

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

In April we have finally seen the arrival of some normal temperatures, although this past weekend was again an exception, with some cold winds around. Anyway it's good to see signs of trees everywhere starting to cover themselves in leaves.

A few of my Mammillarias are in flower, and some of the Rebutias and Gymnocalyciums have formed buds which should open within a couple of weeks. The epiphytic cacti seem a little confused – a solitary flower has just opened on one of my Christmas cacti, so it's flowering at the same time as my old collection of Easter cacti. The new Easter cacti which I got from Haskins flowered about 2 months ago, and these plants had probably been forced to produce flowers a little early.

Announcements

Within the past month, the branch has put on two public displays. During Easter, we participated in the **Spring Flower and Garden Show** at Broadlands, Romsey. A report by Margaret Corina is included in the snippets section. The event was well supported by the public on all three days and we potted a record number of plants for the children who came to the Prickly Potting Post. It was encouraging to hear that some of them had been along in previous years and that their plants were still alive! Plant sales were also good across all three days. Thanks are due to all those members who helped to make the event a success.

More recently, during the past weekend we took part in the **Outdoor Home and Garden Show** at Whiteley Shopping Outlet. (Note that this event was moved to the first bank holiday in May, so the date in the branch/zone programme is incorrect.) The unseasonally cold weather seemed to have kept people away, and the number of people who stopped to buy plants or discuss our exhibit was slightly lower than last year.

If you look at the Forthcoming Events section, you'll see that there's quite a lot on in the coming weeks. Both our neighbouring branches are due to have their annual shows later in the month.

Tony Grech will be holding an **open day** on the Sunday (4th June) prior to our next meeting. He lives on Braeside Road, Bitterne (a couple of miles southwest of our meeting hall), and maps are available from the front table. For those of you who have not attended an open day before, this is an opportunity to visit a member - to see their collection, and to have an informal chat with any other members who have come along.

Thanks are due to Mrs Margaret Sullivan of Bournemouth. Her late husband was a member of the Society, and she has donated a collection of Journals dating from 1946 to the 1960's to the branch.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Bruce Beckerleg had brought along some *Plants of Interest*. He mentioned that the extended spell of cold weather had delayed the flowering of many plants, and it had been difficult to pick out things in flower.

First was *Pelecocyphora (Normanbokea) valdeziana*, a plant which is sometimes also classified under *Turbinicarpus*. This is always one of the first to flower in his greenhouse, and the flowers, although closed that evening, had been open earlier in the day. Next was *Neoporteria villosa* which also tends to flower early in the year. It cheats a little by

forming buds late in the previous year, and it can sometimes flower during the winter, although the main burst of flowering is in April. This particular plant had the characteristic dark spines and was almost a foot high.

Uebelmannia pectinifera was also in flower, although Bruce described the flowers as “modest yellow things” The plant was on a graft and dated from 1981, and he felt it might perhaps have grown just as well on its own roots. The plant was beginning to mark up and perhaps it was nearing the end of its useful life.

Moving on to some succulents, *Pelargonium incrassatum* is a geophyte which forms a caudex and which had pinnate (feathery) leaves and pink flowers. *Echeveria chiapensis* had a collection number F0207. It had been flowering for a while now, and the stems were 8 inches tall.

Pleiospilos nelii had two flower buds on it. In response to a question from the audience, Bruce mentioned that this mesemb flowers early in the year whereas *P. bolusii* flowers in the late summer – he had two plants of *P. nelii* and both were about to flower.

Orostachys spinosa normally grows as a rosette, but his plant was a cristate which was now tending to revert to normal growth. At least it was still alive. This species tends to die off when it gets to any size, so you have to constantly restart it from the numerous offsets that it produces.

Sedum palmeri appears to be hardy and had lasted for a few years on his rockery although it was looking a bit sorry after this winter. It has bright yellow flowers. *Dudleya saxosa* ssp. *collomiae* has grey leaves and yellow flowers which are quite pretty. It is mostly active in the winter.

Last was a hybrid between *Aloe albiflora* and *Gasteria batesiana* - it had pale green/white flowers which hung downwards. The plant body should have been greener and Bruce said it probably needed a good watering.

Thanks are due to David Corina for providing the following account of last month’s talk.

Tanquana Hunt

There has been a tendency lately for some intriguing titles to our talks, and we were eager to find out the significance of this title. Most of us

know that Derek Tribble’s interest is in South African succulents and there are occasions on field trips when we all would like to see certain special plants in habitat.

Let us start from the beginning again. Tanquana is a relatively newly erected genus of 3 or 4 species formerly in *Pleiospilos*. Derek thought that Tanquana was a nice name, and it is derived from the plants location in the Tanqua Karoo, sometimes known as the Ceres Karoo. Derek’s quest was to seek out plants of this genus in habitat, and while looking for the Tanquanas it was inevitable that Derek would have found lots of other succulents, and the talk centered round these other finds while searching (successfully) for the few species of Tanquana.

