

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Although we are about to enter the summer months, there doesn't seem to have been much improvement in the weather since I wrote the last newsletter. It's June, but there are still some chilly evenings around.

At least the plants have continued to move on. There was a continued show of colour from my cacti – more flowers on Rebutias, Mammillarias and Gymnocalyciums, with some Lobivias, Echinopsis and Neoporterias also coming into bloom. The Epiphyllum which I mentioned previously went on to produce a spectacular flower which lasted for 2 days and I have put up a picture of the bloom on our website.

The plants which I repotted last year are looking good and this makes me feel guilty about all the ones which I haven't touched in the last few years. There are probably more than 300 plants to do and I think I need a full week off work to tackle this backlog. Hopefully there will be a chance to do something about this before summer is out!

Announcements

Towards the end of May, the branch took part in the 3-day garden event at **Whiteley Village**. I went along on the third day, and found several members of the committee and also branch members Tony and Russell helping out. TV personality Charlie Dymock did a tour of the stands during the afternoon and she came by for a chat. She even remembered us from last year. Overall, across the three days, I think we had a similar level of interest as last year.

Fresh Acres Nursery will be holding an Open Evening starting at 6:30pm on Monday June 13th, with plants available at sale prices. The nursery is situated at Yapton Lane, Walberton (between Chichester and Littlehampton) and a map is available from the front table. A number of our branch members are likely to attend this event, so if you want an evening out and would like to share a lift, please let one of the committee know as soon as possible.

June and July will be busy months for the branch. Next weekend, we will be putting on a display and plant sales at the **Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum** in Ampfield. We probably have enough volunteers to handle this two day event, but do please come along if you're passing by.

At the end of June there's also the **Southampton Festival** to look forward to. If you want to enter the Cactus & Succulent Show at the Festival, please pick up a schedule from the front table. This event tends to be quite busy for us, so help would be appreciated with manning the display, keeping an eye on the show plants and with plant sales.

The **branch dinner** will go ahead on the evening of Friday 1st July. The venue is the Clump Inn, at Chilworth, with a 7:30pm start. Members are most welcome, although please let Margaret Corina know if you plan to attend.

Previously, I had mentioned that the Corinas would be hosting an **Open Day** on July 10th. However, it transpires that a street party will be held in Shirley Avenue that day and the road will be closed off. Therefore, the Open Day is being postponed, for the time being.

Last Month's Meeting - Cultivation Evening

Peter Down started off proceedings by explaining that this was going to be a practical evening, with a series of sessions on different topics, hosted by various members.

Glenn Finn started off the first session, which was all about repotting. He demonstrated how a plant could easily be removed from a pot by using a special tool (see diagram below) called a “cobra” because of its shape. These tools were available, in different sizes to suit different pot sizes, from the sundries sales table (Figure 1).

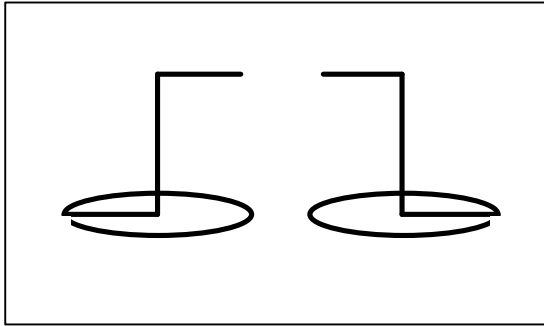


Figure 1

One tool could be used for a small plant, and two might be needed for a large plant. The technique involved inserting the cobra’s “head” into the bottom of the pot through one of the drainage holes. Then the cobra was pushed upwards to dislodge the plant from the pot (Figure 2). Using this tool, the plant could be eased out of the pot with the root ball intact.

