

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Editorial

A couple of weeks ago, I visited the Chelsea Flower Show and this was quite an experience. The quality of plants and blooms inside the main pavilion has to be seen to be believed. There were a couple of very good displays of cacti and succulents, and of course there were many other stunning displays of plants of all types. I went on the Friday afternoon and although it was very busy, the crowds were not overwhelming.

In the conservatory, a number of cacti continue to flower. The weather has started to warm up and the plants look a little tired – I think they need more watering and perhaps a little feed too!

### Announcements

During May, the branch put on a couple of displays: at Hilliers on 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> May, and at Whiteley Village on 30<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> May. We did reasonably well at Hilliers. Quite a few people enjoyed our display and plant sales were up on recent years, probably helped by the fact that quite a few of the sale plants were in flower. A few of the regulars helped out at Whiteley, where the weather was considerably better than our previous visit, where the whole gazebo was overturned during some freak weather.

A reminder that Portsmouth Branch are holding their **Branch Show** at Wickham this coming Saturday.

The **Annual Branch Dinner** will be held on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, at Luzborough House, which is situated between Romsey and North Baddesley. This is the same venue we've used for the last 2-3 years, but the atmosphere and service has been quite good. Please let David Neville know if you would like to attend.

At the last meeting, Peter Down mentioned that Graham Charles is publishing a new book on *Gymnocalycium*, running to 288 pages and containing over 600 pictures and 75 distribution maps. The price is £48 + £5 postage, but orders placed before the end of June will get the book delivered for free.

### Last Month's Meeting

#### *Mini-Judges Course*

David Neville explained that the branch had booked Kathy Darbon from Oxford Branch, and a member of the National Shows Committee to run the judging class. Unfortunately, Kathy suffered a stroke in April, and she was still in hospital, making a gradual recovery. David had agreed to stand in for her, and we also retained the show schedule which Kathy had prepared.

David mentioned that the BCSS leads the world in training judges. In the USA, you can grow the plants for 10 years and then become a judge. Here in the UK, there is a Judge's course which you have to attend and pass, in order to qualify. If a show does not use an accredited judge, then you can't use BCSS show stationery or issue diplomas or medal cards.

Judges try to be consistent across the board, but of course there is some personal preference involved. Judges may have different viewpoints on plants, depending on their experience of growing particular plants. And different judges would not necessarily judge plants in the same way, so it's quite possible for different judges to come to different conclusions depending on their viewpoint. Indeed there can sometimes be much bitching and sarcasm behind a judge's back.

David mentioned shows are nothing as popular as in days gone by. Our branch used to hold a show in Eastleigh, and we then moved down to Southampton. We used to get entries not only from our own branch members but further afield, for example from Portsmouth Bournemouth (when it existed), New Forest, Reading, and Oxford. There is generally less interest in showing these days, and with the cost of hall hire, Shows do not tend to make any money. There also tend to be very few members of the public who visit the shows.

So what we tend to do now is more public displays. For example, at Broadlands, we took part on the Garden Show and were allocated a 40 foot square marquee to ourselves. Another advantage of a display over a show is that several thousand people are likely to see our plants, whereas with a show it might just be a few dozen. Having said, Portsmouth Branch still hold two shows each year, with next one being just a few days after the June meeting.

David mentioned that there seemed to be very few entries and Ivor mentioned this low level of interest seemed typical for our branch. The show consisted of 6 classes as chosen by Kathy - 3 of these were for cacti and the remaining 3 for other succulents. David said he would explain the basics of judging and then let the audience have a go at judging the plants.

For this show, the pot sizes had been specified in inches. David commented that this was rare – most branches have moved on to metric. Indeed for the last three national shows, the sizes limits have been specified in centimetres. Many people still use BEF pots which are labelled in inches, but most modern pots including those from the continent are labelled in cm. One should measure across the widest part of the inside of the rim – and there's also a 1/8" allowance if the pot is slightly over. However, if the plant is pushing against the edge of the pot and caused it to widen, then one has to use that as the diameter.

The judge's first job is to study the class and check that the plants are eligible and conform to the class. If they are not, they are deemed "Not As Scheduled (NAS)" and subsequently ignored. The Handbook of Shows is a booklet produced by the Society Shows Committee and it lists all the species included in a particular class - so it's well worth having for those involved in showing regularly. The show classes are broken down into groups of related plants. For example, for *Gymnocalycium*, the guide lists that *Gymnocalycium*, *Brachycalycium* and *Neowerdermannia* are eligible plants. Throughout the country, Branches and Zones use these groupings

when setting up their show schedules. The handbook can be ordered from the address listed in the BCSS Journal, or via the BCSS website.

