

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial	1
Announcements	1
Last Month's Meeting - AGM	1
Snippets	3
Is this the Slimming Secret of the Stars?	3
A new type of Pet	5
Forthcoming Events	5
Next Month's Meeting	5

Editorial

Welcome to another year! I hope everyone had a good time during the Christmas and New Year break. The weather has been unsettled but still quite mild – I was walking around on the morning of New Year's eve without a coat and the sunshine and warm temperatures made it feel just like a pleasant day in the spring.

Little seems to have changed in my conservatory, the magenta-flowered *Mammillaria* has continued to bloom, and the flower buds on *Brophyllum tubiflora* continue to develop. The latter is around 3 feet tall, I gave up trying to keep it under control some time ago! Earlier in the year, I repotted *Clivia caulescens* and moved it to a shadier spot, and it currently shows no signs of wanting to form a flower spike; in previous years, it has always started to flower around now.

Announcements

Branch Programme cards for 2007 are available from the front table. The Zone 11 programme was also being finalised and copies of that should be available in the near future.

By now, you should all have received the **December Journal**, along with the annual seed list and membership renewal forms. The accompanying gift aid form should be filled in and returned (if you haven't already done so previously). The cost of **membership** remains £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.bcsc.org.uk>) using a debit or credit card.

With Steve Hammer being the speaker at our **March meeting**, we are likely to attract a significant number of visitors that evening. At the moment, the plan is that branch members should use the regular hall car park (off Hatherell Close) and visitors will be asked to use the main church's car park whose entrance is round the corner, on West End Road.

Last Month's Meeting - AGM

Our chairman Peter Down started off proceedings by welcoming the assembled members to the 52nd AGM. He mentioned that he had been at all the AGMs, except the first, when he was in the army.

Copies of the 2007 branch programme were available from the front table, and Peter pointed out that on March 6th, the speaker would be Steve Hammer, who is the world's leading authority on Conophytums. On April 3rd, there will be no meeting since our meeting hall is unavailable, having been booked for another event. However, a few days later, the branch will be involved at the Spring Garden Show at Broadlands. All of the Committee's reports were included in the December newsletter, but in the usual tradition, some of the key officers discussed their reports at the meeting.

Peter mentioned that changing to our current meeting hall was one of the best moves made by the branch. He went on to discuss the Spring Garden Show at Romsey, including the prickly potting. The New Forest show was one of the highlights of the year, with thousands of people seeing our display. We had a good selection of speakers at our meetings, with a wide coverage of cacti and succulents, and hopefully people also enjoy the social side of things at the monthly meetings, such as plant sales, the library, and the plants of interest. He offered his best wishes for a good growing year in 2007.

David Corina spoke next in his role as secretary (he is also the branch's vice-chairman). One of the best kept secrets of the year was the Robert Holt Meritorious Award for Ivor - three members of the branch were party to the nomination and had to keep this to themselves for a while. Ivor's help with the

seeds and cuttings at the Spring Garden show was much appreciated. Do keep bringing in seeds from your plants, since we will need plenty for the coming year. The branch now has a membership of 70, and according to David Neville, over the last year we had attracted the second highest number of new members (7) out of all the BCSS branches in the country. We get about 30 members attending each meeting, and a Christmas mail-out is sent to members affiliated with the branch but who can't attend our meetings.

Looking forward to the coming year, at the May meeting, we will hold a Branch Mini-Show and in August we will stage a Branch Show at the Summer garden show at Broadlands. It's a big tent to fill and we hope as many people as possible will take part. We have also finally been allocated some storage space at the meeting hall and this will help the library. David ended by thanking everyone who helps at our events, takes part in the raffle or the table show.

Margaret Corina handed out a summary of the accounts for 2006 and then went through some of the key figures of the branch's finances. The branch had achieved a surplus of £585, which was slightly down on last year due to the fact that we had taken part in one less event, and we had also bought some expensive books. We now have over £6000 in our Building Society account and the interest on this helps to cover the hall rent for the monthly meetings. The accounts were accepted by the members, and Margaret went on to thank everyone who does something for the branch – anyone who buys a cup of tea, borrows a book or buys or sells plants is helping to raise funds for the branch. She especially thanked June Purseglove for handling the raffle and those members who donated prizes for the raffle. She also thanked Colin and Lorraine Bielckus for preparing the branch's financial accounts.

