

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

I've often referred to global warming and the unpredictable weather we experience as a result. Last month it was amusing to see pot marigolds (*Calendula*) in flower right next to snowdrops and crocuses! A week later, the whole lot was under a blanket of snow. In my garden, pale green shoots of *Hemerocallis* are growing as if it is already spring, and even the recent icy weather does not seem to have deterred them.

I haven't set foot in the conservatory for a whole month(!) so can't comment on whether any new plants are in flower, although some of the ones I mentioned last month are still blooming. With the weather being so mild and plants still growing, I should really venture out and see if anything needs some light watering or misting. Otherwise, there's a danger that plants might dry out too much and wither into nothing.

Announcements

Members should have received their copy of the December 2003 Journal last month. This issue contains the **BCSS subscription** renewal form, please remember to send off your membership fees as soon as possible. If you are a new visitor to our branch and want to join the society, please consult Margaret Corina; alternatively you can also join by visiting the Society website, <http://www.bcsc.org.uk>

A reminder that the **50th Anniversary Convention** and **Mini-Mart** will be held on March 7th, at the Nursling and Rownhams

Village Hall. Several nurseries and plant sellers will be attending, and we also have two excellent speakers lined up, namely Graham Charles and Ernst Specks. They will be giving talks about *Gymnocalycium* and plants from the horn of Africa. All being well, Society President Gordon Rowley will also be present.

The date/venue for the next **Annual branch dinner** is being discussed, and the evening of Friday, 7th May is being considered. Please let us know if this date is unsuitable for you.

A new edition of the **BCSS Guide to Shows** has been published by the Society. We have bought several copies and these are available from the Pots and Sundries table for £2.

Last Month's Meeting

Although there was no formal *Plants of Interest* session, some members had brought along a couple of plants to discuss. Derek Prior's *Lachenalia* featured 9 stems bearing coral pink flowers. He mentioned that the source of this plant was originally acquired 32 years ago.

Next was *Aloe haworthioides*. I am not sure whether the plant was Ian Acton's but he discussed it with me during the break. [At the start of the meeting, I was still busy moving my car, since our car park at St James was full. We even ran out of newsletters!] This plant grows in Madagascar, and the type species has orange flowers although there is also a yellow flowered variety "aurantiaca". The plant grows under scrub, it has fleshy roots and it likes shade. It is a slow growing plant and is rather tricky to cultivate since it can easily rot if kept too wet. This 5 headed specimen was ~ 10-15 years old.

Members' Evening

Our first speaker was **Mark Jakins**, who took the rather unusual step of handing out copies of a CD called "Plants 2003" which he had prepared specially for the talk, and which he

said contained some of the material he was going to present. The bulk of his talk was going to be “The Z-A of plants” (or an explanation of why he hates gardening books), and Mark said he was going to use a LCD projector which allowed him to project an image of what was on his laptop computer onto the main screen. The CD also contained a “game” which was a computer simulation of Fibonacci series. This program needs some library files which may already be on your PC - if they were missing, he advised users to run the setup.exe file in the \compositae\Package\ directory.

Mark’s first topic of discussion was why do plants grow the way they do? Why do rosettes and spirals form? He explained that growth comes occurs from a single point. Using Excel, Mark showed us the Fibonacci sequence, where each number in the series is calculated as the sum of the previous two numbers, i.e. 0 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 89 144 233 and so on. The ratio between a number and its predecessor tends towards the value 1.61803, and this is known as the “*Golden Number*”. Interestingly, 1.0 divided by 1.61803 yields 0.61803. It turns out that many plants grow in accordance with the numbers in the Fibonacci sequence. The following web site discusses this topic:
<http://pacsoa.org.au/cycads/Articles/Mathematics.html>

If one takes a circle and divides it into 2 sections, in a ratio of 1 to 1.61803, then the circle is split into segments of 137.5 degrees and 222.5 degrees. Mark had devised a computer program which spewed out dots at regular intervals from a central point. The angle of rotation before the next dot was emitted could be adjusted. It turns out that although various numbers produce regular patterns, an angle of 137.5° (or 222.5°) gives the best density and spiral form. Even slight variations from these angles give non-ideal results.

