

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has continued its unsettled manner and we seem to be getting a mixture of cold and wet weather with the occasional nice day in between. It's rather chilly on some days and even though we have entered May, I feel like turning the central heating on.

Several more cacti have come into flower in my conservatory, although the overcast weather has arrested the development of flower buds. Those flowers which have opened are lasting a little bit longer, thanks to the lowish temperatures.

Announcements

The Spring Garden Show at Broadlands, Romsey over the Easter weekend went very well. There was plenty of interest in our display, and over the course of two days, we helped over 400 children pot up a plant of their choice. Although plant sales were down on the record levels set last year, it was still a very successful event for the branch, and thanks are due to all the members who helped out during the event.

Today's meeting will provide an opportunity to learn more about showing and judging. After a brief explanation of the basics of judging, we will run a **Mini-show**, where the audience will have an opportunity to judge 10 classes. A marking form is attached to the back of the newsletter. Enter your choices on that sheet, then make a copy of those choices on a spare marking sheet (available from the front table) and hand the copy to me. I

will collate all the audience results and after the break, David Neville will reveal which entries he would have placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd.

The **Branch dinner** will take place this coming Friday evening, at the Clump Inn in Chilworth. A booking has already been made. If you have not already done so, please let Margaret Corina know if you plan to attend.

On the following day (8th May), the Havering Branch will be staging the **12th Havering Cactus Mart** at Hornchurch, Essex, between 10am and 4pm. Admission costs £1, and at least 14 nurseries will be present. More details are available from the Havering branch's website.

And just a day later, our branch will be staging a display at the Bonsai Show which will take place at the **Littledown Sports Centre**, Bournemouth. The event is expected to run from 10:30am to 5pm, and maps are available from the front table.

At the end of the month, our branch will also be staging a small display / sales table at **Whiteley Village** as part of their 3-day Garden Market event. This is a popular shopping outlet, consisting of over 50 stores and situated just off junction 9 of the M27 motorway. Charlie Dimmock will be holding a garden clinic on the 29th, and our stand is likely to be seen by thousands of people on each of the three days.

Mark and Rebecca Jakins will be opening their plant collection to branch members by hosting an **Open Day** on Sunday 23rd May. They live at 35 Richlans Road, Hedge End, which is about 3 miles east of our meeting hall. Visitors will be welcome between 2pm and 5pm, and tea and cakes will be provided!

Earlier on the same day, Portsmouth Branch will be hosting the sale of the late Chris Webb's cacti and succulent collection. The gates will open at 10am and the larger plants will be auctioned at 12 noon. Refreshments will be provided. Further details can be obtained from Brian Plunkett (brian.plunkett@port.ac.uk)

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

In keeping with the theme for the evening, Ivor Biddlecombe had brought in some seedlings. Two years ago, he collected and sowed seeds from *Lithops* cv. 'Stones Throw' which is a hybrid between the green bodied *L. lesliei* v. *albinica* and a *Dinterops*. *Dinterops* is the name given to hybrids between *Lithops* and *Dinteranthus*.

Some of the seedlings had come up with green bodies, but the majority were brown, similar to 'Stones Throw'. Out of 41 seedlings, 8 were green. It was interesting to see that there was considerable variation between the seedlings, some reverting to one of the parents while others were somewhere in between.

Ivor also mentioned that he found some *Lithops* seeds from 1998, and after sowing these in 2002, he found no appreciable difference in germination between the old seeds and a fresher batch of seeds. So it appears that the seed of some species keeps well. Cacti seeds are not so long lasting, and they are best sown as soon as possible.

Other *Plants of Interest* had been brought along by Jim Roskilly. A few years ago, he had bought a *Rhipsalis* plant in a 3½" pot for £1 from Homebase. Last year it managed to produce one flower, but this year it had gone on to produce hundreds of flowers and the plant now had stems (leaves?) which were 3 feet long. He grows the plant in his greenhouse.

