

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

March 2012



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### Editorial

It's been nice to see some sunshine recently, although the weather has alternated between warm and cold days. I even saw a few snow flakes at the weekend. Spring plants are beginning to make an appearance in the garden and it must soon be time to give the cacti and succulents plants their first watering of the year.

### Announcements

If you have not yet renewed your **BCSS membership**, please remember to do so – this can be done online via the BCSS website.

The annual **Zone 15 mini convention** will be held at Capel Manor (M25 J20) on Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup>. 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 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 for the event are available from Eddy Harris.

Also available from Eddy Harris are tickets for the 16<sup>th</sup> **Havering Cactus Mart**. This will be held at Romford, on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May. At least 12 leading nurseries will be present, so there should be a good selection of plants for sale. Admission is only £1. There's a leaflet on this event at the front table.

### Last Month's Meeting – Highlights of Arizona and Utah

Chairman Geoff Card introduced our speaker for February, who was none other than David Neville. Having noticed John Carr (a well-known BCSS member from the Yorkshire area) in the audience, David said if he had known John was going to be here, he would have asked him to give us a talk instead!

David mentioned that the pictures we were due to see were taken on a trip that he and I (Vinay) went on last April, to Arizona and Utah. This was his first visit to either of these states, and the intent had been to visit lots of different places and also see some of the sights. He hadn't done a lot of research on plant locations but did have information on some Sclerocactus and Pediocactus populations to visit.

The backdrop to the title slide was a Sclerocactus, well camouflaged in some grass. David proceeded to show a map of Arizona with the cities of Phoenix and Tucson highlighted (we flew into the latter), and then two more slides showing the locations visited in Arizona and Utah. We would start with the Organ Pipe national monument, which is located near the border with Mexico, and then the historical mining town of Bisbee. He had left out pictures from the Phoenix Desert Botanical Gardens, because that was worth a talk on its own. Continuing north was Sedona, Flagstaff, and the Grand Canyon, followed by Holbrook for some Pediocactus, then the Painted Desert and Petrified Forest, followed by Monument Valley. In Utah, the locations visited included Arches National Park, Capitol Reef and Bryce Canyon.

The main plant that everyone associates with Arizona is the Saguaro - *Carnegiea gigantea*. This was a plant he had never seen in its natural habitat before, but after one day he had seen thousands of them. It was the second week of April, and not many of the plant were in bud, although this varied from area to area. The plants were stunning and it was easy to take a huge number of photographs. Some of the plants start to form their characteristic

arms even when quite small. It was difficult to take good pictures of the flowers at the top of the stems, unless they happened to be bent over.

East of Tucson is Bisbee, a town we decided to visit after having seen some nice pictures in the brochures. It is an old mining town established in 1880. As you drive in, you pass a huge copper strip mine which has an area of 300 acres. This mine was opened in 1954, and closed in 1974. With more advanced extraction techniques and the current price of copper, the old heaps are being reprocessed. It is a quaint little town situated in a narrow canyon, with a more recently developed suburban sprawl of houses outside the canyon. In the main centre, the buildings are nicely done up and brightly painted, with the feel of an artistic community and little artisan shops dotted around. It was very quiet, with the high street at the rush hour being virtually empty. A killer bee sign outside a shop was advertising wild desert honey. A mining museum proved to be very interesting, as it traced the history of the town and featured the minerals found in the mines. Behind the museum is the Copper Queen hotel, which dates from the turn of the previous century. David managed to take one picture inside the museum before being told off, and this showed the bustling town and the Copper Queen in 1900. It was a real boom town which is now just a shadow of its former self.

Heading back to Tucson along a road which had been suggested as a place to find some plants, we came across *Echinocereus rigidissimus*. The plants had lovely pink spines on the top, as well as flower buds forming and the usual pectinate spination. There was also a *Mammillaria* growing nearby – it was almost certainly one of the forms of *M. heyderi*. John Pilbeam said the subspecies were ill defined. The plants were hunkered down and there some signs of flowering. Fifty yards away was a much larger plant with brown spines instead of white, and a ring of yellowish green flowers.