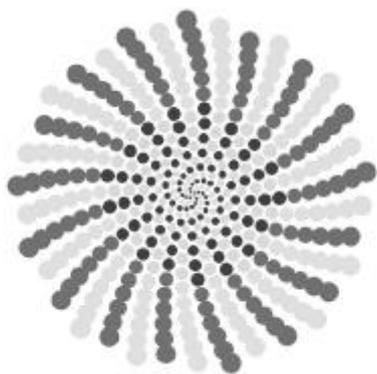


Figure 1 : Spirals using an angle of 222.5°

Mark stated that the reason behind this form of growth was proved by an experiment where electrically charged drops of oil were dropped onto the same spot. As the drops fall, the electrical charge repels them from each other and the eventual position of a new drop depends on the position of the previous drops and the combined effect of their electrical charge.

Now onto Mark’s second topic. He originally started growing plants in the 1970’s and his enthusiasm was renewed a few years ago. Now he was more interested in classification and relationships between plants. He was a bit disappointed that plants do not seem to be organised sensibly, but when he went to an Alpine Garden show, he found the huge variety of plants and their classifications seemed even worse than those employed in our particular hobby.

He briefly discussed the main classifications of living organisms and described how his view of the world had changed over time. Back in the 70’s, his plant world was split into Mammillaria, Cacti, Cerei, Opuntia and other succulents. Then he added Trees, Bushes, Roses, Flowers, Grass, Weeds, Fruits and Vegetables.

Searches on the Internet suggested that no one can agree the higher levels of taxonomy, and Mark mentioned there are at least 4 classifications systems defined. One of his aims was to build a virtual greenhouse in his laptop. What he was working on was something which satisfied *his* mind, pulling in whatever he needed from the different theories which exist.

He had written some web pages (HTML) which allowed him to link the classifications, so that you can navigate up and down the plant orders with ease. On a piece of paper you would soon run out of space, but with HTML, you can link together relevant information in manageable pieces. He was hoping to develop plant keys to aid identification, and he can also incorporate representative pictures in his database.

We then went through some images which Mark had taken with his digital camera. The quality of these was pretty good, even though limited by the 800 x 600 resolution of the LCD projector. We saw a picture of his late father’s greenhouse. Digital cameras did not exist at that time, and what Mark had done was to project a slide onto a screen and then take a photo of that with his camera. At this stage, Mark realised that

Windows XP had re-sorted his collection of images, so we would now be treated to a random walk through the rest of the images!

His old 4' x 6' greenhouse had only sufficed for 2 years, and he had resorted to putting some of the plants outdoors. He lost some, but an *Opuntia microdasys* did survive. We then saw some of the parts which were going to make up his new greenhouse, which was going to be sized 12' x 10'. He was hoping to invite branch members to an open day, later in the year.

His camera was a 2 megapixel unit, and these can now be bought for just over £50. He mentioned that the macro mode is worth checking - his camera allows him to get within 10cm of the subject, but the cheaper ones won't manage that. He also stated that digital photography does take some getting used to. It's easy to take lots of photos, and without some judicious pruning, you can end up with thousands of images, each just slightly different from the last one. You really need to sort through them from time to time.

A photo taken at Hollygate Nursery showed a cereus which had grown through the main ventilation fan's protective grill, and which must be subjected to tremendous water loss due to the forced air rushing past it. The last slide showed a plant which he had been pleased to win in a raffle, but the selection of which had caused his dad to berate him.

Mark ended by saying that there was so much going on, and he just wants to find the truth. Peter Down commented that the fact that we need to produce new editions of *Handbooks of Shows* every few years shows how much change there is when new experts come along and reclassify things.

After the tea break, **Derek Prior** took to the floor, to show us some of his slides. This was a continuation of a talk which he gave at a previous Members' Evening.

The first slide showed an *Echeveria* with orange flowers and hairy leaves. This plant had a collection number rather than a name. Next was *Copiapoa krainziana* which is a "hairy" plant. *Mamillopsis senilis* doesn't flower often, but when it does, it has red flowers which open late in the year. This species may need more heat and light than other mammillarias.