Looking at the *Mammillaria* group, *Cochemia poselgeri* doesn't look like a typical *Mammillaria* - but the genus is listed as a member of the *Mammillaria* group, so the plant would be eligible for entry in a *Mammillaria* class. Other plants which look like *Mammillarias* but which aren't listed would be disqualified. David mentioned that in class 1, one of the entries was suspicious – the first of the pair of plants was labelled incorrectly and there was no label on the second plant.

The next thing to check is the pot size. For class 1, there was a size limit of 5½". If someone entered a plant in a 2" pot, this would be allowed, but something that small wouldn't be mature and hence not stand much of a chance other plants entered in the class. If there was a doubt as to the size of the plant, the judges would use a set of callipers to check the rim measurement. Most Show Managers would remove the oversized plants at the start, to avoid embarrassment for the entrant and the judges! If the entry consisted of a pair of plants and one was disqualified, the whole entry has to be disqualified. This means that the paired plant can't be given any prizes or awards, even if it happened to be the best plant in the entire show. As far as the audience was concerned, they just had to make a note of any "NAS" plants in the space provided on the marking form.

Once you've eliminated any ineligible plants, then you can make a start on assessing the qualities of the various plants. In the limited pot size classes, you're looking for plants which are as mature as possible in the allocated size. For example *Mammillaria bombycina* can be grown to huge sizes – sometimes reaching 2-3 feet across – so a plant in a 5½" pot is neither mature nor remarkable. There are however other examples of *Mammillaria* which would be mature at that size, and as an example, *M. dodsonii* was a good entry for a 5½" inch class.

When assessing maturity, one also has to assess the condition of the plants. Those which were marked or damaged or exhibited signs of pest damage would be marked down. Whether plants are in flower is not important – there are no extra points awarded for plants being in flower.

Overall, a judge needs to have a fairly broad experience of growing the plants he is judging, otherwise they will not know whether the plant is mature or not, and whether it's easy or difficult to

get to that size. The Judge's course tests the knowledge and experience of the judges, the aim being to make sure that the judge has the necessary basic knowledge, and they apply it evenly. It's not something you can learn overnight, but a judge will build up experience as they grow and encounter more plants over the course of time.

David mentioned that the choice of classes for the judging class were a little unusual, there must have a reason for Kathy having chosen these groups. He mentioned that the audience needed to check each class, eliminate the bad entries and then decide which are 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> amongst the remaining plants. As a judge, you are allowed to pick up a plant or rotate it to take a good look at it, but this wouldn't work if twenty people all wanted to do that. After having judged all the classes, please hand your marking sheets in, so that an average of all of the audience's marks could be calculated – this would be used to hand out the prize cards. After the tea/coffee break, David would give us his views on how he would have judged the six classes.

**Class 1 - Mammillaria Group, 2 plants, max. pot size 5½"**

David started by weeding out the NAS entries. Entry Y contained a Lobivia, entry Z contained a plant in a pot which was over 6", and entry A contained a double NAS – an oversized Echinocereus! This left 4 entries. *M. dodsonii* is a good plant but it was paired with a weak *Cochemia*. *M. densipina* was paired with a *M. candida* – these plants were well grown but both can grow larger. Similarly, *M. bombycina* can grow on to quite a size.

David C, P, K  
Audience C, P, K

**Class 2 - Strombocactus or Pediocactus Group 1 plant, max. pot size 5½"**

David pointed out that entry U was a *Stenocereus* (*Echinofossulocactus*) so it was ineligible. Entry Y was an *Ariocarpus agavoides* (Y) so it also was NAS. This left only entries C and P.

Entry C was a *Strombocactus disciformis*, grown from seed and around 10 years old. This should resemble a flat disc but the plant was slightly conical. Entry P was *Pelecypora aselliformis* – this is a choice slow growing species but it tends to get attacked by red spider and the brown epidermis of this plant suggested it had been attacked in the past. Due to this, David placed it second.

David C, P  
Audience C, P

**Class 3 - Any Cactus, 2 plants (different genera), Max. pot size 5½"**

The "Any Cactus" is always hard to judge because of the variety of plants which can be entered. This makes it difficult to compare.

Entry (A) consisted of a *Mammillaria* and *ferocactus* – but the pot size was over the limit. Entry P consisted of a *Neoporteria villosa* and *Copiapoa cinerea* combination was quite a good entry although the *Copiapoa* had some marking on the base. Entry C was *Epithelantha micromeris* and *Copiapoa tenuissima* and this was also a good combination. The *Epithelantha* was showing signs of necking but some of the offsets might cover that up in due course. The *Copiapoa* was a miniature and probably 15-20 years old. A *Rhipsalis* and *Parodia* were an interesting combination. The former grows quickly and the latter was not yet a show quality plant. A combination of *Copiapoa bridgesii* and *Gymnocalycium horridispinum* was reasonable – the plants were 5 to 10 years old. A *Neoporteria villosa* and *Oroya* combination contained a decent *Neoporteria* but the *Oroya* was probably too young to have a chance.

