

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The month of April started with a hot spell and we supposedly had our hottest April day for over 60 years. However, the month has ended with another cool spell, with some parts of the country experiencing frost, even on the first day of May!

I have given my plants some waterings, especially during the hot spell earlier in April. The current conditions have slowed things down again, although outdoor plants in people's gardens look nice and lush right now.

Announcements

In a couple of weeks' time the Branch will be putting on a display at the **Sparsholt Countryside Day** (12th May). It's a nice day out for families, with plenty to do for visitors to the event.

Today's meeting is a cultivation evening and as is traditional, all attendees can collect a free plant, courtesy of the branch. The plant to be handed out today is *Gymnocalycium stenopleurum* (which was previously known as *G. friedrichii*.)

I have put out forms for people to register their interest in the branch trips to Bristol/Oxford.

Portsmouth Branch will be holding their **summer show** on Saturday 2nd June. Entry forms for the show classes can be downloaded from the Portsmouth branch's website.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Plants of interest – David asked for volunteers from the members, to bring along a few plants to talk about for a few minutes, at the start of future meetings before the main speaker starts. Anything would be suitable - plants doing something unusual or flowering, or a particular theme or group of plants.

David had brought in some plants which were showing signs of forming buds. The Rebutias had been obtained recently from a Dutch greenhouse - only 2 varieties were in flower, but the others were budding up. Other genera he had brought in included Mammillarias, Gymnocacti, Notocacti, Parodia, Frailea, Stenocacti, Turbinicarpus, Aloes, Adromishchus, Echeveria, Graptopetallum, Gasteria and also Peperomia. With the Peperomia - pinch the flower stalks off at the earliest opportunity - the flowers smell like mouse urine!

What I Saw Last Winter – Madagascar

Paul Klaassen was our speaker for the day, and he mentioned he would be giving us 2 talks - one on Madagascar and then one on Mexico. He mentioned he likes cacti and doesn't have too many succulents, but of course he comes across them during his trips to various habitats. He showed us the picture which is on the cover of volume 1 of Werner Rauh's 2 volume set "Succulent and Xerophytic Plants of Madagascar" featuring Baobabs and this was an image which had always impressed him. He happened to find the book cheap in the USA (search for Chuck Everson, bookseller) and managed to get a set of two for just \$50. David mentioned the books were £80 each when they first came out. Paul said he wanted to give a talk on caudiciform plants - but felt he really couldn't until he'd been on a trip to their habitat. He finally went in 2016 – so he must have discussed it at ELK in 2015. Bob Potter had been there as had Leo van der Hoeven, but these people like Euphorbias whereas he had a wider interest. Caudiciform means fat stemmed and the caudex is the structure between the stem and the roots. He also talked to John Childs from the Herne Bay branch, and at the Oxford show he happened to

talk to Al Laius who said he had been to Madagascar and had found a tremendous guide in the form of a French botanist called Christophe Quénel who lives in Madagascar. Christophe has been there 12 years and Paul decided to book a trip with him. Christophe's speciality is Euphorbias as well.

As the talk started, we saw the cover of volume 1 of the book followed by a picture of him on the day he took off, standing alongside a large box containing a air intake snorkel for Christophe's Land Rover Defender - spare parts are very expensive in Madagascar. We then saw a video clip, taken in Christophe's garden, featuring a chameleon. There were a few native plants in the garden, including some Euphorbias. Next was a trip through a market area of Antananarivo and we saw a picture of a lady waving a phone at him - obviously she wanted to exchange numbers with him! The local place names in Madagascar are long and horrendous.

On their first trip into habitat they climbed a very low and unstable area of soil - he couldn't make it up but we saw some of John Child's pictures of the hill. Plants found here included *Kalanchoe synsepala* and *Aloe madecassa*. We also saw their 1st night's hotel. The next day, they had some rain, which actually turned to hailstones. We saw Nadia - Christophe's wife - holding a handful of hailstones - she had never seen snow before in her life! A plant was labelled as *Kalanchoe tomentosa* but Paul felt the ID needed correcting. On the second day Paul was feeling fitter. The temperature was now also 40°C! They came across plants of *Pachypodium brevicaulis* - they found quite a few and they were widespread. There were also enormous numbers of Aloes, including *Aloe trachyticola* and *Aloe laeta*. Many of these are very large and not really suitable for cultivation. Other plants found here included *Bulbophyllum* (an orchid) and *Kalanchoe tetraphylla*. They got to a volcano where the crater was filled with water (Lac Tritriva). They were soon surrounded by kids who wanted to sell them fossils and gemstones. When the kids learnt that they were more interested in plants, they started to find some and dig them up! They also found *Euphorbia primulifolia* and *Pachypodium densiflorum* in flower.

