

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Branch Secretary

David Neville  
6 Parkville Road  
Swaythling  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO16 2JA  
davnev@btopenworld.com  
(023) 80551173 or  
07974 191354

### Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah  
29 Heathlands Road  
Eastleigh  
Hampshire  
SO53 1GU  
vvshah@clara.co.uk  
(023) 80261989

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## Editorial

We've had some cold weather recently and also quite cloudy days, but when the sun shines, there are some signs that spring isn't too far away. Of course it's too early to be sure about this – February can be a very cold month, but I feel we've had our fill of cold weather for this winter!

## Announcements

If you haven't done so yet, please don't forget to **renew your membership** – this can be done using the form supplied with the December Journal, or online via the BCSS website.

Copies of the **2011 Branch Programme** are available from the front table.

**David Neville** will not be present at today's meeting because he's judging a show - in Bermuda of all places! So just as we climb into our freezing beds tonight, he'll probably be walking around in shirt sleeves in warm sunshine.

## Last Month's Meeting

### Members' Talks

Last month's meeting followed the usual tradition of members giving some short talks and sharing their pictures with us.

**Alice Jankovec** was the first speaker, and she talked about the history of cactus growing in the Czech Republic. She featured Alberto Vojtěch Frič (1882 - 1944), who was one of the first people to start importing cacti from South America. His interest in these plants arose in an unusual manner. When he was a young boy, due to prohibition, duty had to be paid on eggs. Frič used to smuggle these in and

thought it would be a good idea to have something spiny in his bag when the local bobby wanted to check it! The cacti in question eventually flowered and he was amazed how such an odd and ugly plant could produce such a wonderful flower.

As his interest in cacti grew, he went on to conduct 8 expeditions to South America. These were not short trips, and many lasted a year or longer. His father paid for the first of these trips thinking it would help get this weird hobby out of his son's system, but of course it had the opposite effect. Frič's trips were to countries such as Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina and he was particularly interested in places where no one had been. On his second trip, which was in from 1903-1905, the government of Paraguay sponsored his trip and he successfully went down a river which 20 previous explorers had failed to reach, so his skill and determination was quite exceptional. He was also interested in learning about the local tribes and wrote several books on this.

By the age of 15, he had some of the best knowledge of cacti in Europe, and he was invited to speak at various events. His first collection died out in 1899 due to the harsh winter, and then again in the 1930s, he lost 30000 plants in one winter. Alice proceeded to show some of the names of the cacti attributed to him, such as *Lophophora fricii*, *Echinopsis fricii*, *Pilosocereus fricii*, *Stenocereus fricii* and *Cleistocactus strausii* v. *fricii*. He probably discovered more plants, but he wasn't interested in all the paperwork so let others claim those.

In 1903, a cactus club was set up in Prague. This was quite informal and it lasted until 1914, when the War started. In 1922 the first official Prague Cactus Society was set up. Frič did join the 1903 club and also was a member of the 1922 society for two or three years, although afterwards he stopped being a member but gave talks and continued with plant sales to finance his trips. The initial meetings of the society were held in a pub. In 1925-1926 there was a big disagreement within the society, which split into two, resulting in two societies within Prague.

Eventually, other clubs and societies were set up around the country. These days, they have an annual symposium in March which is a one-day event with 3-5 talks - the format is similar to some of the UK conventions. In the Spring they usually hold a 1-2 day trip to a region of the country and visit local collections. The spring show is actually held in June and it lasts a week. The Autumn Show is held in September and it is held for 9-10 days. At the end of the season, they hold an event at a town 200km from Prague (whose name I did not catch) which is an all-day event with lectures and plant sales.

The Prague Botanical Gardens were established in 1777, and they are associated with the local Charles University. In the last weekend of September, the Prague society cooperates with the Botanical Gardens and holds a joint event. Entry to the Gardens is free but you have to pay to go into the greenhouses. One of the greenhouses has a cactus collection - and the plants have been there for 70-odd years. We saw many cacti, and some Lithops and Crassulas, and also a golden barrel cactus. In other parts of the greenhouse, there is a tropical section. Alice mentioned these pictures were taken in 2001. There is a second set of Botanical Gardens in the outskirts of Prague and this is known as the Fata Morgana. However, she doesn't like this as much, since it is difficult to see the plants clearly because you can't get close to them. Other parts of the greenhouse have tropical plants such as orchids. In April thousands and thousands of butterfly larvae are brought into the greenhouse and are hatched in the greenhouses. Some of the butterflies are tropical or South American types, and have wingspans of a few inches across. This has now become an annual event at these gardens.

