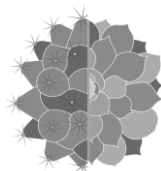


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

We have now held meetings for half the year. And we have had good attendances on each occasion. Of course the total number of people attending hasn't fully reached the levels we had before covid struck, but hopefully we'll get there within a few months.

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

Prior to the main discussion, David mentioned a few things about the National Show, which was due to be held at Newark in Nottinghamshire on 3rd September. In the event, Southampton members had 3 sets of sales tables at the event – David, Ben

Turner, and Amelia Herbert. I don't know how many people came through the door, but it was quite a busy event throughout the day and I think most sellers were happy with how much business they had done.

Plant Focus Evening – Parodia / Notocactus and Agave

Adrian mentioned that David Neville would cover the "Cacti" part of the meeting and Ben Turner would handle the "Succulents".

David started off covering the Parodia family. Those who have been in the hobby for a while will know that a section of the plants were formerly called Notocacti but it was decided a few years to merge everything under Parodia. The plants come from South America - from countries such as Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina. David mentioned that the person in the branch who has grown them for a very long time is our president, Peter Down. Peter said his interest was mostly in Parodia and he had brought in a good selection of his plants. Peter has also had trips out to Bolivia and Argentina to see the plants in habitat.

David mentioned that one of the difficulties with talking about the subject matter is that (1) he doesn't grow many Parodias himself and (2) he doesn't know what plants will be brought in.

One of the commonest and most widely grown plants in the genus is *Notocactus leninghausii* – it is sometimes also classified under *Eriocactus* as well. When this happens, the genera name might be different, but the species name always stays the same. He mentioned that the large plant which had been brought in was a very old plant of *N. leninghausii*. The plant does not branch from the stems - but it does form lots of offsets from the base and these grow as additional stems. The growing point at the top of the plant grows at an angle – it is never flat. The plant needs to be 5-6 inches tall before it is ready to flower. It forms glorious large yellow flowers which have a sheen and look like satin. You could see that there were a lot of flower buds on the main stem. Most of the flowers will

open together, over a period of 2-3 days. Most of the Notocactus are relatively easy to grow. This is the tallest growing one and it looks attractive all the time. David also mentioned that it is one of the few cacti which can split its stem when first watered after the winter rest, so it is best to water it gradually after the winter rest. Next was *Notocactus magnificus*, which is the largest growing of the globular plants. David mentioned that this plant was perhaps not the best looking example – it can also have a bluish body colour and more white wool on the areoles and that form does look better. Like *N. leninghausii*, this plant is also from Brazil, and it also forms large yellow flowers. Although some plants from Brazil can be cold-sensitive, both of these would be fine in a frost-free greenhouse and they pose no difficulties in cultivation. It remains solitary until it reaches grapefruit size, but there are some examples these days which start to offset at a younger age. Another example of *N. magnificus* was a more attractive form, with a bluer body and more white on the ribs. Tom's plant of this species had had a problem, and he said he had to cut out the central head. but the plant had managed to recover – however, now all heads were the same size, normally the central head would be larger. Cathryn had a plant which seemed to consist of multiple seedlings in the same pot. David spotted another younger *N. leninghausii* with wispy spines.

One of the other popular plants in the genus is *Notocactus uebelmannianus* (*Notocactus crassigibbus* is also similar) and this can have either yellow or purple flowers. It can flower before they're in a 3 inch pot. Another one of the popular species is *Notocactus scopa* – this is a pretty species with fine white spines and often red tipped central spines. Some are globular, some get more columnar. They also have golden yellow flowers. *Noto succineus* – it normally has ginger spines but this one had white spines. flowers are smaller on the small plants but still an inch or two across. *N. submammulosus* and the closely related *N. mammulosus* are similar plants, with a dark green glossy epidermis for former, and less green and glossy for the latter. It's quite a hard plant to repot – it has needle like spines in every direction. Other problem can be plants with hooked central spines.

Geoff Penrose mentioned that *N. submammulosus* (and a *Trichocereus*) were amongst the first plants he had bought from a local shop. Next was an unusual form of *N. uebelmannianus* without spines – this tends to come from growers in Europe and it looks quite attractive. Another group of Notocacti used to be classified under the name *Brasilicactus* – and *N. haselbergii* was an example – it has brilliant orange-red cup shaped flowers early in the season.

another is *N. graessneri*, which has a green cup shaped flower. Both these plants remain solitary through their lives, and David mentioned he has seen them get to 6 inches wide. He mentioned that with *N. graessneri*, the growing point can shift it's position on the body – it can drop down and almost reach ground level!

Another group of plants from Brazil were classified under *Wigginsia* – these also remain solitary, although they can reach football size. They have smaller yellow flowers which emerge from the centre. They can mark up quite badly by themselves and so are highly rated on the showbench if they are grapefruit sized and in good condition.

Notocacti tend to have mainly yellow flowers which emerge in the spring en masse – we would now look at *Parodia*. These are generally spinier, and they can have flowers in a wider variety of colours. They tend to flower later in the summer and the flowers open in dribs and drabs rather than all at once.