Mount Mandato is the home of *Aloe mandatoensis*, which is related to *Aloe macroclada*. There were tree-like Pachypodiums, identified as *Pachypodium rutenbergianum* - these had fluffy seeds, rather like dandelions. *Vanilla madagascariensis* is a plant which has naturalised in Madagascar and is considered a native, but Paul said it originally comes from Mexico, however there's a butterfly in

Madagascar which can pollinate it. They reached the "Avenue of the Baobabs", which is a group of baobab trees lining the dirt road between Morondava and Belon'i Tsiribihina. Two types grow here (*Adansonia grandidieri* and *Adansonia digitata*) and they can be distinguished by the fruits. Due to the height of the trees, either type of fruit would give you a severe headache if they dropped on you! Kids were playing with their chameleons and some of the tourists were distracted by goats being released. He managed to take some good pictures of one of the chameleons - nicknamed "Chammy" with the baobabs in the background and people wanted to buy his pictures, which upset the kids whose chameleon it was.

Two entwined baobabs are known as Les Amoureux - the lovers. The plants are thought to be either *Adansonia za* or *Adansonia rubrostipa*. Paul said deforestation is a big problem in the country and if the locals see any wood, they tend to want to burn it. There are lots of rivers in the south of the country and all the bridges seem to be taken down. While waiting at a river crossing, John decided to pick up a chameleon which was crossing the road, thinking it needed help. We saw a shot of it gripping his finger in its mouth - the teeth are just made of cartilage so it's not painful - they tend to chew up insects. *Pachypodium menabeum* is distinct from *P. lameri* and it was growing on growing on a nasty sharp limestone rock - called tsingy, which is the Malagasy word for "walking on tiptoes". They came across a nocturnal lemur - with large eyes - it was *Verreaux's sifaka*, and it wasn't scared of them.

Paul mentioned that he saw an enormous number of kids - Madagascar has gone from being very poor through to a more wealthy phase and it's resulted in the country going through a population explosion. We saw John trying to make sure that all the cars were lined up on the ferry. There were some Greater Vasa parrots in the trees. We saw stands of baobabs. They reached the edge of the *Didierea madagascariensis* area but they didn't go into it. At a lake where there was quicksand, after seeing some other vehicles which were stuck, they decided to use the help of a local guide to navigate. We saw Nadia climbing up a sand dune, and the view down, looking over a forest of baobabs. "Were there any young baobab plants?" asked David. "Just wait" said Paul.

A really large baobab is called La grand-mère (the Grandmother). It is the oldest and largest example of *Adansonia rubrostipa* on the island - they got the kids of the village to line up holding hands and stand around the base. The bark of the tree covers three stems which had fused together and

radiocarbon dating indicates an age of several hundred years for the samples that were examined, and a probable start date of 400AD.

Opuntia are evil invaders here and they appear on the list of harmful species for 53 countries. *Ipomea bolusiana* has colourful flowers - it forms a caudex which in habitat is below the ground. He remembered how Cliff Thompson once made a small fortune selling a growth from a sweet potato (which is from the same family) at a plant fair. We saw another bottle tree - *Delonix floribunda*. An image of some *Adansonia rubrostiba* plants suggested this is where Dr Who takes the Daleks on their holidays. The holes in the sides of the plants are made by locals to store food. The stems are almost hollow and made of a quite spongy material - they contain moisture and sugars, and can be fed to oxen. They are used to make a drink as well, which Paul said was quite revolting. Christophe was over the moon to find an asclepiad. They also saw a pretty lizard. They found *Cyphostema elephantopus* and Paul showed a picture of Christophe posing next to one of these trees from years past. Unfortunately that particular plant had died. Either they have a certain lifespan or perhaps they had unusual weather. *Oeceoclades spathulifera* is an orchid. A weaver bird had built a nest in a baobab. John handed his washing in and later on spotted women walking to the sea with clothing - they were probably taking the clothes to wash them!

They were taken to some botanic gardens, which really consisted of some stones positioned to partition off parts of the wilderness. There were 2 guides there - one who spoke good English and was quite knowledgeable, and his brother who went out to look for wildlife. We saw a night jar, and a three-eyed lizard which has a spot on the back of its head. There were some baobabs. Where are the seedlings? He was shown some spindly stems - apparently the guide's father had sown them 20 years ago and they were still just twigs. This just emphasizes how slowly they grow and the fact that the mature Baobabs are hundreds of years old. His brother had come back with some scorpions - apparently, the larger the pincers the less poisonous they are. A chameleon was ever so well trained - if a cricket was held in a hand a metre away, it would be able to go for it straight away.

