

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

I suppose we are now in the "summer" months although it does not feel like it on some days! I have been watering the plants more regularly and I guess it's also time to give them some feed.

In terms of flowers, several of my cacti (Rebutias, Weingartias, Mammillarias, Notocactus) have flowered, and I've also had flowers on Haworthias, Aloes, Gasterias, Aeoniums and Echeverias.

## Announcements

We had a successful day at Sparsholt last month. The weather couldn't really make up its mind and there was some rain at the end of the day but we had a steady stream of visitors and plant sales were reasonable.

I have put out forms for people to register their interest in the branch trips to Bristol (end-June) and Oxford (end-July).

For those members who missed last month's cultivation meeting, a free plant was handed out to all present, to grow on and bring along to future cultivation meetings. If you were absent last month, David may have a few plants left over so you can collect yours this month. The plant is *Gymnocalycium stenopleurum* (previously known as *G. friedrichii*.)

## Last Month's Meeting

### Cultivation & Propagation Workshop

David started off the first set of discussions and these were about the winter we have just endured. We had snow a number of times, including all the way into March, and David said his electricity bill was 50% higher this winter. It seems that most people use electricity to heat their plants, with Bruce being the only person who uses propane. There had been a propane shortage during the winter but Bruce said he hadn't had any issues - the cold spells we had were not for very long and his overall gas usage wasn't much more than normal.

In some eastern European countries where they experience severe winters, they actually pack their plants away in winter. Fortunately, here on the south coast, our cold spells are shorter and less severe. David said he had gone through countless white plastic heaters over the years. Ben said he had tried an "Apollo" brand but that didn't seem any better - all 4 he bought had developed faults. It seems that none of these heaters are designed for continuous operation for more than a year. Alice said she had got a 2500 watt industrial heater from Lidl and that seemed to be well made. It was agreed that the best position for a heater would be on the ground, so that the hot air would rise from ground level and avoid leaving any cold spots. Bruce mentioned he had some tubular heaters which were over 60 years old and still in working condition! Those heaters don't have any moving parts, so there's not much to go wrong with them. Mike Shaw wondered whether having a concrete base to a greenhouse would add mass and keep temperatures more stable.

Jane said she had an old precast concrete shed with a solid floor which was converted by having a doubled glazed roof fitted, along with side and front glazed panels and she could now grow almost anything in there.

David asked what about the late spring that we had? Did people water later? It seemed everybody answered yes to that. In fact Paul Klaassen hadn't even started watering yet. Are things growing later as well? Adrian repeated some advice that Mark

Jakins had given him - "When a plant is in flower, water it". David mentioned he had noticed that some genera - like *Rebutia* - can abort their flower buds if they are watered too early. But he hadn't noticed that with other genera of cacti. What about repotting? Had anybody repotted any plants this year? New member Sharon mentioned that she had repotted a few things. David mentioned that some people have carpet in their greenhouse - he was referring to Sandy Wooller from Portsmouth, whose greenhouse was immaculate.

He had brought in some of the Tesco cat litter that people used as a soilless compost, or for mixing into soil. Rebecca mentioned that the design of the bag had changed, so David's example was an old version of the bag. The important thing to check is that the cat litter type is "low dust lightweight cat litter". It's made from Danish "moler" river clay. The material used by Bonsai growers (*akadama*) is essentially the same thing but it costs more. I myself had actually started to use the Tesco cat litter to root *Haworthias* and had done a few experiments with measuring the weight of seed trays containing the clay and plants to try and assess how often it needed watering.

David moved the discussion on to hardy plants - does anyone grow anything outside, successfully? Jane mentioned *Aloe strigulichila*. Ben said he had been quite a few *Agaves* and *Opuntias* outside - he uses a polycarbonate cover to provide some additional protection. With *Agave parryi*, the main plant was fine, sometimes the pups die. *Agave ferox* is more tender but it had also survived. With *Opuntia fragilis*, different clones seemed to fare differently. David said that *Agave americana* didn't survive for him, his grew to 5 feet across and then both died during a cold and winter, around 10 years ago. Ted Smith has a variegated one outside and his has survived so far. Paul said *Austrocactus* come from the southern tip of Argentina and are supposed to be tough so they should survive - he has seen them growing in snow as well as on the Chilean coast, at temperatures of 40°C.

Richard mentioned that at Wisley just outside the Alpine house, they have *Lobivias*, *Echinocereus* and *Mammillaria* plants growing in various raised bed with a single sheet of twin wall polycarbonate over the plants to keep water off - there is no other protection round the sides. Michelle, who lives near Compton Acres mentioned she had seen an *Echinocereus grusonii* being grown outside in a bed and it had survived without being marked. David thought there aren't many cacti other than *Opuntias* that can survive outdoors, mainly due to the combination of cold and wet. He mentioned that

some *Echeverias* are cold hardy and there was a recently article by David Quail in the journal. Mark Jakins - *Astrophytum myriostigma* came through the winter and also some of the ground cover mesembs. Dot England said that one of her *Aeoniums* had suffered some damage this year during the cold spell we had in March.

