

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Well, January did get colder and perhaps came close to resembling a normal winter. I was in north London this last weekend and 4 inches of snow fell on Saturday evening and night. I was wondering whether our meeting today might be in danger but when I got home, I realised that this area had managed to escape lightly – at least for now.

Last month, I detected some signs of spring (I saw daffodils open a week ago) but the latest cold weather should slow things down a bit. I have not set foot in the conservatory for 2 months (!) but looking through the window, I can't see much going on in there, fortunately most of the plants still seem to be alive.

Announcements

Copies of the **Branch and Zone Programme** for 2012 are available from the front table.

David sent out an email a couple of weeks ago, mentioning that our Treasurer Alice did give birth to a baby boy (Wesley) on January 8th - and both mum and baby were doing well.

If you have not renewed your BCSS membership, please do so as soon as possible - this will ensure that you receive the March 2012 journal on time. Payment can be made online from the BCSS website.

The annual Zone 15 mini convention will be held at Capel Manor (M25 J20) on Sunday March 11th. The speakers will be Peter Berresford from Leeds (our new Assistant journal editor) speaking on "Hunting the Hedgehog - the Mojave Way" and Alice Vanden Bon on "South Africa 2001". The event runs from 11.30am to 5pm and the venue is the same as last year's event and is where the Lea Valley branch

meet and have its annual show. The cost is £9 which includes refreshments and if arriving early (grounds open at 10am), free admission to the Capel Manor Gardens (normal entry is £5). Plantlife will be the nursery and Keith Larkin will be selling books. Tickets are available from Eddy Harris.

Last Month's Meeting – Member's Mini Talks

Michelle Fox-Rousell started off the evening with a talk using conventional slides. She said that considered herself bit of a honorary member – she has belonged to the branch for a long time, but has only been to meetings 7 or 8 times in 8 years. She had been growing cacti and succulents since 1968, and the first plants she got were a large *Opuntia* and a *Trichocereus*, from Stewarts in Christchurch. She didn't know much about them but got a copy of "Cacti" by Borg – which amongst other information contained around 40 or 50 recommendations for compost! She was working as an analytical chemist and having read that cacti like acidic soil, she adding sulphuric acid to the compost – the plants somehow managed to survive!

She got an *Ariocarpus* from Hollygate and paid quite a lot for it – looking at it, she felt it might have been dead for at least 5 years before she got it. She did better with *Astrophytum asterias* and managed to keep it for a while. She joined the NCSS as it then was, with a subscription of 2 guineas per year. She learnt quite a bit from the Journal, but even more from Tom Jenkins and his Jumanery Nursery in the Fens. She only went to the nursery 2 or 3 times but bought plants by mail order and looked forward to receiving the packages containing plants wrapped in newspaper – you never knew quite what you'd get.

At that time, the plants were mostly imported, and we saw *Backebergia millitaris*, *Euphorbia piscidermis*, *Hoodia gordonii*, *Jatrophas*, and *Ariocarpus* of various types. She was living with her mother in Poole and had a relatively small aluminium greenhouse. She gradually built the collection up and eventually got up to 500 plants. The only problem was that she was due to go off to university, and so her mother was given the duty of looking after the plants. She mentioned her 35mm

slides mostly dated from around 1973. We saw views of her greenhouse, a Melocactus, some quite big Ariocarpus, *Echinocereus dasyacanthus* with a yellow flower and a *Pelecyphora strobiliformis* from Jumanery which she managed to flower.

We then saw a mixture of plants, including Obregonia, Lophophora, Mammillaria, a Lobivia with a yellow flower, an Epiphyllum (orchid cactus), a Wigginsia (now Notocactus) and an Aporocactus, perhaps a hybrid of *A. flagelliformis*. A rebutia prompted David to comment that some of his were currently in bud! A Hamatocactus had a yellow flower, and a Stenocactus had a typical white flower with a purple midstripe. She like this genus except for the fact that mealy bug could get into the wavy ribs.

