

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

The weather continued with its dry streak through the month of May although I'm glad to say that there has been some rain during the past week or two.

Plants in my conservatory seem to have resumed full growth after a couple of heavy waterings. Sometimes they stop growing when the temperatures are too high but that has yet to happen this year. Plants in flower recently have included Rebutia, Mammillaria, Gymnocalycium, Echeveria and Aloe.

## Announcements

Our branch took part in 2 events over the past month - the Countryside Day at Sparsholt College, and a weekend display at Hilliers Arboretum. Both events were well attended and there was good interest from the public.

The Branch Annual **Branch Dinner** will be held on Friday July 1<sup>st</sup>, at the Luzborough Inn near Romsey. Please let David Neville know if you would like to attend.

Doug Donaldson's plants will be auctioned on Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> July at High Wycombe. The list of 400 plants up for sale is available on the Internet at <http://zone8.bcsc.org.uk> and there is also a copy of the list on the front table. Some branch members may attend the auction, so if you are interested in going along, please discuss with David.

The library has received donations of books in recent months, and many of these are duplicates and will be sold off to members. Our librarian Dot will

be putting out a selection of titles each month, so please check the library to see what's on offer.

## Last Month's Meeting

### Plants of Interest

Dot England had brought along some *Pelargonium* which were originally part of Margaret Corina's collection. She had also printed out some information about the plants from the Internet, but she asked anyone who had more information to let her know. The plants were *Pelargonium campestre* which was just coming into flower, *Pelargonium triandrum* with spotted yellow flowers, and an unnamed species from Areb Farm (Bushmanland) with white flowers.

Ivor Biddlecombe had also brought along some items. Apart from growing cacti and succulent plants, his other main hobby is woodcarving. He had a carving of a cactus plant and a bird and had come up with a clever way of attaching this 2-part sculpture by having the bird poke its long beak into a flower on the cactus.

He had also brought along some *Opuntia* plants. All of these had been propagated from bits of plants and pads picked up from various shows and individuals. *Opuntias* are one of the easiest of plants to propagate and the jointed pads provide an easy means to take a piece off an existing plant. The plants on the table included *Opuntia microdasys*, *Opuntia invicta*, *Pterocactus geometricus*, two examples of *Tephrocactus molinensis*, *Opuntia pachypus* and *Opuntia berteri*. Ivor ended by saying that some *Opuntias* can grow into massive plants but the ones he had brought along would remain a manageable size.

### Bolivia

Geoff introduced our speaker - who was none other than our president - Peter Down. Peter mentioned that he would be talking about a trip he made to Bolivia some time ago, long enough in the past to be counted in the last century. At the time, the country was quite unstable with political coups and it

seemed rare for the government to last more than 6 months. The roads were quite bad and one consequence is that they couldn't move milk around, so there were no dairy products. If you asked for butter, you were likely to be offered some cheese. The sanitation also left a lot to be desired. Anyway it was quite an adventure, and he would attempt to show us a bit of the country as well.

A map of the region showed Bolivia almost in the centre of South America. The legend said "Heart of South America" but after having been there, one might be tempted to describe it in terms of some other body parts! The country is named after Simón Bolívar who was instrumental in liberating many of the South American countries from Spanish rule. At one time Bolivia's borders reach across to the western coast of South America, but neighbours Peru, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay have all taken some land and now the country is half the size it was 200 years ago.

Peter showed a more detailed map, showing the areas he visited. Starting at the capital, La Paz, they headed south to Oruro and Potosi and Tarija on the border with Argentina. On the way back, they went through Sucre (the business capital), Tarabuco, Aiquile, Cochabamba and Lake Titicaca which is on the border with Peru. The trip was in the month of December and the whole experience was amazing.

La Paz is the highest airport in the world at 12,000 feet and the town is situated in crater of an extinct volcano. In the backdrop were the snow covered peaks of Mouth Illimani which is over 21,000 feet high. On their first day it poured with rain which rushed down the sides of the crater and into the town, and all the roads were like a river. They were also suffering from altitude sickness. Some of the roads were cobbled and a street repair team consisted entirely of women, each with black plaits and felt hats. The other people on the trip were Secretary of Liverpool Branch Roysten Hughes, and the then secretary of Doncaster branch, Brian Bates. Brian now lives in Bolivia.