South West of Tucson is Ajo, and nearby is the Organ Pipe Cactus monument. "Organ Pipe" refers to plants of *Stenocereus thurberi* which when mature branches from the base, sending up a cluster of stems. You don't see large plants in cultivation, usually just single stems. The entrance to the monument was marked with a nice plaque featuring a sculpture of the Organ Pipe cactus. Just outside the monument is the Ajo loop road which features some interesting plants. A sign reminded us that we were near the Mexican border, and indeed on the main roads there were huge numbers of border patrol cars keeping any eye out for anything suspicious. In one place where we had stopped to photograph a

*Ferocactus*, a patrolman even pulled up to investigate our car. A close up of a *Stenocereus* stem showed that the older spines lose colour and become grey, but the new growth has attractive chocolate brown areoles. Occasionally we found plants with flower buds developing, but there were no plants in flower. The nearby plants with radiating slender stems and red flowers were *Fouquieria splendens*. This is a family of trees and shrubs with differing growth habits. There are some Mexican species which form a central stem and these are considered to be choice plants for cultivation. These particular plants had stems 8-9 feet tall. In some places they were leafless, in others they were in leaf and others were also flowering. As an aside, Paul Klaassen mentioned that there was a species of white flowered *Fouquieria*.

David thought the slides were looking too bleached on the digital projector so after some fiddling, the slide background was changed to black and this improved the contrast. Driving along the Ajo loop road, it was time for another "stop" after seeing a splash of purple. This was *Echinocereus engelmannii* in flower. A shot of it in the foreground had our hire car in the background framed by a huge spoil heap near the town of Ajo. This is another town which was prosperous when mining was viable, but it has now turned into a very quiet place.

Another plant of *Echinocereus engelmannii* had straw to brownish spines with larger flowers. Also extremely widespread is *Mammillaria grahmaili* (formerly *M. microcarpa*). It has lovely dark hooked central spines. None of the hooked spine mammillarias are easy to grow in cultivation, but out here they grow like weeds, and were found under almost every shrub. These cacti were generally in good growth. We came across a sign saying "Seasonal Area Closure" and this was due to protection for the Sonoran pronghorn. Another sign issued a warning about "smuggling and illegal immigration". Continuing along the loop road, a road sign warned of "narrow winding road" but in fact it was easy to drive on, we saw hardly anybody else in the 2-3 hours that we spent there. We came across more plants which might have been *Echinocereus engelmannii* ssp *nicholii* – these were half a mile away from the previous find and had yellow spines and paler flowers. The clumps were fairly large. *Ferocactus emoryi* v. *colvillii* is distinguished by its strong spines and lack of bristly spines. *Ferocactus wislizeni* is another species found here. The large cholla-type *Opuntias* were attractive from a distance. We also saw the "wood" from dead stems of these - they consisted of a hollow tube with holes where the areoles had been.

An *Echinocereus* had bright yellow variegation and this was a rare find. Another *Ferocactus emoryi v. colvilii* had lovely long central spines. Carnegieas were plentiful in this area, and a close up of a couple of youngsters showed how stout and thick stemmed plants they were. Despite being only a couple of feet tall, they must have been many years old, being incredibly slow growers. The narrowing of the stem in places suggested the plants must have struggled at some point in the past. Back out on the tarmac roads, just off to the side there were open patches with nice plants. There were branching Carnegieas and others with arms twisting and flopping around. Paul thought this was caused by frost. It was as if the joint wasn't strong enough to support the side arm and then the stems started to split. *Opuntia acanthocarpa* stood 4 foot tall and it was several feet wide. A close up view revealed interesting chains of growths, where each fruit grows from the previous fruit, eventually forming a chain of fruits. An *Opuntia*'s dried stem showed it gets quite woody. A Carnegiea's stem loses spines as the plant ages, but with this *Opuntia*, the glochids continue to produce new spines and the plants get spinier as they age.

