

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

July will be our fifth meeting of the year. Of course the threat from covid has not gone away – cases are rising but fortunately most people have been vaccinated and the symptoms of the newer strains appear to be milder.

Announcements

The 11th edition of the “Handbook of Shows” has been purchased by the branch and is being made available to all members - Amelia Herbert has copies so please ask her if you need a copy. The booklet defines which species of cacti and succulents are eligible for the different classes and groupings that are accepted by the BCSS for its shows - and hence it's a very useful guide, especially if you have any interest in plant nomenclature and showing.

You may notice that Glenn Finn sometimes takes pictures of members at the branch meetings. He sends me these pictures for use on the branch website and although I've not used any recently, the intent is to give new members an idea of the atmosphere of what a branch meeting is like. I will not name any individual members on any pictures I happen to use without asking them first, but if you do have an objection to any pictures featuring you to be used, please do let me know.

Last Month's Meeting

David mentioned that Ted Smith had brought in a *plant of interest*. When this plant was discovered and introduced to cultivation, it was originally called *Tacitus bellus* – but it has since been renamed to *Graptopetalum bellum*. It looks like a man made cultivar but it does occur naturally in the wild in Mexico and it was discovered by Alfred Lau in

1972. It is a member of the Crassulaceae so it has rosettes and star shaped flowers, which are large compared to the size of the plant. It is quite easy to grow as a young plant, but you rarely see large plants since it can get infected by mealy bug. This plant was several inches across - and a quick poll indicated more than half of the audience had grown it. *Graptopetalum* “Superstar” is a version with redder flowers.

Cactus Hunting in northern Peru

Adrian mentioned that Cliff's talk would be about Peru and that Cliff didn't really need any introduction since he's a well known member from Portsmouth Branch. Peru is a rather interesting country. On this trip, they covered areas mainly north of Lima, but they did spend a couple of days heading south as well. As an introduction, Cliff mentioned that Peru has been in a rapid state of development between 2015 and 2020. Apart from being of interest to mining companies, the government had taken the initiative to divert rain water from the Andes towards the land along the coastal strip and now a tremendous range of fruits and vegetables are being grown there and you'll see quite a few of these featuring in our supermarkets from time to time.

Peru is quite a large country, 1300 miles from tip to toe and 790 miles wide. The capital of Lima is in the middle of the left hand part of the country. On this trip they travelled north part and went into the Amazonas area. The brown areas on the map are the Andes and there are a few other mountain ranges too. The rainfall is sparse on the coast but there's a lot in the Amazonas area. And quite a lot of water does fall in the foothills of the Andes. A red line on the map showed the journey they made.

Rubbish is one of the biggest problems in South America as populations develop, and unfortunately people dump this rubbish out in the wilderness. We saw plants of *Haageocereus acranthus* – the plants were displaying new growth, there had been recent rain. A nearby state park was quite verdant - but once you got to the fence, it was barren. There are succulents in Peru as well, and Calandrinias grow up and down the coast – they have attractive flowers

and only need small amounts of water in the summer. We saw a picture of Ian Woolnough, who was on this trip with Cliff, and who has spoken at our branch a few times. There were fruits on the cacti and they collected a few of these. Some of the flowers are moth-pollinated and some are hummingbird pollinated. We saw a lizard – these can be quite inquisitive and this one had signs of a new tail (they can regrow these if they are damaged or torn off by a predator).

