

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Branch Secretary

D & M Corina
79 Shirley Avenue
Shirley
Southampton
Hampshire
SO15 5NH

(023) 80779057

Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah
29 Heathlands Road
Eastleigh
Hampshire
SO53 1GU

(023) 80261989

vvshah@clara.co.uk

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Editorial

Here we are at the start of another year! I hope everyone enjoyed a good time over the Christmas break. The weather has been fairly typical, with a couple of cold spells, but also some sunshine which has encouraged the flowers on my *Crassula tecta* and *Fenestraria rhopalophylla*. The Mammillaria I mentioned last month has managed to open two magenta buds - I think it's the first time I've had a cactus (other than a Schlumbergera) in bloom on New Year's Day.

Over the weekend I went to a few garden centres to see if any of them were selling any interesting Christmas cacti. The choice of flower colours was fairly standard but I did pick up a nice scarlet variety at one store. I also ended up getting a young *Strelitzia* (will produce the exotic bird-of-paradise flower in a few years) and a *Chlorophytum orchidastrum*. The latter has green leaves but the heart of the plant is a striking orange colour. It is related to the spider plant and is supposedly quite tolerant and easy to grow.

Announcements

Today's meeting will consist of talks and presentations by branch members, with the emphasis being on pictures taken with digital cameras. We will use a digital projector to display the images, although a conventional projector is available, in case anyone wants to show slides.

By now, you should all have received the **December Journal**, along with the annual seed list and membership renewal forms. The cost of membership remains at £15, with reduced fees for OAPs and junior or associate members. If you have misplaced the membership form or are a new member, then it is possible to pay the subscription on the BCSS website (<http://www.bcss.org.uk>) using a debit or credit card.

The **2006 Branch Programme** is available from the front table. Apart from not having settled on a date for a display at Hilliers Arboretum, all other dates have been assigned. The Zone 11 Programme is also being put together and copies of this will be available soon.

The last article in the Snippets sections contains details of a proposed trip to Argentina/Bolivia, and the organisers have requested a quick response. Please contact Peter Down for further details.

Last Month's Meeting

2005 AGM Report

Chairman Peter Down commenced proceedings by stating that yet again, we had been underwhelmed by volunteers to take a seat on the committee, and no nominations had been received for the any of committee posts. Fortunately, the existing committee members had agreed to carry on in their current roles.

He went on to state that the Branch had a very successful year. Attendance at our monthly meetings is higher because the church hall is substantially better than the previous hall in Bangor Road. Our finances are sound. And we have continued to represent the Society at several shows. The branch owes a big debt to the four or five members who set up the displays and the shows. There's a tremendous amount of work which goes on for days before and during the shows to make them a success.

The branch has tried to arrange for interesting speakers and a good balance between talks on Cacti and the Other Succulents. Peter appealed for

more help with the shows, and with general Branch activities. Several of the committee are getting on in years, and we do need fresh and younger faces on the committee. The more that you put in, the more you'll get out.

Peter ended by thanking the current Branch committee, who all work hard to keep the branch running smoothly. He also thanked members, who contribute to branch funds by buying raffle tickets or sales plants at meetings and shows.

David Corina presented the Chairman's report. He mentioned that he would like to give special thanks to Ivor Biddlecombe for handling the collection and packaging of seeds (these generate good profits for the branch) and also for everything else in conjunction with the shows and displays. He also thanked Vinay Shah for maintaining the branch website. The website was activated two years ago, the content is expanding all the time, and we now get a lot of enquiries thanks to our presence on the Internet. If anyone has any pictures of plants or of general interest to the branch, please pass them on, for inclusion on the website. David ended by thanking Peter for his work for the branch.

Margaret Corina presented the financial report. The bottom of the front page of the accounts detailed that our operating profits were over £1000. The surplus of income over expenditure for the year was not as large as the previous year, but the figure of £657 was still a healthy one, as is the overall level of the branch's accumulated funds. Thanks were due to everybody who comes along to the meetings since everything that's spent helps the branch's finances. Margaret also thanked Colin and Lorraine Bielckus for auditing the accounts.

