

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The clocks had to be put back this weekend so we must be approaching winter. The weather has remained surprisingly mild and I have not yet turned on the central heating, although I am sure it will be needed within a week or two. It is nice to see the different hues of colour as the trees begin to drop their leaves.

In my conservatory, several Conophytums and other mesembs have been in flower over the past few weeks. However, I was rather surprised to see a *Notocactus magnificus* in bloom last weekend - I don't ever remember it flowering this late. I watered that weekend thinking it might be the last water the plants get for this year - although if the mild weather persists, that might need to be revisited.

Announcements

As everyone is probably aware, last month's meeting - where we were due to host the Zone 11 Quiz - had to be cancelled at short notice due to damage to the meeting hall's floor. David conveyed the cancellation to everyone whose email address or phone number he had - but if you didn't receive any notification and ended up making a wasted trip, please pass on your contact details to him. It is also a good idea to check our branch website on the day of a meeting since we do try and update the site if there are any unusual circumstances.

In September, the Branch put on a display and sales table at Romsey Show. This went well, and the branch even won a cash prize for our display.

Next month is our **Annual General Meeting**, which will be followed by an American supper. As is

usual, there will be no table show, library or plant sales at the AGM. However, please do bring along some food or nibbles for the American supper. There will also be a lucky dip "bran tub" where members can exchange gifts. Further details of this are given on the back page.

Nomination forms for the 2012 Committee are available on the front table. We would like to see some new faces join the committee and there are a variety of tasks which people can help with, so if you are interested in maintaining the success of the branch, please do have a chat with a committee member.

Last Month's Meeting

Agaves through the Ages

Our chairman Geoff Card welcomed Colin Walker, and invited him to give us his digital presentation titled "Agaves through the Ages".

Colin began by thanking the branch for inviting him - he had not visited Southampton branch before and was pleased to see such a large audience, and his impression was that we were a very impressive branch. He mentioned that he had been invited to a conference in Australia and had given an earlier version of this talk there. However, while in Australia he found that agaves growing like weeds there and so was able to update the presentation by adding quite a lot of new pictures. He had also brought his physical pointer with him - he doesn't like electronic ones because he is red-green colour blind and can't see the dot - and also this might be more useful to keep the audience under control!

He said this would be a wide-reaching talk, consisting not just of pictures of plants. We would also see some history, some Agave diversity and start branching into topics such as Agaves in art, uses and abuses of the plants, and some culture too!

We started with some Agave history. The first known images go back over 500 years, and we were shown some representations of the Aztec goddess of Agave, Mayahuel. It might be difficult to recognise the plants because of the crude representations, but

there were two uses visible in these images - sisal rope and alcoholic beverages, the latter forming part of the foaming head-dress that the goddess wore. These images were at least 500 years old and predated the Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1519, so they were from the Aztec era.

We moved on to the first good representations of agaves in print, from Francesco Hernandez. These dated from 1570-1577. The King of Spain had wanted someone to go to Mexico to investigate the natural history and to look for things that might be of economic importance. It proved to be a sad story. Hernandez was there for seven years and returned to Spain - but the originals of the works he took to Spain were destroyed in a fire in the King's palace, and the copies of the work left in Mexico were also lost. It wasn't until 1651 that pieces of his work were published. You could see recognisable images of an Agave which were referred to as "metl", and these were the first published image of an Agave.

At this time, interest in the New World was increasing, and Agaves started to feature in printed books. They featured in herbals, books dealing with the medicinal uses of plants. In England, John Gerard was a famous English herbalist and he published his "History of Plants" in 1597, and we saw two images from his book. The first was an *Aloe vera* and the second was "Aloe Americana" - at this time. Agaves were lumped in with aloes because they were considered to be aloes from the American continent. The myth also built up that they took a long time to flower - in some cases this is certainly true - hence the colloquial name of "Century Plant". In practice, most Agaves should flower well before then. In those days, when they did flower, they caused a great sensation, and we saw two illustrations of the flower spike from Agaves in Ansbach in 1626 and 1688 - one of these was an engraving 4 feet tall.

