

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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<b>Editorial .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Announcements .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Last Month's Meeting.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Plants of Interest .....	1
Interesting Haworthias .....	1
Table Show Results .....	4
<b>Next Month's Meeting .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Forthcoming Events.....</b>	<b>5</b>

## Editorial

Apart from the chilly weather this past week, temperatures and the amount of sun we see each day are increasing nicely. Not much in flower for me as yet, but I am hoping a few things will come into flower later in the month.

## Announcements

Portsmouth branch will be holding their Annual Summer Show at Widley on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June (11am to 4pm). This is a good event to attend if you are interested in judging or learning more about the show classes and groupings, and seeing some nice specimen plants. Copies of the show schedule are available from David on request.

I have prepared some sheets for you to record your names if you are interested in attending either the South West Mart at Bristol (June) or the Oxford Show (July) and are willing to share cars with others.

## Last Month's Meeting

### Plants of Interest

I had brought along a number of Haworthia plants. *Haworthia limifolia striata* has white ridges which run along the leaves and make it an attractive plant. It was quite rare until they were mass produced by tissue culture in Holland and now you will often see it for sale. This plant had relatively plump leaves. Next was a variegated form of the normal *Haworthia limifolia* (without the white ridges). This has been purchased on Ebay from a seller in Thailand. It hasn't produced any offsets as yet, and will be interesting to see if those have the parent's

variegation. Next was one of Joyce Coccozza's plants - this was purchased during a sale and auction of her plants before she passed away in 2014. She had amassed a large collection of plants and had also created numerous hybrids, many of which are sought after. Next was a hybrid of *H. cooperi obtusa* purchased from a Japanese seller at ELK - it was affordable at 30 Euros - some of the plants he brings sell for hundreds of Euros. Next was a group of 5 plants which had all being obtained from the Succulent Tissue Culture nursery in Belgium. It is run by Robert Wellens who looks for desirable clones and then mass produces them and sells them on line for prices ranging from 5-20 Euros and more. This is a much quicker way of producing plants than waiting for offsets! The plants included *Haworthia venusta* (hairy plant), a *H. maughanii* hybrid which chunky leaves and signs of "clock face" markings on the leaf tips, and also a nice hybrid of *Haworthia mirabilis* with reddish markings in the leaves.

Other plants included a clone of *Haworthia obtusa* with clear leaf tips. A plant bought from Bruce - *Haworthia pumila* had an especially nice pattern of pearly dots on the outer surface of the leaves. *Haworthia sprinbokvlakensis* had been bought at ELK several years ago. The plant had separated into two plants. A hybrid plant bought at the BCSS National Show had been green and white but it had acquired a reddish tinge due to being grown near a glass window. Finally, there were plants of *Haworthia truncata* and *Haworthia maughanii*. These plants are closely related and the leaf tips are flat, as if they have been sliced off.

### Interesting Haworthias

Adrian introduced Stirling Baker, who lives at Southend on Sea. He has been growing cacti and succulents for 40 years, is also a judge and has been awarded an order of merit by the Society. He is the chairman of Havering Branch and is also the Zone 15 rep. He is also part of the BCSS National Shows Committee.

Stirling asked how many people grow haworthias? More than half the people put their hands up. He

mentioned he would talk a little about the cultivation. When you read articles about the plants, they tell you where they are found and what they look like, but it's another thing to understand how best to cultivate them. He mentioned that plants in pots could be put out in the garden and put in the sun, but in a pot, the roots are restricted and sooner or later the plant would die. Bedded out, they would have a better chance of survival. Also Haworthias do not grow in the hottest summer months (end-July to early September) and so you have to be careful of overwatering them during this period. The late Tom Jenkins said he didn't water his plants when the sun was hot - well they'll either die or pull themselves into the soil - you do still have to water them.

He asked if people use pumice? Paul Klaassen said he uses Seramis clay granules, which has some similarities. Bob Potter has stopped trading as Toobees Nursery, but he still sells pumice so it can be obtained from him, and there are other suppliers too. Stirling uses a mix of 4 parts pumice to 1 part composted bark and grows all his Haworthias in this mix. He mentioned that if you water the plants and then we get no sun for a few days, the plants will be sitting in water and the roots can rot. You do need to be ultra careful with Haworthias to ensure the drainage is correct. Totally organic soils are not suitable for Haworthias. Akadama is used by Bonsai growers and it's a material he was using the last time he spoke to us, but after 5 years it tends to break down. It is also more expensive than pumice. He was asked what type of pots he used. He preferred to use black pots. Someone had said that black pots could be a problem in sunshine - but it's not really an issue - he has been using black pots for years. Is the colour of the pot significant? Not really.