We saw a Easter cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis*). Derek has five different flower colour strains, and we saw some of these later in the talk. This one had a peach coloured bud which never opened. We also saw a red-flowered *Echinopsis* which was a Paramount hybrid.

A collective shot of 18 *Notocacti* and *Parodias* was followed by another shot of the same plants later in the year, in flower. *Gymnocalycium pflanzii* has white/pale pink flowers, and *G. friedrichii* has a dark body with pink flowers.

Rebutia heliosa v. *condorensis* is a choice plant with orange/red flowers. *Lobivia jajoiana* has orange flowers and a characteristic black throat. *Obregonia denegrii* and *Uebelmannia pectinifera* are also very distinctive plants. The next plant had orange flowers but no one in the audience was able to identify it. Derek mentioned that it was an unusual specimen of *Gymnocalycium ritteri*, with orange flowers.

Astrophytum coahuilense has pale yellow flowers, *A. ornatum* has yellow flowers, and a grafted *A. myriostigma* had heavy white speckling on its body.

Out in the garden, *Incarvillea delavayii* had pink trumpet shaped flowers. A deep purple iris was one of his favourites. Others irises we were shown had exotic gold/orange, pink, bronze and yellow/brown blooms.

Then we saw some orchids: a yellow/brown flowered *Oncidium* and 2 colourful *Paphiopedilums* (slipper orchids) also in bloom. These prefer some shade. In the garden, a *Sapiglossis* had exotic orange/yellow flowers and we also saw a tree peony with cerise flowers. In a collective photo of four *Amaryllis*, two were stunted, where the flowers were starting to open before the flower spike had fully emerged. He didn't know what had caused this.

Chirita is a genus within the gesneriads, and some of species are similar in appearance to *Streptocarpus*. "Aiko" is one of the more popular hybrids, and has yellow flowers. We also saw other varieties with blue and purple flowers. For more information, visit:
<http://www.gesneriads.ca/genchiri.htm>
http://www.maavs.org/html/growing_cheritas.htm

Outside in the garden again, we saw orange poppies and a picotee begonia (grown from

seed). An amaryllis called “Green Goddess” had pale green flowers. And Derek included a photo of *Clivia miniata* in flower, just for me!

Next we saw a double freesia, and a laeliocattleya orchid with perfumed white flowers and a pink throat. A magnolia which had white flowers when first planted was now regularly producing pink flowers, after having growing in the same spot for 23 or so years. We also saw a variety of azaleas, with orange/red, yellow and double pink flower. A rhododendron had double flowers which in other respects were similar to ones that grow in the wild.

A photo featured several streptocarpus plants, including an American variety called “Bristol Black”. “Emily” was an attractive cultivar, the pale pink flowers having a yellow centre. Derek has around 18 different day lilies (*Hemerocallis*) and we saw maroon, yellow, and pink ones with different flower forms. One of these was named “Chicago Apache”.

We then saw several cyclamen, with flowers ranging from deep pink and pale pink through to white. Some had very attractive leaf markings. Derek thought the newer varieties on sale these days are not as robust as the old types.

A *Lachenalia* called “Rolena” had thicker stems and redder flowers than the variety on the Plants of Interest table. Another slide showed a yellow one, which was a descendent from one he originally bought as a present for his mother, 63 years ago! Another variety was called “Ramond” (?) and this had yellow flowers with a lavender flush. It was hard to take a photograph which showed this subtle colouring.

We then saw Christmas cacti (*Schlumbergera*) with different flower colours, including the yellow flowered “Gold Charm”, and two more orchids – a *Cymbidium*, and the pink/magenta *Pleione limprichtii*. A “parrot plant” had intensely coloured red and yellow flowers – this is related to the Busy Lizzie (*Impatiens*).

Lycoris aurea is from the lily / amaryllis family and it had spidery flowers. A red/pink double flowered amaryllis was called “Cinderella”. A yellow Peruvian daffodil was perfumed and tended to produce 2-3 flowers. He also had a white version which produced 5 flowers per stem.

