

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

It's June so I supposed we should not be too surprised to see some sunlight at last. A number of my plants have started to flower over the last couple of weeks, but like others reported at the cultivation workshop, everything seems to be running a few weeks behind. Anyway the mix of rain and sun seems to be working out nicely for the garden plants, although the grass has also started to grow quite fast.

Announcements

Bristol Branch are holding the second **South West Annual Cactus Mart** on Saturday 29th June. There will be many nurseries attending, selling a wide range of cacti and succulents, along with a specialist book seller, and a pot seller who offers a large range of pots, pans and bowls. The address for the event is Portishead Youth Centre, 1 Harbour Road, Portishead, Bristol BS20 7DD. Opening times are from 10am to 2.30pm. If you would like any further details, contact David Neville, who will be attending on the day to sell plants.

BCSS Zone 12, the Sussex Zone, is staging a **Zone Show** on Saturday/Sunday 6th & 7th July at Paradise Park, Avis Way, Newhaven, East Sussex TN37 7LD. David Neville has copies of the schedule if you are interested in entering, but in any case this should be an interesting day out, with lots of lovely plants to admire and a large selection of plants for sale from several nurserymen. The show is open from 10am to 6pm on July 6th, and 9am to 4pm on July 7th.

Two weeks ago, the Branch put on a **successful display** during Sparsholt College's Countryside Day. The weather on the day was reasonable, and we had a steady stream of people visiting our stand and buying plants throughout the day.

Last Month's Meeting

David Neville started off the cultivation evening with a discussion on how it had been a terrible winter. Normally, he would expect to commence watering in mid-March, but this year, due to the low temperatures, he had to wait until mid-April. The situation was compounded by the fact that because of his South Africa trip last Autumn, he'd also stopped watering earlier than normal, in September. So with this extended dry spell, some of his plants have suffered.

The cold weather seems to have delayed the early flowerers but hasn't delayed the later flowerers by the same extent. Plants such as *Turbinicarpus valdezianus* should be in flower now, but weren't. According to members of the bulb societies, the Autumn bulbs are also late. Places like Exbury, which has a large collection of Lachenalias are affected too, with hardly any in flower at the usual time. The Nerines were also 2 weeks late last year. David mentioned that at fruit orchards in Kent, 4 different types of fruit trees are flowering together.

Paul Maddison said he still had hellebores in flower, and most spring bulbs were a month late. A show of hands suggested everyone had given their plants at least one or more waterings. David said when he went to Holland in late March, the weather was like the Arctic! He also mentioned that when judging plants for some of the classes at the 2012 National Show, he had noticed that many of the succulents seemed lush, and this was perhaps due to the dull summer we had last year.

Bruce Beckerleg said he lost an *Ariocarpus retusus* and *A. fissuratus* over the winter. David said you always tended to lose some plants over the winter and you can't explain why or what. Another member said they had 3-4 identical seedlings and one of these just died. Ben mentioned that he had lost an *Edithcolea grandis*, despite using electric heating. David said this was one of the more tender

succulents. In terms of greenhouse heating bills it seemed to be a mixed story - some people thought their bills were higher, but Bruce reported his bill was lower. Some had not yet received a bill for the winter! David ended the session by saying this was a lovely time of the year it is great to see all your plants awakening and putting on new growth soon after you start watering.

Next was **Adrian Bailey** to talk about seed raising. There was a rather large wooden box on the front table, which drew the comment "Heath Robinson". Adrian mentioned that he had been growing plants for 4-5 years but seemed to be quite good at killing seedlings, so he had looked around at some of the available literature and racked his brains for a solution.

He found 3 publications of note. First was an article from May 2007 by Leo Martin, written for a Cactus Convention in Seattle. This described how to grow seedlings under fluorescent lights and using interesting composts such as builder's sand. The "pots" used were polystyrene beakers. The setup produced good yields and was efficient in terms of lighting and heating costs - Leo used to go away for months at a time. He had a rack/shelf with 4 shelves and 88 beakers per shelf. The fluorescent tubes were 9 to 12 inches above the soil. The tubes were "cool white" - there was no need for the special spectrum tubes but Leo's advice was to change these every year.

While discussing lighting I mentioned that were a number of led plant lighting kits being sold on Ebay and these seem to be built with varying types of LEDs, but favouring two wavelengths of light in particular - deep red (660nm) and blue (450nm). The advantage of LEDs is their high efficiency of light emission and hence low heat generation. They also have a long service life.

