in Holland is doing just this by exposing plants to radiation to see if any strange things happen.

Geoff Card ended the meeting by saying it had been a very interesting evening and thanking everyone for participating and bringing along plants.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 7 entries in the May table show.

| | Cacti – Opuntia | Succulents – Gasteria /Haworthia |
|--------------|--|---|
| Open | (1) B Beckerleg <i>Opuntia invicta</i> | (1) B Beckerleg <i>Gasteria liliputana</i> |
| | (2) - | (2) - |
| | (3) - | (3) - |
| Intermediate | (1) B Beckerleg <i>Opuntia miquelii</i> | (1) B Beckerleg <i>Haworthia maughanii</i> |
| | (2) J Roskilly <i>Opuntia sp.</i> | (2) T Radford <i>Haworthia comptoniana</i> |
| | (3) - | (3) T Radford <i>Haworthia truncata</i> |

Ivor Biddlecombe

Recent Events

Sparsholt Countryside Day

On Saturday 19th May the branch mounted a display at the Countryside Day at Sparsholt Agricultural College near Winchester. Once again we set up our gazebo on the green outside the glasshouses in the Horticultural Department, with a display of mature plants alongside our sales tables. This is the third year that we have attended this event, and once again we had a lot of interest from the visiting public. As always, there were a handful of people who showed some interest in attending the branch, and we hope that in due course we may see some new faces at our meetings. I always think that it is easier for new people to come along to our meetings after they have met us at shows, because many people find it rather daunting to walk into a hall full of strangers. We had good support from branch members in helping to man the stand, and I would like to thank everyone involved for their help.

Rocky Plant Show

On Saturday 26th May the branch undertook a display and sales at the Rocky Plant Show in Wimborne. This event is the summer show of the local group of the Alpine Garden Society. We hadn’t attended the event before; it was arranged by Ivor with his connections to the AGS. We had some interest from the AGS members and the visiting public, although sales were quite slow. The show itself was wonderful, with many interesting and beautiful plants. Once again a number of branch members came along to lend a hand and a good day was had by all. Given the chance we would attend this event again in the future, but it usually clashes with the Portsmouth Branch Show, although this year the AGS show was brought forward by one week in order to avoid the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend, and the Portsmouth Show was delayed by one week for the same reason. When we have the dates for both events in 2013 we will be able to make a decision about whether we can attend next year.

David Neville

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on July 3rd and will feature John Watmough with a talk titled "Colonise and Populate" – which will be a discussion about cultivation.

The July Table Show will consist of the **Mammillaria** group (cacti) and the **Euphorbia** group (succulents). Please note that members can submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The **Mammillaria** group contains 13 genera, including *Mammillaria*, *Bartschella*, *Cochemiea*, *Dolichothele*, *Mamillopsis*, *Mammillyodia* and *Solisia*.

The **Euphorbia** group only contains *Euphorbia*.

A committee meeting will be held at the usual venue (Totton) on June 18th.

Forthcoming Events

| | | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|---------------|---|
| Sat | 9 th | Jun | Portsmouth | Portsmouth Summer Show @ St Colman's Church Hall, Cosham |
| Sat | 9 th | Jun | Isle of Wight | "Peru" - John Hughes |
| Sat | 16 th | Jun | Portsmouth | "Collections of the World" - Ian Woolnough |
| Mon | 18 th | Jun | Southampton | Branch Committee Meeting |
| Tue | 3 rd | Jul | Southampton | "Colonise & Populate" - Cultivation discussion - John Watmough |
| Sat | 14 th | Jul | Isle of Wight | "What I Did Last Winter" - Paul Klaassen |
| Sat | 21 st | Jul | Portsmouth | "My World of Mammillarias" - Tony Roberts |
| Tue | 24 th | Jul- | Southampton | Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst |
| Thu | 26 th | | | |
| Tue | 7 th | Aug | Southampton | "South Africa Tamed - Kirstenbosch & Other Collections" - Eddy Harris |
| Thu | 9 th | Aug | Isle of Wight | Open Evening at Mark Bulloch, 28 Western Road, Shanklin |
| Sat | 18 th | Aug | Portsmouth | no meeting |
| Sat | 18 th | Aug | | BCSS National Show – Godmanchester, Cambs |
| Mon | 27 th | Aug | Portsmouth | Display/Plant Sales @ Emsworth Horticultural Society Show TBC |

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