Next were the Dutch who were important explorers at this time. The Dutch East India Company was interested in the plants both for commercial and botanical reasons, and plants were collected and sent back to Amsterdam where botanists studied them. Jan Commelin published 5 books between 1697 and 1705, and these were large works with beautiful engravings. He had artists paint the pictures. We saw an example from 1701 showing an "Aloe americana ex Vera Cruce foliis angustioribus minus glaucis". These were polynomial names which were really a description of the plant, in this particular case meaning American aloe from Vera Cruz (Mexico) with slender and slightly glaucous leaves. Another engraving from the book featured "Aloe

americana polygona" which eventually was named *Agave vivipara* in 1753.

In England, Agave plants also flowered and one notable case was in 1729 when John Cowell in Hoxton (Hackney, London) flowered *Agave americana* in his garden, and decided to open the garden to the public. The flower spike was 20 feet tall. Some hooligans tried to destroy the plant and John was severely wounded in the ensuing melee. In the same year he produced a small book titled "An exact description of the Great American Aloe, its manner of blossoming, and uses". The book wasn't illustrated but he did also have some companion prints of the plants produced.

In 1753, Carl Linnaeus gave the birth to the binomial naming system and this meant that those long polynomial names could be discarded. Four agaves were named at this time, three of these were true Agaves and fourth was a member of the related species *Furcraea*. Colin was not sure of the origin of the name Agave - the name means noble - but Linnaeus was the first to use it and it has persisted. Linnaeus had recognised that the "American aloes" were very different structurally from the African Aloes and hence set up the new genus. After 1753, many new species of Agave were found and described.

Curtis's Botanical Magazine was one of the publications where Agaves were featured. The magazine commenced in 1787 and it is still being published, hence holding the record for the longest published botanical work. It was beautifully illustrated and we saw plates featuring *Agave horrida*, *Agave guttata* and a *Manfreda*. More plates showed *Agave xylonacantha* and *Agave striata*. These early plates were all hand coloured - so no two copies were the same - and this continued till 1948 where increasing costs and a shortage of skilled artists led to a switch to colour printing. The text to go with the illustrations was produced by John Baker who was interested in Agaves and Aloes - *Agave bakeri* (now *A. gilberti*) was named in his honour.

Pierre Joseph Redouté was a Frenchman based in Paris and under patronage of the empress Josephine, he published a book on succulents, although his best work was considered *Les Liliacées*. This featured plants from various genera including an Agave. Charles Lemaire was a French botanist who set up many genera including *Cleistocactus* and *Astrophytum*. He was the editor of a Belgian succulent journal and we saw illustrations of *Agave shidigera* from 1862 and *Agave verschaffeltii* (now

called *Agave potatorum*) from 1868. These were high quality hand coloured plates.

Back in England. John Peacock had built up an amazing collection of agaves. An illustration published in 1783 of the Peacock collection showed that it was a quality collection. He had a greenhouse full of agaves, and another full of cacti. Five years later, a catalogue of his collection was published, and it included 216 types of agaves. It was amazing to amass such a collection in that day and age. His collection was auctioned on his death, and quite a few of the plants were purchased by Kew. As they flowered, the plants were painted.

In America there was also some interest in the Agaves. George Engelmann was famous for his work on cacti - "Cacti of the boundary" contained some wonderful illustrations of the cacti - it was he who first described the saguaro. He was also interested in yuccas and their relatives and published a summary of these. He named some of the American agaves, such as *A. parryi* and *A. shawii*. Published round the same time, we saw the first illustration of *A. victoriae reginae*. It was described and illustrated in 1875 by Thomas Moore in The Gardeners' Chronicle - the plant was of course named after the reigning monarch, Queen Victoria.

In Italy, Agostino Todaro was a botanist who had a wide interest in plants which were being grown in botanical gardens in Palermo. He produced a book of 40 plates, of which 10 featured Agaves. Some of the names he used have disappeared now, but *Agave macroculmis* survives. Back in America - William Trelease was the first director of the Missouri Botanic Gardens in St. Louis, and in 1914, he produced a monograph - "The Agaves of the West Indies". This described around 40 species - the featured illustration showed *A. hurteri* from Guatemala.

A milestone in the history of Agaves was due to German botanist Alwin Berger, who worked in the Italian Riviera. Weather conditions there allowed plants to grow all the year around and he was the curator in charge of a wonderful collection owned by Sir Thomas Hanbury. He was a prolific author and produced books on many plants such as Aloes, Mesembs, Crassulaceae, and in 1915 he published a monograph of Agaves and this remains the most up to date and complete work on Agaves as of now. He recognised 274 species, compared to the three named by Linnaeus in 1753.