Next we saw African violets, from a firm in Canada, called Fishers. One of the plants had stunning red flowers, and Derek mentioned he once had 146 different violets. One with green edging on the flowers was called “Money Business”. We saw varieties with pink, deep purple, speckled pink and lilac flowers.

Next was an *Epiphyllum* in bud. The remarkable thing was that this plant was a cutting (I think it might have been one of the ones given away at a meeting by a speaker last year, Derek Tribble?) and yet it had managed to flower just one month after it had been put in a bottle of water to encourage it to root.

We ended the talk with a series of different *Rhipsalidopsis* (Easter cactus) plants, featuring flowers in salmon, red and pink shades.

I think it’s fair to say that the two talks we saw were very interesting, with something for everyone. I am sure you will echo my thanks to our home-grown talent who made it into such an enjoyable evening.

Vinay Shah

Table Show – January

There were 14 entries in the January table show.

	Cacti – Neoperteria or Copiapoa Group	Succulents – Adromischus subgroup
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Copiapoa hypogea</i>	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Crassula tecta</i>
	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Copiapoa uhligiana</i>	(2) P Clemow <i>Crassula portulacea</i>
	(3) P Clemow <i>Neoperteria waggenknechtii</i>	
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Neoperteria villosa</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>C. mesembryanthemopsis</i>
	(2) G Finn <i>Copiapoa marginata</i>	(2) P Clemow <i>C. “Jade Necklace”</i>
	(3) P Clemow <i>Neoperteria multicolor</i>	(3) I Biddlecombe <i>Adromischus triflorus</i>

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Berlin Botanical Garden

I really must ask the Chairman to accept my apologies for absence from the December meeting, but given the chance to extend one's stay in Berlin and visit the Botanical Garden, what would you have done? Like the rest of West Berlin, the Botanical Garden is on a grand scale, and this goes for the greenhouses too. Everything is maintained immaculately, and the labeling is meticulous. Showpieces like this reflect the demonstration of western affluence made to the former East Sector during the time of partition.

The public show greenhouses are arranged in a rectangle with a "rundfahrt" (tour) indicated by red arrows. This starts with the cafe, and with certain inevitability, finishes in the shop. Although there were precious few visitors on a cold December morning, the good citizens of Berlin nevertheless obeyed the directions.

The first house contained bromeliads, which are another of my interests. These were superb, but so they should with a minimum temperature of 25°C and a misting system. On the other hand, the orchids were disappointing at a time of year when they should be coming into flower.

Surprisingly, plants which we would regard as only frost tender, such as *Arbutus* (strawberry tree), *Cordyline* (New Zealand cabbage palm), *Liriope* (autumn muscari), *Ophiopogon*, *Salvia* (Mexican sage), etc., were kept at a minimum temperature of 20°C. Even more surprising, they were probably a month behind their counterparts growing outdoors in our own gardens.

The final house of the tour contained cacti and succulents. These were mostly bedded out, with the cacti apart from the other succulents. There was strong emphasis on tall growing cerei, which had obviously been there for some time. Some had been cut down once and even twice, yet were still reaching for the roof. *Cephalocereus (Pilocereus) polylophus*, which is notoriously difficult to keep without cold-damage, was in pristine condition, but so it should in those temperatures. The old man cactus (*Cephalocereus senilis*) was conspicuous by its absence, or were we merely blind?

It was interesting to see decumbent *Borzicactus* (including *Seticereus*), *Haageocereus* and *Trichocereus* making sprawling clumps with only the tips erect, just as nature intended, instead of being constrained to grow up stakes. In spite of its name, *Coryphantha erecta* also grew naturally in this manner.

Globular cacti were represented by flowering size *Echinocactus*, *Ferocactus* and large clumps of the older Mammillarias, such as *M. compressa*, *M. magnimamma*, *M. parkinsonii*, and so on. There were relatively few Lobivias, *Notocactus*, etc. Unfortunately the cactus collection remained in a time warp. The species on display brought back memories of those current when I first started collecting over forty years ago, with none of the more recent introductions. Perhaps this is a legacy of the time when the garden was reestablished after the Second World War?

