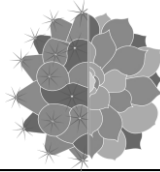


# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

June 2023



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## Editorial

The days are certainly getting longer and it's now light until 9pm or later. The temperatures have also been rising, so it does feel like summer is here. Hopefully last month's meeting helped everyone get into the mood to get amongst their plants.

## Last Month's Meeting

On the front table there's a sheet for people to put down their names if they are planning to drive to the Oxford Branch Show (due to be held on 7th July) and if they have spare seats - or if they need a lift to that event. We will try and match people up.

Lennie and other members from the branch are planning to holding a plant fair event Winchester on 8th July, and a number of people that you know will be selling plants at the event – more details are contained later in the newsletter.

We were due today to hear a talk from Trevor Jackman called "Past and Mostly Present" but Trevor phoned at the weekend to say he was unwell and would not be able to attend, but he does hope to come instead in July. Since it's difficult to arrange a last minute replacement, David Neville may have to give us one of his own talks today.

David made some announcements at the start of the last meeting. On the front table was a trophy created by Ivor Biddlecombe for the Sempervivum classes – it was made by Ivor and contained a collection of metal sempervivums. Another example of his handiwork which people may remember is the giant mealy bug trophy (which was handed to winners of the Zone Quiz) - it is kept in storage since its appearance can cause a bit of a shock.

Each year at this meeting, we give out a free plant to our members. The plant being given out this year is *Crassula "Silver Spark"* which is a form of *Crassula mesembryanthemoides* - there seem to be three stems in each pot. Amelia sourced it from a local wholesaler. Please help yourselves to one of these plants during the break.

On one of the tables, people had brought in their spare plants and cuttings - there were also some bags there to allow you to take away these plants.

On the front table were some leaflets detailing the "The growing flowering and resting periods of various memsemb species" - this had been sourced by Tom Radford and it was a list compiled by Eddy Harris. Some of the mesembs (especially the smaller growing stemless mesembs) are very sensitive in their watering needs, and if watered at the wrong time or in the wrong season, they can easily succumb. Use these sheets to provide an indication of when a particular genus needs to be watered.

## Cultivation and Propagation Workshop

Glenn is very experienced grower and has good knowledge of various tips and tools as well. He had brought along some large signs, to encourage the audience get into the mood and "say the right thing". He said he had a captivated audience. Signs "Applause" Hand up who can read and talk - say what you see. "Hello", "David's talk was rubbish" and following an admission that he had been growing plants for 50 years "No way, You look too young".

- He mentioned he had been planning the talk for several months and had some good ideas to share. He asked if anyone had been using the new wonder product "Miracle Gro" which he said had helped his artificial saguaro grow x10. He also thanked his uncle who used to drive to various garden centres all over the country and had helped introduce him to aspects of the hobby. He showed how a plastic milk bottle could be marked out and cut to produce a shaped scoop which would allow you to pour soil or

gravel into your pots neatly. Other ideas included forming strips of metal into tongs/pliers which would allow you to pick up their pots without damaging the plants or yourself.

Moving on, he mentioned an idea to help remove plants from pots. This basically was a something you could insert into the hole in the bottom of the pot and it would help dislodge the soil and allow the whole plant to be pulled upwards. David Corina had christened the tool as "a cobra" and Glenn mentioned that it can be made in difference sizes and you could also insert two or three of them into the pot to allow you to handle larger plants.

He did a demo on an artificial "*Echinocereus grusonii*" and this was followed by shouts of "Glenn, you're brilliant". He ended by demonstrating some pot size gauges that Ivor Biddlecombe had created. He thanked people for listening and there was a good reaction to his final sign calling for "Applause".

Adrian wondered how he could follow that. He mentioned that he had been getting strange looks from people when they saw him carrying his basket of dead and damaged plants from the conditions in the winter - a lot of us have suffered a lot during in the winter. The low temperatures caused quite a lot of losses.

His situation was compounded because he didn't have a working heater - during the cold winter, his heater wouldn't switch off so he was forced to turn it off completely and this perhaps wasn't the best course of action. Ben will later on talk about losses of plants grown outside. His Phoenix heater wasn't graduated in temperatures - it just had a scale of 1 to 10 and a thermostat on the side of the heater and after reading the instructions he figured out that 0-1 equated to 0°C to 2.6°C, 1-2 was 2.6°C to 5.2°C and so on. He later bought a Biogreen digital thermostat and this had an operating range of -50°C to +99°C - it had a power outlet for the heater and was controlled by a thermostat and also had a 2.5 metre temperature sense cable. It's quite tricky to get the temperature to the exact level you need and the whole set up needs to be calibrated. The ceiling is a dead spot. The unit has a control for heating as well as airflow and the recommendation is to have the airflow on all the time.