Howard Scott Gentry worked in the USA, and he produced the most recent and solid work on Agaves. "The Agaves of Continental North America" was

published in 1982 but it was not a complete monograph since it didn't cover the Caribbean plants, or those from South America. Another recommended book is "Agaves, Yuccas and related plants - a Gardener's Guide" by Mary & Gary Irish. Published in 2000, it is non-technical but quite useful and does have cultural advice, although being based in Arizona that advice may not exactly be applicable in this country!

The latest survey of Agaves was part of the 6 volume set of the Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants, which covered the Other Succulents. "Monocotyledons" was published in 2001 and it recognised 221 species of Agaves and related genera. There are a couple of more recent works - in 2007, Conference Proceedings from University of Guadalajara in Mexico described two new species, and in 2010, the Czech journal Kaktusy published a special edition devoted to *Agave utahensis* and its close relatives. This was produced in both Czech and English versions.

Colin ended this section of his talk with a map showing the current state of play as regards distribution. About 240 species are recognised and 205 of these occur in Mexico. There are a few in Guatemala and also a few in South America. Islands often have a rich and unique diversity and this applies to the Caribbean. In North America there are 29 species, but most of the distribution consists of *Agave virginica*, which is found in 19 states and it must be considered the most widespread species.

Now for some Agave diversity - an A to Z trip through the genus. *Agave attenuata* is unusual in that it has soft leaves and is quite tender. It has an inflorescence which produces an arching flower spike and we saw pictures of this taken in Melbourne. Australia. Most agaves have fibrous leaves, but *Agave bracteosa* has a brittle leaf rather like an aloe. We saw it growing alongside *A. victoriae-reginae*. *Agave caribaeicolais* is from the Windward Islands. It is distinctive, with a channelled spine on the leaf tip. *Agave cerulata* is from Baja California and it is one of the most widespread and commonest of the Baja agaves. *Agave chiapensis* is a beautiful plant from the Mexican state of Chiapas. The leaves form beautiful imprints on each other as they develop. *Agave colorata* also features leaf impressions from the central growing bud and has wonderful edges to the leaves. *Agave filifera* offsets frequently in cultivation and the fibres peel off. The related *A. shidigera* is now considered a subspecies of *A. filifera* and it has coarser hairs on the leaf edges and tends not to offset.

A. gentryi is a high altitude species with broad leaves, named to commemorate Howard Scott Gentry. *A. lophantha* is a smaller plant with yellowish central band to the leaf. Now for one of his all time favourites, *A. macroacantha*. We saw a picture of his plant in a decorated ornamental pot which he thought matched it well. It has dark fierce spines on the tips. They are architectural plants and one of the choicest agaves. *A. marmorata* has marbled leaves. *Agave mitis* var. *albidior* has pale glaucous leaves and offsets readily - but it is a big plant and not recommended for cultivation. *Agave nizandensis* comes from tropical South Mexico and will flower in a 6 inch pot. If given too much light it goes bright red - and if not given enough light it goes all lanky - he struggles with it. It is recommended if you don't have much space. It has very brittle leaves. The greenish-yellow flower is very unusual and unlike that of typical agaves. Another of the choice species is *Agave parryi truncata*. The chunky leaves contrast with dark spines. It has a broader and shorter leaf than the standard *A. parryi*. *A. parviflora* is another plant capable of flowering in a 6 inch pot. It is an attractive plant with filaments on the leaves. It tends not to offset and has a pale lemon flower. *A. pendula* grows on cliff sides and has an arching flower spike which hangs over the cliff edge, similar to *A. attenuata*. *Agave polianthiflora* looks similar to *A. parviflora* but has a rose-red flower.

Next was *Agave potatorum* which had reached a diameter of 70 cm after 20 years. Many nice forms of this are available. *Agave pumila* is a small plant. It was named as such because it was a dwarf plant and it stayed small, as described by Baker at Kew, but when planted out in places like California it forms big rosettes. It is unknown in the wild and might be a hybrid, and it has never been known to flower. A couple of plants with strong teeth and spines are *Agave salmiana* & *Agave xylonacantha*. *Agave shawii* ssp. *shawii* is an attractive plant with reddish brown teeth lining the leaves. Subspecies *goldmaniana* is the larger, inland form. *Agave stricta* has dagger like leaves which are vicious. It is difficult to accommodate in a greenhouse when it starts to get towards its mature size. *Agave titanota* is one of the most beautiful species. It has wonderful curved spines and several different forms are known. *Agave utahensis* is the most northerly of the Agaves, and *A. utahensis* var. *eborispina* has elongated terminal spines. It is quite slow growing. *Agave utahensis* var. *nevadensis* is not quite as impressive, since the spines are not as long.