For their first night in Lima, the room contained a toilet, a shower, and a bed and beer was available – what more do you need? Some plant vine was growing around the bar area, it had yellow flowers and was perhaps a *Senecio*. They went north to Huacho and then started going inland. They found plants of *Haageocereus*, and *Armatocereus procerus*, one of the taller growing cereus. The valleys were strewn with pebbles. They found a cucurbit with little gourds. The standard *Melocactus* in Peru is *Melocactus peruvianus* – it can reach the size of a small rugby ball and the cephalia can reach a foot in size. Every bit of spare land is cultivated. We saw *Cleistocactus serpens* and *Matucana haynei* are abundant in this area – there were lots growing amongst the dead grass and moss, there was limestone underneath. He managed to get a picture of a butterfly *Junonia vestina* – it took about 30 attempts to get one good shot. There were lichens and lots of different spring flowers which he has not been able to identify. *Oroya borchersii* has golden spines, and it is considered to be one of the more handsome *Matucanas* - selected forms have beautiful spines. *Selaginella lepidophylla* - the resurrection plant was present here. They came across mounds of *Austrocylindropuntia floccosa* - in Southern Peru, in the Andes at 4000m - this can grow into huge mounds containing thousands of heads and sized as large as a car.

Every bit of land is farmed, even some impossible areas on a 45° slope. They travelled from Huaraz to Caraz. The Cordillera Negra and Cordillera Blanca mountain ranges run parallel to each other – they are named after their respective black and white colouring, due to the terrain and snow. Plants of *Puya raimondii* were 25-30 foot tall. Once they form their tall flower spikes - they die. These were growing at around 4000m, and we did indeed see a sign saying 4314m. *Oxalis* grows everywhere and this one had yellow flowers. They found *Oroya borchersii* again and some had seed on them too. The lichens are something else. We saw Ian taking a shot of *Austrocylindropuntia floccosa*. *Oroya borchersii* was 6" in diameter – and the higher up they went, the more golden spined they seemed to be. The slope of the mountains was 60° here – just

how do they farm on that? *Matucana haynei* ssp. *herzogiana* had white spines. *Espositoa melanosteles* can be quite woolly when new stems form. Looking from a higher altitude into the valley, and with Cordillera Blanca in the background.

Mila caespitosa is the only recognised species in *Mila* – previously there were around a dozen different species identified, but it turns out that this is very variable plant. Cliff mentioned he's been growing one for 25 years and hasn't managed to flower it as yet. They came across many Bromeliads. The rivers were quite full – it was November and effectively spring time, with snow melting from the Andes. This was a water reservoir project and the view of the canyon was amazing. It was a one track road. There was a rather rickety bridge across the river and it wasn't something he would attempt to use.

The mountain roads can be single track and if you encounter a truck coming the other way, you have no choice but to give way, Fortunately it was a Sunday and there wasn't much traffic at all. They saw *Haageocereus* and *Espositoas*. They came across a hydroelectric scheme – this will probably be used to supply power to the valley. Plants had already colonized the roof, and some of the cacti had grown to several feet in just 10 years. There are several settlements up the valley up to a height of 4500m. The road opened up a bit more at the other end of the valley, and some of the landscapes were beautiful. There was a tennis ball sized fruit on a cereus and more examples of *Melocactus peruvianus*. A hechtia (which is a bromeliad) had yellow flowers. The cephalia on some of the melocacti had reached a height of several inches. In some places the road went back to being a dirt track. They saw some fresh water cormorants. There was a new bridge at one location - they had been told there might some problems due to heavy rains - the old bridge had fallen down and had just been dumped there. They saw more examples of *Mila caespitosa*. Up in the hills, chillies grow well and you sometimes see them spread out on the ground for drying – there's usually a man and a dog who guard this from a nearby tent.

They came across an amazing market with lots of fresh produce being sold there, including perhaps the chillies they had just seen. The locals were dressed up in their colourful garb and Cliff had wanted to take some pictures of them but he didn't get a positive response, despite having been prepared to pay them. He ended up just taking a few clandestine shots. "Mina del carbon" signified an old coal mine and this happened to be on the route. There were many fossil beds here. The road featured

new bridges and tunnels. There was a small waterfall. The canyon was spectacular.

They came across another hydroelectric project where the turbines were visible. At the next hotel, Cliff showed some pictures of an electric fan with multiple problems. The back of the fan was broken, the cord was too short to reach the wall plug and what's more, the plug on the cable had different pins to what was on the socket. These sorts of problems are common.