Roysten was into Tephrocactus and the first plant we saw was *Tephrocactus bolivianus*. Peter explained how Roysten used to spend the evenings cutting off the spines from collected pieces of plants, to get them to fit inside film canisters. The first *Rebutia* they found was *Rebutia pygmaea*. This is very variable, which is typical of many South American plants. As a result, dozens of different names are associated with forms of *R. pygmaea*. The *rebutias* tended to grow at the bottom of a big rock where some moisture runs off. One of the best

plants they found was *Lobivia pentlandii*. This again can have variable forms and variable spines. This example was growing in a ditch and getting some more extra moisture as a result. Peter collected an offset and showed us the plant which he eventually grew in his greenhouse.

*Opuntia orurensis* grows near the town of Oruro. The hillside was covered in many *Trichocerei* A plant which looked good because of the backlighting of the sun was *Lobivia formosa* v. *bertramiana*. The main stem was around 4 feet tall and the side stems were 18-24" tall. It was almost in flower. An unusual plant reminded him of a *Ceropegia*, because of its lantern-like flower. They scurried about on the hillsides looking for a bit of colour in the hope it was a cactus, but quite often it turned out to be something else. *Austrocylindropuntia weingartiana* had reddish purple flowers. Cacti grow in all sorts of places, and there was a 2 foot tall by 6 inches wide plant growing on a piece of rock, and you had to wonder where its roots were. There were many other spiky plants around and you needed stout boots. A *Tephrocactus* with a red flower was again *T. orurensis* and we also saw two adjacent forms of this, one with white flowers, the other with red.

One of the reasons he wanted to go to Bolivia was to find plants like *Parodia massii*. There were many forms of this plant in habitat but Peter said the featured plant was the "British Standard". *Oreocereus celsianus* varies enormously. In the early 1950's Friedrich Ritter was exploring this part of the world and was making up dozens of names for the different plants he found. We also saw the plant in flower. One of the other *Oreocereus* found here was *O. trollii*. This never gets more than 2 feet tall and tends to grow out sideways from the base. There were lots of little *opuntias* nearby too. We saw the fruit of *Oreocereus trollii* – it's a dry seed pod unlike *cleistocactus* seed which grows in a pithy berry. It was good to see some regeneration here, with young plants of *O. trollii* which were a couple of inches tall.

We saw Roysten posing near tall plants of *Helianthocereus* and *Oreocereus*. *Helianthocereus tarijensis* has red flowers and is now classified as an *Echinopsis*. *Rebutia pectinata* would have been very hard to see if not in flower. A succulent plant in the picture looked like a *Crassula* but was obviously something else. We saw a big *Lobivia* with a group of *Rebutia pectinata* at the base, followed by *Lobivia ferox* and *Lobivia versicolor*. Brian Bates had been told there was *Weingartia westii* here and he eventually found it and shouted out to the others. All the local people from the cafe rushed out

thinking he'd found a gold nugget and were quite surprised that these foreigners were getting excited over some "weeds".

Because there's a lot of dust and wind there, a lot of the plants are covered in dust and look quite dark, however the centre of the plants showed new growth. In this area there was a natural cactus garden with *Oreocereus*, *Lobivia*, *Parodia*, *Lobivia* and *Opuntias* in foreground – there were 6-7 different species growing within a yard of each other. An *Oreocereus celsianus* plant must have been close to 200 years old, and it was twice the height of Brian Bates (5' 9") standing next to it. Peter mentioned that Brian wore the same red shirt for the whole month since it made him easy to spot on the hills. At the end of the trip he gave it to a beggar lady who was disgusted with it! In this area there must have 20-30 plants of *O. celsianus* which had reached that age and size. We also saw *Trichocereus camargoensis*. Something you don't often see is the skeleton of a cactus which is the vascular bundles. In this region, *Trichocereus* is widely used as wood. They steam it and flatten it. We also saw the vascular bundle of *Cleistocactus* which is more lacy and not as strong.

They arrived at the town of Cotigata just before Christmas, and the Christmas tree outside the church bore various messages to friends. The tree behind was a eucalyptus which grows twice as fast as anything else. Brain came back very excited when he thought he had discovered a new *Parodia* which was a foot wide and 15 inches tall - but it turned out that the plant had been described by Lau some 15 years earlier. The plant was *Parodia commutans*, now known as *Parodia obtusa*. Even now, it's not a plant that many people will have seen. Peter showed us a 9-year old plant grown from the collected seed.

In another valley, they found *Trichocerei* covering the slopes, and some of these were in flower. There was a fine specimen of *Oreocereus celsianus*, and *Lobivia lateritia* v. *cotagaitensis*. The only one in flower was growing under bushes so the picture did not come out well. There were *Jatrophas* (related to euphorbia) with stinging stems and also spiky bromeliads and the small *Opuntias* so it was fairly hostile territory.