The second article was from David Quail. He was growing Ariocarpus seedlings under lights and his paper was from 1997, titled "Slow growing cacti from seed". He had an arrangement in his wife's airing cupboard - and had taken possession of the top twelve inches, and installed a shelf, six feet long and fourteen inches wide. Two five feet long fluorescent lights were fixed to the ceiling, so that the bottoms of the tubes would be about six inches from the soil surface. He tried using "Growlux" tubes but did not believe the results from these were any different from the use of standard "Warm white" tubes. He used a 14 hour on/10 hour off cycle and found that the heating effect of the tubelights raised temperatures by approx 10°F.

In 2002, David published an update to the 1997 article. He had moved house and no longer had access to an airing cupboard, so decided to build a light box. This was 1.3m x 0.8m and contained 2 pairs of fluorescent tubes (4 in total). This box was situated in the greenhouse under the staging and he used a 12 hour on/off lighting cycle. A soil warming cable was fitted but only used during the winter months at night time, when the lighting was off. At other times, the heat from the tube lights was sufficient.

Adrian proceeded to describe the light box unit he had. He used 2 x 18 watt tubes, and lighting and heating (of the seed trays) was controlled by independent time switches. The seed trays held 3 x 9 BEF pots each, and these trays were placed on wooden blocks to adjust the distance to the lights. He hardly needed to use the heating, given the heat from the lights. Indeed he had to cut some holes at the top of the unit to allow excess heat to escape. Perhaps reflectors could have been fitted at the top.

There was some discussion with the audience about whether seedlings could take continuous lighting, with no dark periods, or whether some rest period was needed. Alice thought with her own attempts at seed growing, some time in the dark was needed. Adrian said his germination rate was around 80%. David Quail's had varied from 50% to 100% (obviously a lot also depends on the quality of the seed).

Adrian said he kept seedlings in the box for around 3 months compared to David Quail's 3-6 months minimum. He did have some surprises with the watering. Apart from watering at the start, no other water should be needed if the plants are grown in sealed bags (either individual pots or 6 pots to a bag). However, he found that the heat from the lights drove the water down, whereas heating from the base drove the water up. The condensation which formed drips into the edge pots, meaning the central pots were left drier. Water can also get into the folds of the bags and not return to the pots. There can also be a build up of salts in the soil, so the advice was check the plants regularly and soak in water once a week, if necessary. Cacti can be left sealed in the bags for months, but succulent seedlings become too lush and soft, and prefer to have some fresh air from time to time.

Some useful links:

<http://www.living-rocks.com/quail.htm>

<http://www.living-rocks.com/quail2.htm>

<http://www.centralarizonacactus.org/seed.html>

Just before we got to the half time break, David mentioned that the branch was issuing a new plant for members to take and grow on - this was *Mammillaria microhelia*. There were two types on offer – the plant bodies were the same but one variety had pale pink flowers and the other had green/yellow flowers.

After the break, we resumed with a short auction of some largish plants from Ciprian's collection, with funds going to the branch. The plants on offer included a *Notocactus* and large specimens of *Ferocactus chrysacanthus* and *Gymnocalycium saglionis*.

David then spent a few minutes to discuss the plants which the branch had handed out 2 years ago and which members had been asked to bring in. The number of plants on the table was a little smaller than last year. One specimen of *Echeveria lilacina* was a standout - it had grown to a size of 8-9 inches and looked very healthy. It was amazing to think that these plants were in 2 inch pots just a couple of years ago. This was Sue Wilson's plant. David picked it up and commented that it was quite heavy – it was growing in Mark Larter's magic soil mix. Mark's own plant was doing very well too. David lifted Bruce's plant and said it was very light – Bruce said it was being grown in a peat mix. Some of the other plants were smaller or looked less vibrant, and these were perhaps suffering from lack of light or sufficient water.

The *Mammillaria albilanata* plants brought in also displayed a lot of variation. Some were very woolly and others had hardly any wool. This was likely to be due to natural variations in the plants and also the conditions they were being grown in – for example whether they were watered from the top. Mark's plant was very woolly but Sue's was being grown next to it and it didn't have much wool. David picked another plant which was healthy but had no wool - it was Tom Radford's and Tom said it was being grown in relative shade. So the wool was perhaps produced by the plant as a defence mechanism when grown in strong light.