Agave variegata was formerly one of the Manfredas. The leaves are quite variable and it has smallish flower spikes. Some species of Manfreda

have tuberous roots and die down - but molecular studies indicate that they are related to agaves. The most impressive of all the agaves is *Agave victoriae-reginae*. It is a wonderful architectural plant and we saw it growing in habitat. If you choose to only grow one, this should probably be the one. He has been growing one for 25 years and it hasn't flowered yet.

Restarting after the mid-meeting break, Colin confessed that he had been growing Agaves for over 20 years - but hadn't managed to flower one yet. It was one of his goals in life to flower an Agave before "he snuffed it".

So on to a section on Agave flowers. Some species should be capable of flowering in 8-9 years. There are 3 sub-genera in agave. *Manfreda* consists of 40 species with soft leaves and short flower spikes. *Agave* makes up half the species, with 120-130 members which have huge telegraph pole inflorescences with branches. The remaining quarter of the species belong to the *Littaea* and have a single flower spike which is superficially not branched and which has densely clustered flowers.

We saw an example of the flower spike forming, at the national Agave collection in Gloucestershire. The photographs were taken by Geoff Bowman and were a series of pictures of *Agave americana* taken over a series of 6 to 8 weeks. In the right conditions, the spike can grow at a rate of a foot a week. The spike eventually reached a height of 21 feet. The final image in the series showed the full spike against a red sky as the background. A close up of the individual flower showed it was 10 cm in size. People have counted the flowers on these spikes and one instance totalled 3000. The fruit which eventually forms is about 2 inches long. We saw pictures taken by Geoff of a pied wagtail and a kestrel sitting on the flower spike of *Agave americana*, but these are not the pollinators, although they may help with seed dispersal. The true pollinators are nocturnal bats since the flowers open at night and we saw a picture taken by Donna Howell showing a bat doing just this. This was *Leptonycteris*, a Mexican long nosed bat. There's a large supply of nectar for them. on their snouts. Although they are not the only animals which visit the flowers, they are the principal pollinators. Monocots rarely go cristate so the picture of a cristate *Agave shawii* flower spike featured a very unique occurrence.

Now for the trendy plants – some variegated agaves. There is a large range of variegated plants in cultivation now, with many being grown in Asia. The earliest variegated plants were noted in Holland

around 1715. We saw some prints featuring *Agave americana marginata aurea* dating from 1764 and 1838, followed by a picture of the actual plant which he took in California. These plants grow large and are not suited for greenhouse cultivation. This plant has a yellow margin to the leaves - there is also the alternative variety *Agave americana* "Mediopicta alba", where the variegation is a central white stripe. This plant also gets quite big. *Agave attenuata* 'Boutin Blue' was a cultivar which he named when David Neville was the editor of the BCSS Journal. It was a blue leaved plant found by Myron Kinnach and Fred Boutin. Another plant which he named in 2000 was *Agave attenuata* 'Emery Stripy', which appeared as a sport in the collection of the late Chet Emery. We saw an *Agave parryi* var. *truncata* 'Variegata' with yellow leaf margins and an even more spectacular *A victoriae-reginae* "Kizan" - with yellow on the leaf edges. This was from the collection of Cok Grootsholten.

Now for a bigger variegated plant. *Agave vivipara* 'Marginata' was photographed in a roof-top garden at Changi Airport Singapore, when he was coming back from Australia. It is a beautiful plant if you have the space. There are also plenty of smaller variegated agaves, and we saw a collage of 9 pictures from Tina Wardhaugh. This included *A. titonata*, *A. parryi*, *A. schidigera*, *A. victoriae-reginae* and a couple of *A. macroacanthas*. An unusual cultivar is formed by crossing the blue grey *A. macroacantha* which has big chunky leaves and purple spines with a soft-leaved Manfreda. The plant was named *Mangave* "Bloodspot" and it has grey leaves with the red blotches inherited from the Manfreda. It is a wonderful cultivar which forms rosettes 15 inches across, and decent-sized show plants should be award winners.