Adrian mentioned that the greater the differential between the greenhouse temperature and the outside temperatures then the amount of insulation comes into play as well. You can also use a temperature data logger and Tom has done this over a number of years. Having an independent record of the

temperatures can help you see how bad a particular year has been. Tom recommended the unit he has been using - the Elitech RC-5 which can be bought for under £20 on Ebay. The technical description for this unit says "This mini Temperature Data Logger has wide measuring range -30°C ~ +70°C, accuracy +/- 0.5deg C, adjustable record intervals & long battery life for convenient and reliable temperature data recording, monitoring and analysis. It has a large permanent data memory of 32000 points and comes with data management software for easy data download to computers through USB interface. With the software, you could analyze data in form of tables and graphs and export in picture format. The data could be queried, saved, printed and exported in Word/Excel/TXT /PDF format.". The unit operates off a lithium coin cell battery which is expected to last around a year, even if temperatures are being recorded as often as every 15 minutes.

Tom mentioned that near the wall of the greenhouse the temperatures can go down lower. He also has a propagator in his greenhouse and he puts more sensitive plants in there and it has its own heating - it's very useful and economic to be able to heat a small area for sensitive plants without having to heat the whole greenhouse to that temperature. David Neville mentioned that with some heaters the fan only comes on when the heater comes on, but having constant airflow is a definitive benefit. Adrian mentioned that his Phoenix heater shows a picture with a cross through it - that is the setting with the constant airflow. Toby mentioned using hand held USB powered fans and David mentioned that people have also used the cooling fans as used inside PCs. Adrian said you can also get other thermostats which can turn on an outlet when a temperature goes over a limit.

David said lots of people grow Rebutias and Lobivias, and Keith and Kathy Flannagan had a long run of cold frames filled with hundreds of Rebutias and Sulcorebutias, and they had been growing these for 20 years but this last winter, they lost almost all of the plants. And our speaker for June (now July) was from Woking and he also reported growing many Rebutia plants in unheated areas and losing almost all the plants this winter as well.

My friend in America used to grow lots of Orchids - she had temperature controlled fans that admitted air into the greenhouse when it got warm, but she also had three high powered fans that were on all the time, and these ensured a constant airflow in the greenhouse and also helped water evaporate after watering and also avoid the water lying in the sensitive centres/crown of the plants. David said his father's old greenhouse is quite well ventilated due

to missing glass and his plants kept there (Cacti, Mesembs, Crassulaceae, Echeverias) were not affected in the winter even if the temperatures might have been lower than normal. He also mentioned that Cliff Thompson used to grow some of the best plants and he used to not heat but leave his greenhouse windows open all the time.

Ben said it's the damp and cold combined that did the damage for him. There was a lot of rain in October and November and then it rained later on when it was also cold, and plants rotted off then. A Yucca that he had for over 40 years *Yucca faxoniana* was something he lost. Does anyone else grow plants outside? Paul lost a Puya after 6 years. Ben mentioned he lost his *Puya chilensis*. Jane also mentioned losing a Puya which was quite close to flowering given it's size. Ben said he used to create cloches and covers for plants but perhaps got complacent. Did anything survive? A *Dasyliirion* survived fine with not a mark on it but *Agave gentryi* turned to mush. David mentioned that where his dad lives, there were some streets which were noticeably colder than other ones. Jane lost her bananas - but her neighbour's banana seems OK. Ben mentioned quite a lot of different agaves outside were lost - including *A filifera* which is supposed to be cold tolerant. *Agave parryi* survived - but was damaged. *A. difformis* had come through unscathed which was a surprise. He also lost many Aloes due to base rot. Ben said that 10 years ago he used to use fleece and a polycarbonate frame and cloches to protect plants - but hasn't done it for years - basically he got complacent. David said his dad used to say that if a plant is hardy, it needs to survive for a decade - not just 2-3 winters.

As the first half ended, Glenn mentioned he had reached the age of 60 yesterday - so he had brought in some cup cakes to share with the members - during the tea break.