David started the second half by mentioning that the temporary EEC ban on Imidacloprid, the active element of earlier formulations of Provado was going to be enforced. People may still have supplies of the older versions of Provado, but the old formulations won't be coming back to the shops. Imidacloprid damages the central nervous system of the insects and there are risks to humans as well. With the old Provado formulations, it was available in different forms (granules, liquid concentrate and spray). The granule form is considered moderately poisonous and it's considered highly toxic if inhaled. Do a search for "Pesticides for Home Gardeners RHS" to find a PDF file of the RHS factsheet on the latest pesticides available in the UK, and their active ingredients.

David discussed some of the other items we had talked about at previous meetings. He had brought in his bottle of Neem oil and the oil had solidified - it has a melting point above room temperature. Alice has the most experience of using it and she mentioned that it should still be usable, after mixing it with some warm water. David had also purchased the diatomaceous earth but he hadn't used this either yet! This material is supposed to work by damaging the insect's exoskeleton. The other compound we had discussed last year was SBK Plant Invigorator. It's supposed to make plants grow better and also deal with insects, but there's very little information on how it does that. David thought he had read somewhere that it seems to suffocate the insects. Anyway those people in the audience who had tried it seemed to have positive feedback about it.

Ivor was next and he discussed about some of the plants he grows outdoors. *Sempervivums* (also called houseleeks) are rosette forming plants and there are plenty of varieties worth trying. The plants provide effective ground cover and spread naturally by offsetting. The plants do die after they flower, but by then, the main plant should have formed a number of offsets. They go through a variety of colours as the seasons change, so plants can look quite different in the spring and the summer. Ivor had brought along several examples. *Sempervivum* 'Pittoni' has unusual pointed leaves which are tipped in red. *Sempervivum arachnoideum* is always popular - it has fine hairs growing between the leaf tips, giving the appearance that the plant is covered

in cobwebs! The plants don't need much care or attention and there are hundreds of named varieties and cultivars to choose from, and there are some specialist nurseries in the UK who offer a good assortment of these varieties.

Jovibarbas are similar looking plants and are closely related to Sempervivums, but the new offsets form in a different way and sometimes grow further away from the parent plant. *Jovibarba heuffelii* and its varieties are some of the best ones to look for. The flowers are bell shaped and have pale yellow petals. With Echeverias, he had grown a few outdoors. Some of these had got soaked and were under water in December. Some got marked but they seemed to survive. Other Echeverias had actually grown as well outdoors as they did indoors. Other plants he had grown outdoors successfully included a mesembryanthemum which was a Bergeranthus species. *Crassula sarcocaulis* is also hardy and forms a nice little shrub which is suitable for treating as a bonsai. He had also grown *Sedum variegata* and *Sedum glaucophyllum* outdoors.

Before we ended with Ivor, he mentioned he had brought along 4 different Staedtler marker pens. These included "permanent" markers as well as the Lumocolor series and Staedtler also make a "Lumocolor permanent garden" marker. He hadn't really done enough testing to figure out which of these was the best. Indeed, finding a marker which will still be legible after several years of exposure to water and light is a major headache, but the Lumocolor permanent garden marker is supposed to be UV resistant so it is probably going to be the best choice. Other options are metal labels which you scratch or engrave the name onto. Wilko also sell black labels with a white wax crayon and these should last a while.

David now covered the plants which had been handed out by the branch in previous years and which members had brought in for this meeting. *Echeveria lilacina* was one of the first plants we handed out, back in 2011! Some of the ones here were offsets or cuttings from the original plant. Mike's plant was a cutting from the original and it was more pink in colour than some of the other specimens. Bruce's plant was well grown and several inches across. Of course our previous members Sue Wilson and Mark Larter had shown us some excellent specimens of this plant in previous years, but they had moved to the Isle of Wight.

With *Mammillaria albilanata*, some nice examples had been brought in, with differing amounts of wool on them, depending on how much light they were given. *Mammillaria glassii* f. *ascensionis* also

displayed some variety. Rebutia "Sunrise" was handed out a couple of years ago and some growers had done quite well, with the plants having moved on a couple of pot sizes and also covered in lots of buds. *Mammillaria microhelix* (also called *M. heliopsis*, depending flower colour) were mostly solitary but it will clump up over time. *Echeveria cuspidata* v. *zaragozae* was handed out last year and the plants had grown a couple of inches larger.

*Frithia pulchra* is a mesemb which can take a lot of water during the growing season, so David's advice was to not be afraid of watering it. There were several *Euphorbia obesas* brought in and David commented how some had male flowers and others were female. Michelle's plant of this had grown into a very odd shape!

