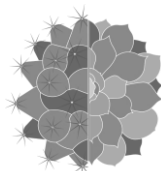


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

November 2023



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Editorial

Autumn does seem to have arrived and of course our clocks went back a couple of weeks ago, so it gets dark just after 6pm now. The recent weather has been quite wet and windy and we've also had the odd frost or two – I had to scrape ice off the car early this morning. I think we are quite close to providing the last watering of the year and it will just depend on whether we get any more warm and sunny days now.

Last Month's Meeting

Adrian said it was good to see a good number of people in attendance. David said that we had an apology for absence from Alice – a fox had been attacking her chickens and a farmer with a shotgun was due to come round and try and deal with this on the day of the meeting. Robin Caddy had recently contracted pneumonia – and although he had been discharged from hospital, it was best to avoid contact with others for a few days. Ted Smith was on a cruise and so was Geoff Penrose. David also mentioned that John Pilbeam had passed away in September. He had given talks at our branch on many occasions, and of course we have many of his books in our library. David said it was a personal loss because he had been on numerous trips with John to Mexico.

David also mentioned that the number of BCSS speakers has dropped dramatically in the past 3 years, and matters are made difficult due to our meetings being on a weekday. The committee will have to think about how to handle this in the future. He welcomed a new member Paul, who was attending our meeting for the first time.

Next month is our AGM and we normally hold an American Supper as well. Please read the

information on the last page regarding arrangements for the meeting. It will also be time to elect the branch committee for next year - David mentioned to me that a couple of people will be standing down this year so we will need some replacements - if you are interested in helping run the branch, please have a word with David during today's meeting.

Adrian said it was a pleasure to introduce Alice Vanden Bon. Alice is the secretary of Reading & Basingstoke branch, and of course we had Keith and Kathy Flanagan from the same branch speak to us last month. Alice is also the technical editor of *Cactus World* (the BCSS Journal) and she has given talks at our branch previously. This talk was going to be about a group of plants which she likes a lot.

Mesembs in Habitat & Cultivation

Alice's talk started with a picture showing half a dozen people on a rocky outcrop, on their hands and knees, presumably looking for some small plants - she said this is how you spend most of your time in habitat, when you are looking for mesembs!

She also gave us some facts about the rainfall in South Africa. It has areas of summer and winter rainfall. The winter rainfall is confined mainly to the Western Cape and the rain falls from May to August. The summer rainfall area covers most of the rest of the country, but in between these regions, you have areas that can have rain at any time of year. So in the West, you get rain in the winter, in the East, rain in the summer. In the Western Cape the rainfall has steadily been reducing, and in 2017 it was the lowest rainfall since 1933. Because of this decline in rainfall, the plants have been suffering and it is concerning because if the trend continues, some species will disappear. Overall the Western Cape climate is Mediterranean, with dry summers and mild and moist winters.

Mesembs are generally grown in loam based soil and she grows hers in a John Innes mix – it needs to be very free draining, so she adds grit (or perlite or pumice) in a 50-50 mix. There are various watering regimes for the plants, since different genera grow at different times and people have drawn up charts to help assess the watering. Peter Bint has produced a

guide which can be downloaded from the Manchester BCSS website (copies available from front table) and she had also been sent information by Alan Bromley which she will pass on to us for printing and distribution to the members (also available from front table). Mesembs don't need much fertiliser – if given too much, they can become bloated or atypical, so only use half strength feed and just administer it occasionally.

Our light levels are lower than those of South Africa, so good light is required at all times. Air circulation is also crucial and she uses fans in her greenhouse to move the air around. As with cacti, shading may be required in the hottest months of the year, especially for the winter growers. In the winter you don't need much heat but you do need to be frost free. She aims for a minimum temperature of 2°-3°C – she used to aim for 5°C previously, but the fuel bills are so high these days. The winter growers do also need some moisture - but this is dangerous in the coldest months, so she only gives a small amount, just enough to keep them turgid. Note that plants can absorb moisture from the air, so if it's really damp and humid you might see plants start to split their bodies even if you have not watered them. During March, as temperatures increase, the watering can be increased before stopping completely in April. After that, species like *Conophytums* will receive no water until the middle or end of July. Summer rainfall plants can be watered just the same as your cacti.

