

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

March 2005



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## Editorial

Containing only 28 days this year, February has raced by quickly. We have had some cold days and nights lately, but overall the winter has been mild and many outdoor plants have had a very short rest period. Crocuses and daffodils are likely to be close to bloom (depending on their location) but a couple of days ago, I spotted an *Osteospermum* in flower – this is normally a summer flowering plant!

In the conservatory, this is one of the quietest months of the year. *Crassula tecta* is in flower, and a couple of *Haworthias* have produced flower spikes but everything else seems to be resting. If the weather warms up a little, I will consider giving some plants their first watering of the year.

A while ago, I mentioned the possibility of crossing *Clivia caulescens* with other clivias. James Black (president of the American Clivia Society) spotted this comment and sent me an interesting e-mail which I've included as a snippet. While we're on Clivias, Margaret and David Corina mentioned to me that Haskins had received stocks of a yellow-flowered variety. Of course I had to investigate this, and found they had over a dozen yellow-flowered plants and several dozen orange-flowered plants. A visit to the garden centre in the next week or so could prove to be quite spectacular as the buds open. One note of caution – the orange-flowered plants were in sleeves labelled "Orange Florid" but this does not seem to be the name of a particular

cultivar - I spotted over half a dozen variations amongst the flowers.

## Announcements

A notice on the BCSS website states that the December **Journal** was sent off to the printers in mid-February, and so should arrive in early March. This issue should contain the subscription forms, please do remember to renew your membership for 2005.

The end of this month will mean a busy time for us at the **Spring Flower and Garden Show**, at Broadlands, Romsey. On this occasion, the event will span 3 days of the long weekend. The absence of some regular helpers, the need to run the "Prickly Potting" corner and plant sales means that we would really appreciate help from any branch members who can spare time during the Easter weekend. Helping in the marquee will allow you to get into the show free of charge – just use the back entrance (@ Romsey Rapids) and follow the signs for exhibitor car parking.

The **branch website** has been updated to include a list of the books which can be borrowed from the Branch Library.

## Last Month's Meeting

### *Plants of Interest*

Ivor had brought along some *Plants of Interest*. First was an Agave which was also an entry in the table show. The plant had originally been obtained from Holland by David Neville. Ivor described how the plant had formed a sport which seemed to be a different form (unfortunately, less attractive) than the main body of the plant.

The remaining specimens were all plants that were in flower at this time of the year. *Glottiphyllum herrei* had numerous yellow flowers. *Fenestraria rhopalophylla* ssp. *aurantiaca* "Fireworth" had orange flowers – the standard species has yellow blooms. *Cheiridopsis candissima* was in bud, and *Aloinopsis malherbei*

had buds on the end of longish stalks. *Aloinopsis rubrolineata* had warty leaves and was also in bud. Apparently the flowers are white with a purple midstripe.

*Lithops optica* ssp. *rubra* has distinctive pink bodies and bears white flowers. Ivor said that this plant can sometimes abort the buds if it does not get enough light in the winter. It usually flowers around Christmas, but was a little late this year. Finally we saw a couple of Crassulas - *C. susannae* and *C. tecta*. Ivor mentioned that the flowers are nice (small, but well worth examining with a magnifying glass) but their scent can be unpleasant and overpowering.

Thanks are due to David Corina for providing the following write-up of last month's meeting.

### **Habitats - Curt Lamberth**

No, it isn't a shop-till-you-drop saga! One of the basic tenets of horticulture is that for plants, the green bits stick up in the air and the hairy bits go into the soil. Most of us then stand back and admire the green (and sometimes coloured) visible parts and tend to forget about the bits we cannot see under the soil. Curt's mission was to make us appreciate, and to be aware of, all the various factors which contribute to the successful cultivation of plants in general, not just succulents.

As a first example, we saw pictures, in Arizona, of small Mammillaria species - nearly always these are found in partial shade under light scrub. This suggests that in *their* habitat, they appreciate partial shade. In order to demonstrate his points, Curt then took us to more familiar habitats around the UK and Europe, outlining their characteristic flora. For example, damp meadows are characterised by cowslips and certain orchids. Orchids can be a good indicator of soil type, and Curt commented that the symbiotic fungus that helps to support orchid growth prefers a low nutrient mix. The level and type of nutrients available depend upon the soil type and the acidity or alkalinity (the pH) of the soil. Contrast the plants found on chalk downland with an acidic heath, the latter supporting ericaceous plants. As in the temperate zones, arid areas can also be acidic or alkaline, depending on the underlying rocks.