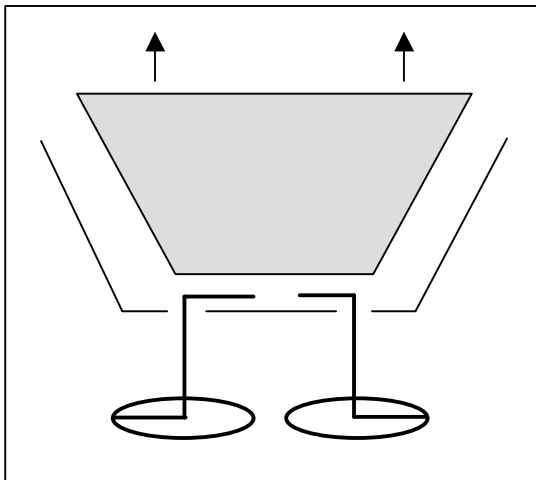


Figure 2

Having chosen a new pot, Glenn poured in some large pieces of gravel for drainage and then situated the old pot (the one from which the plant had been removed) in the centre of the new pot. He then proceeded to pour compost between the rims of the new and old pots. The compost was moist so it retained its shape when the old pot was removed. The plant was then dropped into position in the centre of the new pot. All that remained was for the plant to be firmed down and some top dressing added, using a scoop that had

been made by cutting the bottom off a plastic milk carton.

Responding to a question from the floor, Glenn said that he got his compost from Holly Gate and he used the same mix for everything.

David Neville asked Glenn what he would have done if the plant had been very spiky? Glenn replied that at a branch meeting a few years ago, he had demonstrated the technique for handling a large spiny plant. The removal of the plant would have been the same, but the plant’s root ball would then have been rested on a series of criss-crossed strings. These strings would have been gathered together to form a sling, and the plant would have been lifted and dropped into the new pot. The string could be left in place and would eventually rot away.

Glenn then proceeded to repot a second plant, while comment and discussion continued amongst the audience. Glenn stated that he does not repot every plant in this manner, some could be repotted more quickly. David Neville mentioned that he does not use any implements while repotting – he did everything with his bare hands. What did other members use? A variety of answers came back - gloves, tongs, and even a paint brush to firm the soil down.

Mark Jakins commented that he previously used to use grit in the base of the pot but was concerned that there would be less soil for the plant to grow in. So now he uses paper to line the bottom of the pot. Eventually the paper rots away, but by then the soil will have solidified and won’t drop out.

David Neville commented that he found it harder and harder to get any decent supplies of grit. Glenn said that aquarium shops tend to stock a wide range of grit. Ivor Biddlecombe said that he had been to the aquarium shop on Winchester Road and found that they were charging £10 for 2 kilo bag. But this was a special porous type and perhaps ordinary grit would have been cheaper. Paul Klaassen mentioned that he had just bought a 25kg bag of Westland grit for £2.99.

After Glenn finished the second plant, he asked for a volunteer from the audience to come and have a go. Tony Grech obliged and repotted an *Euphorbia obesa*; he received a round of applause for a successful attempt.

Mark Jakins said he found repotting therapeutic, but David Neville said he loathed having to repot. Paul Klaassen said he had around 3000 plants to do!

As the session ended, David Neville wondered whether the cobra tool would damage plants with tap roots? Sometimes the root hits the bottom of the pot and then winds itself round and round the inside of the pot. Glenn said it should not be a problem if one kept the head of the cobra level with the base of the pot - obviously, the tool should, where possible, be inserted in a hole that was free of any roots.

Unglazed pots can be a real problem because the roots tend to attach themselves to the rough inner surface of the pot. David said that he sometimes has to run a sharp knife down the sides. Once or twice he's had to get a hammer out and sacrifice the pot.

Ivor Biddlecombe took over from Glenn to discuss raising plants from seed. He handed round a demonstration tray holding several pots which contained seeds germinated and raised in different types and mixes of soil, for example, peat, John Innes and coir. He mentioned that his normal mixture consists of 3 parts of John Innes to 1 part of grit. Of all the soil mixes, only the coir had been a failure; the seeds had germinated but they eventually dried out and died.