Now on to Agaves in the arts, in the form of paintings and sculptures. In 1613, Besler produced the "Hortus Eystettensis" which illustrated plants being grown at a royal garden in Eichstätt in Germany. The book contained just illustrations and no text, and 18 hand coloured copies are known to exist. Recently, a copy sold for £1m when it came up for sale at auction, making it the most expensive plant book ever sold. One agave, *Agave americana* was featured in the book. Abraham Munting was a Dutch botanist and he produced a small booklet called *Aloidarium* in 1680. The text was not very good but the illustrations were ornate and noteworthy. In 1710, Scarella in Italy produced a booklet on *Aloe americana*. It featured an artistic picture of an agave flower cluster raining nectar onto a nearby person. In 1755, Peyroleri from Italy did a painting of an agave where the leaves had been "stuck" together forming an unusual clump and not

a proper rosette. In 1731, an elaborate book of engravings celebrating creation was produced by Scheuchzer in Germany. One of the plates showed a flowering Agave and the seed capsules.

Robert Thornton was a medic and wanted to publish the most extravagant book on plants and at the end of the 18th century he produced the "Temple of Flora", employing artists to paint the lavish illustrations in the book. The book was unfinished but contained 31 plates, 4 of which featured succulents. The most famous of the four was a night blooming Selenicereus, and we saw the plate featuring *Agave americana*. This artwork was accompanied by a poem. The work was interesting but botanically useless. The cost of producing the book bankrupted him. An interesting illustration appeared in a gardening magazine in 1871. It featured the mythical "Agave telegraphica", showing tall agave flower spikes supporting telegraph wires. A Liebig "grocery" card from around 1935 featured agaves. There were 100s of different sets and in this instance, a set featured six succulents, one of which was an Agave. Next was a colourful oil painting produced in 1966 by Guatemalan artist, Pedro Rafael Gonzalez. This showed a native woman carrying harvested *Agave sisalina* leaves at a plantation. We then saw a couple of silk screen prints produced by New Zealand artist Kenny Ogle. The bold high-contrast images appealed to him. Next was a very realistic image of a variegated *Agave victoriae-reginae*. Colin asked the audience whether it was a photograph or a painting? It was actually an acrylic oil painting by Australian artist Ardy Tan.

Surfing the Internet, he stumbled across some paintings from American artist Carolyn Schmitz, and he ended up buying a copy of one he liked, titled "Savage Agaves" which featured a composite agave plant made from agave leaves from different species. The title is quite clever since "savage" is an anagram of "agaves". Other paintings by the same artist which we saw were titled "Victorian Agave boots" and "Lounge among the Chuparosa", the latter showing a sun lounger formed from an appropriately curved agave leaf.

Next was a children's A-Z book titled "Agave blooms just once" by Gisela Jernigan. It's was the only instance of an agave he has seen featured in a children's book. Agaves have also have appeared on stamps and we saw examples from Kenya featuring *Agave sisalina* and the USA featuring *Agave deserti*. Moving on to a completely different form of art, we saw an urn-shaped metal fountain at Tresco Abbey Gardens, in the shape of an agave. Members may recollect seeing this earlier in the

year, when Ben gave us his talk on the Abbey Gardens. At Sydney botanic gardens, there was a strange shaped metal sculpture with *Agave attenuata* growing near the base. Next we saw a black pot he had found being thrown out at work = he took it home, drilled holes in it and found it ideal for *Agave macroacantha*. he set it up to take some pictures and found that his cat Fortune decided to take up an interest and eventually fell asleep next to the plant.

Now on to uses and abuses. Agaves are not just beautiful plants - some have an economic importance. We saw an agave hedge in Guatemala. They are fierce plants and well suited for this purpose. Sisal is traditionally an important product derived from Agaves, and we saw a book published in 1963 on sisal cultivation, a print from 1903 showing a sisal plantation and a more recent photograph of a modern plantation in Madagascar with the cut leaves. It is amazing that in this day and age, despite modern day synthetic materials, sisal is able to have unique merits. Sisal is grown in Brazil (largest producer), Madagascar, Mexico, China, and East Africa. The leaves are harvested for the fibres they contain. Most agaves are very fibrous and if you try removing a leaf you'll know how tough they can be. The fibres are cut and washed and dried and we saw some being dried. The end products include rope, matting, shopping bags, and cat scratch posts.