Peter mentioned that all the committee member's reports were contained in the December newsletter. He went through the duties of each of the other committee members. Apart from being Secretary (jointly with Margaret), David Corina is also the Vice-Chairman and looks after the Pots and Sundries sales. Their house is full of bits and pieces related to the society! One of the most important jobs is to organise the programme of speakers. Putting the 2006 programme hadn't been too bad, but getting speakers from a distance was increasingly costly because of the high cost of petrol these days.

Ivor Biddlecombe has been Show Manager for something like 30 years, and Peter mentioned that we were all grateful for his skill and experience in

setting up the Shows and Displays. Jim mentioned that Ivor's brother Peter should also be thanked – he helps out at the shows and displays, even though he's not a member!

Jim Roskilly thanked everyone for having his wife Bett in their thoughts. She has been seriously ill due to cancer but her latest treatment was going better than the consultant had expected. Jim mentioned that she had been cheered by the good wishes on the card which the branch had sent her, especially when seeing messages from people she hadn't even met.

Bruce Beckerleg is responsible for plant sales, and Peter thanked Bruce and David Neville for bringing along the majority of sale plants at meetings and events. The branch receives a decent amount of commission from the sale of these plants, especially at shows.

Vinay does the newsletter and also looks after the branch website. We've had several members join as a result of finding our details on the website, and we get visitors and e-mails from all over the world. Members of the committee take it in turns to write up reports of the monthly meetings, but the newsletter editor would appreciate seeing more contributions for the newsletter, such as snippets or even articles of interest from the press.

Jim Roskilly handles publicity for the branch. He sends out regular reports for publication in the National Journal, and also contacts local newspapers in an effort to highlight our shows. Radio Solent are very good in giving us mentions when requested.

Philip Clemow is the branch Librarian. We have quite a substantial library but unfortunately, it's not being used much - on average, only three books are being borrowed each month. This is a shame - because we don't have storage space at the hall, three members of the committee each cart a large box of books to the monthly meetings. We'd really appreciate more use of the library.

Peter thanked Glenn Finn and his family for helping with the catering and refreshments at meetings, and events such as the Zone Quiz and the Convention which we held last year. He also thanked June Purseglove, who handles the sale of raffle tickets each month.

David Neville does not have an official position in the committee but he helps in many ways. He obtains plants for the 'Prickly Potting' at the

Broadlands show, and for sale at shows and meetings, and also works hard on the National Journal. That of course will change in 2006. Peter thanked David for everything he does for the branch and the society.

Now it was time to present trophies for the Table Show which is held each month. As indicated at the start of the year, Ivor decided not to award himself any points for his entries, to try and encourage some new winners for the trophies. It was a disappointment that only 5 members had support the table show and he hoped more people would make an effort to participate in the coming year.

Jim Roskilly won the 25th Anniversary paperweight, for gaining most points in the Cacti – Open Section category. Peter mentioned that Jim started entering the show classes many years ago, and over time, he's picked up experience on what plants do well in shows. Jim mentioned that it was also possible to pick up a lot of tips by acting as a steward for the Show Judges.

Bruce won the other three trophies – the Gateway Vase (Succulents – Open Section), the Bangor Cup (Cacti – Intermediate section) and the Challenge Cup (Succulents – Intermediate section)

There were no proposals for new committee members, so Peter suggested that all officer were re-instated en-masse. Various members agreed to propose and second this motion.

The final thanks were to the auditors. Peter mentioned our published accounts are the envy of other branches. Hopefully Colin and Lorraine will be willing to repeat their role in 2006.

As the end of the AGM neared, David Neville mentioned that he had some “other business” to discuss. There's a new cactus lexicon being published in the Spring, and the two volumes will cost just over £100. He wanted to get a feeling from members as to whether the branch should get the book or not. The indications are that the book will be a serious reference work, with one volume containing detailed descriptions and the other containing thousands of pictures.