They saw another cucurbit growing by the roadside. This could easily be the result of seed discarded by travellers rather than being endemic. Plants of *Haageocereus* showed new growth from the base of the plant. We saw some of the irrigation projects from 2017 - many water courses had been cut through sand initially (and later on they started to use concrete) and this had given them the ability to grow crops through the year. The church architecture was amazing – in almost all cases, the Church was always the best maintained building in any town in South America.

The Pan-American highway goes up and down the coast. They went to Chiclayo - a sign saying "Mexico" referred to a town here, not the country! Plants of *Browningia microsperma* was tall and straggly. Other plants were growing in this area - it was hot and humid and any trees with rough bark were covered in orchids and bromeliads. A *Borzicactus icosagonus* was 2 feet and 6 inches tall – it was the only one in flower. Salvias also grow here. Plants of *Armatocereus laetus* were characterized by pinching up and down their stems – these constrictions were at random points on the stems and did not seem related annual growth patterns. *Espostoa lanata* can get large eventually. They came across the other melocactus found in Peru - *Melocactus bellavistensis*. This plant can grow to a foot across and 18 inches tall, and the tallest cephalia can reach a height of 2 feet. Some were in flower and there were masses of seed. Many were growing in the shade of a tree. You could see one of the plants had formed an extra rib growing – this sometimes happens. It was very hot and humid here. In Jaen, the view from the hotel showed some nearby repair work being done at the top of a building – without any safety harness. He saw another spring flower, but had no idea what it was – if you search for "Peru pink flower" on Google, you just get 100s of hits.

They came across *Melocactus bellavistensis* again. A tree was exuding large amounts of resin and this smelt quite a bit. He came across a plant with an Ipomea flower but the leaves were totally wrong, he

had no idea what it was. They saw *M. bellavistensis* again. Up some of the hills, there is a cloud forest in some parts of the Amazonas. The snow melt was causing rivers to flow faster and we saw a video of this rapid flow. We also saw more examples of bromeliads and terrestrial orchids. There were plants of *Rhipsalis* there. He came across a plant with a purple flower although this proved to be coloured bracts – the flower itself was small. *Hylocereus* is a fast growing cactus and at one time it was used for grafting stock, but you have to be careful since it can't take low temperatures. The coloured *Gymnocactus* ("Hibotans") are often still grafted on this. They went around a bend and came across massive plants of *Espostoa utcubambensis*.

Continuing on after the mid-meeting break, we were still in the Amazonas region – it was a tropical climate and the trees were dripping with bromeliads. He came across a *Peperomia* with unusual leaves - they normally have round leaves, we also saw a wasps nest and a sedum. Some of the river crossings are done with a rope and basket. There was virtually no space between these plants. A bromeliad had multiple inflorescences. There were ferns and also Cycads (*Zamia*). This region was still the Amazonas – which borders the western-most extreme of the Amazon rainforest. A terrestrial orchid had multiple branches of yellow inflorescences. Another unusual plant had a flower which looked like a protea or leucospermum, but of course those species do not grow here. We saw another terrestrial orchid. Which was beautiful. As you go out of the Amazonas region back into the more arid areas you start to see more cacti again.

Matucana formosa can reach a diameter of 15 inches and there are reports of even larger clumps of plants. We saw *Melocactus peruvianus* growing on a rock, no cephalium had formed as yet. *Espostoa blossfeldiorum* used to be called *Thrixanthocereus blossfeldiorum* – the small plants are quite hairy - later on, the spines are more prominent from the top. *Matucana* again – these are day flowering so probably hummingbird pollinated. The Utcubamba river flows into the Amazon basin. They came across more examples of *Armatocereus* family - *Armatocereus rauhii ssp. balsasensis* which also had the constrictions – these had 6 inch and 9 inch diameter stems and some were 30 foot tall. *Matucana formosa* was a foot in diameter and growing in a road cutting. A tree in flower was identified by Jane as a *Spathodea* tree (tulip tree).