At the Anniversary convention, Jim had bought a *Euphorbia millii* (a thai hybrid) with glowing red flowers from Ernst Specks' sales table. He thought it had finished flowering, but it was continuing to produce more red flowers (actually leaf bracts) from the old growth. Another plant he had purchased at the convention was *Pseudolithos migiurtinus*. It's well-named since it looks just like a stone or pebble. It eventually bears small stapeliad-like flowers which grow into long seed pods if pollinated.

Jim mentioned that he already had a grafted *Copipoa laui* - but at the convention, he managed to find a cristate form from PlantLife. *Tylecodon minima* was still the same size it was a few years ago. Either he wasn't treating it correctly, or it really was a miniature. The next two plants were small-headed conophytums, purchased from Bruce Beckerleg. Jim had tried *C. stephanii*

before and had lost it, however this specimen had survived the winter. The other plant was *C. pubicalyx*, which has even smaller heads.

The last six plants had all been obtained from the John Watmough meeting last year. John had given us a talk on saving dilapidated plants using cuttings and at the end of the meeting, he had handed out several types of cuttings for everyone to try out. Jim had picked up some of the material and now had a nice collection of thriving plants (*Adromischus diabolicus*, *Tylecodon ventricosus*, *Adromischus* sp., *Rhipsalis* sp., *Tylecodon grandiflorus*, *Senecio* sp.)

Seed Raising

Ian Woolnough didn't profess to be an expert and he mentioned that during his talk, he wanted people to speak out about the methods they used. Everyone has their own favourite way of growing plants from seed and the intention was for everyone to learn from one another.

He started by asking who has grown cacti from seed. Most of us raised our hands. He then asked a rhetorical question "Why would one want to grow from seed", and proceeded to give some answers. Firstly he enjoys propagation. There's satisfaction in turning a small speck into a plant. Growing from seed is also a cheap way of obtaining plants – the seeds usually cost a fraction of the price of the plant they will grow into. Another reason is that if you plant a batch of seeds, you will get a variation of spines or forms, or even a cristate, and you can pick out the particular ones you like.

There are other reasons too. If you have plants which have been grown in your greenhouse, they are likely to be better acclimatised to the conditions you provide, and so there's a better chance of getting them to a decent size. Growing from seeds also helps conservation, by reducing demand for live plants and this stops people from denuding plant habitats. Indeed there are several species which are endangered in habitat, and the only way of acquiring them is by growing seeds.

As for obtaining seeds, there are lots of potential sources. The Society sends out a seed list in December each year. Companies such as South West Seeds and Whitestone offer quite a large range of cacti and succulent seed. Many nurseries also offer seeds, and a search on the Internet (via the Cactus Mall) will reveal many other suppliers. As to how good the seeds are, this does vary.

Some sources are better than others at obtaining fresh and viable seed. Apart from a few exceptions, fresh seed does offer much better germination, and this is why he prefers to sow his own seeds. The first task is to set seed on your plants. He often buys two plants of a particular species, in the hope that he can persuade them to flower at the same time so that he can set some seed!

Ian then passed around plastic bags containing some examples of his recent seed raising efforts. Seedlings of *blossfeldia* were around 5-6 years old. These had flowered last year and will flower again this year. Ian mentioned that if you get a decent harvest of seeds, try and pack them in the pot. Getting a good density of young plants prevents anything unwanted from growing in between the plants and the seedlings seem to enjoy each other's company. Even though he used small pots, there was still room for other stuff to grow if only a few seeds had been planted.

If you grow lots of seeds, you can run into problems of another sort. He had sown *Neoporteria multicolor*, and had got so many variations that he felt like keeping them all! In fact he hadn't sown many seed in the last 3-4 years, because he had got too many seedlings and plants from earlier years and was having the scale back new plantings.