Heading north, we went to a place called Montezuma Castle – this is just a name given in recent times, it had nothing to do with the real Montezuma from Mexico. This consisted of dwellings built into the cliffs around 700AD and which were habited for 300 years. There was a nearby river. The structure had been rebuilt and restored to show it as it would have looked like when it was in use. Although this is one of the smaller National Parks in the United States, it represents the oldest cave dwellings in the USA and attracts 350,000 visitors a year. A little fellow in the grass was a ground squirrel. Continuing north, as you approach the town of Sedona you start to see areas of reddish brown rocks surrounded by woods and forests. There are several named rock outcrops in the town and we saw Cathedral Rock. *Yucca elata* was growing here, it had nice filaments on the sides of the leaves. We saw a young plant still growing as a rosette; it hadn't yet produced the central trunk. Also found here was one of the forms of *Agave utahensis* – these were fair sized rosettes which were beginning to sucker. *Yucca battata*, the banana yucca was also growing here. This was a plant he was trying to grow back home, but after seeing how common these were, he threw his away after returning from the trip. A plant with red flowers which we saw in several places was the Indian paintbrush, *Castilleja*. It can't really be grown as a cultivated plant because it is semi-parasitic.

One of the things he wanted to see in Sedona was the church which Alan Phipps had described in his talk to our branch a few years ago. This had been designed by a student of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The church is positioned in the hills behind a housing development and the modern design sticks out like a sore thumb. Access is via a road leading to the back of the church. It is very plain inside but a wonderful setting and at the time of our visit, there was a wedding which had just been held there. Back down on the road, we saw a shot of the decorated tour bus. .

Now on to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. The roads to the North Rim are closed until mid-May, but the South Rim is open throughout the year. It was nice and warm in the sunshine and there was slight haze in the pictures. The place is so huge you simply can't take a picture which can hope to show the scale of everything. It was David first visit to the Canyon. Little promontories go out over the edge but he did not feel safe on any of them. Yet some people don't mind, and we saw some people who had climbed out on the rocks, just one slip away from certain death. One of the shots showed the Colorado River in the heart of the canyon. The late Sonia Barker-Fricker used to go to the Grand Canyon every year – she used to do plant surveys around the rim and also went down to the river.

At the eastern edge is a Watch Tower. Around here there were some plants growing in the shelter of the trees and this included *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*. There was also another form of *Agave utahensis* which was greener and had narrower leaves than the plants we had seen before. These were 2 feet across, and some were offsetting quite well. We also found clumps of *Escobaria vivipara* as well. The subspecies *deserti* is supposed to grow around here, and it is hardy enough to reach into Canada too. We saw a large 2-headed plant and they get spinier as they age. The youngsters do not have the central spine. We also saw a shot of a large raven which was watching out for scraps of food from the visitors.

Moving on east, we were at a locality for a *Sclerocactus* – along a service road near a large power station. We found a few plants between the road and a fence, and some better specimens after crossing over the fence. Two other people who have been since our visit were told to get off the land! The plants found first were *Sclerocactus whipplei* – and some were starting to flower. Some of the plants looked different and he wondered if there was more than one species here. However, it turns out that the plants look different in their juvenile form. Some of the plants were clustering and lower growing.

Others had more spines. From the pictures, you could see how well the plants were hidden amongst the grass. We saw the same species in its mature form, with a solitary head.

At another location - the golf course at Holbrook - we were looking for a *Pediocactus*. A picture of me was intended to illustrate not a new hairdo but rather the very strong wind. Despite having a GPS location, we spent half an hour looking around and didn't see any plants until David finally found one - and then eventually more plants became obvious. The person who had given us the coordinates went to the same spot a month later and didn't find any plants. This was *Pediocactus peeblesianus* var *peeblesianus*. These were small plants only an inch or two across. They are nigh on impossible in cultivation, and difficult even on a graft. Most of the plants had a yellowish flower, although some seemed to have a pinkish tinge when growing protected under a bush. Plants of *S. whipplei* in bud were also found here.

At another locality in Holbrook, we had information on *Escobaria* and *Pediocactus*. When we reached the location, the terrain consisted of flat stone with cracks between the rocks. We wandered round for quite a while and eventually found some plants, close to a bridge with a river running nearby. David's finger next to a plant for scale showed how small the objects we were looking for were! The plants were pulled down almost beneath the soil in the soft silt in between the rocks. The plant found was *Escobaria missouriensis* ssp. *navajoensis*. These were an inch across and coming into flower. We did find more as we wandered around. One had had its flower nibbled. The spines were stronger on the older plants. Some even had seed pods - the big round fleshy fruits and groove in the tubercle confirmed the species. Cliff Thompson in the audience mentioned that seed pods left on these plants during the winter could cause the plants to rot. We found more plants with a shorter flower and rounder bud, with a slightly different colour - was this the *Pediocactus*? However it also had a groove in the tubercle. After removing a flower and comparing it with the earlier plants - both were essentially the same - they were all *Escobaria missouriensis* ssp. *navajoensis*. *Toumeyia papyracantha* was supposed to be here but we didn't find it despite hours of looking. There was a nice low growing spreading *Opuntia* - given the high altitude and very windy conditions, tall plants just don't survive. A perennial in flower had nice yellow flowers but he was unsure about the species.