Next was **Ivor Biddlecombe** with some tips on seed raising. He uses multiple sieves to get the right size of grit to mix into the soil for seedlings. He also sieves the John Innes compost he uses, in order to remove any undesirable lumpy bits. He then soaks the soil mix in boiling water for a few minutes and this has the effect of wetting the soil and also sterilising it. He then sows the seed and places the plant pots in poly bags. He showed examples of seedlings dating from a few weeks ago to a couple of years ago.

Ivor also discussed different soil mixes. Ciprian had given him some volcanic soils to try and although seed germination was OK in this, it was difficult to keep the soil moist enough at all times, and as a result, the seedlings grown in this mix were less vigorous compared to those in a normal soil mix. He showed a Lithops plant – which dated all the way back from to 1997 – you don't realise how long-lived some of them can be! He said that ground-up bone meal is beneficial to these plants, it acts as a slow release feed. Next he showed different grades of sieved soil, and also the very fine dust left over from sieving builder's sand – this really is not much good for anything. Cat litter doesn't work so well on its own, but if mixed 50-50 with John Innes, it works better. Aquarium gravel is very good for pricking out the small plants. He had also tried using 1/3 of clay in a soil mix, but the results were poor. As for the difference between vermiculite and perlite, the former is better at holding moisture and for growing cuttings. Perlite does not absorb any water and so it is better for mixing into soil mixes to reduce weight and to open up the soil. Finally, for feed he used a Vitax balanced feed, but almost any multi-purpose feed will do.

Next to speak was **Ben Turner** – he was going to discuss pesticides. He had raided his chemical cupboard and brought along items that were still approved. He mentioned that people may have heard on the news that the EU was proposing a 2 year ban on thiamethoxam, clothianidin and imidacloprid because of their suspected effect on bee populations.

Ben asked if anyone had *not* got mealy bug. Provado, which most growers will be familiar with, uses imidacloprid. Provado is expected to be available until the end of the year is good for dealing with a wide range of pests and is supposedly safe to use – however it doesn't do much to red spider and results with mealy and scale are variable. For mealy, he suggested that using methylated spirits neat with a brush was the best approach. Sometimes the mealy is accompanied by a black sooty mould – this was a fungus but it can't be treated with fungicides since it's on the plant rather than being inside the plant, and the only way to deal with it is to physically remove it or cut off affected parts.

The RHS website has a list of currently approved products and this contains some excellent advice across the whole range of approved chemicals. <http://www.rhs.org.uk/media/pdfs/advice/pesticides>

For systemic action, Provado ultimate bug killer is recommended. The aerosol can version uses a slightly different formulation which includes

methiocarb which is effective against red spider. The “BugClear” gun contains Acetamiprid. Another Provado product is Provado Vine Weevil killer. He uses it on Crassulaceae. This is another product that might disappear. David asked whether the ban would apply to retail products, and Ben wasn't sure. He mentioned that Homebase Fly and Wasp Killer is good for dealing with sciara fly - it contains tetramethrin and permethrin which are natural plant-derived insecticides. It is a contact (and not systemic) insecticide. “BugClear for Fruit and Veg” contains permethrin and kills on contact.

Fumite is available at Haskins and acts as a nerve gas. You can also get sulphur candles although the RHS leaflet says “Plants in leaf are killed by the vapours so this product can only be used to fumigate empty greenhouses.”

Ben moved on discuss fungicides. Systhane Fungus Fighter works on aloes and agaves - some monocots grown outside develop fungal leaf spots, he had seen it a lot this year and this does help with that. Systhane also works on “aloe rust” – although the new leaves will be clean, the old leaves will be permanently marked. It contains Myclobutanil and is usable on roses and for conditions such as apple scab as well.

To prevent damping off, Cheshunt compound is now banned, so you will have to use an alternative such as a Bayer copper based fungicide. Benlate used to be good but is now banned. Sulphur dust (yellow or green) can be used to control botrytis. David said he used this to dust cut surfaces.