Cathryn mentioned she had been coming to branch meetings for around a year now, and she would talk about seed raising. She had been raising cacti and succulents from seed for around 3 years. She said why would you buy grown up plants when you buy a packet of seeds for 50p? Well it does take quite an effort and luck to get a fully grown plant and it's understandable why people do buy fully grown plants. She would explain how she had grown her seeds and her techniques, and hoped to hear from other members about their views. If you do grow plants from seed, you do learn a lot more about the plants that way and also it doesn't matter if things go wrong since the investment is relatively low - and if you are successful then you will have a lot of surplus plants to share with others.

What medium to use? She started with Coconut coir and used that initially but stopped using it quite quickly. It went mouldy and had a lot of sciarid flies and just did not seem suitable. Now she uses John Innes Seed compost mixed with grit (one mug of cactus to one one mug of grit) - with a bit more soil in the mix for cacti, and more grit for mesembs. She doesn't put anything on the top of the soil after sowing the seeds. She finds some come up quickly and then more come up in the following weeks.

She uses a heat mat and sows her first seeds in the winter - on a coffee table. You can use a window sill if you have one, and natural light probably helps. For cacti she puts it down and loosens it once the seeds have started to germinate. For mesembs she takes off the cling film more quickly since they do not like being moist. She has tried using zip lock bags but these just didn't work out for her, everything just rotted. With her method she can bottom water everything. She doesn't sterilise the cactus either - others spend a lot of time with this and discuss using hydrogen peroxide or microwaving the soil or using an autoclave or oven to heat the soil.

The biggest issue she had was with the sciarid flies - this year has been better because the peat content of her compost is lower is lower. The best weapon against them is the sticky pads which trap the adult flies and also watching these gives you an idea of how many flies there are. She has used "mosquito bits" which contains the bacteria - *Bacillus thuringiensis*. Mosquito Bits® are a microbial larvicide, which means that utilizing a bacterial active ingredient and controls only the larval stage of development. When applied to standing water the Bit's release a natural soil borne bacterium, Bti (*Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *israeliensis*). This bacteria is ingested by the mosquito larvae within the water and soon after kills the mosquito larvae with no effect on anything else. It turns out that this is also effective on the sciarid fly larvae. It took her quite a while to associate the black sciarid flies with the clear maggots squirming in the soil and which were destroying her seedlings. You have to repeat the Mosquito Bits treatment every three weeks to keep the bacteria going.

Pinguiculas are carnivorous plants which have sticky leaves and are a natural method of catching sciarid fly, but they do need pure water to grow properly. Their flowers are a bonus. Cathryn said she now uses groups of small pots rather than a whole tray, and this helps when things germinate at different rates. With the mesembs, they seem to like to go cold at night and seem to need a fluctuation in temperatures, so she does not sow those on a heat

mat - instead she just waits until the spring before sowing those, rather than attempting winter sowing.

In the early days she did not water some of the plants often enough and she had some losses due to keeping them too dry - just remember that seedlings are more delicate than older plants and need a bit more attention. She mentioned that she had grown some interesting Haworthias from seed. The Mammillaria Society is a good source of seed and the Haworthia Society also mails out lists of available seeds from time to time. It is quite hard to buy cactus and succulent seed in the UK, but Tom mentioned that the BCSS will eventually try and sell seeds on their website all the year round.

Cathryn mentioned that the last big mistake she made was that when she had a spider mite problem, she sprayed her seedlings with 70% Isopropanol alcohol (rubbing alcohol). This alcohol is fine for mature plants and it kills mealy bug and spider mites - but it is very harmful to young plants and should not be used on them. Cathryn ended by showing some hybrid plants she had created, she believed these were hybrids between an Echeveria and a Sedum in her garden.

Ben came back to talk about pots. Before he did so, he had a couple of observations. Did anyone grow Echeverias outside? Mark Roberts mentioned he had managed to grow outside in his back garden - Echeveria grandiflora and Echeveria "Black Prince". Ben said he had Echeveria elegans in the rock garden and that had survived. Graptopetalia (Graptopetalum x Echeveria) can also be quite hardy and Toby confirmed he had a plant outside all winter. Does anyone grow aloes outside? For example *Aloe striatula* outside? Don't give up on it just yet - he had three outside and one of them seems to be forming new shoots. However *Aloe polyphylla* had frozen totally.