By far and away, the products of most economic importance and increasing significance are the alcoholic beverages made from Agave. We saw another image of Mayahuel, the Aztec Agave goddess which predated the 1519 Spanish conquest, so we know that the use of alcoholic beverages goes back a long time. Various species are used, but the most popular is *Agave tequilana* which grows near the city of Tequila in the state of Jalisco. The plant is harvested, the leaves are removed and then the central pineapple-shaped core structure can be pressed or roasted and the complex carbohydrates break down to produce sugars which are fermented. Tequila is produced by distilling the alcohol to produce liquor which is one of Mexico's major exports. Other beverages like mescal and pulque are also produced by fermentation without distillation. About a dozen species of agave are used for this. Other products of agave include Agave "nectar" which is sold in health food stores. This is actually produced from the "pina" central core which has the juice extracted from it and then processed. It is recommended as a sweetener for diabetics since it contains fructose and plant sugars which have a lower glycemic index than normal sugar (sucrose).

Now to discuss some close relatives. *Furcraea* consists of 20 species which are not very succulent.

The leaves resemble those of yucca. The plants are tropical and come from Southern Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and the Southern USA, and will not survive outdoors in our weather. We saw *F. parmentieri* with bulbils on the dying inflorescence. *F. longaevea* is notable for producing the largest inflorescence of any plant, with the flower spike being capable of reaching 13m in height. The anthers do not stick out, however the flowers also have tepals which are quite large and broad compared to agaves. We saw the attractive *Furcraea selloa* variegata growing at Melbourne Botanic Gardens. His died in the greenhouse last winter, suggesting it is quite tender. Another relation is *Beschorneria yuccoides*, which looks just like a yucca. The flower spike has large coloured bracts, and we saw it flowering at Kew. It can be grown in a frost-free environment.

Now for a few exciting recent introductions. *Agave albipilosa* is the most spectacular new Agave discovery in many years. Described in 2007, it has tufts of hairs at the end of the leaves, and we saw a close up of this unusual structure. It is an amazing sight and there is no other agave like it. It is just coming into cultivation and will eventually get around. *Agave charazroi* was published in a Mexican book in 2007 and it has yellow-green or bluish leaves with red margins. The dark edge to the leaf means it may be similar to *Agave gilberti* which is only known from one plant at Kew which flowered and which hasn't been found since. It is tricky to grow but makes a beautiful plant. *Agave gysophylla* is an older species described by Howard Scott Gentry. It has brittle wavy leaves. A sport of this in Australia produced bulbils which were variegated, and these plants have crinkly leaves with white edges and goes under the cultivar name "Ivory Curls". It's another tropical plant but the weather out in Australia means it is easy for them to grow.

For small greenhouses, *Agave isthmensis* forms 20-25cm rosettes and is a nice compact little plant, related to *A. pygmaea* and *A. potatorum*. It was first described in 1993 and is one to look out for. It comes from Southern Mexico, so needs some heat. *Agave montana* was considered to be a prime candidate for growing outdoors since it grows at altitudes of 9000-10000 feet in Mexico and hence should be subjected to cold temperatures and be hardy. However, last year everyone who was growing it outside lost it. *Agave ovatifolia* has solitary rosettes of ovate blue grey leaves. The plant can reach a size of 4 feet across and it is related to *A. parryi*. *Agave pelona* is from the Sonoran desert and was described by Gentry in 1972. It has yellow green leaves tinged with red and has long white terminal spines which lead to an attractive overall

appearance. Colin ended his talk with an agave decorated for Christmas, with coloured baubles placed on the leaf tips!

There was some time for comments and questions at the end. Ian Acton suggested that *Agave havardiana* may be hardy and Colin agreed. Ivor said that he had left an *Agave victoriae-reginae* outdoors last winter and it had survived. Colin said he was trying a large 3 feet *A. striata* outdoors - It has tough leaves and he hoped it would get through the winter.