We saw a typical valley bottom road, and when snow melts these would be quite dangerous. A picture taken from the car showed spine-less *Opuntias* being grown as food for livestock. We saw the village of Escayachi in their "rush hour". At this point they were desperately short of fuel. They asked if there was any petrol in the town and were

directed to a chap who apparently had a 50 gallon tank. He let them have 10 litres and expertly siphoned it into their car using his mouth to get the flow started. Their hotel was fairly basic and the only light in the place was through a panel of glass in the doorway. We also the washing arrangements in the yard, with a water pump in the middle and a lady doing the washing. As they striped off for a change of clothes, the people in the restaurant must have got some amusement from their pale bodies.

We saw a bromeliad in flower, and it also had spines down the edge of the leaf. Some of the hillsides were covered with these. *Parodia maassii* v. *escayachensis* doesn't have the twisted spines. One big clump probably consisted of several plants. *Rebutia deminuata* again tended to be found at the base of a big rock where they can get some shelter and moisture. *Lobivia tiegeliana* was hard to spot without the red/magenta flowers. *Sulcorebutia tarijensis* is named after the town of Tarijo which is almost on the border with Argentina. Bright colours alongside the road proved to be a cemetery. The locals have a family party / fiesta on *All Souls Day* at the start of November and decorate the graves of their departed relatives with plastic flowers.

*Lobivia cardenasiana* has nice pink flowers. A lot of people grow the following plant in their gardens – it was *Verbena peruviana*. We also saw a couple of begonia species. They were now in Condor Valley - Simon and Garfunkel wrote a song about this pass in the 1960s. They found *Cleistocactus straussii* growing on steep cliffs but none of the plants were more than 4 feet tall – in cultivation they can easily reach 6 feet or more. Along the base of the valley was a *Trichocereus* with spectacular flowers some 5 inches across. The flowers were being eaten by ants, which were cutting up the petals and taking them to their nests. They also came across *Lobivia ferox*, *Echinopsis mammillosa*, *Cleistocactus jujuayensis* and *Tephrocactus bolivianus*. A small plant had 1.5 inch flowers with a wonderful colour and he had no idea what it was – from the audience, Martin Sheader suggested it might be a *Hypseocharis* which is somewhere between *Geranium* and *Oxalis*. Another flower looked very much like an *Iris* but these aren't supposed to grow in this area. We also saw *Rebutia spegazziniana*. This is the habitat of *Oreocereus trollii* and there were masses of good specimens here. *Parodia commutans maxima* had spines 4 inches long and a body 12 inches across. He collected some seed and took 8 years to flower it. In cultivation the plants grow some wool but in the wild this is blown or washed away. As they headed from San Pedro towards Culpina, they found

*Weingartia cintiensis* growing on the slopes – this is named after the Cinti valley.

We continued after the mid-meeting break. *Parodia maassii* v. *albescens* and *Parodia ritteri* are very variable and tend to merge. The higher altitude plants are *P. maassii* v. *albescens*, but it's similar to *P. ritteri* growing lower down. These were magnificent plants. They also found *Austrocylindropuntia weingartiana*. A view near Culpina showed the erosion in the valley causing all sorts of strange shapes to form in the terrain. In the foreground were *Oreocereus trollii* and *Lobivia ferox*. They were trying to find a place in the Culpina valley and asked a local lad who claimed to know where it was, but they got lost within a few yards.

The next picture showed a typical family on the move – a gentleman on a donkey at the rear, the children on another one at the front and the wife on foot! Plants of *Lobivia ferox* were strongly spined. They looked dark and sandblasted and were covered in sand. *Rebutia albopectinata* would have been hard to spot without the red flowers. We saw a “big” Philips electrical store which was just a shack. It was adequate given that there was little electricity around. There was no shortage of plants of *Parodia maassii* and *Parodia ritteri*, with yards and yards of these plants in both Bolivia and Argentina. *Harrisia tetraanthus* had a nice flower. There were lots of Tillandsias around, and some had made a home on a dying *Trichocereus macrogonus*. They also found *Cleistocactus buchteinii* and *Gymnocalycium pflanzii* v. *milaresi* (or possibly v. *zegarrae*). A plant with a pointed red flower was probably a fuchsia – some of the trumpet flowered species do come from Bolivia.