As many of us are aware, a genus or species may be quite localised within a relatively small area of South Africa, and also that this small area can also harbour a large number of other succulents. The area under consideration was only about 60 miles east-west (note: 60 miles is a mere pop out to the small supermarket in S. Africa) and contains an area separate from but nearly as rich in mesembs, as the west coast. Derek reckoned that we might see up to 25 different genera of mesembs! (Count them if you like!)

Derek looked at three areas around the towns of Laingsburg and Matjiesfontein situated on the main N1 highway in the central-southern part of Cape Province (see map). This area is on the borderline between the summer and winter rainfall areas. Derek bases much of his plant hunting on experience and large scale geological maps, which help to pinpoint areas of suitable terrain and surface ‘rock’ such as shale, gypsum or quartz, some of the best areas to find lots of mesembs. These maps also indicate ridges, valleys or level rocky deposits, also worth exploring.

Essentially three areas were looked at, the first to the west in a warm, low stony level area in a rain shadow, and thus fairly dry (see map, area 1). Now we bring you the plants!

First up was *Lithops comptonii*, well-buried, and mostly two-headed plants, all slightly different. Soon came the first target, *Tanquana prismatica*, of modest flowers but readily found by the red coloured bodies. *Hammeria meleagris*, *Othonna papaveroides* (= *sonchifolia*) and *Didymaotus lapidiformis* (unfortunately flowers not fully open) were other noteworthy plants. A little closer to Matjiesfontein we see more *Didymaotus* (with

seedlings), *Malephora crassa*, *Sceletium tortuosum* and a shrubby *Phyllobolus*, accompanied by a black eagle eager to have its portrait taken alongside those of Derek's companions on the trip, Chris Rodgerson and Eddie Harris.

A slightly moister area further east around Melkboskrall (those names!) Farm gave *Adromischus triflorus*, *Crassula alpestris* ssp. *massonii* with a *Lachenalia*-like flower stem, *Pelargonium undulatum*, and further east, *Pelargonium nervifolium*, *Senecio abbreviatus*, *Peersia macradenium*, *Antimima maxwellii*, *A. pumila*, *A. pygmaea* and even a *Cheiridopsis cigarettifera*.

On a day trip with Peter Bruyns (very expert on succulents, good field knowledge) nearer still to Matjiesfontein (area 2) on a band of gypsum they found *Ruschia spinosa*, *R. crassa*, *Gibbaeum gibbosum* (fairly north for this genus), *Eriospermum paradoxum* (a bulb), *Aloinopsis loganii*, *Deilanthus (Aloinopsis) hilmarii*, various twiggy Euphorbias, (originally described as separate species but are actually different growth stages of the same species, *E. decussata*). Then on dark ironstone, they thought they had found another of their 'quarry' - *Tanquana archeri* - but it turned out to be *T. prismatica*. Also nearby on sandy soil were a yellow flowered *Phyllobolus*, *Sceletium emarcidum*, an unknown *Antimima*, a *Bulbine* with tiny tubers and scented flowers, *Crassula lanuginosa*, *Pectinaria articulata* ssp. *asperifolia* (a 6-ribbed stapeliad), *Tylecodon faucium*, and the atypical *Adromischus phillipsiae* with large red pendulous flowers (pollinated by birds).

Your scribe feels that it is always of benefit to take a break from intense plant hunting, so at this stage Derek took us into Matjiesfontein to admire the 'Colonial' architecture of the Victorian station, complete with a smart train at the platform (as well as the N1 road, the rail line links Cape Town to (eventually) Johannesburg). The station is, in part, also the local museum. In a more flamboyant style is the smart Logan hotel, which Derek recommended. Matjiesfontein is certainly a nicer place than Laingsburg, which is not by-passed like most other towns on the N1, and is basically a rail junction and a 'pit-stop' for huge articulated lorries thundering through day and night!

Back north of Matjiesfontein were *Euphorbia multifolia*, *E. heptagona*, *Haworthia arachnoidea* or possibly *pehlemanniae*, *Senecio scaposus*, the annual *Mesembryanthemum subtruncatum*, *Conophytum minimum*, and *Astroloba bullulata*. Derek commented that before the wind pump was invented in 1883, this area was once populated by native mammals such as springbok, but now it is full of millions of sheep – and a few goats. Many plants only survive in areas inaccessible to sheep or too poor for grazing. Passing through to the north-east of Matjiesfontein onto gravels, a more hopeful *Tanquana archeri* appears, it seems right, although some plants resemble *T. prismaticus*! Here also occur *Deilanthus hilmarii* (yellow flowers), *D. peersii*, *Phyllobolus resurgens*, *Quaqua ramosa*, *Stapelia rufa* and *Hoodia grandis* (= *Trichocaulon pillansii*).