Parodia schwebsiana has copious white wool in the crown and in the new growth, but overhead watering will dislodge that. The wool also doesn't exist in the wild since wind and rain will disperse it. It hadn't offset as yet, and it had curved central spines. Plants of *Parodia marsii* can eventually grow to a metre high – it remains solitary. It has rusty orange flowers which emerge from the crown of the plant and they have to fight their way through the spines.

Parodia maxima (also goes under the name *P. commutans*) has huge white woolly areoles. Peter mentioned that this plant was from seed which he had collected in habitat, in 1992.

P. auricentra had orange brown spines, and the ribs were spiralling – in some variants the plants have straight ribs. These plants need a gritty compost. David mentioned that *Parodias* have really tiny seed – whereas *Notocactus* seed is normal sized. *Parodia occulta* / *Parodia subterranea* has a dark green body and it had jet black centrals and radial spines and white areoles. The flowers are blood-red in colour. It has had 10-12 flowers already. It is a natural miniature, and once they reach maturity they seem to remain a constant size. *Parodia slabana* had a dense woolly crown – it has has very variable flowers. There was a €10 price tag in the pot. It is rare in cultivation.

David mentioned that building up a collection of *Parodias* takes time - few nurseries have good or extensive collections of them. There are seeds available on some seed lists but they are probably from Europe and in the near future it's likely that

there may be more import charges on seeds from the continent.

John Pilbeam did produce a book recently called "Parodia and Notocactus - the Happy Couple" – it is not the finest of his books and not up to the standard of his earlier works, but it is the only book on them. The "Illustrated Dictionary of Cacti" by Preston-Mafham did have some pictures of them. For cultivation, use a free draining compost – there shouldn't be a problem. Some of the slower growing miniatures are the more difficult ones to look after.

After the half time break, we moved on to discuss Agaves. Ben Turner said when he first got into succulents - he had wanted a really large collection of Agaves – after seeing the size that some of them can grow to, he realised how impractical and unrealistic this was. We started with a *Dasyilirion wheeleri* which is also called the "desert spoon". It's an Agave relative which comes from high altitude and arid desert and it's perfectly hardy in Devon. It can take very low temperatures – just ensure it has good drainage - when he grew it, he built a mound in his garden and put in lots of grit and gravel and made a raised bed. His *Dasyilirion serratifolium* is now a metre across after 10 years. The leaves have sharp barbs and the tips tend to die back. The leaves can be curly or tufted and they will persist for a long time. The *Dasyilirion serratifolium* did flower about 3 years ago – it produced a 10 or 15 foot spike which was relatively narrow – it had lots of small flowers. Dasyilirions don't seem to be monocarpic so they won't die after flowering. This is different from Agaves which will die after flowering (although most of them will usually have produced an offset or two.)

Moving on to true agaves, Ben spotted *Agave univittata quadricolor* - one of the smaller growing hybrids – this forms many pups – these can come up a metre away from the parent plant, if grown outside. He puts it outside in the summer and then takes them in for the winter. Peter's *Agave lophantha quadricolor* is actually the same plant – this plant is sold under both names.

Manfreda is a genus related to Agave, and Mangave is the name given to hybrids between Manfreda and Agave. *Mangave "bloodspot"* is a hybrid between *Agave macroacantha* and *Manfreda maculosa*. These intergeneric hybrids are quite popular and they can be quite pricey once they get to a few inches in size.

Moving on to another popular agave, *Agave victoria reginae* was named after Queen Victoria. It is one of the most xeric of all the agaves. A bit of

damp at the wrong time of the year can cause problems. There are many variants in terms of leaf shapes and amount of marking - and then there's a whole set of variegates to consider as well. One example is *Agave victoria reginae* "Golden Princess". Sometimes the names of the cultivars get altered by the sellers, so just go with the look of the plant rather than trusting the name. There are miniature *Agave victoria reginae* which only grow to a couple of inches – these dwarf ones are quite difficult compared to the larger plants. Other related species with nice white markings on the leaves are *Agave schidigera* and *Agave nickelsiae*.

Some agaves have filaments on the edge of their leaves, and *A. filifera* is one of the best to grow. *Agave x leopoldii* is a hybrid and slightly more tender and more compact. There are several others to consider, such as *Agave toumeyana* and *Agave polianthiflora*. The latter produced red flowers when it flowered for Richard White in 2020 – the plant lost its growing point when it did this, but it is still alive – this is unusual, and there appear to be live roots and the hope is that it will somehow produce an offset. *A. toumeyana bella* is another plant which you might see at shows like the National, with really good filaments.

Some agaves are hardy and can be grown outside and we saw a picture of one of Miranda's plants – her *Agave montana* which is planted outside. Ben mentioned that Paul Spracklin from Essex has experimented with growing a lot of plants outdoors in his garden. *A. montana* grows in pine forests in Mexico and it will take damp and cold and it doesn't mind a bit of shade either. His plant is 90 cm across and he puts some mesh on it for protection during the winter months and he also keeps it dry in that season. Ben said he has grown various agave plants outside – *A. montana*, *A. parryi*, *A. filifera*, *A. difformis* have all survived for him for several years outside. He did use a polycarbonate frame for them initially, but he hasn't used that in recent years.