The succulents were mostly of southern African origin, although with strangely few from the former colony of German South-west Africa, now Namibia. There were reasonably large and well grown plants of *Cyphostemma* (formerly *Cissus*), *Didierea*, *Dioscorea* (formerly *Testudinaria*), and *Pachypodium* (but not the Namibian species). Dwarf and medium growing Aloes were well represented and producing a good display of flowers. There were also some interesting Gasterias which are not often seen in collections in this country. Haworthias were disappointing, being restricted to the commoner varieties, although they were grown well.

I was interested to see a large and well grown plant of *Aloe distans*, as I had never seen the true species before in a public collection. This is another sprawling plant with upturned growing tips, albeit succulent, which grows in coastal areas of the South-west Cape region of South Africa.

It is similar to *A. mitriformis*, the only practical differences perhaps being slightly smaller growth and a couple of small teeth on the upper leaf surface. The recent review of Aloe species by the Haworthia Society listed both, whereas the National Botanical Institute of South Africa accepts only *A. distans*. Personally, I would be inclined to recognize *A. mitriformis* as no more than a form of *A. distans* at best.

The freely clumping plant labelled as *Aloe mitriformis* which is passed around between

collectors in this country is undoubtedly an imposter, possibly of hybrid origin. I have a couple of small seedlings of *A. distans* grown from Haworthia Society seed which hopefully are beginning to look like the real thing.

The Mesembs at Berlin, which had been planted out among these other succulents, did not respond well to the same cultivation regime. Fleshy leaved genera such as *Carruanthus*, *Faucaria* and *Glottiphyllum* had reacted by growing like pale green cabbages, whereas only the labels stood as memorials to the more extreme succulents such as *Conophytum*, *Lithops* and *Pleiospilos*.

Our tour of the greenhouses occupied a morning. In answer to the question ‘Was it worth it?’ the answer must undoubtedly be ‘Yes’. But out of choice you should visit the garden at a time of year when the weather is more amenable to spending the rest of the day looking at what is on offer outdoors also.

Ian Acton

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on March 2nd, and will feature Anthony Mitchell (from the Isle of Wight branch) presenting a talk titled “Halfmens and Others – A South African Miscellany”. This talk was originally due to be given last September, but it had to be rescheduled.

Later in the month, on March 7th, we will hold our 50th Anniversary Convention at the Nursling and Rownhams village hall. (see the front of the newsletter for more details) Please contact Margaret Corina to purchase tickets (£8) for this event.

The March table Show will feature the *Rebutia* Group (cacti) and the *Echeveria* subgroup (succulents).

The *Rebutia* group contains 9 genera: *Rebutia*, *Aylostera*, *Cylindrorebutia*, *Digitorebutia*, *Medio-lobivia*, *Neorebutia*, *Setirebutia*, *Sulcorebutia* and *Weingartia*.

The *Echeveria* subgroup contains 11 genera including: *Echeveria*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Pachyphytum*, *Tacitus* and *Urbinia*.

Finally, A reminder for committee members that the March committee meeting has been brought forward to February 23rd.

Forthcoming Events

Fri 20 th Feb	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz
Sat 21 st Feb	Portsmouth	“A Trilogy of Films about the Chihuahuan Desert” – David Minnion
Mon 23 rd Feb	Southampton	Committee Meeting (@79 Shirley Avenue)
Tue 2 nd Mar	Southampton	“Halfmens and Others – A South African Miscellany” – Anthony Mitchell
Sun 7 th Mar	Southampton	50th Anniversary Convention and Plant Mini-Mart Nursling and Rownhams Village Hall, Nursling, Southampton
Fri 19 th Mar	Isle of Wight	“An Introduction to Succulent Plants” – Ray Jeffs
Sat 20 th Mar	Portsmouth	“Arizona in Flower” – Richard Hodgkiss
Tue 6 th Apr	Southampton	“Seed Raising” – Ian Woolnough
Sat 11 th Apr–	Southampton	Spring Garden and Flower Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Sun 12 th		
Fri 16 th Apr	Isle of Wight	“Asclepiadaceae” – T W Radford
Sat 17 th Apr	Portsmouth	Bring & Buy Sale