Now we are around Laingsburg, area 3, mostly to the east and south of the town. This area was the furthest to the east of the trip, and is also the driest. Areas 1 & 2 above receive 5" to 6" of rain per year, but site 3 gets an average of only 4" per year.

Derek showed us (very colourful and pretty) geological maps of the area, with the warning that they are difficult to interpret. We therefore accepted his 'reading of the runes' and resumed the hunt. First find here was a very nice clump of *Euphorbia stellispina*, *Astroloba foliolosa* ssp. *robusta*, the somewhat similar *Haworthia viscosa*, growing both in shade and out in the open, where it colours up well, and *Anacampseros albidiflora*.

To the south, around the Floriskraal Dam, on gravelly/rocky hillsides, were *Euphorbia multiceps*, *Cylindrophyllum tugwelliae*, a *Stomatium* sp., *Avonia alticum*, and on higher level terrace gravels were *Ruschia polita*, *Hereroa fimbriata*, *Piранthus parvulus* (*Duvalia caespitosa?*), *Senecio crassulaefolius*, *Trichodiadema mirabile*, *Anacampseros* (*Avonia*) *papyracea* and *Stomatium suricatum*.

Nearby was an area that Derek thought might be a likely site to find the elusive *Haworthia lockwoodii*, and indeed several haworthia plants were found. Derek made the point that it was very difficult to be certain about an identification – is *H. lockwoodii* a true species or just an extreme form of *H. habdomadis/inconfluens*? Back on more certain territory at the last stop on the hunt, where he found *Hoodia pilifera*, the natural hybrid *Astrohaworthia x skinneri*, *Glottiphyllum suave*, *Gibbaeum heathii* (some much nibbled), *Bulbine mesembryanthemoides* in flower, *Aloe variegata*, and, at last, the final object of the hunt, plants of *Tanquana hilmarii*. This latter is found in very rocky environments and closely mimics the soil. It is a plant that is not too difficult to grow, and it clusters well in cultivation.

Well, did you count the genera? OK, they were not all mesemb genera. Even if you didn't, you have had some idea of the fantastic diversity of succulent plants in just one (relatively) small area of South Africa.

David Corina

Table Show – April 2006

There were 12 entries in the April table show.

	Cacti – Opuntia Group	Succulents – Haworthia & Gasteria Group
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Opuntia invicta	(1) P Clemow Haworthia nigra
	(2) J Burnay Opuntia tuna monstrosa	(2) B Beckerleg Haworthia correcta
	(3) T Grech O. cylindrica cristate	(3) P Clemow Haworthia truncata
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Opuntia aciculate	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia sordida
	(2) -	(2) T Grech Haworthia sp.
	(3) -	(3) P Clemow Haworthia pumila

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Easter Flower & Garden Show – Broadlands

The Branch was allocated a spacious 40 foot square marquee by Roy Trickett, and on Good Friday afternoon, the usual team went into action. Within three hours, a large display, a sales area and the Prickly Potting Post were all set up.

Over the three day event. we potted 576 cacti for the children! Hopefully we shall get a few more members in the years to come. We had three potting stations and this year we had more 'potters' than ever before. There were nine people who potted over the weekend, and thanks go to Jim Roskilly, David Corina, Russell Courtney, David Neville, Glenn Finn, Vinay Shah, Peter Down and Jean Burnay.

Merrilyn Prior spent all three days telling children to wash their hands after the potting and giving them their goody bags – she deserves a medal. Ivor did stalwart service demonstrating seed sowing and giving away cuttings. We also had the services of Bruce Beckerleg, Geoff Card and Derek Prior on the sales table and the display all weekend.

The branch is very lucky to have so many individuals who are willing to spend time

promoting the hobby. Our branch is thriving and it is efforts like this that attract new members and raise funds for the branch. Thank you all for making my Prickly Potting Post such a successful event.

Margaret Corina

The following story was sent to Geoff Card recently. It was described as "A true story with the source being the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service in Adelaide".

A Cactus Tale

A bloke and his family were on holidays in the United States and went to Mexico for a week. An avid cactus fan, the man bought one-metre high, rare and expensive cactus there. On arrival back home Australian Customs said it must be quarantined for 3 months.

He finally got his cactus home. Planted it in his backyard, and over time it grew to about 2 metres. One evening while watering his garden after a warm spring day, he gave the cactus a light spray. He was amazed to see the plant shiver all over, he gave it another spray and it shivered again.

He was puzzled so he rang the council who put him on to the state gardens people. After a few transfers he got the state's foremost cactus expert who asked him many questions. How tall is it? Has it flowered? Etc.