We then saw *Turbincarpus pseudopectinatus*, *Leuchtenbergia principis* with a yellow flower, a white flowered Epiphyllum, and *Parodia gracilis* with a yellow flower – this was a difficult one to flower. A general shot showed 6 plants which were all in flower at the same time, including a Rebutia (perhaps *R. heliosa*). *Acanthocereus pentagonus* was a dull-looking plant but it produced nice flowers every year. *Astrophytum asterias* had been grown from seed, and a Hamatocactus had been bought from someone's collection. She was fond of *Thelocactus bicolor* because of its flowers – that plant had died and the clone she now has hasn't flowered once, maybe its growing point is damaged.

Notocactus buiningii was a plant which she found very difficult to flower. We again saw *Leuchtenbergia principis* in flower, and an Epithelantha with a small pink flower. A different form of *Rebutia heliosa* was on a graft and flowering very well. *Pelecyphora asseliformis* had two flowers. Melocacti are lovely to grow if you can give them the heat, but it's difficult to keep them unmarked. *Aporocactus flagelliformis* flowered every year for her. We then saw an Echinocereus and a big Mammillaria with dozens of heads which she exhibited at one of Poole & Bournemouth's shows. Apart from being a member of that branch, she had also been a member of the Norwich and Cambridge branches when studying at university. We saw *Cephalocereus senilis* and *Copiapoa tenuissima*. *Oroya peruvianus* was difficult to flower, but worth the effort when it finally does.

Now for some succulents - *Trichodiadema densum* is very nice when it flowers, with thin petalled pink flowers. Stapeliads have lovely flowers and we saw a Caralluma followed by a Stapelia from the flavirostrus group, possibly *S. grandiflorus*. A picture of *Tacitus bellus* prompted a comment from

David that this used to be common but is rarely seen now. A general view showed a group of plants, but unfortunately none of the plants were still alive.

Next was a *Discocactus horstii*, obtained from Tom Jenkins. It started to develop a flower at 6pm in the evening and she was so excited that she ran almost two miles to another member to tell them about this event. It is difficult on its own roots, but she kept it for 7 years. A plant she loves is *Uebelmannia pectinatus*, which she got in the early 1970s, soon after it had been discovered. She got it to flower once and was very proud of it.

Another plant she was fond of was *Pachypodium namaquanam*. She saw it in a book and asked Tom to get one for her from the Namib, and he obliged. Obtained in 1970 at 7 inches tall, she kept it until 2006, when it had got to 30 inches tall. It sadly died but was given a full state funeral. The last slide featured another plant obtained from Jumanery - *Pterodiscus speciosus*. She was overjoyed when it flowered. In 1994 she got another one and when that flowered, she called the local paper who came round to photograph it. David said this plant was very prone to red spider.

Paul Maddison started his talk with a picture of the front cover of the August 2007 edition of the magazine "Scientific American". It contained an article which referred to a paper titled "Artificae Plantae: The Taxonomy, Ecology, and Ethnobotany of the Simulacraceae" which had been published on April 1 (perhaps a clue on what was to follow).

The referenced article described 86 species of artificial structures that resembled plants. Some were very good representatives of what they were supposed to be, others required a good deal of imagination.

Paul then described and showed (and even handed out) various items to represent some of these species. The JIF lemon appears once a year, 40 days before Easter and the juice from it can be used on pancakes. An orchid stem in a vase was very realistic but it wasn't attached to a plant and there was no water in the vase, so that gave the game away. A screen capture of Alan Carr's "Chatty Man" show featured some artificial plants in the background, but you'd only have noticed these if you took your eyes off the Pussycat Doll in the foreground

He also showed us a picture of a hand made ornament featuring some incredibly detailed mini cacti and succulents which was very realistic. The

season for fake Christmas trees had been extended by global warming so now you often see them well before and after Christmas. You did however have to watch out not to get afflicted with tinselitis. [groan] Paul showed us a view of him on a “field trip” looking at some sheep and this led him to reference an article published in our old Southampton BCSS yearbook, which featured an article on “knitting cacti”. He mentioned you had to be careful not to water the finished objects! A side lamp in the shape of a cactus proved to have fibre optic strands (with multicolour light) running through into the spines.