Ben mentioned there are also a group of cultural controls and trap for wasps and slugs and snails etc. Agralan make some of these. Of course you could try some of the other techniques such as broken egg shells to keep slugs at bay. One of the companies specialising in biological control is Just Green, and Paul Maddison said he had got some nematodes for use in his allotment garden – these worked on slugs, not so good on snails. Ben said nematodes were also good for vine weevil – you just mix with water and the nematodes spring into life. The Just Green mealy bug killer consists of the larvae of a particular ladybird *Cryptolaemus montrouzieri* whose larvae are voracious feeders on mealy. Unfortunately when they eat all the mealy, the predator dies out. (My friend who has a orchid nursery in the USA had very good success with these - two dozen ladybirds completely cleared a large greenhouse of mealy within a couple of months). Alice said she had success with something used to control mites on chickens/eggs. Ben ended by mentioning that in South Africa, he had seen Aloe cancer controlled by

use of a blue powder which was used to remove pests from pets – the Karoo used it on their sales plants – it was applied and then washed off.

The final session was from **Mark Larter**, on the subject of Notocactus. He said he thought it would be nice to talk about a specific genus and highlight some of the plants worth growing. He had brought with him a selection of 6 years-worth of him and Sue growing Parodias. He hasn't been to the countries where they grow in habitat so was hoping for some feedback from more knowledgeable souls. Notocactus consists of around 57 species and recently the entire genus was merged into Parodia. He thought there were noticeable differences between Parodias and Notocacti – the former had tighter spines and seemed to prefer grittier drier soils.

A classic Notocactus is *Notocactus uebelmannianus* – it forms purple flowers and looks soft and fleshy – perhaps comes from a sub-tropical environment. The notocacti have been lumped into Parodia and depending on which classification system you follow, there are between 4 to 6 subgenera. He prefers Internoto's (International Society of the Friends of Notocacti) sub-genera distinctions of 6 sub-genera rather than the New Cactus Lexicon. Internoto do put *N. uebelmannianus* with *N. scopia* which seems a bit odd, but more logically, *N. magnifica* and *N. leninghausii* are together. In the subgenera Notocactus, all the spines are the same thickness. Some are really spiny, for example. *P. oseoluteus*.

Notocactus come from South America and indeed the name means cacti of the south. They come from a more tropical climate than other cacti. One of the areas which contains lots of Notocacti is Rio Grande do Sul. Paul said this was the most southernmost state of Brazil and a bit cooler than the other parts, reminding him a bit of Wiltshire! *N. magnificus* grows on sea cliffs, alongside *N. leninghausii*, and *N. warasii*. Mark thought it can mark up at lower temperatures and needs a minimum temperature of 5°C. A pot containing a 9 headed plant was revealed to be 9 rooted pups in a pot, so it was NAS – but it was a nice way of forming a good clump quickly.

When it comes to the plants, cultivation is more important than the name – he prefers them to have a soil mix which is neutral to slightly acidic and also moisture retentive – and uses 1 part grit/gravel, 1 part peat, and 1 part John Innes ericaceous. As for water, just splash it all over the plants from Mid-March onwards, and within 2-3 weeks they will go

from being completely inactive to pumped up and growing.

Mark ended his talk with a plant he called *Notocactus leninghausii* var. *knobiendis* – this has several stems and interestingly, the tallest stem had grown a bulge at the tip. Mark said after he stopped watering November, the stem had sagged but it soon woke up this spring, rising in a spiral fashion until it was straight. This was a really hard grown display plant from Margaret Corina where all the heads went to a point – so he gave it a lot of food and water and this was the result. He showed another plant which was much slower – he’s had it over 20 years and it has grown only a couple of inches in the last 6 years. He mentioned that he keeps a paper record of all his plants – from when he gets them, the size they were, what they were growing in, etc and keeps detailed records of everything

Mark ended by saying that Notocacti were good to grow, easy and generally quick, and also easy from seed. He thoroughly recommended them and suggested everyone give them a try.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 23 entries in the May table show.

	Cacti – Opuntia	Succulents – Haworthia/ Gasteria
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe Opuntia sp.	(1) I Biddlecombe Haworthia bolusii
	(2) B Beckerleg Opuntia invicta	(2) B Beckerleg Gasteria liliputana
	(3) I Biddlecombe Opuntia invicta	(3) I Biddlecombe Gasteria brevifolia
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe Tephrocactus geometricans	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia sp.
	(2) A Jankovec Opuntia sp.	(2) T Radford Haworthia comptoniana
	(3) B Beckerleg Opuntia sp.	(3) I Biddlecombe Gasteria cv “Little Warty”

Ivor Biddlecombe

Bookworm Corner

We enjoy feeding the garden birds all year round and now we have house sparrow, starling, greenfinch and dunnoek fledglings in the garden at last. These are all a few weeks later than normal due to the late arrival of spring after the long cold winter. Rosie our young elkhound, managed to catch a just fledged baby sparrow in her mouth which she reluctantly handed over to Mark! After spending most of the day in my aviary with the canaries, it was released that evening unharmed and happily re-joined its mum and sibling.