We saw a video of some flatid leaf bugs - the young insects were fluffy white objects which look like gigantic mealy bugs and they puncture the epidermis and suck the sap out. The adults have red wings and look quite different. Humans have only known about these for a few years, but they are a staple diet for the lemurs who eat them. A bird (a Coua) looked

like it was watching you, however it is actually a false eye formed from colour in its feathers around the eyelid and the bird may be resting or asleep. The Madagascar Paradise-flycatcher is a small exotic looking bird which is very pretty and colourful. They had pizza at a restaurant owned by an Italian - Paul took a liking to a painting of 2 lemurs sitting on a rock which was on display and he was able to buy it for £20. They passed through the tropic of Capricorn - these regions are drier than other parts of the country. *Aloe antandroi* was not a plant he'd want to grow. They found *Euphorbia tuilleriensis*, *Aloe descoingsii* and also variety *augustina* which is slightly different. This Aloe is part of the stock of all the miniature aloes being grown in California by hybridizers such as Karen Zimmerman and Kelly Griffin. They found an Euphorbia but did not have much luck identifying it. It was more fun to look at the fish they were served for their next meal. Christophe needed a snooze, and he then took them to find where *Moringa drouhardii* grows - it's a bit on the large side. To get there, they had to drive along a track where they encountered an overcrowded bus stacked full of people. The little guy on top is the conductor and he'd decide whether they could take more people on - perhaps a crate of beer was all it took.

They stopped to take a picture of *Pachypodium lameri*, and three kids came out with their chameleons. They wanted a cadeau or d'argent - Paul mentioned coins are not used in Madagascar due to the low value of the currency - even a large pile of banknotes is hardly worth 50p. The chameleons always seem to want to climb to the highest point - catch insects as they fly by. Other plants they saw here included *Aloe divaricate* and *Euphorbia primulifolia* v. *begardii*. At the Isalo National Park, they saw some ringtail lemurs (*Lemur catta*). These eat ficus tree figs and always come down to feed at a particular time of the day. The figs are poisonous hence they also need to also drink the water from a nearby stream, to rinse the poisons away. The rocks also contain minerals and the lemurs lick them to control the poisonous affect. He took a video clip of the lemurs, who were just a few metres away from him. He also captured a picture of a tree frog. Christophe wanted them to climb up to a ledge where *Aloe acutissima* grows, but Paul said he had a zoom lens and there was no need to do any climbing. They then found one growing right next to their feet - Christophe said he just thought they needed the exercise!

They did need to climb Mount Horombo, to see *Pachypodium horombense* and *Euphorbia horombense*. They found *Aloe acutissima* here as well. A curious lizard had a whitish stripe down its

back and Paul wondered if it had fallen asleep while the road was being marked but it appears this is a natural effect, since there were several lizards with the same appearance. *Pachypodium horombense* has a unique bell shaped flower. The prices of it at Specks are eye watering. Due to Christophe's interests, they had to learn about every Euphorbia they encountered, including *Euphorbia enterophora* ssp. *crassa* and *Euphorbia didiereoides*. He hadn't seen those at Specks. *Rhipsalis baccifera* has at some point crossed over from South America and across Africa to get to the island. *Sobennikoffia humbertiana* is another orchid. We also saw a Passiflora (passion flower) species. *Aloe sakarahensis* is from the Lomatophyllum section of Aloes, where the plants form round berries. Paul said he attends the occasional meeting at Melksham branch and a chap there had this plant for sale. He killed the first one he got but has since got a replacement.

They also saw *Euphorbia alluaudii* ssp. *alluaudii* with small yellow flowers atop the stems. The traveller's palm, *Ravenala madagascariensis* has a nice pattern to the leaves. They visited an Eco-tourism centre, Sous le Soleil de Mada - the French owners were friends of Christophe. Paul asked Christophe what an eco centre was, and Christophe waited for the owners to be out of earshot before saying it's a place where you have no hot or cold running water, no electricity but some nice people. We saw *Kalanchoe tomentosa* and *Aloe conifera*. *Crinum firmifolium* is a bulb with white flowers. 6 months later in Mexico, they were finding more Crinums! We saw a large snake - a Madagascan tree boa. John used a zoom lens to take a picture of it, its diameter was at least the size of a grown man's arm. At Ambatofinandrahana - a restaurant was run by an Italian and the markings on the wall indicated it was also the location of the Ferrari fan club and there was also a Juventus plaque on the other wall. An area outside with a few tools and workers was obviously the area for pit stops! Although Madagascar was mainly a French colony, there were some signs of British influence - we saw the beer bottle label mention the "Three Horse Brewery".