Alice ended her talk with some pictures of some strange sculptures which featured cacti and succulents stuck on the sculptures in strange arrangements and combinations. These were all the creation of one man and it was one of those things you have to take a picture of, because it is so bizarre. She also showed pictures of the only 4 Czech stamps which feature cacti. These were issued in 2006, thanks to the efforts of the current Prague Society's officials.

At the end of the talk, David Neville mentioned that many of Europe's best cacti collections are in the Czech Republic. Alice mentioned that at one time, there were as many as 5000 members in the Czech societies.

The next speaker was **Ben Turner** and he wanted to share his visit to a wonderful succulent collection in Copenhagen, Denmark. He considered this one of the best kept secrets and this collection, at the Copenhagen Botanic Gardens is little known, being quite small and hidden away in the middle of the City. It is attached to the local University and quite stable, with the same staff working there since 1990.

Ben's visit was in February 2010 and there was lots of snow around - we saw a plant sign marked *Opuntia phaeacantha*, with only a couple of pads visible, the rest of the plant being under several inches of snow. We also saw a front view showing the two large greenhouses to the left and right, one of these contained the cacti and succulent collections. It was a Wednesday and he was devastated to learn that the collection was only open on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He wandered around, found a member of staff and managed to convince them that a committee member of the BCSS deserved special treatment and was let inside!

There was big bunker at the back of the greenhouses and also tunnels under the glass houses. We saw Martin, who Ben classified as a fellow enthusiast and succulent "nut". Martin had responsibility for the cacti and succulent plants in the collection and they were both on the same wavelength, so Ben enjoyed the four hours that followed. There was some exceptional stuff in the greenhouses. They also had a conservation remit and were into micro-propagation of some species. We saw a large *Pachypodium*, a *Cassonia* (from South Africa), *Crassulas*, and lots of *Aloes*. Ben mentioned he was into *Aloes* and this prompted him to be asked to name and identify certain plants! There were main beds and smaller raised beds, and we saw *Aloe ciliaris* and another plant which might have been *Aloe ferox* or *Aloe marlothii* or quite possibly something in between.

There were also *Echeverias* and *mesemb.* Something which looked like a weed and had white flowers proved to be *Pelargonium cotyledonis*, which is very endangered because it is endemic to just St. Helena. They had started to micro-propagate this plant with the aim of reintroducing more plants into the native habitat, and we saw dozens of plants on a table, but they ran into some red tape because Kew considered St. Helena to be British territory and off-limits. Another landscaped house was dedicated to endangered species, and we saw more *Pelargonium cotyledonis* surrounded this time by lava. Ben mentioned that one of the nice features was the attempt to surround the plants with the rocks and terrain that would actually occur in their habitat.

Another group of Aloes they were working with were the Madagascan ones, and we saw *Aloe vaombe*. He had got one of these from Margaret Corina, but it hadn't survived a heating failure in the previous winter. Ian Acton was in the audience and offered him another one. One of the larger specimens was surrounded by *Euphorbia milli*. He was given a plant of *Aloe suzannae* which looked fine when small, but it eventually gets to 2-3 metres tall and has an equally long flower spike. *Aloe deltoideodonta* had glaucous blue leaves. We then saw group of about 40 *Aloe polyphylla* plants. These grow in Lesotho at high altitude. He again was given some of these but found eventually that they had aloe cancer, which is caused by a mite, and the plants had to be destroyed. If you looked carefully at the picture, you could see some signs of yellowness on some of the leaf bases.

Next were some South African aloes and we saw a solitary *Aloe castanea* - there were also some large single stemmed aloes in the landscape collection. *Aloe succotrina* is one of the best species for growing in shade. One unnamed Aloe plant featured white pustules which looked quite stunning. We saw a picture of him looking happy posing next to a tree aloe. This was possibly *A. castanea* although perhaps the leaves were too curved and it might have been something else. A close up of the flower spikes showed that the plant had green/yellow flowers.