Peter thanked Margaret and David Corina for their work for the branch, and also thanked Colin and Lorraine. He then discussed some of the other Committee reports, starting with our Shows Manager, Ivor Biddlecombe. Ivor stated that the table show only has about 5 regular entrants (although with reference to the food for the American Supper, there was rather more on the table for this meeting!) He encouraged members to just bring plants in, even if it was just occasionally. It must encourage newcomers to see more plants at the meetings. He also mentioned that if any of your plants require identification, do bring them along to the meetings and someone will help to name them. Peter mentioned that for Plants of Interest, it was

OK to bring along any type of plant – it doesn't necessarily have to be a cactus or a succulent.

Peter thanked Bruce Beckerleg, the Plant Sales Officer. It is quite a job to take in the money and then at the end of the show, sort out all the labels and calculate what is due to each seller. The branch takes a small commission on plant sales, and if you have good clean plants which are surplus to requirements, do bring them along to sell.

Our publicity officer Jim Roskilly wasn't at the AGM, but Peter mentioned that Jim regularly gets in touch with local newspapers and also goes around asking shops if they will put up publicity posters. Our Librarian is Philip Clemow, and although the branch Library is not used as much as we'd like, it is always available. The main stock of books can now be kept at the meeting hall, and this means that the full stock of books should be available each month.

Moving on to Pots and Sundries, the branch still has a stock of BEF pots - Peter said that some of his are now 40 years old. David Corina mentioned that the BEF moulds are getting old and may have not been repolished, so the quality and thickness seems to be going down. Malcolm Pym now owns the moulds but is in poor health. At some date in the future, the branch will have to decide whether it is worthwhile service to carry on obtaining and selling these items.

Geoff Card was formerly Chairman of the New Forest branch, but joined us when that branch closed down. He helps out at many of our events. Peter also thanked Glenn Finn (and family) for providing the refreshments at meetings and other events. Glenn thanked David Neville and Margaret Corina who help him in the kitchen.

Peter thanked David Neville for everything that he does for the branch, including bringing us news from the BCSS National meetings. Peter also thanked June for handling the raffle at each meeting.

David Corina thanked me for looking after the monthly newsletter, handling e-mail communication for the branch, and maintaining the branch website. Many branches don't have a newsletter, and few do one every month. Gordon Rowley receives copies of our newsletter and has said that he enjoys reading them. Members do seem to enjoy the write ups, and even the speakers are impressed with the written account of their talk.

Peter proceeded to thank all the members for coming to the meetings. buying plants, buying refreshments and taking part in the raffle. The

branch's finances are currently very sound – a far cry from the old days when turnover was £30 and the branch had to be supported by loans from various individuals. If you have any ideas about what the branch should spend its money on, do let us know.

We had again been underwhelmed with nominations for the Committee, so all of the existing committee were re-elected. Peter pointed out that the committee is getting on in years, and won't be able to carry on forever - we could really do with some younger members joining the committee.

The final task was to hand out the Table Show trophies. This was straightforward since Bruce Beckerleg had won all 4 trophies! There was however one new winner, in the form of Jean Burnay, who had won the Ladies Cup, having scored the highest points by a female exhibitor.

Finally, Peter mentioned that he had recently come across some of our former members – David Philips and Iris Palmer - and both had passed on their good wishes to the branch. With this, it was time for the members to be allowed to tuck into the food!

Vinay Shah

Snippets

[Below is an article which Peter Down found. It's a fairly thorough description of the use of Hoodia gordonii as a supplement which may help reduce food intake.]

Is this the Slimming Secret of the Stars?

Imagine this: an organic pill that kills the appetite and attacks obesity. It has no known side-effects, and contains a molecule that fools your brain into believing you are full.

Are you fascinated by how the stars manage to stay so very thin? I've regularly come to the conclusion that after all the personal training, liposuction, colonic irrigation, nips, tucks and what not, there must be a little extra assistance at hand. And I'm not talking about the class A kind that celebrities so often get caught snorting.

Then I stumbled across a couple of articles reporting that the likes of Nicole Richie and the Desperate Housewives stars are apparently getting a little helping hand from a little-known South African herb called Hoodia. According to one of Nicole's pals (who spilled the beans to More magazine) the tiny starlet once confessed: "Hoodia makes you look hot

in low-cut tops and backless dresses. It's good for me - the bushmen have sworn by it for hundreds of years and that's good enough for me."