Towards the end of the trip, they went to a location where the plants were fantastic. However, it took 8 hrs to cover 48 km - the rain makes the roads muddy and then as the mud dries, you get rock hard and razor sharp ridges on the road surface. They didn't see any other cars. They got to a river crossing, but there was no bridge. Walking on, Paul found another bridge a few hundred metres away. They got the assistance of the local villagers to build a temporary bridge and managed to cross both bridges, costing them £5 as a payment to the

villagers. It was a Sunday so they asked if the villagers would be there on the next day for their return journey, and the villagers looked rather bemused at the question, as if school or work were not an important consideration. They were joined by a local botanist and guide, Jean Baptiste, who has covered large areas of the habitat looking for plants - in fact John Lavranos used to visit Jean regularly to check on what new discoveries he had made. We saw *Pachypodium densiflorum*, with the anthers just poking out of the top of the yellow flowers. They stopped at a place where there some large rocks standing in a field - it wasn't in the class of Stonehenge! There were fields full of bulbs in flower. When you look down at the ground, there are some very interesting euphorbias here, *E. quartizicola* is easy to spot with its yellow flowers. They are really not rare, for 10km they were areas of quartz and the plants were widespread here. Paul asked what pollinates these plants? No one there knew, and neither did experts back home such as Bob Potter and Rikus van Veldhuisen of the Euphorbia Society. We saw a large plant of *Pachypodium brevicaulis* which was the size of a dustbin. Paul wondered whether pesticides have killed all the pollinating insects? They found Vellozia here - these originate in Brazil, they must have crossed Africa and now grow here. They posed for a group picture while looking for Kalanchoes.

The last but one night they had to camp out, and they built a couple of tents. John was claustrophobic and he stepped outside half an hour after they went to sleep. The first thing the next morning they had a nice view of the flowers growing just outside the tent. Nadia cooked the dinner inside a cave near a rock overhang. The cave was full of the smoke but she mentioned that Christophe's legs were covered in mosquito bites, and so the smoke was a good thing. Breakfast consisted of fried eggs and fresh pineapple. They walked up a hill and found lots of *Euphorbia quartizicola*. A white flowered form called *Euphorbia itremensis* - other than the flower colour there didn't seem to be much difference. These Euphorbias have little tufts growing out of the ground, and there's a much larger caudex below the soil. It's against the law to import these but there are some examples available in Europe. There were more Aloes to see, including some that grow on quartz, including *Aloe erythrophylla*, *Aloe capitata* and *Aloe compressa*. *Aloe macroclada* forms plants 3 feet tall and with a flower spike taking the overall height to 7 feet - we saw John standing next to it for scale, and it really is too large cultivation. Paul said Aloes change to mush with frost in his collection - the flowers are impressive but they are not very varied.

On the way back we saw a picture of the Landrover with just 3 wheels on the ground, and also where the exhaust had hit the hard clay. They took the return trip over the two bridges without incident. We saw an aloe, *Aloe manandonae*, followed by Paul kissing the car for services rendered. The last slide featured Christophe's contact details in case you want to make the trip: <http://madabotanik.com>

What I Saw Last Winter – Mexico

After the break, the talk switched to a trip made in February 2017, to Mexico, Paul went with Jonathan Clarke and Alain Bouffal from Belgium, both of whom were absolutely nuts about *Ferocacti* - Jonathan had written an article in the very first edition of *Bradleya*, where he discussed whether the seed structure could be used as a way of identifying *Ferocacti*. As an aside Paul said it was amazing how wrong botanists can be sometimes. He was giving a talk to the Northumbria branch on *Tephrocactus* - the genus was first described in 1846 by Lemaire, and all 8 of the species known at that time would now all be considered just one species. In Mexico, they were due to be met by Chris Hayes, who is the Secretary of the Taunton / Somerset Branch. Jonathan and Chris were going to tour for 4 weeks, and the other two would stay on for a further 3 weeks.

We saw a map of Mexico, showing Mexico City and some of the surrounding areas. While driving around, Paul mentioned that this time they stopped to see of the Mayan ruins, whereas in the past they had just driven by. *Ferocactus latispinus* - the Cat's claw biznaga - it has spines which would easily cripple a horse or cow. These days, cactus spotting depends on using a sat-nav device, putting in the co-ordinates provided by some previous explorer and hey presto, there you are! We saw the original locality for *Ferocactus lindsayii* which is found in this area, but the reservoir had filled up with water and the plants are no longer found here. Paul checked online and there weren't many sources of the plant in European nurseries. While driving around, they found a few examples of *Pachycereus (Backebergia) militaris* - this was a very popular plant in the 1970s, and it was usually sold as habitat-collected top cuttings, and sadly most of these died. He saw an area cleared for house building and they did find 2 decent sized plants here. They also found *Mammillaria beneckeii* and *Pilosocereus alensis*. He normally associates *Pilosocereus* with Brazil and the Caribbean islands but there are some growing in Mexico too. They found a tree with lots of mosses and tillandsias and cacti growing on it. He had wanted to find *Ferocactus alamosanus* subsp. *reppenhausenii* and had tried to get the location information from a German gentleman who had

seen them but this was to no avail. He saw a crinum, reminding him of how he had seen the same genus in Madagascar a few months previously.