Now for some plants. We saw *Aloinopsis luckhoffii* in habitat looking very neat and showing the protuberances on the plant body. Next we saw *Aloinopsis schoonesii* in cultivation and flowering well. You do have to be a bit careful with this genus - they have a woody rootstock and too much water can cause rot. *Argyroderma pearsonii* has the nickname “babies bottoms” and you can see why. In habitat they look superb, although some were quite wrinkled, they were still managing to flower. In cultivation they don't look as impressive but they still flower quite well. She mentioned some of the winter growers are coming into flower now and others are also in bud. They do tend to mark very easily and the leaves can also split – even just one generous watering can cause this to happen. *Argyroderma fissum* is a bit easier to grow and it has a nice pink coloration to the leaves in habitat. It is attractive in cultivation and is easy to grow from seed.

Bijlia cana is a plant which she has not seen in habitat - it grows north of Prince Albert. The shrubby *Cephalophyllum alstonii* had been photographed by Chris Rodgers in the

Richtersveld – it is amazing to see in habitat, and the masses of red flowers just hit you in the eye – some have a blood red colour and it grows into very large bushes. We saw *Cerochlamys pachyphylla* growing at Oudtshoorn in the little Karoo it was very suntanned. In cultivation they are much greener but they flower well. There is a white flowered form called *albiflora* which has shinier leaves. They are winter growers and will flower in January.

Cheiridopsis denticulata tends to grow everywhere and it has large flowers, some 2 inches across and these are in shades of pink and apricot and white. She did flower it in her collection, it is quite easy to flower but does need plenty of light so does require top shelf treatment. We saw a *Cheiridopsis* with open seed capsules after some rain had fallen on it, and the patterns of the seed capsule are possibly even more attractive than the flowers. She mentioned they rarely encountered rain on their travels but they did have some on one day. The plants colour up nicely in habitat and we saw a red bodied one – sadly we will never get that coloration in our collections. *Cheiridopsis crassa* flowers well in cultivation and this was a plant she got from Gordon Rowley. If you are going to grow just one, then *Cheiridopsis peculiaris* is the one to try - it is also one of the hardest to grow. These plants were dotted around in habitat, and they found them near Steinkopf in only in a small area. This area has subsequently been disturbed due to grit being taken for road repairs. It has large leaves with a nice coloration and a spectacular yellow flower with thin petals. We saw a seedling in Derek Bowdery's collection, which had grown an extended petiole, which is nothing like the plants in habitat. She has grown them from seed and they are getting better as they age, so she might have a better photograph of a cultivated plant to share one day.

Conicosia elongata is a plant which is probably not suited for a greenhouse - it grows from 18 inches to 2 feet across. It is very floriferous, with yellow flowers and the fields are covered with these but it very rarely seen in cultivation. We saw a close-up of the flower, with a beetle diving head down in the centre. *Conicosia pugioniformis* has similar flowers but it is different - it retains its leaves all year - the previous plant is a perennial which sheds its leaves.

She would now show us a few *Conophytums* - this is her favourite species amongst the mesembs. *Conophytum bachelorum* had been named by Steve Hammer since he thought it was a solitary plant which doesn't offset - but it does clump up. It grows on just one hillside. She showed us where it grows - or where it used to grow. They had visited the site on different trips and previously the plants had been

there - but on a later trip, the mountain had been completely stripped of the plants. There may be a seed bank in the ground and perhaps the plants will grow again one day, but it is very sad to see this sort of thing happening. She showed a picture which had appeared on Facebook, of people offering the plants for sale. We saw an example of this plant grown by Terry Smale – it was a superb specimen, now owned by someone else of course.

Conophytum bilobum is a species which she used to think was boring - but they are not at all. We saw a white flowered form called *C. bilobum* “*lacteam*” which was a nicely coloured plant in habitat. Hers were all green but she put them in better light and they improved. Various different forms exist, in grey or blue shades and pubescent, with angular or rounded leaves and a few of the old names are still in use to identify these. Most are yellow flowered. *Conophytum bruynsii* was discovered in 1995 in the northern Knersvlakte. They are interesting plants which flower erratically from November onwards, but she’s also had them flower in July and some are flowering right now. They never flower en-masse.

Conophytum burgeri is a plant that interested her as soon as she heard that a single head could fill a 2 inch pot. It occurs at just one site which had been plundered but it has since found in another location. These were quite a size and in habitat they tend to remain solitary. In cultivation they can offset and they flower well, with deep pink petals with a paler centre. Last year they didn’t flower at all for her, but this year they have flowered very well and maybe the heat from last year helped them. It is easy to set seed if you get flowers on the plants and they germinate easily as well.

Conophytum concavum is a coastal growing plant from Namaqualand. The flowers are creamy in colour and smell of honey - in cultivation they have green bodies. *Conophytum danielli* was initially published as *C. jarmillae* but it was re-published by Petr Pavelka in 1999, who named it after the farmer whose land it grows on. *Conophytum hammeri* was named after Steve Hammer in 1985 - they thought it was rare initially but it has been found in lots of sites. It grows in the Richtersveld and wherever there are patches of white quartz it’s worth looking for this. Once you’ve seen one you will be able to see a lot more - it takes a while to tune your eye in. It is night flowering but the flowers stay open once they have opened for a couple of days.