We saw a view of a riverside village and Peter wondered how high the water might get during a big thaw. They found green and chocolate-coloured Echeverias – according to John Pilbeam's recent book, there are several species in Bolivia. They had been told that there were plants of *Rebutia fiebrigii* on a hill with a radio mast, and spent hours climbing to the top, only to find that there was a road on the other side of the hill! We saw a view of the road winding its way up the hill. They proceeded to enter Sucre, the industrial capital of the country. Along the way we saw a farmer with a traditional plough. The stones removed from the soil are used to make walls around their fields. We also saw a large outdoor oven. Other pictures showed Sucre's brewery which makes lager, and Sucre airport.

A fence made from closely planted *Trichocereus* was pretty effective, with the flowers being an added bonus. *Parodia yamparaezi* was hard to see without the red flowers. We also saw the problems caused by Tillandsias – they grow in large numbers on overhead telegraph wires and when wet they can weigh a lot and bring the line down. Therefore people are employed to regularly clear them off the wires. White stones in the cliff spelt out “Welcome to Tarabuco”. They found *Lobivia cinnabarina* and also a cristate form. There were quite a few cristates in this area and perhaps cattle in the area tread on the plants. We also saw *Echinopsis sucrensis*. A “Tillandsia tree” consisted of about 7 -8 different types growing on a host tree which was obscured.

At Padilla we saw ladies washing clothes and this also looked liked where the kids got washed. The place they stayed at had an undulating roof and a marbled pattern on the ceiling – due to water stains!

They found *Sulcorebutia crispata* in flower and several specimens of *Gymnocalycium pflanzii*. We have bluebell copses in this country – there they had a copse of Vrieseas with their red flower spikes. *Vatricania guentheri* (now *Espostoa*) was quite tall and had formed a cephalium on top. Having a 4 wheeled vehicle, Brian thought they could drive anywhere but they got stuck. Feeling guilty, he walked back to the last village they had passed, and was lucky enough to come across some Danish doctors who had a vehicle with a winch on it. They persuaded them to rescue them, but the episode still ate up 5-6 hours. Carrying on the next morning, they came across another road block where a small lorry had broken down and was being pushed onto a hill so that it could get a piggy-back ride on the back of a much larger truck. It was all a bit precarious with only a yard of space at the front of the large truck and the cliff side.

Moving on to Tarabuco we saw the market place where vegetables and spices and chillies were being sold. There was also brightly dyed wool to make some nice blankets. The hardware shop was quite impressive. We also saw their version of public transport – they half fill the lorries with cargo, then put some boards across and let people climb on board.

When plants of *Neocardenasia herzogii* are small (5 feet or less) they are heavily spined, but as they grow larger and are able to withstand grazing, they stop growing the spines. Their flowers grow from peduncles which flower year after year and get bigger and blacker. A golden spined *Roseocereus tetraanthus* was 6 feet tall, and we also saw an

opuntia with an orange flower. Another cristate they came across was *Echinopsis calorubra*. Travelling on, they encountered a hold-up when they found a lorry load of grit dumped on the middle of road with no advance warning signs. They had to stop for  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour until this was shifted. He's been told that the roads have improved since then.

He had assumed that *Sulcorebutia swabodae* always had a light coloured body but he found both light and dark-bodied forms. They also came across *Sulcorebutia purpurea*. We saw some ladies carrying wood and Peter repeated that it's the women who seem to do most of the work. They stayed at a reasonable hotel in Aiquile, although health and safety might have some concerns about the kitchen. A plant he described as *Sulcorebutia* sp. nova de Aiquile might just be a form of *S. mentosa*. We saw a shot of spines collecting condensation from the overnight mist and then the spectacular bromeliad *Puya raimondii* which was 30 feet tall and produces millions and millions of seeds. The plant is monocarpic and dies after flowering.

Quiabentia are related to opuntia and eventually grow into large plants. *Corryocactus melanotrichus* was day flowering and had red flowers - others in this genus tend to be white-flowered. They also found *Sulcorebutia steinbachii*. Moving on to Cochabamba, we saw *Sulcorebutia tiraquensis bicolorispina*. This area is the origin of this vegetable and there were many different varieties on sale at the local market. Botanist Martin Cardenas was a Professor at Cochabamba University and was a world expert on potatoes and he knew a bit about cacti too. In Cochabamba, Peter met up with a child he was sponsoring - Orlando Cortejas. Brian gave him a sweater and Peter gave him a satchel and he was really chuffed. Orlando did very well and after his national service, he went through Cochabamba University and is now an engineer. At the Christmas party, only one of the Bolivians spoke any English. The roast chicken for lunch was shared with about 50 children

At the Martin Cardenas botanical gardens, we started with a picture of a wheel. For some reason the locals are obsessed with them and put them in their gardens. We saw South American swans with black heads. Aloes were growing here but obviously not natives. The cacti have been horribly neglected since Cardenas died and all the big ones have been ruined because people have carved messages onto them. We saw a variegated canna, and a variegated oleander. A condor with a wingspan of 8-9 feet was stuck in a small cage, with no space to stretch its wings - this was sickening to see. We ended with a

shot taken on Boxing day of students from Cochabamba University all ready for a party with food and drink in hand.