What they didn't know at the time is that the state of Michoacán is very dangerous, with drugs and people being smuggled. They found a cactus nursery with the prices marked in pesos. Half the plants were being grown in local volcanic rock and others were in compost - many of the plants had been raised from seed in the Netherlands and then sent here. They went to the state of Colima where a local volcano (Colima Volcano) was showing signs of erupting, something it had not done for 200 years. They got a hotel as close to it as they were allowed to. At their next stop, he let Jonathan and Chris go climbing and when they got to the top he told them he had found a rattlesnake here on a previous occasion, causing them to go into tiptoe mode. They found *Strombocactus disciformis* and *Thelocactus leucacanthus*. A *Ferocactus* was considered by Alain to be *Ferocactus echidne* - it could also have been *Ferocactus victoriensis* - but the town of Victoria in Tamaulipas is supposed to be quite a distance away. They also saw *Mammillaria compressa* and *Coryphantha jalipensis*.

They were now at Rioverde in San Luis Potosi, this was a location where on 3 previous occasions he had found *Turbinicarpus lophophorides*. However, last year it was reported that all the plants had been dug up. Some plants also suffer from parasites that wipe out the population from time to time. They found *Coryphantha maiz-tablasensis* and *Lophophora williamsii*. A traffic sign warned you that there is sleeping policeman coming up. Every one of these seems to have a nearby garage to help fix up your car in case bits fall off. They all went down with a form of flu and he had absolutely no recollection of taking some of the following pictures. They found *Turbinicarpus schmiedickianus* and *Mammillaria humboldtii*. *Turbinicarpus pseudomacrolele* had pink flowers - the pictures were taken along a road. *Agave xylonacantha* was present as well. *Mammillaria geminispina* is very variable in terms of spine length and general diversity and there were some huge mounds. They found *Ferocactus echidne*, and *F. victoriensis* is also supposed to be here. They found *Astrophytum ornatum* and *Mammillaria gracilis*. *Fouquieria fasciculata* forms a caudex - some of these were huge plants and it probably takes a hundred years to get to that size. A *ferocactus* was too young to identify. They found *Mammillaria magnimamma*, and also *M. humboldtii*. There are supposed to be smooth and shaggy forms of the former. A plant of *Echinocactus platycanthus* was hanging on for dear life by just one root. It had probably been dislodged due to soil

erosion or construction work. A Ferocactus with yellow/pink flowers was perhaps *F. echidne*. They found *Coryphantha octacantha* and another Ferocactus which was still too young to identify. The flower colour and fruit shape/size and time of flowering can give clues to the identity.

Cacti do like to colonise recently disturbed ground, and we saw a wall which was perhaps 10 years old with a huge number of cacti on it. They saw *M. magnimamma* and also *Cephalocereus senilis* - the "old man" cactus. An American girl who did volunteer work here said the kids often collect the young plants and grow them in their gardens, so relatively few young plants can be found in the wild. They found *Echinocactus platyacanthus*. Outside the town of Metztlán, they strolled for an hour covering around 200m. There were an impressive number of plants growing in the wild, it made an interesting view for people's back gardens. The plants included *Mammillaria geminispina*, *Echeveria*, *Ferocactus glaucescens*, and a long spined form of *M. geminispina*, v. *nobilis* with nice long spines. Paul said he had got one from Ralph Northcott who had obtained it from a Czech nursery. We saw *F. glaucescens* again and a *M. geminispina* with a crest forming on the plant. The spine colour was darker on some of the *M. geminispina* - one of the old names for the species is *leucocentra*. We saw *Astrophytum ornatum* and some African plants such as *Brophyllum* and *Kalanchoe* which must have escaped from cultivated plants. *Aloe vera* must have done the same. It was a delightful walk. When small, the *Astrophytum* has a lot of flecks but when they get older, they lose the flecks. They found a *Mammillaria geminispina* growing epiphytically upon another plant.

They headed south to Oaxaca and found *Myrtillocactus schenckii* - you never see it in cultivation. *M. cochal* and *M. geometrizans* can be found elsewhere. In Baja, you can drive along the main highway and see stands of Ferocactus on the left and right. Here, *Ferocactus flavovirens* is hidden and it grows at the edge of forests, hiding in tall grasses. A plant was perhaps *Ferocactus recurvus*? David said if they were in Oaxaca, it was probably *Ferocactus eastwoodiae*. *Mammillaria sphaelata* ssp. *viperina* looked just as miserable in nature as it did in Paul's collection. *Mammillaria karwinskiana* ssp. *nejapensis* is named after a local village - he gave a talk at the Mammillaria society's AGM where the much delayed journal was handed out, and the German society seems to say that the *karwinskiana* name is not valid for plants in Oaxaca.