C. hanae was found by Petr Pavelka in 1996 – it has a nice distinctive red edge to the plant bodies and this feature appears on cultivated plants too. It flowers quite well. *C. fulleri* is one that tends to

push the flowers through the sheath. It is very difficult to take all the sheaths off on this one, so it is not one that she would put in a show. *C. herreanthus* ssp. *herreanthus* was a plant given to her by Derek Bowdery just before he died. It was last seen in habitat in the 1960s and was thought to be lost, but it has been re-found in habitat last year, and it seems to be plentiful but the location is being kept secret. *C. herreanthus* ssp. *rex* has pink flowers and has red coloration to the bodies – it has a softer look to it since the leaves are less angular than ssp. *herreanthus*. In cultivation it flowers really well and it is easy from seed.

C. obcordellum is a night flowering plant with a nice pattern on the bodies. It is very variable, and in habitat we saw it growing with mosses and lichens. We saw *C. obcordellum* var. *ceresianum*. in cultivation (RR714) with a wonderful pattern on the body. Chris Rodgerson has crossed these plants to emphasise the dark bodies and called the resultant plants “Blackout”. We saw *Conophytum wittebergense* with hair in the fissure. *C. obcordellum* var. *ceresianum* ‘spectabile’ has unusual shaped bodies and it was grown from MSG seed. This species is beautifully perfumed, and we also saw it in full flower.

We saw *Conophytum pellucidum* in habitat – it grows on granite domes in crevices or in grit pans and doesn’t need any depth of soil. It is incredibly variable, and we saw pictures of a few examples in her greenhouse taken a few years ago. *C. pellucidum* v. *neohallii* is particularly attractive. Most are white flowered but some are pink. When they flower, they flower en-masse and you can’t even see the plant bodies – we saw 50+ flowers all open at the same time. Another plant had a “hot cross bun” pattern on the body. We also saw *C. pellucidum* grown from MSG seed, with a better flower.

Conophytum ratum grows completely submerged in the sand – they dug away the sand to take a look at the body and you can see a substantial part was under the soil. There is enough tissue above the ground to let the plant still photosynthesise. In cultivation and you should just grow them like other *Conophytums*. Next was *Conophytum turrigerum*, which grows 30 miles north of Cape Town. You can see how wet it is – it was growing with *Droseras* - and there was standing water there. They were flowering for her at the current time, and they have produced big purple flowers. *Conophytum verrucosum* is one of her favourites. They have beautiful brown bodies in habitat and we also saw it in cultivation, with a nice pattern on top. There is a slight pink flush to the flowers.

Dactylopsis digitata is a plant that grows by the thousand in the northern Knersvlakte but it is very difficult in cultivation and not common. She saw it in cultivation at Kirstenbosch. The flowers are 1cm across and it flowers just as it goes into rest.

Delosperma ashtonii grows in a summer rainfall area, in Lesotho to be precise. It is easy to grow. She had it for many years in her garden (grown from MSG seed) – you just need to keep the rain off it in the winter, but she lost it last year. *Delosperma sphaemanthoides* grows in the Western Cape. You need to water it all the time. Terry Smale said it was one of his best sellers because everyone killed it due to not watering it enough. flowers well and she saw a big pan of it recently at an alpine garden show in Loughborough. The picture of *Didymaotus lapidiformis* was taken many years ago, on her first trip to South Africa. It flowers from both sides at the same time. She has grown it from seed but not managed to keep it going for very long.

We resumed the talk in the second half of the meeting. *Dinteranthus puberulus* grows at the same site as *Conophytum burgeri* – it has a nice yellow flower, and pink flowered forms also exist. *Dracophilus dealbatus* grows in the Richtersveld in arid areas. It has pink flowers. *Faucaria boscheana* was a plant she had only seen in habitat – it has a white cartilaginous edge to the leaf. *Faucaria albidens* in her greenhouse had produced a mass of yellow flowers. *Faucaria candida* is a white flowered one to watch out for – it is the only species of *Faucaria* with white flowers.

Fenestraria rhopalophylla in habitat is a plant that is very hard to find - only the very tips of the leaves are exposed and the main body of the plant grows totally submerged in the sand. The plants can photosynthesize through the leaf tips. We saw a pan of *Fenestraria auriantica* “Fireworth” in her greenhouse – this has orangish flowers.