Hoodia comes from an ugly-looking cactus that thrives in the high temperatures of the African Kalahari dessert. The San Bushmen of the Kalahari, one of the world's oldest and most primitive tribes, have been eating the cactus for thousands of years. They use it to stave off hunger during long hunting trips and to keep their youngsters' cravings at bay when food is in short supply.

But how does it work? Well, here's the science bit: there is a part of your brain called the hypothalamus, and within that mid-brain are the nerve cells that sense glucose sugar. When you're full, the cells tell the brain that your blood sugar levels are good and there is no need to eat more food for now. Hoodia causes these cells to send the same message to the brain. So, the nerve cells are firing as if you were full, but you're not. And you're not hungry either.

Hoodia takes years to mature and so to protect it, pharmaceutical giants who are keen to manufacture the plant as a slimming aid to the western world have begun growing it across huge plantations of the South African desert.

The bio-pharmaceutical company Phytopharm, based in Cambridge, has been routinely testing the plant and has isolated a previously unknown molecule in it, which it has christened P57. The molecule has been patented by the company, but the cactus itself, being a living plant, cannot be. [Ed. other articles state that the patent is owned by the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and has been licensed by Phytopharm]

What Happens If You Eat the Cactus Itself?

The BBC sent a reporter to the Kalahari desert to test the benefits of this wonder-herb. Tom Mangold tucked into the raw Hoodia cactus, which he described as "a slightly unpleasant-tasting, fleshy plant", eating a piece about half the size of a banana. So did his cameraman. On their four-hour drive back to Capetown, both of them felt good and neither of them thought about food. "Our brains really were telling us we were full. It was a magnificent deception," says Tom.

Neither of them wanted dinner, and the next day neither of them wanted breakfast. Lunch was eaten with little pleasure, and their appetite did not return fully until 24 hours had passed.

On reading this report, I couldn't resist trying Hoodia. I'm a big fan of the GI Diet, simply because it lets you eat lots and feel full without putting on weight (well, if you're 'good', that is). I wondered if trying this new wonder herb would help to curb my appetite a little in order to shift a couple of extra pounds before the Christmas parties get into full swing. I spoke to James Leon, who owns the Pure Hoodia company here in the UK, and ordered myself a sample.

James discovered Hoodia when he was at a rural trade fair in South Africa about 12 years ago. He now buys direct from the South African farmers who he established a direct link with.

"I really like it because it's a herb and therefore natural," says James. And while many other Hoodia suppliers choose to mix up the Hoodia herb with things like green tea or chromium (which is said to boost the metabolism), James says it's perfect in its natural form and he likes to keep it that way.

Hoodia may take a few days to start taking effect and the recommended dosage may be anything from one or two capsules a day for people who only have a little to lose, to around six for a 25-stone man. "People may already have a suppressed appetite before they notice any weight loss," says James, who explains that to lose 1lb of fat, a person must burn up 3,500 calories, which can take a while. "But today someone who started taking Hoodia at the beginning of October emailed me and said they'd lost a stone," he added proudly.

It is entirely up to the individual if they wish to continue using Hoodia when they've reached their target weight. James tends to find that people may contact him to buy a two or three month supply, then they stay at their target weight for six months, before coming back later when the weight starts to creep back on.

"People eat for different reasons, and if it's out of boredom or because they're unhappy, then maybe Hoodia might not be the right thing for them in that instance. But for those who want to lose weight and are prepared to stick to a diet, or cut back between meals – it can be very helpful," says James. "We sell thousands of pots a month, which is based on the fact that we have a good product and a good customer service. I'm usually the one who answers the phone."

We Put Hoodia to the Test

I tried Hoodia over a two-week period and found

that taking it twice a day did help to reduce my appetite. There were a couple of particular instances on my way home from work when I felt absolutely ravenous and decided to try one of the capsules. Within about ten minutes the hunger had subsided. That's not to say I didn't want dinner when I got in, but I possibly ate less than I might otherwise have done.

In another instance on a Friday evening when I was about to head home via the chip shop after a night with friends at the pub, Hoodia came to my rescue again. And I was pretty pleased with myself when I woke up the next morning.

While I was running my Hoodia test, I didn't feel as though I was eating a lot less than usual and yet I did manage to lose 2lbs over two weeks. At certain snack times I was less hungry and didn't really think about food. But that said, Hoodia doesn't take away the appetite completely, which can only be a good thing. Not eating all of the necessary vitamins and minerals will obviously always be detrimental to one's health. But using a herb to simply help to curb the appetite can't be bad, can it?