Ivor mentioned that he used 2 sieves to sieve both the grit and the John Innes compost. With the grit, the finest particles go into the seed compost, and the largest pieces were used for top dressing. He also sieved the John Innes compost to remove any large lumps of material. If these pieces are left in, they can hinder seed germination, either by obstructing the seed or by failing to provide a suitable material for the root to grow into.

Ivor then demonstrated how lithops seed capsules open when moistened. This is a natural mechanism which is designed to keep the seeds safe inside the capsule until moisture is detected. On contact with water, the capsule hatches opened, revealing lots of little seeds which floated off in the water. Recovering the seed was rather like panning for gold.

When sowing using 2 inch square pots, he can fit 24 square pots in a seed tray. The seed tray (without holes!) is filled with boiling water and the pots are then placed in the water for 10

minutes to allow them to soak up the water. After this, he sprinkles seeds on the top surface and then pours a fine layer of soil on top of the seeds. Seed germination times vary from 3 days to a couple of weeks. The pots are placed in individual polythene bags which are sealed to allow the moisture to re-circulate. In effect, each bag becomes a mini-greenhouse.

Ivor mentioned that he had started an *Euphorbia obesa* farm. With this species, as soon as the seedlings germinate, they need to be taken out and given good light otherwise they etiolate (become tall and leggy) very quickly.

For something like lithops, he suggested that it was best to wait for the second year before moving the plants on. He found that lithops tended to grow better in groups while small, and they also grow better in pans rather than small pots. Ivor mentioned that he had attended one of Professor Desmond Cole's lectures and found that Professor Cole recommended the use of deep pots for lithops, growing his plants in pans 4 inches deep.

In response to a question from the audience, he doesn't use any fungicide. With fresh compost there should not be any problem. He does let the compost dry out before use. The key to achieving good germination was to ensure that the temperature was warm enough.

This led to more discussion about the different soil types. The plants in the coir + vermiculite mix had dried out and died. Perhaps the compost was too dry or perhaps there was no nutrition in the compost. David Neville said that he was surprised with these results – a grower such as Bill Greenaway from the South West had been getting very good results with coir.

Ivor then passed around a berry of *Gymnocalycium mihanovichii* so that people could see how the seeds were surrounded by pulp inside the seed pod. This sticky pulp needs to be washed off the seeds which then need to be dried prior to storage.

When sowing seeds, he uses a small brush to sweep the seeds into the pot. He also showed a tool called a Pro-seeder which had been given to him as a birthday gift. It allows seeds to be lifted and planted individually, and comes with 3 different tips to handle different seed sizes. This process is very time consuming but it might be worth using for rare seeds.

David Neville mentioned that René Geissler from Cheltenham sowed each seed individually. Doreen Oakman from Cambridge also sowed each lithops seed individually. Both David and Ivor though this was unnecessary unless perhaps you were dealing with very expensive seed.

Ivor then handed out a packet of mixed seed to everyone in the audience and asked everyone to sow this and maybe we could all compare results at the social evening later in the year. Mark Jakins asked Ivor whether we had to count the seeds first so that we each have a percentage success rate? This was not felt to be necessary!

For the impatient, David Corina mentioned that *Anacampteros* seeds can germinate in as little as 24 hours.

After the break, David Neville restarted the meeting by naming plants which had been brought in for identification. The first plant was identified as *Mammillaria celsiana*, also known as *M. muehlenpfordtii*. It grows dichotomously. Next was *Mammillaria rekoii* ssp. *leptacantha* and finally there was a *Mammillaria* with an unusual body form which goes under the name “Pico”

Russell had brought in several of his plants for identification and comment. First was *Mammillaria hahniana*, which is fairly distinctive. Then we saw an *Echinopsis subdenudata* which seemed to have suffered slug damage. Next was a *Gymnocalycium*, although David said he would need to see it in flower in before attempting to identify the species.