Frithia pulchra is easy to grow and is a summer grower. It never gets incredibly big, so you are doing well to get it past 4 inches. She has never seen it in habitat because it grows near Johannesburg and she’s not been to that area. *Frithia humilis* is a smaller plant and it has paler flowers – it does not have the same vigour as *F. pulchra*. The photograph of *Gibbaeum album* was taken at Springfontein Farm. The plants seemed to be growing in a circle and she explained the older bodies in the centre must have died. In cultivation the plants retain the blue-white body coloration and they have pink or white flowers. *Gibbaeum heathii* is another nice species. In habitat it looks a bit more sunburnt, and the coloration is better. *Gibbaeum velutinum* was a

plant that she had not seen in habitat - it is one of the larger growers and it flowers well.

Glottiphyllum was a genus that she had not seen much in habitat but this was one example, although she did not know the species name. *Glottiphyllum pygmaeum* was growing in her greenhouse and we saw it featuring yellow flowers in October. This plant is considered to be a small form of *Glottiphyllum nelli*. The plant had 2 to 2.5 inch flowers. The discrepancy in names became obvious to her when she saw a plant at a show at Bristol and it was also named *G. pygmaeum* but was actually *Glottiphyllum nelii* - and it fitted the description of the latter. We saw *Glottiphyllum oligocarpum* in habitat followed by a plant in cultivation which had filled an 8 inch pan. This is the one to grow if you only want to grow one species, it has the largest flowers in the genus.

Jordaaniella spongiosa is considered to be *Cephalophyllum spongiosum* after Heidi Hartman reclassified it in 2001. The attractive flowers are 10cm across and they were pink with yellow centres, and they can be redder than the image we saw. *Juttadinteria kovismontana* grows up in arid areas in the Richtersveld and Namibia. In cultivation it flowers almost continuously. This species is also called *Juttadinteria simpsonii*, with the only difference being the protuberances on the leaves. They have nice white flowers. The plants sometimes get little brown marks on the leaves – she wasn’t not sure what causes that. *Lapidaria margarethae* and *Dinteranthus* and *Lithops* are grouped together these days. In habitat they grow in Bushmanland and into Namibia. They are easy from seed but very slow growing, so take a while to clump up. *Lampranthus* is too large for the greenhouse. This photo was taken in habitat in September where they wore some extra shirts because they were being attacked by some flies. The plants can be grown outside in a garden, but they are not frost hardy.

Lithops bromfieldii was very shrivelled in habitat but alive and well. *Lithops comptonii* didn’t look so good – it is one of the most southernmost *Lithops* and is difficult to find. *Lithops dorotheae* was looking very good when they first found it in 2009 but 10 years later in 2019, the site had been stripped and all the plants had gone. *Lithops herrei* was growing in the lichen fields at Alexander Bay. *Lithops marmorata* has one of widest distributions in habitat and was in great condition, and we also saw this in cultivation. *Lithops olivacea* wasn’t too bad and *Lithops otzeniana* was one of her favourites, this was dehydrated. but it can look very good as well. At Luderitz we saw them adopting the pose when searching for a small plant – they were

looking for *L. optica rubra*. Eventually they found it and it was about 10mm across. After spending ages looking for more, all they found in the end was one green plant and one pink one. We saw Derek Bowdery's wonderful plant of *rubra* which was several inches across, and this would have done well on any show bench. It flowers in December.

Meyerophytum globosum used to be called *Monilaria* previously. It grows in the coastal area of Namaqualand. This particular plant was growing at Kirstenbosch. It has a white flower and is quite a challenge in cultivation since it needs excellent light. *Mitrophyllum* produce long shoots when they are going to flower. They generally have yellow flowers but she did find a pink flowered one once. A seedling in habitat had amazing coloration. *Monilaria pisiformis* were lovely plants. We saw a photo of Andy Young's plant taken in September – it was just coming into growth for her now and so it would probably flower in February. She's never flowered it. The photo of *Monilaria chyrsoleuca* was taken at Steve Hammer's collection in California by Andy. We saw *Monilaria moniliformis* in habitat, followed by a plant of *Monilaria moniliformis* in flower which Andy Young had grown from seed. It took 8 years to flower and they do take a very time before they will flower.

Muiria hortensae is now considered a *Gibbaeum* and this grows at Springfontein farm. It is easy from seed and easy to grow for a couple of years but also easy to kill. There is no obvious fissure on the plant body so the flower has to burst through the body at the top. In a habitat picture, we saw it growing with a *Gibbaeum album*. We also saw three plants in a pot cultivated by Don Smith from seed but unfortunately these plants died last winter. *Nelia meyeri* are arid loving plants from the Richtersveld. They tend to split their leaves in cultivation and they should be more highly rated on the show bench since they are very slow. For most mesembs, the flowers open at midday and close in the evening but with this, the flowers open and then remain open until they die. With *Nelia pillansii* we could see the split leaf on this plant.