You do need to repot most plants every few years and Haworthias do require this. He doesn't just pot the plant on - he does a full repot, i.e. he removes all the old soil and removes all the dead roots. As the plant grows, the bottom leaves tend to die and then you can get a bit of a stem at the base. You don't want that, since the bare section of stem also gets in the way of new roots forming from the base of the plant. So in this case the stem needs to be cut off and the entire plant needs to be re-rooted. With feeding he asked what feeds people used. Chempak #8 and Chempak #3 were mentioned. In his view, the best one is Chempak's Cactus and Succulent fertiliser - he has been using it for years, and he also adds a pinch of Epsom salts. The pH is important - ideally the plants prefer a pH around 6.5. The tap water in this general area is hard, with a pH around 8. He recommended adding some white vinegar. Using a feed will also tend to acidify the solution. Some of the north American/Mexican cacti grow in

alkaline (limestone) terrain but even those are OK with slightly acid water. A question from the audience asked using an acidified feed, such as Miracid? Stirling hadn't used that but he wondered if it might be too acidic. He suggested getting hold of a cheap pH testing kit and just using that to get an idea of your water's pH - it won't change much over time. You can put the vinegar in the water and leave it overnight before using it. 1 teaspoon to a gallon is a starting point - but it depends on the original pH of your water. If it's too strong, just leave the water for a day, the acidity will reduce naturally. A person from the audience asked what about adding peat? Stirling said he personally doesn't like it - but it can be used. David mentioned that Keith and Kathy Flanagan from Reading branch told us that they added vinegar. Another person asked about using rainwater - well, it depends on how clean it is. It can have insects and other things in it, and he doesn't use it.

Stirling asked if anyone propagated plants? Haworthias will propagate from cuttings and also via offsets and from leaves. April-May-June-July are the best months. You need to get a good healthy leaf and pull it off sideways, so that a little bit of stem is still joined to the leaf. Let it dry for 2-3 weeks then lay it on moist sand and it should root. Another way to do it is to detach a leaf from the root by cutting it - and letting the root remain in the soil - it can go on to produce a plantlet on top of the root. The root must be alive and healthy to try this technique. Tissue culture is another technique but not really accessible to the average grower.

In terms of pests, mealy bug can be a problem. There's top mealy, and a new type which he didn't really describe. They are all exactly the same and can be dealt with using methylated spirits - just bush them with the alcohol and it will destroy their protective coat. Dimethoate is used by commercial growers but it's not available for domestic use. Repotting a plant allows you to check the roots for the root mealy bug. Aphids can be quite nasty and affect soft leaved plants. Red spider is another potential problem. Sciara fly is terrible when using peat based composts. Snails can also take a chunk out of your favourite plants. Hygiene is also a consideration - make sure your pots are clean and your compost is in good condition. Inspection of the plants is also important - look at them and check if they don't seem to be growing well. Check that you are not over-watering or under-watering them. He stands his pots on sand and the sand can hold some water. Some people leave the top dressing off their plants, in order to be able to see the soil's surface.

Poor light is another potential problem. Many people think that Haworthias can be grown in poor light or stuck under the bench, but you need to grow them in decent light to get healthy good looking plants. There are different locations and directions where you can site a greenhouse – a south facing one with no shelter will get very hot in the summer months. If you have it facing the east, it will get the morning sun, and if facing the west, it will get the afternoon sun. He finds morning sun is best for his plants. If they are getting too much light, shade them. Underneath the staging is not good for them. the plants should be the correct colour. in the winter the colours will become dull. You do have to watch the sun. in the wild they will grow under shrubs and in sheltered spots, very few grow in the open. People also ask him about watering - but it's a silly question to try and answer, since everyone's greenhouse and soil is different. In the winter the plants can survive a certain amount of cold. He uses 5°C as a winter minimum in his greenhouse.