A pertinent point was the fact that the library only took in £5 from lending last year. Also, some of the members tend to buy their own books and so do not use the library. But then the question comes up, what is the point of our cash reserves and accumulated surplus?

After discussions which lasted several minutes, David asked for a show of hands and a majority of the people present thought we should go ahead and get the book. I think the outcome might have been different if the book's price been substantially higher, but with the branch's finances in a healthy state, expenditure of around £100 or so is not a major issue. Margaret Corina brought up the issue of whether the branch should also get the new volumes covering Succulent plants. There are several volumes covering different families but the collection is substantially more expensive, running to a few hundred pounds if one gets all the volumes. It is likely that just one of two of the volumes would be useful than the others.

After the discussion reached a conclusion, Peter invited everyone to help themselves to the food and drink which had been laid out on the tables along the side of the hall.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Plant Exchange

Last year, Ian Acton mentioned to me that it might be a useful service if the newsletter or branch website could be used by members to list surplus plants which they were willing to exchange, and also to list plants that they were looking for. I am willing to try out this idea, so if people have lists of plants they want to exchange, or plants they are trying to acquire, please let me have the details.

Vinay Shah

Jim Roskilly spotted the following article recently:

Hit With A Cactus

A woman was seriously injured after her boyfriend beat her with a cactus.

Sandy Bowers, 23, had a perforated eardrum and deep cuts and bruises on her jaw, face and arms. It took doctors hours to remove the huge thorns.

Nathaniel Radzicki, 22, used the cactus “like a baseball bat” because of the amount of time she had spent on the phone, a court in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, heard. He faces 10 years in jail if convicted of attacking her with a dangerous weapon.

Daily Mirror, 24th November 2005

The following press article was noticed by Ivor.

The Cactus Patch

WHAT IS IT? Thousands of years ago, the Bushmen of the Kalahari found that a miracle cactus called Hoodia kept them alive in the harsh desert environment by reducing cravings for food and water and making them feel fuller after eating and drinking small amounts. The “Curb Your Cravings” Bushman patch contains extract of Hoodia and promises to make you feel so full that you’ll never feel hungry again.

HOW'S IT MEANT TO WORK? The blurb claims: "The patch is a superior delivery system because materials contained in it enter the body through the skin, bypassing stomach enzymes and the liver which destroys a significant amount of the benefits."

Eating cactus may fill you up but patches containing it have very little value.

Daily Express, 9th December 2005

Margaret Corina found the following article in the Times:

The humble cactus - a goldmine for poor farmers

IN MOST parts of the world the cactus is either a weed or an ornamental plant. But in Mexico it is a source of national pride: "I am as Mexican as the cactus" is the common refrain.

No where else is the lowly *Opuntia ficus indica* part of a national coat of arms — emblazoned as it is, under the talons of an eagle devouring a snake. In no other country is this succulent such a vital ingredient in home cooking.

The "Mexican cactus" is now attracting attention from around the world, having proved itself an ally in land conservation, anti-hunger projects for countries with too much marginal land, as cattle fodder, and as a health supplement for its high fibre content and blood-glucose lowering properties.

Israel, Peru and Chile are posting increased sales of prickly pear fruit from the flat cactus. "It was a mistake that led to it being given an important sounding name in Latin," says Arturo Anaya, director of Nopal Trade, which specialises in

organically grown cactus that is ground and dried for the health supplements market. "The Spaniards called it the tree of the Indies because they thought they were somewhere else when they landed in the New World."

The Mexican Indians, later called Aztecs by the conquistadors, already revered the plant and used almost every bit for food or medicine, says Claudio Flores, cactus researcher at the Autonomous University of Chapingo, the country's leading farm research.

The nopal cactus was a source of vitamins and fibre for the tribes of Mexico, as well as an intestinal cure and poultice for wounds.

Pre-Hispanic legend has it that the nomadic Aztecs listened to priestly advice and started a colony on a lake where prophecy said they would see an eagle eating the fruit of a thorny cactus. They saw this on one of the lakes of Tenochtitlan, where Mexico City was founded.