Within the “Simulacraceae”, we moved to the sub family “Imaginaceae” and the genus “Pencilartus”. Paul showed us some images of sculptures built from pencils. This was accompanied by some witticisms, including descriptions of how pencils were built from vascular bundles of different materials and subspecies of graphite and charcoal, and how overuse of a pencil would make the pencils shrink. There were even bicoloured examples. The sculptures were amazing and consisted of thousands of pieces. A couple of the memorable ones resembled a starfish and a stapeliad flower.

Paul completed his talk by pulling a pencil from behind his ear to rapturous applause from the audience. [I was asked to state that!]

Now for something completely different. **Peter Down** mentioned that plants from South America tend to show a lot of variation, and if you only stock to the main species rather than the varieties and forms, you will miss out on many plants. He likes to see and grow all the variations and so he was going to talk about *Parodia ritteri*, *Parodia maassii* and *Parodia aureicentra*, which are all big growing Parodias from Bolivia.

He started with the standard *Parodia ritteri*, with white spines. He mentioned they need to be quite an age before they flower, and you could see the corky base on the plant, which was around 10 years old. There are forms with reddish spines too. *Parodia ritteri rosealba* has white spines with pink tips. *P. ritteri* f. *splendens*, had orangish flowers. *P. ritteri camargensis*, from Camargo had hooked spines. The picture was taken a couple of years ago when it was around seven years old and you could see the corky tissue at the base. It has since flowered. *P. ritteri* v. *carrerana* has dense spines and the flowers must get caught up in the spines. We saw *P. ritteri camargensis* again followed by a very dark spined example which might have been either the *camargensis* or *carrerana* forms. A *P. ritteri*

fulvispina with yellow flowers was from the collection of John Brickwood.

The normal form of *P. maassii* is *P. maassii* f. *maassii* and it has fiercely curved spines. A couple of *P. maassii* growing in habitat had rather less fierce spines. A photo of *P. maassii* form *albescens* was taken in habitat, near a place called San Pedro in Bolivia as you go through up the mountain to go over the pass into Culpina. In this area, you have *P. ritteri* at the lower heights, this changes to *P. maassii* and then *P. subterranea* over the other side. Another *maassii* had the collector’s number RBC312 – this was a reference to seeds from Ramirez Brothers Cacti, who are collectors of seeds from Bolivia. *P. maassii suprema* sometimes has black spines. The spines are not as curved as fiercely as some of the other forms, but it is still a very impressive plant. *P. maassii escayachensis* is found near the village of Escayache. *P. maassii* f. *intermedia* has flowers with very skinny petals which look very different from the others. Another *P. maassii* was almost double flowered with deep blood red flowers. One example of *P. maassii* v. *suprema* in habitat had a yellow flower.

Parodia aureicentra muhrri has yellow central spines. An example from the John Brickwood collection was about a foot tall. *P. aureicentra omniaurea* has all yellow spines and it is the most sought-after form. *P. aureicentra variicolor* has spines with different colours throughout. The final photo showed *P. maassii* in habitat looking rather tired – however after a few showers of rain, Peter said the plants would transform and quickly green up and flower.

Tom Radford said he had been thinking of putting together a talk on photography for quite a while - so this was an embryo of a talk, titled “Capture the Moment”.

It was always useful to take pictures of your plants, to keep a record of them. Sometimes they flower once and then die. And as you get older (he had been collecting for 40 years) it helps if you want to look back. He had found Michelle’s talk quite interesting because it reminded him of plants he’d grown a long time ago. A photograph is also useful if you want your plants identified – it’s better than trying to provide someone with a vague description. It’s also useful for giving slide shows – he’d been invited to other branches and you end up getting plants for free and a nice meal too. Finally, he mentioned that he produces table mats from pictures – you can encapsulate them in plastic using a laminator and it’s very cheap to do. He showed an example featuring with birds but it can be any

subject of course. They last a few months and when they wear out, you just produce another set.