Hoodia has few known side effects at the moment. But it might be worth mentioning that a report in the New York Times claims there may be unwanted effects on the liver, caused by other components in Hoodia which cannot easily be removed from the supplement. While this has yet to be proven, further tests are needed before the full-known effects of the extract are completely understood.

But lawyer to the San tribe's South African lawyer Roger Chennells believes Hoodia is the answer to obesity in the West, and for his people, the end of poverty in the Kalahari desert. He told the BBC: "The San will finally throw off thousands of years of oppression, poverty, social isolation and discrimination. I envisage Hoodia cafes in London and New York," he says. "Salads will be served and the Hoodia cut like cucumber on to the salad. It will need flavouring to counter its unpleasant taste, but if it has no side effects and no cumulative side-effects, this is where we're going."

As for whether Nicole Richie and the Desperate Housewives cast are using the herb to keep their frames stick-thin, I couldn't possibly say. But what I will say is, if they are, they must be using a very strong dose to make their appetites so very small. To me, Hoodia seems more like a herbal diet supplement to aid healthy eating, as opposed to the pharmaceutical slimming drugs that speed up the metabolism and can keep their users awake at night.

And if it is proven to have no side effects and help out obesity, that can surely only be a good thing.

Nicole O'Neil, MSN Lifestyle

[One of the trendiest gifts to buy on the Internet right now is something called a "Pet Tree", which consists of a low maintenance cactus or succulent in a small glass vial. Here are some descriptions from typical sellers]

A new type of Pet

What a stroke of genius! Think of it as an extremely miniature garden in a handy protective jar – just what you need if home is a caravan, prison or submarine.

The astonishing Pet Tree puts a little bit of 'mother nature' right in the palm of your hand, so laugh at landscaping and pooh-pooh pruning, because these natural wonders are virtually self-sufficient!

Far from needing daily love and attention, the Pet Tree's care instructions will take about 23 seconds to read and carry out once in a blue moon, and if it does all go horribly wrong, it's a few quid down the drain and not a lifetime's hard work. Of course we'd never encourage laziness or neglect, but we reckon that sounds ideal!

Fancy a holiday? No need to grovel around looking for neighbours who'll water your pride and joy in your absence – the handy clip means you can fix Pet Tree to your mobile phone and take it everywhere you go.

(From crazyfruitbat.com)

Just like having the Eden Project in your pocket, only without all the tourists - which would be more than any pair of trousers could stand. If it's been a while since you've had anything alive in your trousers, other than yourself of course, then you don't know what you're missing. We're not

suggesting a fistful of ferrets, or even the fond attentions of a significant other, oh no, we're talking Pet Trees - the latest hot key ring accessory to hit the market since the last one. Coming in two varieties, these tree-meets-cactus things are the closest many of us will ever get to the green belt. The two trees Victo and Rance, symbolise luck & victory, and unchanging love & courage, and fortunately you don't need green fingers in order to keep them alive. Water them every month or so (it changes depending on the season), and let them sit in the sunshine as much as possible. When they grow to a certain size, you can remove the tree from the bell jar and replant it either indoors or outdoors.

(From www.traffordcentreshopping.co.uk)

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on February 6th, and will feature a talk with the interesting title of "Succulents on a Shoestring" by John Watmough.

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

The Rebutia group includes *Rebutia*, *Aylosteria*, *Cintia*, *Cylindrorebutia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Mediolobivia*, *Neorebutia*, *Setirebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*.

The Echeveria subgroup includes *Echeveria*, *Cremonophila*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Hasseanthus*, *Oliveranthus*, *Pachyphytum*, *Stylophyllum*, *Tacitus*, *Thompsonella* and *Urbinia*.

A reminder for Committee members that a **committee meeting** will be held on 15th January.

Forthcoming Events

Mon	15 th	Jan	Southampton	Committee Meeting
Fri	19 th	Jan	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction & Members' Slides
Sat	20 th	Jan	Portsmouth	"Argentina - Part 1" – Cliff Thompson
Tue	6 th	Feb	Southampton	"Succulents on a Shoestring" – John Watmough
Fri	16 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Sat	17 th	Feb	Portsmouth	"Arizona Adventure – Part 1" – Alan Phipps
Tue	6 th	Mar	Southampton	"Conophytums" – Steven Hammer

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