Continuing north east, we arrived at the Petrified Forest and Painted Desert - the two national parks

border each other. The petrified "wood" is the mineralised remains of some relative of the sequoia. Tony Grech mentioned there was a place in Dorset which also had petrified wood. *Oenothera caespitosa*, the tufted evening primrose was widespread in northern Arizona and Utah but these were the only examples seen here. The landscapes were amazing, quite unlike anything we'd see anywhere else on this trip. .

The next location visited was Monument Valley, which sits on the border between Arizona and Utah. Again there was a haze in the air which meant the photographs weren't at their clearest. Nevertheless, the rock structures were amazing. We then passed through a small town called Mexican Hat - the name derives from a large balanced rock sitting atop a column of rock. Not too far from here was another *Sclerocactus* location and on reaching there we quickly found plants of *Sclerocactus parviflorus*. There were dozens of plants, in various conditions - some dying but also plenty of healthy youngsters coming through. *Scleros* are attacked by beetle grubs and in some years they all disappear, but the seed bank in the soil allows them to regenerate. These plants are again virtually impossible to grow on their own roots in cultivation. The climate here can get very cold so the plants are very hardy.

Going on to Moab, we reached the Arches National Park. Again there was incredible scenery all around you, although after two or three weeks of seeing amazing scenery, your interest does tend to fade a little. The rock structure here means that erosion causes huge arches to form. Views all across the park showed a number of different rock structures. In the distance were the beautiful La Sal mountains, half covered in snow. There were more arches, balanced rocks and wonderful scenery stretching out in all direction. In other places there were towering rock structures. In the park there were clumps of *Echinocereus coccineus*, coming into bud, but unfortunately not in flower, which would have been stunning.

Moving on to Capitol Reef, as we drove into the national park, David noticed white spiny balls on the verge. These were a white-spined form of *Sclerocactus parviflorus*. A two headed clump was almost a foot across. The plants did not look as vibrant as the ones we had seen earlier. In Capitol Reef, there was a great variety of rock formations. We wandered around on the slopes, and found more *Sclerocactus parviflorus*, these were also white spined, with a reddish tinge on the centrals. There were also some youngsters about an inch across. Some more plants of *Escobaria vivipara* were also

found – these were less strongly spined than the ones seen earlier.

We didn't have specific information on plant localities here but some searches on the internet suggested that the Notom Road area was a good candidate for *Pediocactus*. We drove around for a while, not really sure what to expect. After stopping at one spot, David must be one of the only people to ever spot a *Pediocactus* from the car! The plant was in flower and it was just a few feet away from where we had chosen to stop. We found several more in the area. Again this was a very windy exposed site, and not much else was growing here. The plants were standing well proud of the soil and had lovely white woolly areoles, and nice radiating spines. Some were in flower and the flowers were of yellowish and pinkish shades. There was a group of 4 heads which might have been a single plant unless they were somehow growing close to each other. The soil consisted of soft silt and flaked softish rock, and this general terrain was visible into the distance, so there were probably many more of these plants here. In this area there were again more examples of the semi-parasitic *Castilleja*, but surprisingly there was no obvious host nearby.

We continued in a Southwest direction, and in so doing, reached an altitude of 9000 feet as we cut through a road high in the mountains. There was snow and ice around, but the road itself was clear and very scenic. The destination was Bryce Canyon, and David said that if you're only going to visit one place in Utah, then this has to be it. It is much smaller than the Grand Canyon, but more colourful, with its "hoodoos", which are vertical pillars of orange-coloured rock. It was just after mid-April, and there was still some snow around.