Gymnocalycium baldianum had been sown in February 2000. The plant bodies were touching each other and Ian admitted that if he had pricked them out earlier, they would be better off. Next were a species of *Melocactus*, and *Solisia pectinata*, both sown in July 2001.

Ian mentioned that you can get spectacular successes but sometimes also failure. He had planted *Leuchtenbergia principis* and *Lophophora decipiens* in 2001, and the latter had not germinated at all. He claimed that *Leuchtenbergia principis* always sets 38 to 42 seeds in a pod although Cliff Thompson mentioned that he had once got over a thousand seeds from a pod.

Occasionally, you can get differing germination even if you place two pots containing the same seed in a bag, perhaps due to slight differences in the compost or how much light or heat one side of the bag receives. *Copiapoa montana* and *Thelocephala glabrescens* from February 2004 had good germination, and the small plants were visible. However, *Frailea* and *Copiapoa*

barquitensis, also sown in February 2004 had not germinated as well.

Some seeds germinate quickly and *Astrophytums* seedlings usually emerge within 2-5 days. Others are slower. In particular, *Ariocarpus* can be very slow, sometimes taking 2-3 years. If you were to sow 10-15 seeds, you might get 2-3 seedlings plants coming up in each of the first, second and third years. His advice was not to discard them, even after a couple of years!

Ian then gave a practical demonstration of the seed sowing process. The first task is to get plants to flower at the same time, in order to set seed. This can be a frustrating process – it's amazing how plants of the same species will often flower a few days apart! However, pollen will keep in a fridge. He grows similar plants close together so that they get the same conditions and this should increase the chances of them flowering together. If you only have one plant then all you can try is self-pollination, in the hope that the plant is self-fertile. When the flowers open, use a small paintbrush to transfer the pollen from the anthers to the stigma. You can also use cotton buds, or if nothing else is available, your finger!

He also demonstrated a device which can be used to collect seeds. A clear container (about the size of a film canister) contained two tubes which had been inserted through the lid. The bottom of the first tube (inside the container) was covered with gauze. The other pipe was open ended and was made from flexible pipe, allowing it to be directed to where the seeds are located. By sucking on the exterior end of the first tube, suction is caused inside the canister and this causes seeds to be drawn into the container through the other pipe. Ivor mentioned that he had a squeeze-action sucker which was also useful for picking up seeds, especially at arms length.

The next item to consider is the pot. He uses 2" BEF square pots. These are a convenient size and two will fit inside the 9" x 7" Sainsburys' food bags which he uses. Some types of plastic bags can go opaque or the plastic can become brittle. Some cheap bags he's used in the past also leaked.

For the compost, he uses John Innes seed compost. Before use, he puts a quantity inside a bag and microwaves it for 5 minutes. The soil can be very hot after this, so let it cool down. Other people use sand or perlite in the soil but he does not find this necessary. He then adds tap water -

although he waters his normal plants with rainwater, he does not use that on the seeds since all sorts of algae and stuff would come up.

Cheshunt compound is considered by some to be detrimental to seed germination, but in his experience, it prevents damping off which can be lethal for plants. He uses a tray which he fills with the Cheshunt solution, and lets the pot take up as much of the water as it needs. He fills the pots to around $\frac{3}{4}$ full and also takes out any lumps in the compost.

Plant labels are very important. It's infuriating to plant something and then a few years later not know what it is! He uses "T" labels which have a low profile. He also uses pencils to write on the labels. The various "permanent" pens which are available are just not stable (maybe it's the Cheshunt compound) - but pencil marks always remain there. HB or softer lead is best. The T labels cost a couple of pence each, but he considered them to be worth it.

After filling a pot with soil, tap the soil down. Use a sugar spoon or a 2" square with a handle on it to flatten the surface. Sprinkle the seeds on top. Some types should be washed before sowing, since the seeds may have pulp on them, also try and pick off any bits of the seed pod since this can attract mould. Spray the top surface with Cheshunt solution to help the seeds settle.