There were some nice other miniatures here. *A. bracteosa* is one of the octopus-like agaves - although the leaves are more delicate, it is hardy outside. He mentioned he was talking to a chap at Lullingstone who had planted a whole lot of these these growing outside and many were forming pups.

A. difformis flowered for him and it produced a 2 foot stem. The plant is still green and alive and producing lots of offsets, perhaps it is also growing a new central growing point.

A lot of the variegates aren't hardy - but people often plant the variegated forms of *A. americana*

outside. This variegated plant from Peter Down says *A. difformis*. The leaf tip can be broken off and you get a “needle and thread” – many agave leaves are fibrous and indeed sisal is produced from an Agave species. Tequila is a product from Agave which have to come from the Tequila region – the usual species is *Agave tequilana* - other agaves from other regions can also be used but in that case the fermented liquor is just called “pulque”.

Next was a variegated *A. parrasana* - it is quite cold tolerant. *A. parrasana* has more upright leaves than *A. parryi* and it perhaps looks better. With many agaves you see the imprint on the back of leaf due to the leaf growing behind it, and this can be quite attractive. Next was *Agave sobria marginata* – this was not a plant he was familiar with – it looks like a compact form of *A. americana marginata* and the leaves are curled. *Agave x Leopoldii* is a hybrid between *Agave filifera ssp. filifera* and *Agave filifera ssp. Schidigera*.

We continued with a few more plants - *Agave guiengola* hails from the south of Mexico (Oaxaca) and the species name is related to the mountain it grows on. It is sometimes called *A. “Creme Brulee”* and it has a red edge / tinge to the leaves. *Agave americana “Mediopicta”* has a broad white stripe up the middle of the leaf. Many of the American crossed have come into this country via Stuart Riley’s regular trips out to the USA. *Agave potatorum “Snowfall”* is quite a variable species. Ben said this plant looked a bit dry and perhaps was stressed due to that - give it some water and the leaves will open up. *Agave potatorum* normally has leaves with a grey blue colour. *Agave potatorum v. verschaffeltii* is one of the “butterfly” Agaves. Some people consider another choice form of small agave as *Agave isthmensis* and it might be considered a variety of *Agave potatorum*. This plant had split dichotomously. David mentioned that John Pilbeam’s Agave book is in the library and it is a relatively good reference. *Agave titanota* is another tender plant and this was a nice blue form – it is very variable. Some are compact and others make huge plants. Generally they all have quite dramatic teeth along the edge of the leaves. David Neville mentioned that it grows in the same canyon as *Echeveria laui*.

A. “romanii” is a hybrid between two species: *A. filifera* and *A. mitis (celsii) v albidior*. The next couple of plants were from Geoff Penrose and they were named after the locations where he got the cuttings – namely Gibraltar, and Columbia. after he had visited there. One of them perhaps looked like *A. angustifolia*. looks like *A. angustifolia*.

Agave polianthes (amica) is used for the cut flower trade. It would have a bulbous base to it and bulbils will form on the leaves or the inflorescences.

Just before we finished there were a very nice couple of variegated plants. *Agave isthmensis “Ohi Raijin”* is hard to keep going but it is a beautiful variety. Last but not least, *Agave “Kisshou Kan”* is a butterfly agave – it can also go under the name *Agave potatorum “Kichijokan”* – this can go on to make quite a large head eventually.

Adrian thanked both speakers for coping well with the selection of plants which had been brought in – and he also thanked the audience for bringing in the plants.

David Neville asked if people like the format of the meeting and if we wanted to do it again? The general opinion was positive and a couple of possible genera for next time were selected – *Rebutia/sulcorebutia* for cacti and *Echeveria* for succulents.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

At our next meeting on **Tuesday 4th October**, the speaker will be our own member, Tom Radford. Tom has been growing many cacti and succulents for a number of years and his interest extends over quite a wide variety of genera. He is also a keen photographer and he has given us some hints and tips on this topic in the past.

Portsmouth Branch will be holding their late **summer show** on 24th September. If you've not been to a show before, this would be a good chance for you to see the classes and types of plants that can feature at an official show.

Forthcoming Events

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|--------------------------|---------------|---|
| Sat 10 th Sep | Isle of Wight | TBA |
| Sat 17 th Sep | Portsmouth | Madagascar exposed (David Traish) |
| Sat 24 th Sep | Portsmouth | Portsmouth Autumn Show at Christ Church Hall, Widley, PO6 3NB |
| Tue 4 th Oct | Southampton | My collection through the years (Tom Radford) |
| Sat 8 th Oct | Isle of Wight | TBA |
| Sat 15 th Oct | Portsmouth | A personal choice, cacti and succulents (Tom Radford) |

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