Academics say that Spanish priests changed the prickly pear for a snake in the symbol now on the national flag. Today 72,000 hectares of cactus are dedicated to commercial fruit production; the red or green fruit, stripped of the fine-tipped thorns, is a diced or frozen treat in the kitchen.

Farmers also cultivate 12,600 hectares of cactus for young, small pads (seeds and stalks). When trimmed and boiled to remove the spines and the gooey insides, nopal lends a tangy edge to many dishes. But the bulk of the cactus crop — about three million hectares — grows wild.

Almost every rural home has a few plants sprouting nearby. For rural people the plants are at once a drought-tolerant landscaping, a source of food, or, when the plants die off, a vital source of nitrogen for farmers. When all other crops fail to yield enough income, there is always cactus.

Nopal Trade was started nearly ten years ago to help subsistence farmers to cash in on a global market. It now supports 20 families, and its products are sold around the world. As Anaya adds: "Leave it to us Mexicans to turn a humble green cactus into gold."

The Times, 17th November 2005

Finally, Peter Down forwarded me a message from Dr Geoff Bailey, regarding an imminent trip to Argentina and Bolivia. More people are required, in order to make the trip viable. I have listed the places that the group expects to visit. A list of the species of cacti that are expected to be found at these localities is also available.

Trip to Argentina/Bolivia

Hello Peter,
Barrie Glover passed me your email saying you could not personally go on this trip, which is scheduled from 14th – 27th February, but that there were others in the Southampton and Portsmouth branches who may be interested. You also said you had met with Pete Arthurs, who is a very good friend of mine, and who is likely to go on this trip - he has been to Mexico with our group and also joined us on the trip to Argentina and Chile last February.

I attach further details of the trip which you may wish to copy them with. However, time is of the essence (we have 5 confirmed at the moment and Pete is a strong probability - not quite viable numbers) and we have to make some hard and irreversible decisions regarding the booking of flights and hotels very soon.

Dr Geoff Bailey

Trip Summary - N. Argentina & S. Bolivia,
14th -27th Feb 2006

Day 1: Buenos Aires - Salta – Cafayate
Day 2: Cafayate – Cachi
Day 3: Cachi – S.S. de Jujuy
Day 4: S.S de Jujuy – Humahuaca
Day 5: Humahuaca – La Quiaca
Day 6: La Quiaca – Tarija
Day 7: Tarija – Potosi
Day 8: Potosi
Day 9: Potosi – Tupiza
Day 10: Tupiza - La Quiaca
Day 11: La Quiaca – Purmamarca

Day 12: Purmamarca – Salta
Day 13: Salta - Buenos Aires
Day 14: Buenos Aires

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 7th February, and will feature a talk titled “Galivanting in South America” by Malcolm Pym. Presumably this will discuss various cacti to be found in parts of South America.

The February table Show will consist of the **Echinocactus** group (cacti) and the **Agave** group (succulents). Please note that you can submit more than one entry in any of the classes.

The Echinocactus group includes *Echinocactus*, *Ferocactus*, *Homalocephala*, and *Leuchtenbergia*.

The Agave group includes *Agave*, *Beaucarnea*, *Beschorneria*, *Calibanus*, *Dasylyrion*, *Dracaena*, *Furcraea*, *Hesperaloe*, *Manfreda*, *Nolina*, *Samuela* and *Yucca*.

A reminder for committee members that a branch committee meeting will be held on the 16th of January.

Forthcoming Events

Mon	16 th	Jan	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Fri	20 th	Jan	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction and Members' Slides
Sat	21 st	Jan	Portsmouth	“6000 Miles Around SW USA” – Cliff Thompson
Tue	7 th	Feb	Southampton	“Galivanting in South America” – Malcolm Pym
Fri	17 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz and Member's Talk
Sat	18 th	Feb	Portsmouth	“Three Men and a Condor – Part 2” – Eddy Harris
Tue	7 th	Mar	Southampton	“Wild West” – Neil Oakman

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