He eventually got a picture of a moth. *Matucana formosa* was in flower here. Sometimes you find a 100 plants in an area the size of this room, and then walk a few yards and there's nothing there. Plants

of *Armatocereus* were 25-30 foot tall and there were plenty of cacti growing on the rocky hillside. We saw another peperomia. Some of the road repairs were rather questionable and you always had to have your wits about you since damaged sections were not always signposted. An *Espostoa* had an impressive 8 feet long pseudocephalium and *Espostoa mirabilis* had a orangey-brown cephalium. Another peperomia was a shrub with thick stems. David mentioned there were over 1000 species in Peperomia. We saw more terrestrial orchids and a 2 inch long beetle.

More plants of *Armatocereus rauhii* again indicated that the necking is not consistent on each stem, and Cliff wasn't sure how this occurs. Some of the geology here was stunning, *Matucana formosa* was growing in a man made cutting. It's amazing that where there is human activity, cacti seem to be amongst the first and most successful plants to attempt to colonize a new area. We saw another lizard with a regrown tail. *Melocactus bellavistensis* ssp. *onychacanthus* was growing in a small area – this plant is different in shape from the main species. An overhang had formed a nice sheltered spot for wasps to build a nest. We saw a buddleia and another vista provided a nice view from the top of a hill. Again every available area was being farmed. We saw a bromeliad apparently growing on a rock – although there was some moss there – the plant was an impressive 3 feet in diameter. A plant had colourful purple bracts – it was almost like a Bougainvillea. A bridge they were expecting had not been built, so they ended up having to take a 50km detour. The population is more sparse at the higher altitudes. A spider was around 3 inches across and attempts to poke it to make it pose had limited success. They came across another buddleia, and another spectacular bromeliad.

Next was *Matucana aurantiaca*, they had been given GPS co-ordinates by Graham Charles. The ones in cultivation seem to have far less spination. These were growing at 2500m - 3000m. There are periods of drought in between the wet periods. Another *Matucana aurantiaca* was hiding behind a rock and some grass. There were also ferns here. There were some seed pods on the cacti but they were not ripe. An exotic flower looked like it might belong to the Salpiglossis or Petunia families. They found more *M. aurantiaca* again, there was some variation in supination and some of the plants were 9 inches across. A *Weberbauerocereus longicomus* was seen at 2500m. Young plants and seedlings seemed to have been eaten by goats and other grazing animals. *Matucana aureiflora* was growing on a hillside in amongst pine trees – it was nice to see them in flower - many were in bloom. The grass

had started to die down. The *matucana* flowers are only 3-4 inches tall so not visible normally until the grass does die back. They again found the resurrection plant *Selaginella lepidophylla* here. They found more plants of *Matucana aureiflora*, these were 6-7 inches across. One had to be careful with the terrain - at the edge of the cliff, there was no fence and it was a straight drop of 100 feet into a quarry.

Just like with *M. borchsessi*, some of these plants were amazing when they had their golden spines. One of the plants was found to be unusual – it had double flowers – it was the only one in the population and there were no seeds on it.

We saw a view of the city of Cajamarca. There were some huge plants here growing amongst moss and ferns, but none were in flower. Cliff put another picture with 18 circles drawn on it – at first glance it seemed like 18 random circles but cliff indicated that if you zoomed in, each location represented a plant. A few of the plants had unusual supination. There were loads of *Matucanas* growing here. There were also some seedlings and based on size. the mature plants must have been quite some age. A view of the landscape showed a white section of the mountainside – but Cliff admitted this was an illusion, it was quarry spoilings, and not a glacier.