It was time to make our way south, and crossing back into Arizona, there were gravel-strewn clearings in pine and juniper forests. Here we found *Pediocactus paradinei* (previously *Pilocanthus*). There were mature plants over 3 inches across, as well as younger examples, and some were in flower. There were other plants such as annuals and ground cover. Also here was *Coryphantha vivipara*, similar to plants on the south side of the Grand Canyon, and *Yucca baccata* again. *Echinocereus coccineus* was just coming into bud. There was another large population of *Pediocactus paradinei* a couple of hundred yards away from the first sighting, and interestingly this second group of plants were all tagged.

Heading on to Marble Canyon, there was an unmarked gate off the side of the main road which connected to a dirt road, which eventually led to an

informational sign mentioning the Brady pincushion cactus. Walking out towards the rock, there were *Opuntias*, and examples of *Echinocereus engelmannii* with darker spines. After the flat area was a shallow wash where there were big plants of *Echinocactus polycephalus* v. *xeranthemoides* which was supposed to be a smaller growing form, and also solitary - although all the plants we saw were clustering. This is quite a rare and difficult plant in cultivation. Each head was 5-6 inches across and there were some which had broader spination. A young plant looked quite different but was already fiercely spined. There were also variations in spine colour in the new growth, with pink, yellowish and straw coloured variants.

Continuing on towards the river, the plants of *Pediocactus bradyi* were eventually found – they were growing on a shelf near the edge of the canyon. As before, once you got your eye in and knew what you were looking for, it became easier to find many more of the plants, even though they had sunk into the soil with only part of the body visible. Some were doing really well, and some had already flowered with unripe seed pods present. There was even one plant which was developing a crest. After the rain shower, the spines on the *Echinocactus* plants brightened up – an effect you can see with your own plants if you give them a light spraying. At the edge of the canyon, one could see the rapids on the Colorado River and also hear the water.

On one of the later legs of the trips, we went to the town of Globe, which is west of Phoenix. The Apache trail loop road consists of a mixture of paved and unpaved roads and is quite scenic. There was also a huge dam and reservoir at the Theodore Roosevelt Lake. We saw *Carnegiea* and *Ferocacti* growing on the hillsides and decided to climb up the hill. We found more plants of *Mammillaria grahamii*, and flat padded *Opuntias* with beautiful yellow and orange flowers. Tall pink stems and yellow flowers were everywhere and we quite surprised to find these belonged to a *Dudleya* – possibly *Dudleya arizonica*. There were thousands of them here. We also saw Saguaros which were growing on the hillsides and some were right at the water's edge – these would probably perish because their roots would be too wet. This was the end of the talk and probably the end of those *Carnegieas* too!

Vinay Shah

## Table Show Results

There were 5 entries in the February table show.

	<b>Cacti – Copiapoa</b>	<b>Succulents – Lithops</b>
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Copiapoa longistaminea	(1) B Beckerleg Crassula "Celia"
	(2) -	(2) J Roskilly Adromischus cooperi
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Copiapoa cinerea	(1) B Beckerleg Crassula susannae
	(2) -	(2) -
	(3) -	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, and will feature a talk from Ian Woolnaugh on the desert in Chile in flower.

The April Table Show will consist of the **Rebutia** Group (cacti) and the **Echeveria** Subgroup (succulents). Please note that you are allowed multiple entries 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*, *Cremnophila*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Hasseanthus*, *Oliveranthus*, *Pachyphytum*, *Stylophyllum*, *Tacitus*, *Thompsonella* and *Urbinia*.

Committee members should note that a Branch Committee meeting is due to be held this month – the date will be confirmed during today's meeting.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Isle of Wight	Branch Quiz & Members' Talks
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Portsmouth	"Xiaoqing's Photos" - Ralph Martin
Mon 19 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting (to be confirmed)
Tue 3 <sup>rd</sup> Apr	Southampton	"Chile - Desert In Flower" - Ian Woolnaugh
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Isle of Wight	"Wildlife" - Colin Haygarth
Sat 21 <sup>st</sup> Apr	Portsmouth	Bring and Buy Auction
Tue 1 <sup>st</sup> May	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
Sun 6 <sup>th</sup> May	Portsmouth	Display / Plant Sales @ Bishops Waltham Garden Fair
Sat 12 <sup>th</sup> May	Isle of Wight	"Brazil" - Cliff Thompson
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> May	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College Countryside Day
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> May	Portsmouth	"Brazil Part1 : Rio Grande do Sul" - Cliff Thompson

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