Next was a short spined form of *Ferocactus wislizeni*, followed by a *Neoporteria*. Russell was wondering when the latter would flower. David thought it was large enough to be capable of flowering within the next year. Some *Neoporteria*s flower in spring and others in autumn, although this plant had not formed any buds as yet. *Rebutia hoffmannii* usually has orange flowers but Russell wondered why the plant in question had red buds. David mentioned that the flowers can be orange-red and the flower colour does vary with the age of the flower. Ivor mentioned that with some plants, the shade of the flower's colour can vary slightly from year to year.

Russell's final plant was an *Echinopsis*. He mentioned that the plant had been growing lots of offsets and so far he had taken about 20 of them

off. Should he leave these on, or was it best to take them off? David mentioned that the central stem can form a head as big as a football and it would look more impressive if the offsets are taken off. With *Echinopsis*, the flowers tend to open en masse, and the display is often spectacular.

The final speaker was David Corina, who was going to guide us through a motley collection of plants which he described as a *Chamber of Horrors*. These were plants which he had taken in from people who no longer wanted them, and which had undergone some sort of cultural mishap. Some of the plants were worth keeping or reviving, but it was obvious that some had not received much love or attention!

One of the plants had been grown on a east-facing window sill and had not received enough light. It was necessary to decapitate the plant and re-root the top section. David Neville mentioned that prior to taking a cutting, it was best to water the plant thoroughly beforehand so that it was prepared for the trauma that was about to follow. The audience had much fun when the other David took a knife to the plant, shouting “higher” and “lower” as he chose a point at which to cut into the stem. A member of the audience collected the cutting. It was best to leave this aside for at least 10 days, to allow the wound to heal, before attempting to re-root this section.

Next was a *Glottiphyllum* which had suffered the opposite problem of receiving too much light. It had consequently coloured up to a shade of red. The next plant had a marked body and this was probably due to red spider, or perhaps the plant was malnourished. David Neville suggested the only thing one could do at this stage was to save the pot and throw away the plant!

David went on to mention how John Pilbeam's *Sulcorebutia*s has suffered an attack from another insect (tarsonemid mite) and it had taken a while to find a pesticide (Intercept, a commercial form of Provado) which was finally able to deal with the infestation, although many of the plants were damaged beyond saving. There is fly paper (yellow for aphids, blue for thrips) but Ivor said that he once surrounded all 4 sides of a pot with the blue paper and never saw any insects captured.

With the next plant, an incorrect label in the pot had led to the plant (an Euphorbia) being watered at the wrong time of the year. The plant could probably be rescued by taking a cutting. The sap of Euphorbias is poisonous and also takes a while to congeal, once the stem is cut. It was suggested that the cut stem should be dunked in cold water, and that the water could subsequently be used as an insecticide.

Next was an unusual pest - a caterpillar having caused damage to a Crassula by getting amongst the leaves. This prompted David Neville to mention that leaf tortrix moth caterpillars were potentially a big problem. This moth is unusual because it flies around during the day. Their caterpillars were destructive and relatively fast moving.

Next, David Corina pulled out a *Euphorbia obesa* and proceeded to stick his finger into a hole in the plant body, leading to groans from the audience. A possible explanation for the damage to this was that the hole might have been caused by water dripping on to the plant.

An *Astrophytum* looked malnourished and had various marks on the body. David Neville said that some do mark up with a brown or purple colouration and if this happened, it would never grow out. Next, a *Copiapoa* had scorch marks on one of its sides. This is a slow growing plant and the damage would remain visible for a long time.

A Crassula grown in a cold greenhouse had developed hard lumpy brown marks. With some succulents, it is possible for the plant to grow and eventually be able to hide or discard the sections which have been marked. David Neville mentioned that regular feeding of plants can make a amazing difference in promoting healthy growth.