Llamas are icons of Bolivia and Peter mentioned that the animals are marked with a ribbon and position of ribbon identifies who owns them. We saw *Echinopsis cochabambensis*, *Trichocereus*, *Cleistocactus* and even a maidenhair fern. The Cochabamba to La Paz tarmac road was the first section of tarmac road after three weeks of rough roads, so there was no chance they'd stop for the kids begging along the roadside. At Panduro there was a fiesta, and we saw a musical instrument made from bamboo recorders. The ladies were in their best skirts and wearing bowler hats. And they gave a couple of musicians a lift. Along the road they passed some lovely *Lobivia pentlandii*. They encountered a sudden hailstorm and could see mountains with snow caps in the distance. They went past La Paz onto Lake Titicaca and Sorata. The white spots on the hills were villages and the lines were field divisions. The farmers here grow potatoes and maize at 14000 ft on these hills. At Sorata the hotel they stayed in was formerly the house of the Spanish governor. They saw hummingbirds here. *Lobivia maximiliana* had a bicoloured red/yellow flower, rather like an Oroya.

A photo taken from car featured white clumps of *Tephrocactus floccosa* - there were millions of them. They gave a lady a lift and she didn't speak a word of English and called them the three Caballeros (gentleman). Given their state, it must have been quite an ordeal for her to travel with them. Peter spoke to her in Spanish and asked her the name of some plants she was carrying - and she replied Gladioli. We saw some blue lupins in the wild. At Lake Titicaca, a ferry goes across a narrow piece of the lake. Buses can go on the ferry but it all looked pretty precarious. We saw a shot of the lake with Peru in the distance. In the 1940s, Thor Heyerdahl made a balsa wood raft and sailed from Peru to islands in the Pacific. His grandson Olav was in the area and working on a similar project.

In the Valley of the Moon just outside La Paz, they found *Oreocereus fossulatus*. We also saw a viscacha which is a rodent with a long tail which resembles a rabbit in appearance. We ended with a shot of the three travellers returning to Heathrow. All three had a beard by the end and they smelt a bit because there was no where to shave and washing facilities were few and far between.

Vinay Shah

## Table Show Results

There were 30 entries in the May table show.

	<b>Cacti – Opuntia</b>	<b>Succulents – Haworthia/ Gasteria</b>
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Opuntia inivicta	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia parksiana
	(2) T Smith Opuntia vestita	(2) T Smith Haworthia sp.
	(3) A Sheader Astrocylindropuntia lagopus	(3) B Turner Haworthia cuspidate
Intermediate	(1) A Sheader Puna subterranea	(1) B Beckerleg Haworthia maughanii
	(2) A Sheader Pterocactus valentinii	(2) T Radford Haworthia sp.
	(3) A Sheader Puna subterranea	(3) J Roskilly Gasteria batesiana

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, and will feature Tony Roberts speaking on the topic of propagating cacti and succulents. Getting plants “for free” ought to be a topic which appeals to everyone and we are fortunate that many of the plants we grow in our collections can be persuaded to produce new plants with only a small amount of effort.

The July Table Show will consist of the **Echinopsis** group (cacti) and the **Aloe** group (succulents). 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 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 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Isle of Wight	“Patagonia” - Anna & Martin Sheader
Sat 18 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Portsmouth	“Cotyledon, Adromischus, Tylecodon” - Derek Tribble
Fri 1 <sup>st</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Branch Dinner @ Luzborough Inn, near Romsey
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Southampton	“Propagation of Cacti & Succulents” - Tony Roberts
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Isle of Wight	to be confirmed - Paul Klaassen
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Portsmouth	“What I did Last Winter” - Paul Klaassen”
Mon 18 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Tue 26 <sup>st</sup>	Jul-	New Forest	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 28 <sup>th</sup>			
Sat 30 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Titchfield	Display / Plant Sales @ Solent Fuchsia Society Show, Titchfield
Tue 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Aug	Southampton	Cultivation Masterclass - John Pilbeam
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening at Robin Goodredge's
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Portsmouth	No meeting

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