There were quite a few Agaves in the collection too, and he managed to get some of these back without injuring himself. We saw plants from the picta complex and also *A. filifera* and he was given some seeds of this. One of the shots showed a few cacti, including some Opuntias. *Agave titonata* is one of his favourites, and he got given a small one of these to bring back. Next, we saw a mix of young Agave plants including the octopus Agave, *Agave vilmoriniana*. A variegated plant of *Gasteria gracilis* included one pup with virtually no chlorophyll. *Gasteria rawlinsonii* is a lovely plant when in full flower and it prefers to grow in a pendulous manner. He was given seed of this and germinated very well. Moving on a wider spectrum of plants, we saw *Dracaena serrulata* (from Yemen), which was again planted in a natural habitat. The Hawaiian plant *Brighamia insignis* was also being grown in large numbers, and this was a plant he had brought in for our cultivation workshop last year. Here it was being grown in volcanic pumice. Finally, *Sinningia leucotricha* is a geophyte - although it has a caudex, it is not eligible in the class of cacti and succulents.

Our third speaker was **Tom Radford**, and he started with some pictures taken in St. Lucia, where he had gone on a walking holiday. There were columnar cacti growing at the beach and you also find Opuntias growing everywhere. A bit further inland, the east coast is drier and there areas where cacti 10-12 feet tall were growing. David Neville thought they might be some type of Pilosocereus. *Melocactus intortus* is a nasty spiny little thing.

His Eucomis in the garden is still going strong - it is supposed to be frost tender but in 5 years, it has grown from 3 heads to 14. *Haemanthus hirsuta* was growing in a 2¾ " pot - the flower stalk emerges first and the leaves follow some weeks later. leaves. Glottiphyllums give a nice show and *G. nelii* has yellow flowers in the autumn. *Hoya australis* flowers well - it seems to like shady conditions. Different hoyas either grow well or badly for him. Next was a close up of a Dorstenia which he had got from Margaret Corina - he had managed to keep it through the winter. As it gets to flower, suddenly the leaves get bigger and eventually they grow to be a few inches across. This plant is capable of growing twice a year. Then followed some strange red and yellow 4 lobed flowers. He asked if the audience had any guesses as to the plant and none were forthcoming. It was actually a flower on his Nepanthes, which had suddenly decided to flower.

Next were some pictures from a trip to Bolivia in November 2009. We started with a terrestrial bromeliad, possibly a Neoregelia. Then we saw "something looking for breakfast" - a bird of prey called the Crested Caracara. It was a large bird and perched some 30 feet above him. Bolivia is quite interesting - in some places, you have large plants, and in others you can wandering around and almost tread on small cacti. David though the tall plants were some species of Borzicactus or Cleistocactus. A green snake was 4 feet long - you very rarely see them as they are quite timid. We saw some scenes overlooking the lodge (Los Volcanos) where they were due to stay and it involved quite a walk down to the lodge. The next area was near Santa Cruz and was mainly lowland with some hills up to 1000m. He found plants with white flowers which might have been some sort of Trichocereus - except that the flower buds were not hairy. The flowers were open at 6am in the morning but would close up by 7am. Higher up in the Andes at 3800m, the landscape was more barren but he did take some pictures at a distance of 150m through a telescope. There were small clumps of a smaller cactus growing amongst the rocks.

We saw the oven bird Rufous hornero living on top of a cactus – its nest is like an oven. In an area, land was being cleared for building houses, but they had decided to leave the large cacti. By the roadside they found a large *Gymnocalycium* – it was covered in mud so it must get wet here. At 2000m they found an *Opuntia* and a sprawling *Cleistocactus*. Some more birds included a burrowing owl which lives in underground burrows and a olive crowned Crescent Chest which was quite a rare find. Higher up, they found *Notocactus* plants which were quite large. Near to La Paz, they were now at an altitude of 4000m. One of the small camelids in this area is the vicuna which is now farmed. They were looking for flamingos but it was too dry. Instead they found spiny plants everywhere, including *Lobivia ferox* with very strong spination.

In a river valley near La Paz there was a rocky outcrop and they found a large 3 foot-mound of a cactus. More birds included a mountain tanager, a crested oropendula, a masked yellow throat and a greater wagtail tyrant which is quite hard to find. They also saw a little woodpecker on a cactus, and an emerald hummingbird. They also found the bird they really wanted to see - the red fronted macaw. These are found near fields of maize which they strip! They also saw cliff parakeets and the flightless greater rhea.

Next were some plants from his collection – this included *Larryleachia picta* in flower and *Caralluma frerei* which is an Indian succulent. We also saw an *Ariocarpus* in flower. Another plant with good flowers is *Ceropegia ampliata*. *Haemanthus coccineus* forms quite impressive red flowers, after which the leaves come up.