Oophytum grows like a weed on the Knersvlakte and they grow by the million there, but they are very difficult in cultivation. You can germinate them but they will never look like the habitat plants and they are a great challenge to grow well – she has never seen one entered in a show. We saw the tiny plants of *Oophytum oviforme*, they were just millimetres across. *Phyllobolus* used to be *Sphalmanthus* previously. They have fabulous flowers and they are widespread over South Africa. Insects love them.

We saw one species with interesting projections on their leaves and they also have conspicuous epidermal cells to store water and these grow on cultivated plants too. One plant had a papillose surface, almost giving it a reptilian look. *Phyllobolus resurgens* had pearl droplets on the leaves which made it look very nice - this had been grown from MSG seed and it has nice yellow flowers in February.

Pleiospilos bolusii was a plant she had not seen in habitat - there are 4 species (*bolusii*, *nelli*, *simulans* and *compactus*) and *P. nelli* is probably the most popular. *Pleiospilos simulans* is a lovely plant and has good flowers. *Prenia sladeniana* is another plant not for the greenhouse – it grows by the metre. *Psammophora herrei* is the same as *Psammophora longifolia*. These are lovely plants which grow in the Richtersveld. They tend to have sticky leaves which are covered in sand and this must be a form of mimicry and also provide protection from the sun and UV. The seed is not offered much these days, but she did get some from Mesa Garden some time ago.

Sceletium is named after the skeleton leaf remains covering the leaves. It is easy to grow in the greenhouse. *Schwantesia herrei* grows near the Orange River and into Namibia. It likes arid conditions and you need to grow them on the top shelf. They have yellow or white flowers. *Schwantesia borchersii* is another plant which forms brown marks on the leaves, and she wasn't sure what causes this. *Stoerberia frutescens* is not for the greenhouse – it grows to a metre tall and it can also become woody. It has a nice flower but it's a pity about the size of the plant. *Stomatium albo-roseum* grow well in cultivation but they can get sprawly. In habitat they missed the flowers on these since they were there early in the day. There were amazing markings on another plant – the papillae are very pronounced. They do look best in habitat. *Stomatium murinum* has distinctive teeth on the leaves which make it easy to identify. It is quite a rare plant.

Tanquana prismatica was hived off from *Pleiospilos* by Heidi Hartman. There are three species (*prismatica*, *archeri* and *hilmari*). We also saw *Tanquana hilmarii* in her collection - a plant she had for years. It has had 5 heads for many years and doesn't seem to want to get any bigger for some reason. *Titanopsis calcarea* is probably the biggest plant in the genus but it is not as attractive as some of the others. The plant was in a 5½ inch pan. We saw a close up of *Titanopsis hugo-schlechteri* - this is her favourite in this genus. The plant was emerging through the sand in the Gamsberg and it was well

camouflaged. In cultivation it is similar. *Titanopsis primosii* is also quite good.

Vanheerdea primosii is incredibly difficult to grow. It has a bright yellow buttercup flower and we saw a plant in habitat, but she's never seen the flowers. There was no sunset to end with, but Alice decided to use a picture of a yellow conophytum to end the presentation – this was *Conophytum tantillum* in full flower.

Adrian thanked her for the talk – he said he never realised that there were so many different genera amongst the mesembs. He wondered how many plants she grows and how she copes with the winter growers as well as the summer growers. Alice mentioned she has a 34 foot greenhouse and also two 12 feet greenhouses.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday December 5th** and this will be our Annual General Meeting, followed by the Christmas Social. After receiving reports from the main branch officers, and electing next year's committee, we would normally hand out the Table Show trophies - but since we did not have a table show this year, that last part will not be necessary this year.

After this, it will be time to dig into some food and refreshments! A selection of drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food suitable for sharing for the buffet table. Please note that we do not have an oven or cooking facilities at the meeting hall, so any food items which need cooking will need to be prepared in advance at home.

In order to give the Committee members a chance to participate in the festivities, there will be no plant sales or library at the December meeting.

Forthcoming Events

Sat	11 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	Plants and Animals of the Western Cape. Part 2 (Hazel Taylor)
Sat	18 th	Nov	Portsmouth	Agaves, Aeoniums and Haworthias (Stuart Riley)
Tue	5 th	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat	9 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting followed by American Supper
Sat	9 th	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue	2 nd	Jan	Southampton	A Selection of Short Talks by Branch Members

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