Stirling mentioned that there is a specialist society called the Haworthia Society which produces a quarterly journal and also distributes seed. At the start of the second half of the meeting, Stirling described the judging of the table show plants (which also featured Haworthia this month).

He mentioned that many Haworthias you buy these days are not true species – there's some hybridising going on. You should always record details of the plants but should name the plant or where it comes from. A plant he bought from Ernst Specks was called *cv. "Hummingbird"* and it's a complex hybrid which contains several characteristics, perhaps including *H. argenteo-maculosa*. *cv. "Star Wars"* was a cloned plant – it's another distinctive plant but he had no idea of its parents although *H. emelyae* was probably present. *H. emelyae major* was very flat. The next plant was obtained from Alan Butler in 1990. It was a Japanese hybrid and was sun burnt at the time, but it was now 30 years old. "CC3902" was a Joyce Coccozza hybrid and her database of several thousand plants has been put up on the Haworthia Society website. She propagated many plants and some were nice, some were horrible – you should keep the good ones and throw the rest away – but she kept very good notes which is important. A Japanese cultivar of *H. truncata* had nice markings on the leaf surface. Some of these sell for thousands. "Jupiter-B" had a big leaf and he wondered if it was a polyploid plant. *H. bayeri* has nice leaf markings and is named after Bruce Bayer from South Africa – the old name used to be *H. correcta*. *H. minima* was a plant he obtained from Bryan Makin. *H. maughanii cv "Dragon"* has lovely markings on the leaf tips.

Robin Caddy asked why were the Japanese cultivars so good? Well, they spend a lot of time crossing and breeding. They find a common variegated plant and cross it with something rare – and hope to get offspring where the variegation has transferred into the rare plant. What the Japanese also do is keep the best offspring and throw the rest away – that's why they end up with some really nice plants. He mentioned how Stuart Riley says he goes to Holland and looks through the rows and rows of plants in the big greenhouses and always manages to find variegated plants amongst the regular plants.

He was once with Bob Potter who had a nice specimen of *H. comptoniana* - one of the bigger growing forms. He admired the plant and told Bob, when you replot it, keep the offset on, or it will spoil the shape of the plant. Anyway later on Bob gave him the offset and it's grown on nicely. Too much light can make *H. comptoniana* go orange and if that happens, just place it in a shadier spot. A *H. maughanii* cross called "Purple Lens" was another Japanese cultivar – it grows half a leaf per year. It was 8 years old and David asked "Wouldn't a good grower have managed to get it bigger than that"?

*H. cv. "Massaii"* is a richly coloured *H. splendens* hybrid. It will go green if grown in shady conditions. A person from the audience asked what type of grit did he use for top dressing? It was quartz fish tank grit. *H. "Black Splendens"* is another plant going for good money. Where *H. splendens* grows, west of Albertina, the BCSS and the Haworthia Society have established a conservation area, which is fenced off to stop porcupines and other animals digging them up. Almost every plant is a different clone in the area so there's a huge amount of natural variation. He almost lost this plant but rescued it from a leaf cutting. His *H. pumila* was is a lovely plant with nice tubercles on the leaves - but these can be a bit sensitive and you can't give them too much light. Also don't let it get too dry or the leaf tips will go brown. Some plants can get massive but this once was a nice example. It's now been placed into "Tulista", along with some of the other hard leaved types. It was 10-15 years old so is a slow growing plant.

*Haworthia arachnoidea v. scabrispina* is a good one – with feathery leaves covered in small spines. 25 years get something half the size. *H. cv "Kegani"* goes green in the shade – it was throwing up nice offsets. He gave all his emelyaes to a friend to propagate them for him. It comes from a big area so there are hundreds of forms of it - you could fill a entire greenhouse with just this species and its variations. *H. mirabilis v. badia* has fat/wide leaves which go to a point. This one was green but there

are also some brown forms around. *H. tessellata* grows all the way up to Namibia and the Orange Free State – the plants from the different areas all have different markings so several dozen different forms exist. cv “*Lady Grey*” is a pretty plant named after an area and it’s a nice one and is slow growing and will take 10-12 years to get to a few inches, in contrast with one from the Fish River area which can get up to washing up pan size in a few years

A plant which Tom Hughes at a neighbouring branch have to him was called “*Dark Shadow*”. Another splendens cross was well marked. A “*Wimii*” cross had a lovely mauve/purple colour to it. AsSplendens cross bought from Tony Irons at Bristol had some nice coloration to it. *H. mirabilis pilosa* is sometimes also called *H. cv bobii*. His cat nicked this plant from its pot and he couldn’t find it for two months – until one day he saw it in his garden. It has “hairy” leaves. He mentioned that Alan Rollason will be writing an article on it for the next issue of “*Haworthiad*”.