The final set of slides featured some pictures taken in Peru, and we started with an *Espositoa*. A picture taken high up in the Andes featured a small shack which was a café, but there were four melocacti growing just near the entrance. Around this area they found lots more melocacti, including *Melocactus peruvianus*. Another melocactus plant was 16 inches tall but had not formed a cephalium yet. Lower down near the coast, they found very old plants of *Neoraimondii* with dried up stems but still managing to flower. Here, the river bed had been dry for 30 years, but the plants get their moisture from the air, and some have adapted to maximise the amount of water they can condense. Another plant had tufts a foot apart along the stems. They also found some large *Espositoas*. The final picture from this trip showed their group enjoying a meal at one of the best restaurants in Lima, La Rosa Nautica.

The final talk was given by Paul **Maddison**, who started by issuing a warning about the Internet and how easy it is for information about you to be available to others. The first picture was a screen shot of the 123people site, having done a search on “Paul Maddison”. The next showed him being mentioned in one of our branch newsletters from 2005. (Since all of our recent newsletters are up on our website, Google searches their contents and includes our newsletters in search results).

Our January meeting in 2010 had to be cancelled due to bad weather and the next picture was taken around that time, and showed him posing next to a snowman. The weather also damaged a yucca plant whose stem snapped. Offsets had grown from the base section, so the plant will live on. He also re-rooted the top section. Next followed some pictures on the topics of art, architecture, and geometry. We saw some shots of the Pier Head Café at Swanage. The outside has been very cleverly painted as if to show a 3-d view of the inside of the building. It was very clever how this conveyed a sense of perspective and depth. Next was a picture of his wife Pam sitting in a large picture frame, apparently taken in Innsbruck. The frame was slightly narrower at the top to again give an impression of depth.

Certain ratios or triangles look good to the eye and we saw some pictures of a ship with features in the background and also a swimming pool, where a curved end instead of a regular rectangular end made the pool look more interesting. The ratio of 2:3 is generally a good one to use. We saw various images from Italy, including some of an illuminated Madonna taken inside a church. In the church there were also some succulent plants being grown in low light conditions. He showed two pictures of a view of some curved steps - one in black and white and the other in colour, where the curves and the light/dark sections made it look pleasing.

Next was an ammonite in limestone, and a picture of a *Sempervivum* showing a nice spiral and with this he referenced the article in the December Journal on Fibonacci numbers, a series of numbers which have represent important ratios and which are often found in the natural world. This was followed by some pictures of flowering plants in his collection, including some *Echinocereus* and *Echinopsis* plants. Some of the plants were not that photogenic but the flowers were spectacular. Some leaf cutter bees had decided to set up home in one of the pots and he managed to get a picture of a bee actually entering the hole in the soil - taking this shot had required many minutes of patience! David Neville said he had a lot of trouble with these and the offspring

come back to the same greenhouse the next year. We then saw a wasp's nest, the size of a football which had been removed from his loft. A view inside showed the hexagonal chambers which are a strong structure and an efficient use of space.

Moving on, we saw some pictures taken during the branch's visit to Keith and Kathy Flannagan's collection. It had been raining lightly that day but luckily this soon stopped. They had one large greenhouse and also some larger hardy plants outside. In the garden was a tortoise which weighed three stones and needed to be over-wintered indoors because it does not hibernate. We saw various plants in the collection, including many Mammillarias, Echinocereus, Lithops and a nicely patterned *Astrophytum asterias* hybrid. Some of the plants illustrated rotational, reflected and vertical symmetry.

We finished some pictures of the leaning tower of Pisa, a close up of the golden spines of *Echinocereus grusonii* and the same in black and white, and some views of the agaves at Keith and Kathy's collection, showing the patterns made by the leaves onto each other. The final couple of pictures showed a circular staircase with some interesting sculptures in the centre.

*Vinay Shah*

## Next Month's Meeting

The March meeting will feature Suzanne Mace who will be talking about succulent plants and also showing slides. If you have any problem plants or those that you want to know more about, do bring them along – I am sure Suzanne or husband Tony will be able to offer some advice.

The March Table Show will consist of the **Echinocactus** Group (cacti) and the **Agave** Group (succulents). Please note that you are allowed multiple entries in any of the classes.

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

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

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 12 <sup>th</sup>	Feb	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction and Members' Slides
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup>	Feb	Portsmouth	"The National Show 2008" - Cliff Thompson
Tue 1 <sup>st</sup>	Mar	Southampton	"Succulent Miscellany" - plants & slides - Suzanne Mace
Sat 12 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz and Member's Talks
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Portsmouth	"A Trip to Mesa Gardens" - Ralph Martin
Mon 21 <sup>st</sup>	Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Isle of Wight	to be confirmed
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Sale

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