Eucalyptus trees grow fast but the wood is brittle and not useful as timber so it's mainly turned into charcoal. The next plant was probably a *Senecio* based on the flower. Another sprawling plant 3 feet across might have also been a *Senecio*. They came across an artificial reservoir and the entrance featured the image of a crayfish - a secondary industry of harvesting seafood has developed along some of the coastal plains. They followed a route from Pacasmayo to Neuvo Chimbote. A lorry was stacked with the remains of sweet corn – sometimes you do see trucks carrying huge loads and overloaded to an incredible extent. We also saw some of the newly built irrigation systems which bring in the water from the Andes to the coastal areas. We saw the remnants of a defensive castle dating from the 13th or 14th century just before the Spanish arrived. *Melocactus peruvianus* occurs in pockets. *Neoraimondia ariquepensis* appear along the coast. A plant of *Melocactus peruvianus* had heavy spination but it was only 10-12 years old and only just producing a cephalium. We also saw young examples of *Neoraimondia ariquepensis*.

In the spring of 2017, floods devastated roads in Chile and Peru and mountain sides and plants were washed away. The damage has been repaired but it as a reminder of the problems that can occur. There was a mass of yellow spring flowers in an area

where the road had gone. We saw a hummingbird feeding on a banana flower. At the end of the trip, they had a couple of days left over and they went south of Lima to see plants of *Browningia candelaris* – there are massive spines at the base which disappear as the plants get larger. An unusual shrub was probably an asclepias. *Cumulopuntia sphaerica* is known as the "South American" jumping cholla – due to the ease with which it attaches itself to passing animals who brush past it. This helps the stems of the plant transport themselves from one location to another. *Oreocereus leucotrichus* is known as the "Old Man of the Andes" and the pictured plant probably consisted of several plants growing in a clump. There was some fantastic spination on them.

He saw one condor – these birds have one of the largest wingspans (something like 11 feet) wingspan. We saw a bee in a *Cumulopuntia* flower. *Matucana haynei* ssp. *hystrix* was another population – it had different supination, including bicoloured spines. Another *Oreocereus leucotrichus* had big yellow central spines.

Now for a sad story, there was a well known Cathedral in Pisco prior to 2007, but a magnitude 8 earthquake in 2007 caused the building to collapse, while midnight mass was being held. 148 people lost their lives. The adjacent town hall was also seriously damaged. The cathedral was rebuilt in 2012 using better construction standards. Cliff showed some pictures from the area, and 10 years on, some people were still using standby power generators.

He showed some bottles of drink and one had to wonder what the bottles contained previously – in addition he showed a 2L bottle which had two 1L labels stuck on it! Overall this had been a spectacular trip and we ended with a sunset photograph that Ian Woolnough had provided.

Cliff ended the talk by thanking Ian for having researched the trips and arranging the flights – he organised the car – and Graham Charles helped with plant localities. He mentioned that the locals don't really like Americans so do let them know you are from Europe when you can.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

At our next meeting on **Tuesday 6th September**, our friends from Reading & Basingstoke branch Keith and Kathy Flanagan will be hosting a talk titled "40 years of growing Mammillarias". Both Keith and Kathy are well known as active member of the Mammillaria Society.

On the Saturday prior to the branch meeting, the BCSS will be holding the 2022 **National Show** at Newark. This is held every 4 years and this actually is a replacement for the 2020 event. It is well worth a visit since it's an opportunity to see some of the best cacti and succulent plants in the country. A few of our branch members are likely to be driving up for the day, so do let me know if you are going – or if you need a lift to the event.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 13 th Aug	Isle of Wight	Open House Meeting - members only
Sat 20 th Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting
Sat 3 rd Sep	Newark	BCSS National Show, George Stephenson Hall, Newark County Showground
Tue 6 th Sep	Southampton	40 years of growing Mammillarias (Keith & Kathy Flanagan)
Sat 10 th Sep	Isle of Wight	TBA
Sat 17 th Sep	Portsmouth	Madagascar exposed (David Traish)

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