Then sit the pot in a tray of Cheshunt compound, and let it soak up as much water as it wants. Finally, place the pot in a plastic bag. Think of this as a mini-greenhouse. A good seal is important - if you leave the bag open, *Sciara* flies can enter the soil and their larvae hatch as clear maggots which will soon destroy the young plants. Since he's microwaved the compost, there should be no insect eggs in there, and the Cheshunt compound should look after any mould.

What about larger seeds? He tended to push these into the soil, but did not cover them completely. Hard seeds like *Opuntia* need scarifying but he's had mixed results with them.

He tends to sow seeds in the spring or earlier, and sometimes he does use a propagator. Any later and the plants will have not got to a decent size before the winter arrives. He leaves the plants undisturbed for 2-3 years, but this decision really depends on the plant's rate of growth. The plants seem to do better as a community but at some point they will start to hinder each other's growth

and need to be moved on. When putting two pots in a bag, do try and use plants with a similar rate of growth, otherwise you'll have to open the bag early. For the same reason, he does not grow mixed seed.

At some point, the plants need to be prepared for the real world. An easy technique is to slit the bags to admit air and to harden them off. One can get amazing results sometimes. The extra moisture present in the bag means that some plants do especially well. He's had very good results with *Mamillopsis* and *blossfeldia*.

Overall, hygiene is the most important factor. Sterilize the compost and use Cheshunt compound. Some people think the latter hinders germination, but in his view, it was worth using. Although he does not grow any succulents from seed, he felt the techniques described for cacti should work just as well.

Ivor mentioned that he does not use Cheshunt compound, but instead uses boiling water to water the compost. He also places grit at the top of the compost and finds that this tends to help the seedlings to get a better hold. He has no trouble with damping off. Ian mentioned that he had once tried a top dressing of grit but got very low germination so didn't use it again.

Ian then discussed a couple of methods of grafting plants. From Roger Ferryman, he had learnt how to use some old tights! Get the nylon and place it over the scion and then stretch it over the scion/stock combination. The important part is to align the vascular bands. An alternative is to use a couple of rubber bands to hold the scion onto the stock. But the bands do perish eventually so one has to hope that the graft has taken by then.

After the tea-break, Ian showed some slides. In the coastal region of Chile, he found oxalis and sedum, growing alongside *Neoporteria subgibbosa*. There was no compost or Cheshunt compound here, but the seedlings were doing well nevertheless.

Next we moved to Europe and saw a truck marked with the logo of a wholesale nursery in Holland, called Van der Linden. Plants are grown in massive numbers and the aim is to grow as cheaply and quickly as possible. So you'll never see a name label, and the plants are packed extremely densely. If you intend to pick out some plants, do take some forceps with you. The plants were in 4cm pots and we saw photos of thousands

and thousands of them. When you see so many, you start to wonder where they all go?

A shot from a distance showed the variation between plants, in terms of spine and body colours. We saw thousands of mammillarias and also large plants of *Echinocereus grusonii*. These golden barrels might have been grown in the Canaries and then imported to Holland for potting up and re-distribution. We also saw a conveyor system for potting up the plants.

Another shot showed hundreds of the grafted chlorophyll-less plants which frequent our large DIY stores and nurseries - coloured (red / orange / yellow / purple) *Gymnocalycium*s and yellow-bodied *Chamaecereus*. The plants were priced at 1 Euro (65p) each. We also saw plants packed up ready for shipping, with B&Q labels on them.

One of the nice things about visiting a nursery is that you can pick out plants which stand out from the crowd, such as cristates or plants with unusual forms or flowers. The nurseries don't have time to do this themselves – all they are interested in is mass production.