David P, C, B  
Audience C, P, W

**Class 4 - Crassula Group - Adromischus subgroup, 2 plants, max pot size 5"**

The crassula group is very large and varied, so judging can be difficult. Entry Y was invalid since it was in a 6-7 inch pot. Entry C consisted of a fast growing *Crassula nealiana* and *Crassula herrerae*. Entry P consisted of *Crassula suzannae* which is difficult to get to any size and *Adromischus marianae* which was a bit leggy but quite a slow growing plant.

David P, C, X  
Audience P, C, X

**Class 5 – Haworthia, 3 plants, max pot size 3½"**

Entry Y was NAS, being over the pot size limit. This prompted Mark Jakins to ask who owned all the entry Y's since they didn't seem to be doing too well in the show.

The best plant here was undoubtedly entry P which was a *Haworthia maughanii* some 3½ inches across. The label indicated it was almost 30 years old.

*H. aranea* was a pretty plant, *H. pymaea* was flat topped, but not the slower *retusae* type. *Haworthia nigra* is tiny headed but this specimen didn't look great – the central head had lost its crown and although the plant was growing offsets, it was not in show condition. *Haworthia retusa* var. *asperula* was reasonable. A *Haworthia arachnoidea* + *Haworthia retusa* combination didn't look that exciting.

David            P, K, C  
Audience       P, K, C

**Class 6 - Any Succulents (other than cacti)  
2 plants (different genera), max pot size 5½"**

Entry J consisted of a *Sempervivum* paired with a good miniature slow-growing *Crassula ausensis* – unfortunately the *sempervivum* was over the pot size. Entry C consisted of a *Haworthia comptoniana* which was a flat topped *retusae* type and it looked a little sunbaked, Its partner was an average sized *Euphorbia susannae* which varies tremendously in growth rate depending on the clone.

Entry P contained an *Anacampseros* (*Avonia*) *alstonii* which was huge. It was early in the season and not showing signs of growth yet, but David gave it the benefit of the doubt. It was paired with an *Euphorbia mosaica* which comes from the horn of Africa and needs a lot of warmth. Finally, entry K was an *Euphorbia meloformis* with persistent flower remains. It was offsetting nicely. Unfortunately it was paired with a *Stomatium* which David descried as rubbish and requiring no cultivation skill. The owner of the plant objected to that remark!

David            P, C, K  
Audience       P, C, K

David ended the meeting by mentioning that it's harder to judge a big show when you have lots of good quality show plants - if there are tatty plants then it's easy to dismiss some of the plants and pick out the better ones.

From the audience, Bruce Becklerleg, Mark Jakins, and Ivor Biddlecombe were closest to David's 1-2-3 placements. Peter Down questioned who submitted entry Y in all the classes – and David Neville finally came clean – he had brought along rogue plants to see if he could catch people out!

*Vinay Shah*

**Branch Committee Meeting**

A branch committee meeting was held at Peter Down's on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May.

Mark and Rebecca Jakins were also present – they had come along to see how the committee functions.

Our display at Hilliers had gone well. We sold over £400 of plants during the weekend, and overall it was a pleasant couple of days.

Future events such as the Whiteley Village and the Solent Fuchsia Show were discussed. Arrangements for the New Forest Show were also discussed, although there will be another committee meeting before then.

Stocks of raffle prizes were held by Margaret but were getting low. It was suggested that the members be asked to donate any small items or plants which are surplus to requirements for inclusion in the raffle.

A date and venue for the branch dinner was discussed. It was suggested that we visit Luzborough House on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July.

There was some discussion of the Society AGM where some major changes to the structure of the BCSS committees were made, in response to some recent Charities Commission rulings.

The Zone Quiz will be held at Portsmouth on 17<sup>th</sup> October. We need 3 people for the team and also hope that some members will come along to cheer the team.

*Vinay Shah*

## Snippets

The following article was spotted by Peter Down in the Daily Mirror.

### ***Derek's King of the Cacti***

A retired telecoms engineer has amassed Europe's biggest personal cactus collection, with more than 50,000 plants.

Derek Bowdery, 77, started with a packet of seeds from Woolworths more than 40 years ago.