Alain wanted to take them to a hillside on the Pacific coast to see Melocacti and they found

Melocactus curvispina. They also found *Pereskia lychnidiflora*. *Mammillaria karwinskiana* ssp. *collinsii* used to be *M. woburnensis*, a variety supposedly found in the 1700s at Woburn Abbey. They went to the location for *Coryphantha retusa* and also found *Ferocactus recurvus* ssp. *greenwoodii*. The location is also famous for *Ortegocactus macdouglii* - and yes, it does also mark up in nature. We saw a shot of the zig zag road they were traversing, in the mountainous terrain. Plants of *Pilosocereus leucocephalus* looked like they need a drink.

After a lot of Sherlock Holmes work, they found where the new discovery *Mammillaria bertholdii* grew and decided to visit the location. The plants were guarded by 2 people who were part of the family who had discovered it. It is just found at one hill and the locals had never looked for the plants when not in flower. Like so many cacti, it flowers when conditions are right. They are charming plants, and are now readily available on grafts. The plants need to be mature before they look reasonable. A month after they came back from the trip, Paul saw huge clumps of *M. bertholdii* on grafts in flower. Although the plant was supposedly discovered in 2014, the grower said he had them on grafts 2-3 years earlier. They also saw *Ferocactus latispinus* and *Mammillaria dixanthocentron* - the spines are very variable. Some of the plants were *Mammillaria pseudocrucigera* perhaps? Paul said he was more and more coming to the conclusion that taxonomy is not a science but just an expression of an opinion. Keith Flanagan said the plants we see in cultivation are only the ones which are collected and distributed in cultivation. Two members of their party left for home and he and Alain headed down towards Guatemala. This is not a very safe part of the country. They found an Agave which is named after the local river (River Grijalva) which has been dammed for the production of electricity. *Agave grijalvensis* is now called *A. kewensis* which is at least easier to pronounce.

We saw pictures of *Pilosocereus collinsii* which grows on the side of a canyon, as they were taken on a boat ride. The pictures were a little fuzzy - the captain pretended he was Lewis Hamilton and liked to take the boat from one side to the water to the other, and it was difficult to take a clear shot between the orange life vests. There seemed to be crocodiles resting on the side of the river. For a moment he wondered if they were stuffed or real, and then one turned round. It was impressive scenery and interesting cacti.

Finally they went to El Tajín - in state of Vera Cruz, where there are some Mayan remains from 800AD.

While taking pictures, they heard laughter behind them - some Mexicans asked them, why are you taking pictures of plants, the monuments were behind you! Thy replied no, we're here to photograph cacti! The ruins are impressive but the Mexicans have been inconsistent with their restoration of the ruins - some areas rebuilt from scratch using concrete and others were so derelict.

David knew the next spot they visited - Morelos Cañada. They found *Ferocactus haemacanthus*. *Yucca elephantipes* can be included in a pachycaul collection, but be aware it can grow to 35 feet tall. At a hill known as "Derek's Hill" - after Derek Bowdery, they saw *Agave potatorum*, *Agave triangularis*, *Coryphantha retusa* and *Mammillaria mystax*. There are about 15 populations of *Ferocactus haematacanthus* - but this is the only one he's been at. Alain has been here 5 times, and Paul had been here 3 times. The first time he came, it was halfway through their trip and none of the plants were in flower so they decided to revisit the spot on the final days of their trip just to see the Ferocacti in flower. All seemed very badly damaged at the base of the plant. Paul said they grow in shrubs which have volatile sap - if it gets very hot a forest fire would spread very quickly. However, there were no signs of any fire according to David, and Derek Bowdery's plant in cultivation did the same. Also the *Echinocactus platyacanthus* plants growing here did not seem to be affected in any way despite being of a similar age. They also saw *Mammillaria napina* - Ian Woolnough wrote an article about these. Paul didn't recognise it because all the plants he'd seen were grafted. *Ferocactus robustus* was a large plant. It was time for him and Alain to return to Mexico City.

Paul recounted an incident earlier in their trip where they had been stopped by the police and fined 1000 euros for not indicating they wanted to change lane - had to pay up. 6 of them and 4 of us, and they had machine guns and hand arms. We saw Alain with a constrictor. Paul photographed a sign outside some public toilets "No pisar el pasto". No it doesn't mean "Don't piss on the pasta" - it actually means "Do not stand on the grass". We ended with a video taken on the floating gardens of Mexico City. The boats are very professionally managed by the guys with their stick, and there were various other boats celebrating with music. Mexicans are amongst the friendliest people he's met but there's always some tension - life is just not valued in the same way as in other countries. At the end of the talk Adrian commented on how both of Paul's talk had contained danger and excitement and adventure. Unfortunately Paul couldn't be given the normal gift we give to

speakers of a bottle of wine, since he's now a member of Southampton branch!