The number one thing to do is to get the object in focus and he illustrated this with an out-of-focus shot of a flowering ariocarpus. Of course, sometimes out of focus effects can lead to a desired effect – for example you can have the front and back out of focus, to concentrate the attention onto the middle part. Sometimes just moving the plant and changing its angle can allow more of the plant to be in focus. He showed two shots of a tape measure side by side – with the first, the range from 8cm to 10cm was in focus, and with the second, the range from 5 to 15cm was in focus. This illustrated the difference made by the aperture setting – the first shot had used a large aperture of f3.3 and the second had used a smaller aperture of f8.

Two more photographs taken at the same place (of a snake amongst foliage) illustrated the difference caused by shutter speed. The first exposure on top had used 1/30 second and was slightly fuzzy, while the second shot had used 1/50 second and was much sharper. A tripod would have been much better, but isn't always practical. A problem with most of the digital cameras is that they tend to overexpose, so if you have a light flower and a dark background, the flower will get overexposed and you'll lose detail. If you deliberately underexpose, you'll see more detail. A similar thing happens with pinks and oranges – these also tend to affect the sensor and the image gets burnt out very easily. You can see how much more intense the colour is with the fstop taken down by one. A couple of photos of a river scene taken in Venezuela again illustrated how a photo was improved by having the camera set 1 stop lower compared to the automatic setting.

Next was a Mammillaria in flower – it wasn't a bad picture – but when taking the picture, your eyes tend to focus on the subject and don't notice all the detritus around the plant and it only becomes obvious after you've taken the picture. His summary was:

- Don't settle for second best - it might be the only chance to photograph something.
- There's no need for expensive equipment - he uses a Lumix FZ45. (~ £200)
- Make sure the plants look their best.
- Be careful with surroundings.

Many cameras will be suitable but it is best if it allows you to alter the focus point, the aperture and the exposure. If possible, he always uses a tripod and also used a timed exposure so that the camera is absolutely still. You also need good lighting - he

generally tries for sunlight. If you use artificial lighting, it causes a colour cast which might need correcting on a PC. He also uses various staging materials to set the plant.

With a simple example, the two pictures of a Conophytum with yellow flowers may not look that different, but the one on the top had a lot more shadow on the flower and in the second picture, this had been reduced by just photographing from a slightly different angle, to use the light to better effect. He doesn't like labels so unless it is really neatly written, he tends to remove them. He also doesn't like shots with the subject at an angle, so tries to arrange the scene to be square – but if this isn't possible at the time of shooting, you can do it later on a computer. He showed a picture of a purple flowered Conophytum with and without the label. It was labelled Steinkopf – which was the location of where the plant originated.

Next he illustrated that if you take shots in the greenhouse, this is what you often get – a perfectly good plant but with scrappy bits all around. He uses boards painted black for a background and with the plant label also removed, you get a much better picture. His first example of a stapeliad flower was a little overexposed, but in the next he had used the computer to lighten the shadow and increased the highlights and it looked more like the real thing. There were still some marks on the pot and the flower - and the next picture showed how that could also be cleaned up in Photoshop.

A Christmas cactus in flower on a windowsill was an attractive subject but the photo could be improved significantly by putting something behind it – after a bit of cropping, you ended up with a nice picture of the flower. *Leuchtenbergia principis* is a pretty plant – a shot of the plant in flower taken in the greenhouse was not bad but you can do better. He tried it outside but didn't like the background of a brick wall and grass which distracted from the plant and made it look smaller. He propped it up with a rock and a dark background and got a much better shot.

Next was a *Pelargonium carnosum* – with the right background and positioning of the plant, it was possible to get a nice close up picture of the flowers. A *Rhipsalis* was a nightmare to photograph with stems going off in all directions. The plant looks OK when you look at it - but as soon as you take a photo you see all the other stuff come out at you. So he took it off the shelf and used various chairs and tables to prop up the plant, and also used a black background. While photographing it he noticed a yellow bulge on the end of a stem, and after taking

photographs over the course of a week, was able to show how the flower buds bursts through the skin and develop over time.