Next was a Bryan Makin hybrid but he had no idea what it’s called. A South African purchase was *H. pygmaea* “*White Cloud*”. Another Haworthia “*Wimii*” hybrid was well marked. cv “*Tiny Tim*” was a small growing hybrid – it also grows slowly. cv “*Jack Frost*” was another of Joyce Coccozzas’s hybrids. David asked about the prevalence of growing hybrids vs species, which for Haworthias seems to be different than everything else we tend to grow. Stirling said that he simply likes to grow the best looking plants and doesn’t care if they are hybrids or species. Some people like Jakub Jilemicky don’t grow hybrids at all. And if Graham Walker was to give a talk on Haworthias he’d probably only cover species as well. For some spectacular plants on the Internet, go and look at George Theodoris’s site (Artisan Plants). Renee Wong also runs a business selling some wonderful plants. If you ever want to buy plants from these sellers, do let him know – he can help with Phyto certificates which are needed to import the plants. A *H. picta* from South Africa got stuck in customs and started etiolating, but it’s was growing ok now. *Haworthia pygmaea v. fusca* is really a *H. argenteo-maculosa* without the white spots.

Stirling ended by answering a few questions. He owns around a thousand Haworthias and has them in 2 x 20 foot greenhouses. One of these is for the Haworthias and the other is for cacti. Someone asked whether it was better to leave the offsets on the plant or take them off. It really depends on the type of plant – sometimes the main head dies after producing offsets and you are then left with a gap in the middle of the pot. Other plants will never offset.

With regard to the black pots he uses, he used to get them from Japan via Bob Wilson of Southend. However he now has some new ones from Mark Plumer of Teeside, who has bought 10,000 in five different sizes and these are available at prices ranging from 80p to £1.50. These will be on sale at Lullingstone, later in the year.

Vinay Shah

### Table Show Results

At the April meeting, there were 9 entries in the table show, and 4 entries for “Plants in Flower”.

	Cacti – Rebutia	Succulents – Haworthia
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Sulcorebutia canigueralii	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia maughanii
	(2) I Biddlecombe Rebutia sp.	(2) I Biddlecombe Astroloba aspera
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Rebutia heliosa	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia lockwoodii
	(2) I Biddlecombe Rebutia carmeniana	(2) I Biddlecombe Haworthia emelyae major
	(3) -	(3) I Biddlecombe haworthia nigra

Cacti/Succulent in Flower
(1) B Beckerleg Mammillaria bombycina
(2) I Biddlecombe Aloe variegata
(3) I Biddlecombe Echeveria cuspidata

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on 4<sup>th</sup> June and this will feature Tony Mace who will be talking about columnar cacti. Tony will probably be accompanied by wife Suzanne and they both have a tremendous knowledge of cacti and succulent plants.

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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 11 <sup>th</sup> May	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter - Paul Klaassen
Sat 18 <sup>th</sup> May	Portsmouth	Getting ready for the Summer Show - Cliff Thompson
Sat 1 <sup>st</sup> Jun	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Summer Show, Christ Church Hall, Widley, PO6 3NB
Tue 4 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Southampton	Columnar Cacti - Tony Mace
Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Isle of Wight	To be confirmed - Rodney Sims
Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Portsmouth	Seed Raising - Ian Woolnough
Sat 29 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Southampton	visit to South West Cactus Mart, Portishead Youth Centre, Bristol BS20 7DD
Tue 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jul	Southampton	Crassulas Everywhere - Derek Tribble
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Isle of Wight	Mexico, Winter 2017 - Cliff Thompson
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Portsmouth	Cacti in Northwest Argentina - Hazel Taylor
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Southampton	visit to Oxford Branch Show, Old Mill Hall, Grove, Wantage OX12 7LBW
Sun 28 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Southampton	Garden Party - hosted by Alice Jankovec, West Moors, Dorset
Tue 6 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Southampton	Plant Focus Evening – Aloe and Gymnocalycium

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