Next we saw some examples of Ian's own efforts. *Ariocarpus trigonus* (with yellow flowers) had been crossed with *A. agavoides*. The resultant seed was viable, but with *Ariocarpus*, it's a long wait to check the results. *Turbincarpus alonsii* was on a graft, and it had magenta flowers. Next we saw 12 plants of *Astrophytum asterias*, all grown from seeds obtained from one seed pod. Some of the plants were well flopped, others were hardly marked at all. The second generation of these were now flowering.

At Westfields he had taken photos of a yellow-flowered *Chamaecereus*, and some Shick *Echinopsis* hybrids. The flowers only last a day or two, but they are very showy. We also saw a *Lobiviopsis* with glowing yellow flowers.

At one of the Dutch nurseries, we saw tall stems of *Buiningia* with pseudocephaliums. At De Herdt (in Belgium), the stock plants used for seed production were choice specimens which were likely to yield quality seeds. We saw nice examples of *Obregonia*, *Astrophytum asterias* and *Lophophora*.

The Eden Project hosts the private collection of a collector called Molyndijk (?). There were fine examples of *Melocactus*, *Uebelmannia* and *Neopteris* and also some unusual cristates.

We also saw some photos of a plant which goes under the name of "Fred". This is a montrose form of *Mammillaria bocasana*. Its flowers are also cristate.

New we saw a tray of plants which Ian had selected at one of the Dutch nurseries. There were some nice forms of *Astrophytum* with different rib counts, and also pink and orange flowered forms of *Notocactus uebelmannianus*.

We saw Cliff's photo of himself sitting on a large *Copiapoa* in Chile, and ended with some photos of the spectacular Bryce canyon (Utah), with the sun playing on the reddish rock. Finally we saw a photo of a spectacular sunset with orange and pink hues in the clouds, taken in Chile.

Overall, this was a useful talk at just the right time of the year. Hopefully it will encourage a few of you to try growing plants from seed.

Vinay Shah

Table Show – April

There were 9 entries in the April table show.

	Cacti – Opuntia Group	Succulents – Aloe Group
Open	(1) J Roskilly <i>Opuntia dinteri</i>	(1) J Roskilly <i>Aloe erinacea</i>
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Tephrocactus pentlandii</i>	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>Aloe longistyla</i>
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Opuntia pachypus</i>	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>Aloe cv. 'Doran Black'</i>
	(2) J Roskilly <i>Opuntia molinensis</i>	(2) J Roskilly <i>Aloe pachygaster</i>
	(3) P Clemow <i>Opuntia microdasys</i>	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Branch Website

Our website (<http://www.southampton.bcss.org.uk>) has been up and running for about 2 months now, and I've had a few enquiries by e-mail over that time. One contact was from a russian engineer

who wanted some penpals. Another contact was from a Mr Jakins who had read an account of Mark's talk at the January meeting and who wanted to be put in touch with Mark!

More recently, I had a query from a lady who had been given an Easter cactus and who was now wondering how to best look after it. Accesses to the web site number in the 100's per month, and it will be interesting to see how things develop.

I have now placed copies of the newsletter on the website, in PDF format. Each newsletter can be downloaded in a couple of minutes or less, and having done this, Acrobat reader software (available free of charge) allows you to read or print the newsletter.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Next month's meeting will feature a talk by John Pilbeam on "Ferocactus". John is an excellent and popular speaker, and he'll probably bring along a nice selection of sale plants too.

The June Table Show will feature the **Parodia** Group (cacti) and the **Crassula** Group (succulents).

The **Parodia** group contains 6 genera, as follows: *Parodia*, *Brasilicactus*, *Eriocactus*, *Malacocarpus*, *Notocactus* and *Wigginsia*.

The **Crassula** group contains 5 subgroups (*Adromischus*, *Aeonium*, *Echeveria*, *Sedum*, *Sempervivum*) and encompasses almost 50 different species. Some of the more common species include *Adromischus*, *Brophyllum*, *Cotyledon*, *Crassula*, *Kalanchoe*, *Rochea*, *Tylecodon*, *Aeonium*, *Greenovia*, *Monanthes*, *Echeveria*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Tacitus*, *Sedum*, *Sempervivum* and *Jovibarba*.