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 19 entries in the April table show, and 2 entries for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – Rebutia	Succulents – Gasteria
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Weingartia pulquinensis	(1) B Beckerleg Gasteria baylissiana
	(2) T Smith Sulcorebutia hoffmanniana	(2) T Smith Gasteria glauca
	(3) I Biddlecombe Rebutia sp.	(3) I Biddlecombe Gasteria glauca
Intermediate	(1) I Biddlecombe Sulcorebutia rasuchii	(1) I Biddlecombe Gasteria batesiana
	(2) B Beckerleg Rebutia heliosa	(2) T Radford Gasteria armstrongii
	(3) T Smith Rebutia sp.	(3) M Stevenson Gasteria batesiana

Cacti/Succulent in Flower
(1) T Radford Haworthia comptoniana
(2) B Beckerleg Gasteria liliputana
(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

Books and things

Long-standing Southampton branch member Ian Acton has been spring cleaning (note to self: must do the same!) In particular, he has been through his book shelves and has very kindly donated three books to the Southampton branch library.

New books in the library

The first of these is:

"**Cites Cactaceae Checklist**" compiled by David Hunt, assisted by members of the International Organization for Succulent Plant Study (IOS), and published by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. At 315 pages in length, this second edition (1999) is considerably enlarged from the first edition (1992, 190 pp.) As you probably know, CITES (www.cites.org, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between

governments, whose aim is “to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival”. “CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to ... a licensing system.” “The species covered by CITES are listed in three Appendices :

[<https://www.cites.org/eng/app/index.php>], according to the degree of protection they need.” Incidentally, seeds are not protected, unless they are “from Mexican cacti originating in Mexico”, nor are hybrids in cultivation of certain listed parents.

All cacti (except *Pereskia*, *Peresklopsis* and *Quiabentia*) are included in Appendices I or II, the two main levels of protection. The small number of species and genera included in Appendix I (the highest level of protection) are listed there (and can be found using the web link above), but the remainder, the vast majority of cacti, are not explicitly listed. Hence the need for this book, which lists the recognised names and synonyms, as at the date of publication.

Don't expect to read it from cover to cover, unless you have a photographic memory or insomnia. However, it's fascinating to dip into. Part I is an alphabetic list of all cactus names and synonyms, the names in bold type being the currently accepted names, and other names are synonyms with their accepted names indicated. So you can quickly discover that there is a genus called *Praecereus* (who he?), or that all species of *Sulcorebutia* are currently regarded as species of *Rebutia*. (I am not suggesting you change your labels!) Part II contains several sections, including bibliography and a table summarising the numbers of species and subspecies in each genus (*Opuntia*, defined broadly, has the most, followed by *Mammillaria*). This is followed by two very interesting lists, one of species and subspecies telling you which countries they inhabit, and the reverse, a list of the species and subspecies found in each country. The latter might be useful in planning your next holiday (only four species are listed for Canada, which was a bit of a surprise to me).

The other two books are being covered for their protection and will hopefully appear at our June meeting and be listed in the June newsletter.

The Cactus Journal

In addition to the books mentioned above, Ian showed me photocopies of some early issues of the “*Cactus Journal*”, a British monthly publication that we had not been aware of. They include issues number 16 (May 1899) and 24 (January 1900) from volume II (pages 49–64 and 177–191 respectively, plus the index to Volume II and some un-numbered illustration and advertisement pages). Letters from subscribers describe their cultivation techniques, and there are articles which include accounts of collecting trips to the USA and Mexico.

Of particular interest are the adverts, especially to see what was available over a hundred years ago. The prices are interesting, with F.A. Walton of Handsworth, Birmingham, claiming to have “the largest collection in

the world”, and quoting a price range of sixpence (6d, six old pence) to £50. Ian told me that a pound in those days is equivalent to £115 today, so that range is now approximately £3 to £5,750! More typically, prices listed are from sixpence to ten shillings (2.5p – 50p) per plant, or up to two pounds or more for large plants –, so that works out at £3 for the cheapest plants (assorted *Mammillaria*), £12 – £25 for *Mammillaria plumosa*, £15 – £30 for 4–5” *Echinocereus grusoni* or flowering Epiphyllums, etc. According to the editorial at the beginning of the first issue of volume 2, it originally sold for sixpence (now equivalent to £3) per issue. The six shillings (now about £35) annual subscription for twelve issues including postage to anywhere in the world sounds more reasonable.

By searching online I discovered that the *Cactus Journal* was initially published in 1898 by E. W. Allen of London. Parts of Volume 2 (labelled “Volume II February 1899 to January 1900”) were digitised by Google from copies originally in the library of the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University, and uploaded to the Internet Archive. You can see the title page for volume 2 (which describes it as “Devoted exclusively to Cacti and Other Succulent plants”), here:

<https://archive.org/details/cactusjournalde00unkngoog>.

You can click on the pages to turn them, or you can click on the full-screen view icon (four arrows) to enter an online reader in which you can click on left-pointing and right-pointing triangles to change pages. At the start you will find Google's conditions of use. Basically it is free for personal non-commercial use. There is a button allowing you to download the whole thing in PDF, ePub, plain text, DAISY or Kindle formats. (If you are reading the printed copy of the newsletter and find that the link above is a bother to type, you can also find my copy of it here: <https://ice9.tk>.)