Ben said round plastic terracotta pots are his preference for most things. Different sizes and different qualities are available. Different types of plastic and different colours of plastic will drain differently. Black pots seem to drain more slowly. The BEF pots are of course famous in the hobby and some have been used by members for 40 years. The green BEF ones don't last as long as the others but brown and black last for a very long time. Manchester branch bought the moulds and made them for a few years and these have now been bought by Craig Williams Cacti. The pots were very popular with hobbyists, and the BCSS show schedules were based on the BEF pot sizes and these pots also fit in well in seed trays.

The better quality plastic pots will tend to last longer. Some of the cheaper makes are flimsy and end up cracking after just a year or two. Some plants prefer a better depth and other plants prefer shallow pans. Adrian mentioned that the smaller pots will need watering more often - larger pots need watering less often. Some cacti had a tap root - e.g. Lophophora and Turbinicarpus so these would need a "long tom" pot. Some caudiciforms also prefer this too. Ben asked how many people put crocks in pots - his advice was to not do it. He had heard a talk by Paul Cumbleton - he was the Alpine Manager at Wisley and during a talk about perched water tables, he mentioned using crocks causes the opposite of what you are trying to accomplish,

You can use garden mesh / shade netting and put that over the holes in the pot to prevent excess soil from washing out. Some of the stapeliads have shallow roots and can be grown in pot saucers, and some of the smaller Rebutias and Mammillarias grow better in a shallow pan - the same is same for Lithops etc. With terracotta pots, they dry out too quickly - and he's stopped using them. Also, if you repot plants every year - they will grow larger - and take up more space!

David ended the session by talking about the *Rebutia perplexa* plants handed out last year. Three plants had been-brought back - two of them were covered in flower buds - but one from Nicola has already flowered - it depends on the amount of sun that the plants get. If your greenhouse is shadier then the plants will tend to flower later. Some other plants had been handed out in earlier years. *Mammillaria plumosa* had been handed out in 2019 and was brought in by Tom. *Mammillaria glassii* dated from 2014 and *Echeveria cuspidata* var *zaragosa* had flower spikes which are held nicely - the plant will never will get very big. *Rebutia heliosa* x *albiflora* was from 2016 - it had grown larger (growing into a 7" pan) but it had then rotted off in the centre and got smaller.

Toby had brought in *Mammillaria schiedeana* ssp. *giselae*. There were some Echeverias flowering nicely. Gasteria always has unusual shaped flowers. *Astrophytum asterias* was flowering quite early - it is the choicest of the Astrophytums. A Rebutia labelled as *violaciflora* might be *R. minuscula* perhaps - it was coming into flower. And a dainty little Gasteria was in flower. Sally had brought in *Euphorbia decaryi* - it was growing well - this is a choice plant from Madagascar.

Vinay Shah

Here are some details of the Plant Fair that some members will be holding on July 8<sup>th</sup>:

## Hampshire Succulents and Cacti Plant Fair

St Barnabas Church Hall,  
Fromond Road,  
Winchester,  
SO22 6EF

8th July Saturday, 10.30am to 3.30pm.  
Free entry

Sellers:

- Benjamin Turner - a large range of mostly small succulents.
- Lennie - Small succulents and aeoniums
- Paul - Agave and Cacti
- Misfits Plants - Succulents
- The Mammillaria Society display and sale plants
- Totally Potty About Succulents - a small scale succulent and cement plant pot
- business based in Bournemouth
- Sarah Morrish - Botanical illustrations

Join our facebook group for updates

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/243392311247612>

Branch members are most welcome to sell. £12 pitch with table, £10 if you bring your own table. Please get in touch with Lennie Kwan ([kwanjc@gmail.com](mailto:kwanjc@gmail.com))

*Lennie Kwan*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday July 4<sup>th</sup>

Although Trevor Jackman was originally due to speak to us in June, he was taken ill and as a result his talk has been moved from June to July.

As a result, these notes are the same as I had posted last month - Trevor has been behind the successful running of the Woking Branch for a long time, and this will be his first visit to our branch. He will be giving us a talk titled "Past and Mostly Present" and this will be a talk on plants he has grown over the years, and it should cover a wide range of plants.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Isle of Wight	to be notified
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Portsmouth	Sulcorebutia (Kathy Flanagan)
Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> Jul	Oxford	Oxford Branch Show + Haworthia Show, Wantage, OX12 7LB
Tue 4 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Southampton	Past and Mostly Present (Trevor Jackman)
Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Winchester	Hampshire Succulents and Cacti Plant Fair @ St Barnabas Church Hall
Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Isle of Wight	to be notified
Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Portsmouth	Coping with Copiapoa (Jonathan Clark)

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

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