Finally he asked the most disturbing question. "Is your family in the house?" The bloke answered yes. The cactus expert said get out of the house NOW, get on to the front nature strip and wait for me; I will be there in 20 minutes.

Fifteen minutes later, 2 fire trucks, 2 police cars and an ambulance came screaming around the corner. A fireman got out and asked "Are you the bloke with the cactus?" "I am," he said. A guy jumped out of the fire truck wearing what looked like a space suit, a breathing cylinder and mask attached to what looked like a scuba backpack with a large hose attached. He headed for the backyard and turned a flame-thrower on the cactus spraying it up and down.

After a few minutes the flame-thrower man stopped, the cactus stood smoking and spitting, half the fence was burnt and parts of the gardens were well and truly scorched. Just then the cactus expert appeared and laid a calming hand on the

bloke's shoulder. "What the hell's going on?" he says. "Let me show you" says the cactus man. He went over to the cactus and picked away a crusty bit, the cactus was almost entirely hollow and filled with tiger striped bird-eating tarantula spiders, each about the size of two hand spans.

The story was that this type of spider lays eggs in this type of cactus and they hatch and live in it as they grow to full size. When full size they release themselves. The cactus just explodes and about 150 dinner plate sized hairy spiders are flung from it, dispersing everywhere. They had been ready to pop. The aftermath was that the house and the adjoining houses had to be vacated and fumigated: police tape was put up outside the whole area and no one was allowed in for two weeks.

And here's what one of the b*stards looks like sitting on a FULL SIZE dinner plate



Now that you're twitching in your seats, here's an assessment of this story from www.hoax-slayer.com :

It hardly needs to be said that the tale is completely untrue. Most types of tarantula live in underground burrows while a few live in trees. However, there is no record of them building nests inside cactus plants. Furthermore, even if spider eggs were laid inside a plant, it certainly would not explode when the eggs hatched.

*Tarantulas are the giants of the spider world. Given their size and frightening appearance, it is not surprising that they play a starring role in this lovely old tale as well as numerous horror stories and Hollywood films. They are often portrayed as being extremely venomous. However, according *The Natural History of Tarantula Spiders*, Tarantula venom is not considered to be of medical importance to humans. Of the hundreds of reported cases of tarantula bites very few cause anything more serious than temporary local inflammation.*

Although this hoax email is a work of fiction, it is rather an entertaining tale.

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 6th June, and will feature John Pilbeam talking about Rebutias and Sulcorebutias. John of course authored the Cactus File handbook on the genus Rebutia. He also runs a nursery called Connoisseurs' Cacti which offers over 450 types of plants. (see www.cactus-mall.com/connoisseurs-cacti/index.html). If you want to buy plants from him and save on postage costs, I am sure he'd be pleased to receive your orders in advance so that he can bring the plants along to the June meeting.

The June table Show will consist of the **Parodia** group (cacti) and the **Crassula** group (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 Parodia group contains *Parodia*, *Brasilicactus*, *Brasiliparodia*, *Eriocactus*, *Malacocarpus*, *Notocactus*, and *Wigginsia*.

The Crassula group is large and contains several subgroups (Adromischus, Aeonium, Echeveria, Sedum and Semperivium). These contain many genera, some of the more common being: *Adromischus*, *Bryophyllum*, *Cotyledon*, *Crassula*, *Kalanchoe*, *Rochea*, *Tylecodon*, *Aeonium*, *Greenovia* and *Monanthes*, *Echeveria*, *Dudleya*, *Graptopetalum*, *Pachyphytum*, *Tacitus*, *Sedum*, *Sempervivum* and *Jovibarba*.

A reminder for committee members that a branch Committee Meeting will be held on 22nd May.

Forthcoming Events

Fri	12 th	May	Isle of Wight	Pre-show preparations @ Peter Collard's
Sat	20 th	May	Portsmouth	"Looking Back - C & S growing since 1965" – John Hughes
Sat	20 th	May	Isle of Wight	Branch Annual Show – Church Hall, Town Lane, Newport
Mon	22 nd	May	Southampton	Committee Meeting (@79 Shirley Avenue)
Sat	27 th	May	Portsmouth	Branch Annual Show – Wickham Community Hall, Wickham
Sun	4 th	Jun	Southampton	Open Day @ Tony Grech (Bitterne, 2pm to 5pm)
Tue	6 th	Jun	Southampton	"Rebutias & Sulcos" – John Pilbeam
Sat	17 th	Jun	Portsmouth	"Madagascar '93" – David Kirkbright
Fri	23 rd	Jun	Isle of Wight	"Succulent Humour" – John Watmough
Sat	1 st	Jul	Southampton	Display + Show @ Southampton Festival, The Common
Sun	2 nd	Jul		
Tue	4 th	Jul	Southampton	"Cacti in Flower" – Ian Woolnough

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