A picture of a nerine sitting on a chair with a camera on a slide rail prompted the comment from David saying that most of us don't have room for furniture in the greenhouse! Tom said of course not, so you have to get the plant out of the greenhouse! The resultant picture of the pale pink flower was not quite in focus, but it was decent picture and some more playing around with the camera settings might have improved it further.

The next shot was of a pink *Cattleya* hybrid orchid, taken outdoors in Thailand. The flower was a very intense colour and it was overexposed. He stopped it down 1.5 for the next picture, which showed much better colouring. He also cropped out a lot of the background. They say never work with children and animals – and greenflies were the bane of his life – we saw one on the yellow flower of a notocactus. The next shot was more interesting, with a hover fly approaching an ariocarpus flower. A ladybird on the flower buds of *Cynanchum gerrardii* was unexpected. The next photo always gets an ahhh – it was a young cat next to a flowering *Edithcolia grandis* with a spectacular bloom.

The final series of photos showed *Ceropegia ampliata*, growing on a green plastic trellis / frame. A black background behind the plant helped improved the appearance, but the green trellis was still a major distraction. By using Photoshop, you can select the green of the trellis and fill it with the background colour, effectively making it disappear - the next slide showed this and how much the picture was improved. If you looked very carefully at the picture, you can see where the frame used to be. The software he uses for editing is Adobe Photoshop Elements v7. A cropped example showed a close up of the *C. ampliata* flower.

Our final speaker was **Ben Turner**, who mentioned that his talk would be a very brief run-through of the development of the arid section at Wisley. In his previous employment, he was part of the team that designed and planted out the glasshouses, including, in 2007, the glasshouses that housed the cacti and succulent collection. He was very lucky to be working there. There were eight of them on the project, along with some students and trainees, and their job was to ship down the plants from the old collection and to arrange and plant them in the new houses. The old houses were arranged with different temperature ranges – the main collection and a cooler growing section whereas in the new greenhouse all plants were mixed together.

It cost £8m for the whole structure put up by a Dutch company who are pioneers and who knew what they were doing. First the ground work team did the landscaping. The first views were from January 2007. Ben mentioned we were the first audience who've ever seen these pictures – he had been sworn to secrecy while the work was being done.

We saw some of the rock being put into place, with something like 6 tons of granite brought in for the main cactus and succulent sections. Ben revealed that a large part of the overhang and cliff face rock in the scene was actually artificial, with sand and silicone painted to look like real rock. The plantings were to be split into old and new world, with cacti and agaves at one end, and succulents from Africa and the Middle East at the other end. There was a separate section with bromeliads and a blend of both.

All the plants then had to be moved here. This included the existing ones which had been uprooted in 2005-2006 and the new donations (including many from the BCSS, especially the Yorkshire branch. A lot of plants also came from Hollygate, including tree aloes. The plants, including things such as Pachypodiums, agaves, cycads had to be wrapped up, both to protect them and the people moving them. It was quite a job. The plants themselves were only being moved 400 yards, but a steep slope meant there was no easy access, and so they had to go onto a van, out of Wisley onto the A3, around a couple of roundabouts and back in through the back gate. We saw more plants being prepared and wrapped, including *Parodia magnificus*, *Echinocactus grusonii*, a big *Pilococereus leucocephalus* and a large *Agave americana marginata* – these all had to be properly wrapped to protect the plants from damage during their trip.

He was there when the first plant was brought in, in December 2006 and this was a fishtail palm (*Caryota*) which was a great big plant requiring some block and tackle lifting gear. We saw some of the workers and trainees positioning plants, including Matt and Helen who are BCSS members from the Woking branch. We also saw Matt moving a multiheaded *Agave attenuata* into place, up on the shelf of artificial rock. As spring arrived, things were moving ahead more quickly. It was April 2007, and the official press and royal openings were due in June. At the opening, Ben said he was lucky enough to meet the Queen. She asked the person next to him, "Did you do all the planting?" "Yes ma'am" came the reply. She turned to Ben and asked him "Are all the plants different?" For a

moment, he was open-mouthed, not knowing quite what to say, but he was able to come back with "Oh yes, we have plants from all over the world".