A reminder for Committee members that a **Committee Meeting** will be held on Monday 17th May.

Forthcoming Events

Fri	7 th	May	Southampton	Branch Dinner (The Clump Inn, Chilworth)
Sat	8 th	May	Havering	12 th Havering Cactus Mart, Horndean, Essex
Sun	9 th	May	Littledown, Dorset	Branch Display @ Bonsai Show, Littledown Sports Centre
Sat	15 th	May	Portsmouth	"A to Z" – Bill Morris
Mon	17 th	May	Southampton	Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue)
Fri	21 st	May	Isle of Wight	Pre-show preparations (@ Peter Collard's)
Sun	23 rd	May	Southampton	Open Day (2-5pm) @ Mark & Rebecca Jakins, Hedge End
Sat	29 th	May	Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight Branch Annual Show - Church Hall, Town Lane, Newport
Sat	29 th	May-	Whiteley Village	Display & Plant Sales @ Whiteley Village, J9 M27
Mon	31 st	May		
Tue	1 st	Jun	Southampton	"Ferocactus" – John Pilbeam
Sat	5 th	Jun	Portsmouth	Portsmouth & District Summer Show - Wickham Community Hall, Dairy Moor, Wickham
Fri	18 th	Jun	Isle of Wight	"South African Bulbs" – Terry Smale
Sat	19 th	Jun	Portsmouth	"Around the Four Corners" – Terry Smale
Sat	3 rd	Jul-	Southampton	Cactus & Succulent Show at the Southampton Balloon and Flower Festival, The Common, Southampton
Sun	4 th	Jul		Wickham Community Hall, Dairy Moor, Wickham
Tue	6 th	Jul	Southampton	"A Walk on the Wild Side – Part 1" – Eddie Harris
Fri	16 th	Jul	Isle of Wight	"Our Collection" – Tony and Suzanne Mace
Sat	17 th	Jul	Portsmouth	Zone 11 Quiz

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

SPRING MINI SHOW – Instructions

- Examine the entries and decide which plants you think should be 1st, 2nd and 3rd in each class. Each entry will have a letter (A, B, C, etc.) placed next to it. Record this letter in the white sections of the results table below. The grey sections can be used to record the Judge’s selections.
- Also record any entries which are NAS (not as scheduled) – usually pots which are too large, a genus entered in the wrong class, or the wrong number of plants.
- When you have finished judging all 10 classes, copy your results to a marking sheet (available from the front table), fill in your name and hand the sheet to Vinay Shah. The results will be compared with the Judge’s selections and will also be collated to determine the audience’s favourite choices.

Class			1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
1	Mammillaria Group Two plants in pots not exceeding 4"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
2	Parodia Group Two plants in pots not exceeding 4"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
3	Gymnocalycium Group Two plants in pots not exceeding 5"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
4	Rebutia Group One plant in a pot not exceeding 6¼"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
5	Echinopsis Group One plant in a pot not exceeding 5"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
6	Any cactus One plant with no pot size limit	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
7	Crassula Group One plant in a pot not exceeding 6¼"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
8	Haworthia Group Two plants in pots not exceeding 4"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
9	Euphorbia Group One plant in a pot not exceeding 5"	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				
10	Any succulent One plant with no pot size limit	Your choice				
		Judge's choice				

Scoring: (for each class)

- One point will be awarded if an entry which you placed 1st, 2nd or 3rd is also placed (within any position) in the top 3 by the Judge.
- A bonus point will be awarded if your selection for 1st place matches the Judge’s choice for 1st
- A bonus point will be awarded for every NAS* plant which you correctly identify.
- A point will be deducted if you place a NAS* entry in the top 3, or if you incorrectly mark an eligible entry as NAS*.

* NAS - Not As Scheduled – an entry which does not comply with the class description.