Derek, of King's Lynn, Norfolk, keeps his plants in a heated greenhouse covering half an acre, and they need 10,000 litres of water every 10 days.

He said: "It's hard to say which is my favourite as they are all so unusual and wonderful."

*Daily Mirror 29th April 2009*

Jim Roskilly pointed me to an article in the Telegraph on 20th May – "350-year-old yew is Britain's widest tree". The picture is too wide to print in the newsletter but there's a good picture of the tree on the Daily Mail website : <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1184461>

### ***Yew must be kidding***

A giant yew with a canopy the size of London's Royal Albert Hall has entered the record books as the widest tree in the UK.

The champion tree, which has engulfed a National Trust garden, has an amazing crown circumference of almost 200 yards. Tree experts, who discovered the 350-year-old Yew as part of the Woodland Trust's ancient tree hunt, believe it may even be the widest in Europe.

...

The oldest tree in Europe is the Fortingall Yew in the churchyard of the village of Fortingall in Perthshire, Scotland. It is thought to be at least 2,000 years old. The Ancient Tree Hunt is a project that aims to involve thousands of people in finding and mapping all the fat, old trees across the UK. It will create a comprehensive living database of ancient trees and is the first step towards cherishing and caring for them. The Woodland Trust is challenging everyone to take part by finding and recording any ancient or notable trees on the project website at [www.ancientreehunt.org.uk](http://www.ancientreehunt.org.uk).

*Daily Mail*

The following article was provided by Peter Down.

### ***Prickly fingerprints foil cactus thieves***

Rare and endangered cacti are to get their own unique identity badges to help prevent wild populations from being destroyed.

Scientists from the UK and Mexico have identified DNA 'fingerprints' of legally grown cacti originating from the wilds of Mexico and the USA. The plan is to issue certificates of authenticity to accompany these plants, so customs officials and collectors can be sure they are not handling and buying illegally-collected specimens.

'A lot of the pressure on wild cacti comes from collectors - they want interesting and novel plants,' said Julie Hawkins, of the University of Reading, who is leading the project with Rolando Barcenas of the University of Queretaro in Mexico. 'But we think collectors would also like to know that their plants were sourced sustainably.'

Currently, Mexican law allows the licenced collection of 'mother plants' from the wild for propagation material. It is legal to sell their offspring, but it is often impossible for customs officials to detect if a shipment of cacti is propagated from nursery stock or contains plants stolen from the wild. This, coupled with the challenge of policing vast and sparsely-populated desert areas, means the theft of rare and endangered cacti from the wild is extremely difficult to detect.

Not only does DNA marking identify the mother plant but also all propagated material from that plant, using a technology similar to that used in determining human parentage. 'This is much more effective than trying to catch illegal collectors,' said Julie.

The problem is most serious in the Chihuahuan Desert, straddling the border between Mexico and the USA. The region is home to almost a quarter of the 1,500 known cactus species, and many are now rare or endangered in the wild. More than three quarters of Mexico's cacti are endemic, and 35 percent are listed as endangered.

A report into the illegal trade in cacti by TRAFFIC, which monitors trade in wildlife, especially endangered species, found 'the number of specimens entering trade illegally may be significant enough to destabilize wild populations of some species'.

The project has been funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, which helps

countries with rich biodiversity but limited resources. The team plans to develop the certificate scheme and bring authenticated plants onto the market. The technology is applicable to other plants, not just cacti.

*From an RHS Publication (The Garden?)*

## Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on July 7<sup>th</sup> and will feature John Pilbeam, who will be talking about the genus *Echeveria*. I had a preview of this talk at the Gloucester convention and as expected it was delivered very well.

The July table show will consist of the **Echinopsis group** (cacti) and the **Aloe group** (succulents). Please note that you can submit more than one entry in any of the classes.

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	6 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Wickham	Portsmouth Summer Show @ Wickham Community Hall, Wickham
Fri	19 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter 2 (Paul Klaassen)
Sat	20 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Portsmouth	Seed Raising (Ian Woolnough)
Tue	7 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Southampton	The Genus <i>Echeveria</i> (John Pilbeam)
Fri	17 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Isle of Wight	Basic Botany for Cactophiles (Mal Weobley)
Sat	18 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Portsmouth	Euphorbias for You (Dr Gillian Evison)
Sat	18 <sup>th</sup>	Jul-	Titchfield	Display / Plant Sales @ Solent Fuchsia Show,
Sun	19 <sup>th</sup>			Titchfield Community Centre
Tue	28 <sup>th</sup>	Jul-	New Forest	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu	30 <sup>th</sup>			
Tue	4 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Southampton	Succulents of South Africa (Alice Vanden Bon)

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