The cacti and succulents are continuing to flower well in the cacti house with lots of colour from the rebutias, lobivias, echinocereus, echeverias, mammillarias and turbinicarpus. At our latest count up of flowering or flowered plants to date this year, Mark has now overtaken me with 99 species to my 78!

'ENJOYED THE LECTURE? THEN ENJOY THE BOOK!'

April

May was the annual great cultivation workshop with numerous cacti and succulent subjects covered. Recommended books on cultivation includes the two titles by **John Pilbeam**,



although now quite dated, are still a valuable read for newcomers in particular. These are '**How to care for your cacti**' and '**How to care for your succulents**'. For the hard core growers there is the little green book '**Cultivation table for succulents-cacti included**' (Noltee F.). Other books include '**The Complete book of cacti and succulents**' (Hewitt T.), '**Cactus and succulents in the garden**' (Bell S.A.), '**Cacti and succulents**' (Andersohn G.) and '**Cactus culture based on biology**' (Buxbaum F.).

June

This month we have Chris Davis giving us a timely presentation on mammillarias. Many of this genus are coming into full flower bringing a riot of colour to the greenhouse. Recommended books from the library include '**Mammallairas – Cactus File Handbook 6**' (Pilbeam J.). This weighty book covers cultivation, distribution in the wild as well as containing some lovely photographs and descriptions of all the species. Other species specific books are also by John Pilbeam:

'Mammillaria – A Collector's Guide' and 'Mammillaria – A Colour Supplement'.

Also worth looking at is the 'The New Cactus Lexicon' (Hunt D *et al*) which is the 'taxonomy bible'. All these books can be found in the 'Featured Book Corner'.

Sue Wilson

Snippets

The following article was spotted in the Daily Telegraph on 19th April, by Jim Roskilly.

Black Sabbath is a hit in the greenhouse

Heavy metal music is the secret to growing plants, according to a leading gardening expert.

Chris Beardshaw, from BBC Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time, says playing music by Black Sabbath helps plants to flourish and resist disease.

But, in an experiment conducted by horticultural students, plants played songs by Sir Cliff Richard "all died". The test, where alstroemerias (Peruvian lilies) were played different styles of music, found that plants surrounded by classical scores grew slightly shorter than those in silence, but were "slightly more floriferous". Those played Black Sabbath were the shortest but had the best flowers.

Beardshaw will tell listeners this afternoon: "The alstroemerias in the Cliff Richard house all died.

"Sabotage was suspected but we couldn't prove it."

Daily Telegraph

Next Month's Meeting

The next branch meeting will be held on July 2nd and will feature a talk on Crassula by Derek Tribble.

The July Table Show will consist of the **Echinopsis** group (cacti) and the **Aloe** 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 Echinopsis group contains *Echinopsis*, *Lobivia*, *Acanthocalycium*, *Acantholobivia*, *Chamaecereus*, *Helianthocereus*, *Hymenorebutia*, *Leucosteles*, *Mila*, *Neolobivia*, *Pseudoechinopsis*, *Pseudolobivia*, *Pygmaecereus*, *Reicheocactus*, *Setiechinopsis*, *Soehrensia* and *Trichocereus*.

The Aloe group contains *Aloe*, *Bulbine*, *Chamaealoe*, *Guillauminia* and *Lomatophyllum*.

A reminder for committee members that a branch committee meeting is due to be held on Monday 17th June.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 8 th Jun	Isle of Wight	Plants of Merida, Venezuela (John Hughes)
Sat 15 th Jun	Portsmouth	Socotra (Bob Potter)
Mon 17 th Jun	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting (to be confirmed)
Tue 2 nd Jul	Southampton	Crassulas Everywhere (Derek Tribble)
Sat 13 th Jul	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 20 th Jul	Portsmouth	Conos & other Mini-mesembs (Derek Tribble)
Tue 30 th Jul-	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 1 st Aug	Southampton	
Tue 6 th Aug	Southampton	Aloes Through the Ages (Colin Walker)

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