We were then told of a story where green plasticine had been used to repair a mark on a plant body. Ivor mentioned another example where someone had repaired a body wound with green soap. This was only discovered when the plant was entered in a show, and an exhibitor decided to spray water on a nearby plant to freshen it up. Some of the water landed on the repaired plant and the soap had consequently started to bubble!

Finally, while discussing ways of fighting pests, Paul Klaassen mentioned that Provado was not environmentally friendly. If a bee feeds on the

nectar a day after a plant has been watered with Provado, harmful chemicals are still present in the nectar.

Overall, I think the meeting went well, with good audience participation and several interesting and practical points being discussed.

Vinay Shah

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held at the Corina's on May 9th.

Glenn Finn had checked the branch projector for electrical safety. It was agreed that we should also invest in a RCD circuit breaker.

The library borrowing figures are very low at present, with only one book having been borrowed during the past 2 months. Currently a lot of effort is expended at meetings, with three members lugging heavy boxes of books to and from the meetings. Ways of encouraging more borrowing would be investigated.

We have been thinking of getting some branch lapel badges and some price quotes had been obtained for these. It was agreed that the old design from the 1970's was still suitable, although some wording changes such as NCSS to BCSS would need to be made.

The Branch Annual Dinner would proceed at the Clump Inn on 1st July. It was agreed that the practice of sharing the bill across everyone was unfair on those who did not eat every course, so this time we would ask for individual bills.

Sometimes at the start of our meetings, there are still conversations going on between members when the speakers are about to start their talk. Branch members would be asked to be more considerate about this.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next branch meeting will be held on July 5th, and will feature our own members Peter Down and Geoff Card, who will describe their trip to Argentina last year.

The July table Show will feature the **Echinopsis** group (cacti) and the **Aloe** 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 Echinopsis group contains *Echinopsis*, *Lobivia*, *Acanthocalycium*, *Acantholobivia*, *Chamaecereus*, *Helianthocereus*, *Hymenorebutia*, *Leucostele*, *Mila*, *Neolobivia*, *Pseudoechinopsis*, *Pseudolobivia*, *Pygmaecereus*, *Reicheocactus*, *Setiechinopsis*, *Soehrensia* and *Trichocereus*.

The Aloe group contains *Aloe*, *Bulbine*, *Chamaealoe*, *Guillauminia* and *Lomatophyllum*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11 th	Jun-	Ampfield	Display and Plant Sales @ Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum, Ampfield
Sun 12 th	Jun		
Mon 13 th	Jun	Sussex	Open Evening @ Fresh Acres Nursery (6:30pm)
Fri 17 th	Jun	Isle of Wight	"Succulents around Vanrhynsdorp" – Derek Tribble
Sat 18 th	Jun	Portsmouth	"Anacampseros and Avonia" – Derek Tribble
Sat 25 th	Jun-	Southampton	Display and Plant Sales @ Southampton Festival,
Sun 26 th	Jun		The Common, Southampton
Fri 1 st	Jul	Southampton	Branch Annual Dinner @ The Clump Inn, Chilworth
Tue 5 th	Jul	Southampton	"Argentina 2004" – Peter Down & Geoff Card
Sun 10th	Jul	Southampton	Members Open Day @ The Cerinas – postponed
Fri 15 th	Jul	Isle of Wight	"Alpines in Chile" – John Hughes
Sat 16 th	Jul	Portsmouth	"Galivanting in Northern Argentina/Chile" – Malcolm Pym
Mon 18 th	Jul	Southampton	Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue
Tue 26 th	Jul-	New Forest	Display and Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 28 th	Jul		
Tue 2 nd	Aug	Southampton	"Madagascar 1993" – David Kirkbright
Fri 19 th	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open House @ Robin & Joan Goodredge's
Sat 20 th	Aug	Romsey	Zone 11 Show + plant sales @ Summer Garden Show Broadlands, Romsey
Sun 21 st	Aug	Romsey	Display + plant sales @ Summer Garden Show, Broadlands, Romsey

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