Soil chemistry also determines which chemical elements are 'free' in the soil, and available or otherwise to plants. For example calcium (an

alkaline soil) will lock up phosphorus, and a very acid soil below pH4.5 (e.g. pure peat) will render aluminium soluble and elemental aluminium is very toxic to plants. The ideal compost should be just the acid side of neutral at pH6.5. We were shown some typical soil profiles - cross-sections down through the soil - to illustrate how these vary and that what is under the surface is also important!

An interlude to do some table-top chemistry. Members had brought along a few samples of soil, compost, tap water and rain water for testing. Curt checked the pH of the supplied water and of the solution formed by washing through the soil samples with purified water, and also tested the electrical conductivity of the water (a measure of the dissolved salts). Most of the samples were the acid side of neutral and although the salts content varied widely, were deemed to pass muster. [I had previously mentioned to Curt that here in Southampton we have the unusual combination of acidic garden soil but very hard tap water from the chalk downs further north!] Curt mentioned that in his opinion most commercial composts contain too much nourishment.

[Ed - Curt used pH and Electrical Conductivity meters. He did not state the units for the latter, but I assume that they were microsiemens. Ivor's rainwater was measured as 57 and his tap water (filtered!) was 606, and had pH of 7.8. David's rainwater was 113 and his tap water registered 641. Pure water would have a conductivity of around 10 and a pH of 7. Curt mentioned that orchids need the conductivity to be around 110 or less, but tomatoes can stand around 1000. I had a look on the Internet and found that electronic meters to take these measurements cost anything from £60 to £300. Will think about getting one later in the year! Now, back to David's report....]

Now onto our sort of plants! Most of us have to grow our plants in artificial conditions in pots using a general compost. How do we water? From the top - and we wash away nutrients, or from the bottom - when we concentrate the salts near the top. So, how and what can we learn from the habitats? Curt showed various maps, available on the Web, showing the geology and soil types, rainfall, total organic carbon etc. of the arid parts of North and South America. He demonstrated their usefulness by various examples. First was *Theolocactus macdowellii* - why does this plant seem difficult to grow on its own roots? Curt applied his theories and information from the habitat location on the maps

to deduce that this plant comes from a low calcium habitat. By contrast, using the same procedure, *Turbinicarpus lophophoroides* is found in a high calcium area, and indeed this plant likes a compost containing coarse gypsum, as also do most species of *Ariocarpus*. Curt recommended coarse gypsum (calcium phosphate) rather than chalk (calcium carbonate) as gypsum dissolves slowly but more readily in an acidic peat compost.

Further examples included *Strombocactus* and *Melocactus* species, both preferring a little lime. In the case of *M. peruvianus*, this comes from a high limestone area but *M. curvispinus* (?) grows within a narrow band of non-calcareous soils. *Uebelmannia* and *Arrajadoa* come from granite areas and for these 'purified' water is recommended! (Mine will have to make do with Fawley energised rainwater!) Conophytums also would probably be better off with rain water.

We briefly viewed some of the habitats that Curt had visited around Arizona. Around Tucson there are alkaline rich soils supporting the Carnegias in the Saguaro National Parks (foothills of the limestone Catalina mountains), and in the Chiricahua mountains further south there is not limestone but 'tuff' volcanic hills (and weird pinnacles); on open patches one finds *Echinocereus triglochidiatus* at cooler higher altitude among light woodland. This is approaching an alpine type habitat. Nearer the Mexican border, at Mule Mountains area on granite lives *E. rigidissimus*, while nearby, in part defying Curt's theory, grew an unidentified Agave on the spoil from an old copper mine. At the top of the mountains, Curt invited us to view the scenery - one shot towards the US and another towards Mexico - and to 'compare and contrast' the relative greenness of the two. The Mexican side looked very verdant - with what looked like crops to feed the hungry. Most of the original habitat is no longer; this echoes Curt's interest in trying to maintain habitats, wherever they are.

Take home message is therefore don't ignore the welfare of the hairy bits below ground, it is important! Fortunately, the majority of the plants we grow are fairly adaptable. I am reminded of a famous wag on one of the gardening programmes of yesteryear on the radio whose answer to all questions started 'The answer lies in the soil!'

David Corina

## Table Show – February

These were the entries in the February table show.