A member of the audience asked whether agaves always died after flowering. The answer is yes, since the growing point of the plant that turns into the flower spike. However, by then the plant may have produced offsets or clumped and formed more heads. Anyway, death was a certainty once the flower spike was produced. Another question was whether there was any hybridising going on? Colin referred to the Mangave he showed earlier and mentioned that one or two others exist. However, generally the answer is no due to the long life cycle - you may have to wait 20 or more years to get the plant to flower and of course you need to have both parents in flower which might be hard to arrange! The final question was about the pinas which are used to make tequila. These are effectively the start of the inflorescence and when these are harvested, the plant dies. For sisal, the story is different and the leaves can be harvested for several years.

Overall I am sure all who attended would agree this was a very interesting and informative talk which was well presented.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 19 entries in the September table show.

	Cacti – Gymnocalycium	Succulents – Mesembs
Open	(1) T Grech Gymnocalycium sp.	(1) B Beckerleg Glottiphyllum oligocarpum
	(2) B Beckerleg Gymnocalycium hybopleurum	(2) -
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) T Grech Gymnocalycium baldianum	(1) B Beckerleg Conophytum tischeri
	(2) B Beckerleg Gymnocalycium spiegazzinii	(2) A Jankovec Conophytum sp.
	(3) T Grech Gymnocalycium sp.	(3) A Jankovec Conophytum sp.

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held on September 19th.

Branch finances were discussed. Alice had still not been properly registered for the COIF deposit account, but was able to present balances for the deposit account and the current account. She had also prepared some initial data on the financial year and we appeared to have made a small profit. In fact all our shows and displays had made a profit and hence had contributed to branch funds.

A thank you to all those who were involved and have helped at the shows or have donated plants or seeds for sale. Thanks are also due to those members who donate items for the raffle.

Dot provided some early information on library receipts for the year. We had received donations of books and where these were duplicates of books we already have in the library, they were put up for sale off. Proceeds from the sale of these had raised useful funds.

Our vice-chairman Bill Seymour has been unable to attend branch or committee meetings this year and depending on his circumstances, we may seek a replacement for this post. For catering, Glenn has to

sometimes miss meetings and this causes a problem because David needs to cover. We would ask for volunteers who would be prepared to help out in the kitchen

Since the last committee meeting we had put on events at the New Forest Show, the Solent Fuchsia Show and also at Romsey show. We had won a silver medal at the New Forest Show and a cash prize of £80 at the Romsey show.

We had a good series of talks over the summer and the Agave talk given by Colin was reckoned to be one of the best and most interesting we have had..

Preparations for the Zone Quiz in October were discussed. David Neville and I had visited Mark Jakins on September 14th to review the questions which had been prepared so far and to discuss what more was required. About 15 rounds has been prepared but not all were suitable and another 40-50 rounds of general knowledge, horticultural and cactus & succulent questions were still required. David and I had agreed to continue working with Mark. Other matters such as a laptop and projector for the event had also been discussed with Mark. Tony Gretch agreed to collect the Isle of Wight members from the ferry. The layout of seating in the hall (so that the teams and audience could see each other and the screen and question master) were also discussed. The branch would need three volunteers to form the Southampton team, and this would be chosen closer to the day of the event.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of the year will be held on December 6th. This will be our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the **Christmas Social**. After receiving some reports from this year's Committee and choosing the Committee for next year, we'll get on with the real business of enjoying some food and drink and chatting with fellow branch members.

Drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food for the buffet table.

There will also be a "bran tub" lucky-dip. Simply bring along a wrapped present (suggested value is £2 or therabouts) and place it in the tub at the start of the meeting. Later in the evening you'll get a chance to take a present out of the tub.

In order to give the Committee members a chance to participate in the festivities, there will be no plant sales, sundries sales, table show or library at the December meeting. (Although Dot will be willing to accept back any library books which you wish to return).

Finally, for Committee members, a reminder that a committee meeting is due to be held on 21st November. **Please bring along your annual reports** so that these can be included in the December newsletter. Any format (handwritten, typewritten, or as a file on a floppy disk or USB stick) is acceptable. Alternatively, reports can be emailed to my email address, as shown on the front of the newsletter.

Forthcoming Events

Sat	12 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	To be confirmed - Suzanne & Tony Mace
Sat	19 th	Nov	Portsmouth	"Travels in Southern Mexico" - David Neville
Mon	21 st	Nov	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat	3 rd	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue	6 th	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper
Sat	10 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & American Supper

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