We saw *Pachypodium lameri* being planted out, as well as an *Alluaudia*, which came from Terry Smale - Terry is an independent consultant for Wisley. We also saw more big plants being moved in. Some of these had come in from a commercial nursery in Holland. Some were from habitat and unfortunately not many of these survived.

One of the plants from the original collection was *Cereus peruvianus monstrosus* and it was quite a job getting it in position. He was helping and just occasionally breaking off to take the pictures. We saw *Crassula ovata* "Hummel's Sunset" and another of his favourites, *Echinopsis formosa* being planted next to a *Pilosocereus*. We also saw nice clumps of *Parodia magnifica* and *Parodia leninghausii* going into place. Behind him was an unidentified Agave, a piece of which he had brought in for identification at our John Pilbeam meeting last year. We saw them planting the *Pilosocereus leucocephalus* and staking it. Moving ahead, we saw more things in place, including tree aloes and more columnar cacti. More tricky were the shallow trays of clumping plants - *Echinocereus scheeri* had been growing in drip trays and it was quite a job getting them out and replanted without breaking them into pieces, but they managed it. There were large clumps of Rebutias too. A shot of some of the plantings showed some big Echinocactus, and also some nice Ferocacti, including *F. wislizeni*. Something a bit different was the small headed clumping bromeliad *Abromeitiella brevifolia* - now reclassified in *Deuterocohnia*.

It was now early June and things were looking good. The plantings and arrangements had progressed and everything was taking shape. We saw *Euphorbia horrida* and *Euphorbia trigona*, and the red flowered *Euphorbia millii*, which flowered for 4 months. There were also Aloes and Aeoniums, and we saw Ben planting out a group of *Aeonium haworthii* 'Variegatum'. Something else he was proud to plant was *Aloe vanbalenii*, a plant which he donated to the collection, having himself obtained it from the Kirstenbosch display at Chelsea in 2003. The leaves of this plant turn bright red in strong sun.

After planting came mulching, and this required the placement of granite chips around the plants. We saw the completed ravine, prior to the mulching - it featured a mixture of old world and new world plants, with the white leaves of half a dozen plants of *Dudleya brittoni* standing out in particular. We then saw the almost completed cactus section, with *Cereus aethiops* prominent - Ben said it did flower

at 11 o'clock one night. *Euphorbia abyssinica* grew to 4 times its size once planted out - you could almost see it growing daily.

Finally we saw the completed succulent section. There were a couple of *Dendrobium* orchids and *Beaucarneas* in there too. Ben ended by saying that if you get the chance, do go along and take a look, the collection is very impressive.

Geoff ended the evening by thanking all the speakers for their talks. It was certainly a good interesting evening, with some interesting topics being covered.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on 6th March, and will feature Keith and Kathy Flanagan with a talk about the American collection of Elton Roberts, who has been growing plants for some 40 years.

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*, *Dasylyrion*, *Dracaena*, *Furcraea*, *Hesperaloe*, *Manfreda*, *Nolina*, *Samuela* and *Yucca*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11 th Feb	Isle of Wight	Plant auction and Members' slides
Sat 18 th Feb	Portsmouth	"California and Arizona 2011" – Angie Money
Tue 6 th Mar	Southampton	"Elton Roberts' Californian Collection" - Keith & Kathy Flanagan
Sat 10 th Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Sat 17 th Mar	Portsmouth	"Xiaoqing's Photos" - Ralph Martin
Tue 3 rd Apr	Southampton	"Chile - Desert In Flower" - Ian Woolnaugh
Sat 14 th Apr	Isle of Wight	Wildlife (Colin Haygarth)
Sat 21 st Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Auction

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