	Cacti – Echinocactus Group	Succulents – Agave Group
Open	(1) G Finn Ferocactus macrodiscus	(1) J Roskilly Agave utahensis
	(2) B Beckerleg Echinocereus sp. (NAS)	(2) G Finn Agave victoriae-reginae
	(3) -	(3) B Beckerleg Agave victoriae-reginae
Intermediate	(1) G Finn Ferocactus acanthodes	(1) P Clemow Agave toumeya
	(2) P Clemow Ferocactus glaucescens	(2) -
	(3) B Beckerleg Echinocereus sp. (NAS)	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Snippets

The following article is based on an e-mail which I received last week:

### Storing Clivia Pollen

Just for general information, in reply to the editor's article in the December 2004 editorial column of your newsletter, Clivia pollen can be kept for years and it's easy. Find someone that has recently purchased a hard disc drive or other electronics, as most of these have a small desiccant pack in with them to keep moisture out. Take a small 35mm plastic film canister and pop the little desiccant pack in the canister. Collect your ripe pollen by taking just the end of the anther with pollen sac and put it in the canister. Once you have collected it, leave the lid off the canister for one day in a dry warm area like on top of the refrigerator. That gives the filament that remained when you cut the sac off the anther time to dry a little.

Pop the top on the canister and put it in your freezer. Do label what it is, so no one thinks it's spice or something! I name it by plant, month and year. It will keep for a few years in the freezer. When I'm ready to use mine I just take a pair of

tweezers and pick one sac out and pollinate the flower just holding the sac in the tweezers, covering the top and undersides of the three lobes of the stigma. Interspecific crosses like you were suggesting have yielded some of my more outstanding plants.

By the way, Clivia are perfect companion plants to Cactus and Succulents, since if you have ever looked at the roots, they are more like an orchid's roots, thick and long, not like others of the Amaryllis family and really have no bulb at all, just a crown.

They are drought tolerant plants and do best if given the same treatment as Cactus. I pot mine in 1/3 orchid bark mix, 1/3 peat mix and add a handful of compost and a couple handfuls of coarse sand or small rock to the mix. Fast draining and let dry between watering - I would think very similar to many of the plants your members already grow.

By the way I think your site is great and although Clivia are my passion, I can't resist reading your newsletters.

Sincerely,  
James Black  
President American Clivia Society  
<http://www.AmericanCliviaSociety.org>

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on 5<sup>th</sup> April, and will feature a talk from Stirling Baker on "Interesting Haworthias" (Stirling is the Show Secretary for the Haworthia Society, see <http://www.haworthia.org>). This is one of my favourite succulent genera, and I'm looking forward to his talk.

The April table Show will consist of the **Opuntia** group (cacti) and the **Haworthia & Gasteria** groups (succulents). Please note that members are allowed to submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Opuntia group contains *Opuntia*, *Airampoa*, *Austrocylindropuntia*, *Brasiliopuntia*, *Consolea*, *Corynopuntia*, *Cumulopuntia*, *Cylindropuntia*, *Grusonia*, *Maihuenia*, *Maihueniopsis*, *Marenopuntia*, *Micropuntia*, *Nopalea*, *Pereskia*, *Pereskiopsis*, *Pterocactus*, *Puna*, *Quiabentia*, *Rhodocactus*, *Tacinga*, *Tephrocactus* and *Tunilla*.

The Haworthia and Gasteria groups contain *Haworthia*, *Astroloba*, *Chortolirion*, *Poellnitzia* and *Gasteria*.

A reminder for committee members that a committee meeting will be held on the **14<sup>th</sup> of March**. (Note that the date of this meeting has been brought forward by one week).

## Forthcoming Events

Sun	13 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Basingstoke	Convention & Mini-Mart @ Viabes Craft Centre, Basingstoke
Mon	14 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue
Fri	18 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Isle of Wight	"Seed Raising" – Ian Woolnaugh
Sat	19 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Portsmouth	"Cacti in Flower" – Ian Woolnaugh
Sun	20 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Edenbridge	Cactus Mart @ Crockham Hill Village Hall, nr. Edenbridge
Sat	26 <sup>th</sup>	Mar-	Romsey	Spring Flower & Garden Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Mon	28 <sup>th</sup>	Mar		
Tue	5 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Southampton	"Interesting Haworthias" – Stirling Baker
Sun	10 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Crawley	Derek Desborough Mem. Lecture (D Bowdery / J Pilbeam) @ Crawley RHS Hall
Fri	15 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Isle of Wight	"Mesembryanthemums" – Eddy Harris
Sat	16 <sup>th</sup>	Apr	Portsmouth	Bring & Buy Sale
Tue	3 <sup>rd</sup>	May	Southampton	Cultivation Evening
Mon	9 <sup>th</sup>	May	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Fri	13 <sup>th</sup>	May	Isle of Wight	Pre-show preparations @ Peter Collard's
Sat	21 <sup>st</sup>	May	Portsmouth	"Three Men and a Condor, Part 1" – Eddy Harris
Sat	28 <sup>th</sup>	May-	Whitely	Display and Plant Sales @ Garden Market, Whitely Outlet
Mon	30 <sup>th</sup>	May		Shopping Centre (J9 of M27)

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