The digitised version seems to include issues 1 (pages 1–16), 14 (pages 33–48), 16 (pages 49–64), 17 (pages 65–77) and the first page of 19. As you can see, the page numbers do not seem to correspond with the apparent absence of issues 2 to 13 etc., and near the end there are three apparently random pages, from which it is clear that many pages from the complete volume are missing.

A photographic competition was announced, with valuable prizes (up to £2, now £230), but with some stringent conditions. Persons entering must have been annual subscribers, the photographs must have been taken in 1899, and for class 1, photographs of the interior of a succulent house, “Any plant not either a Cactus or an allied succulent appearing on the photograph will disqualify it”!

Mealy bugs seem to have been a problem, then as now, and in view of the present ever-tightening restrictions on insecticide use, the remedies suggested may be of interest: kerosene, naphtha, kerosene emulsion, alcohol and ammonia. The writer claims to have had success with each of these, but doesn't recommend ammonia, presumably because of the smell. An interesting

reflection on the contents of the average home in 1899 is given by the statement “Alcohol is probably the best, but may not be always at hand as some of the others are.” A friend of the writer had used “some kind of washing powder” on an *Echinocactus*, which may have killed the mealy bugs, and had certainly killed the plant!

There is an interesting article on the succulents of the British Isles, many of which are found near the high-tide line, apparently because the salty conditions may hinder the uptake of water. The article notes that the collector is more likely to want to grow the more typical British non-maritime succulents (*Cotyledon umbilicus*, *Sempervivum tectorum* and various species of *Sedum*).

The existence of a “National Cactus Society” is noted. Dip into it and have a read: you will find all sorts of interesting advice, including the dangers of bears and flash floods in California and no doubt other gems I have missed. I also discovered (at the original link) that there was a Baltimore Cactus Journal which started in July 1894 and can be read online, and is also at ice9.tk.

Read All About It!

This month’s meeting is our Cultivation and Propagation Workshop, so you might be interested to note that we have several books in the library devoted to these topics, namely Shirley Anne Bell’s “Growing Cactus and Succulents in the Conservatory and Indoors” and “Growing Cactus and Succulents in the Garden”, John Pilbeam’s (rather old) “How to care for your Cacti” and “How to care for your Succulents”, the very interesting “Succulents: Propagation” by Kapitany & Schulz, and the old and somewhat opinionated (but not necessarily less useful) “Cactus Culture based on Biology” by Buxbaum.

Do not forget the more general advice given in several introductory books on cacti and succulents, in which even the more knowledgeable and experienced of you (I do not

say “us”, as I exclude myself from this group!) might find some useful snippets of advice.

Next month’s meeting is on Ethiopia. We have several books on succulent genera which might occur in that region.

Richard White

Next Month’s Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on June 5th and it will feature a talk by Bob Potter on Ethiopia. This should be a good opportunity to learn about the plants which can be found in a country which is still quite dangerous to visit and travel around in.

The June Table Show will consist of **Parodia Group** (cacti) and **Euphorbia Group** (succulents), along with “plant in flower”. Please note that members can submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The table show classes use the classifications from the *Guide to Shows 10th Edition* (contact me if you don’t have a copy of this).

The *Parodia* group includes *Blossfeldia*, *Brasilicactus*, *Eriocactus*, *Frailea*, *Notocactus*, *Parodia* and *Wigginsia*.

The *Euphorbia* group includes plants from *Euphorbia*, *Jatropha* and *Monadenium*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 12 th	May	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 12 th	May	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Sparsholt College (Countryside Day)
Sat 19 th	May	Portsmouth	How to best show your plants and an insight into judging - Bill Darbon
Sat 2 nd	Jun	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Summer Show at Christ Church Hall, Widley, PO7 5AU
Tue 5 th	Jun	Southampton	Travels in Ethiopia - Bob Potter
Sat 9 th	Jun	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 16 th	Jun	Portsmouth	Christmas & Easter Cacti - Schlumbergera, Rhipsalidopsis, Hatiora (Dr Mark Preston)
Sat 30 th	Jun	Southampton	Branch visit to South West Cactus Mart, Portishead Youth Centre, Bristol
Tue 3 rd	Jul	Southampton	Cultivation of Cacti & Succulents - Terry Smale
Sat 14 th	Jul	Isle of Wight	Keith Grantham Slide Show – SW USA 3
Sat 21 st	Jul	Portsmouth	Mexico 3 (Cliff Thompson)
Sun 22 nd	Jul	Southampton	Garden Party - hosted by Alice Jankovec, West Moors, Dorset
Tue 24 th	Jul	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 26 th			

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

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