The final speaker was Bruce who would talk about Haworthias. His interest in the genus started many years ago. After his greenhouses were built, he had some space left over and he had a think about what to grow - and he decided to choose Haworthias. He had brought in a number of different species to illustrate what a wide variety of plants the genus encompassed.

*Haworthia scabra* is a slow growing dark green species and it needs patience. *Haworthia sordida* is closely related and is also very slow growing and tends to remain solitary - the plant Bruce had brought in was 20 years old. *Haworthia comptoniana* is varied and can have nicely patterned leaves with attractive "window" markings. Different clones tend to vary in size. Next was a selected Japanese clone of *Haworthia picta*. This is now considered as a variant of *Haworthia emelyae*. His plant of *Haworthia maughanii* dated from 1988 - it forms round leaves with clear tips which look like they have been sliced or cut close to the ground. *Haworthia truncata* is closely related and the leaves have a rectangular shape rather than round. Both species are slow growing and take many years to form decent sized clumps.

*Haworthia bolusii* can vary in appearance and some forms can have very feathery leaves. *Haworthia arachnoidea* is closely related and it has fine hairs emanating from the leaves. *Haworthia aranea* is similar and can perhaps be considered a subspecies. *Haworthia setata gigas* is part of the same grouping of plants and some can have attractive golden "spines" curving over the plant. *Haworthia Blackburniae* can vary in appearance but the plant Bruce had brought in looked just like long strands of grass - indeed it would be very hard to find this growing out in habitat. With *Haworthia lockwoodii* he had two different clones and the amount of "die-

back" within the leaves can vary - some forms can look just like wisps of papers, others can be more green.

*Haworthia* "Hakuma" was a selected Japanese hybrid which is related to the *Haworthia emelyae* - it often has a reddish appearance if grown in sun. The plant of *Haworthia pumila* he had brought in was covered in a nice series of white dots - the patterning is quite variable so it's always worth being on the lookout for nice clones. *Haworthia badia* has glossy leaves - his example had dark shining leaves but the colouring of individual plants can vary - some are highly prized and it is often used by hybridizers.

*Haworthia pubescens* forms small rosettes and can be quite variable in the amount of "hair" on the leaves. *Haworthia springbokvlakensis* is a slow growing plant with unusual flat leaves with glassy-topped surfaces. *Haworthia reinwardtii* v. *kaffirdriftensis* forms upright columns of stems and the individual leaves have a series of white markings on their outer surface, giving the whole plant an attractive appearance.

Vinay Shah

### Table Show Results

There were just 2 entries in the May table show, and 5 entries for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – 3 Cacti	Succulents – 3 Succulents
Open	(1) -	(1) -
	(2) -	(2) -
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg	(1) B Beckerleg
	(2) -	(2) -
	(3) -	(3) -

Cacti/Succulent in Flower
(1) B Beckerleg Mammillaria bombycina
(2) P Down Gasteraloe "Green Ice"
(3) T Radford Pelargonium oblongatum

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Books and things

### New books in the library

Last month I mentioned that Ian Acton had kindly donated three books to the Southampton branch library, and I described one (the Cites Cactaceae Checklist). The other two are much more readable, and could both be described as "coffee-table books", being large and square and full of lots of gorgeous colour photographs. Together, they cover the natural history of the northern half of the west coast of South Africa, from the area of Nieuwoudtville, Vanrhynsdorp and the Knersvlakte north to the Richtersveld on the border with Namibia, which follows the Orange River. Neither book concentrates entirely on succulents, including fine landscape views and other plants such as bulbs. However, this is not to imply that they lack good reading matter - there is much information about succulents in both books:

- **"Richtersveld – The Enchanted Wilderness"** by Graham Williamson (2000), 258 pp. This is the original edition: there is a revised 2010 edition. Keith Larkin wrote on his web-site "this sumptuously illustrated book covers the geology, people, climate, survival strategies floristic zones of the plants and fauna of the area, written by an expert and excellent writer" and I agree entirely. The book starts (after a foreword by David Attenborough) with a description of the landscape, geology, history and people of the area, followed by the climate and examples of the adaptations which plants and animals have acquired to enable them to survive in the harsh conditions. After that, the floristic zones of the Richtersveld are outlined, which introduces 90 pages of illustrated notes on the genera and species of plants found in the area, arranged taxonomically. A large proportion of these are succulents. Animals are not forgotten, with 30 pages on invertebrates and vertebrates.
- **"Namaqualand – A Succulent Desert"** by Richard Cowling and Shirley Pierce, with photographs by Colin Paterson-Jones (1999), 156 pp. This book covers a much wider area, and therefore cannot go into as much detail as the preceding book. It also lacks the organised notes on genera and species of plants, focussing instead on the landscape, explorers and local people, the floral areas and the ecology and adaptations of the plants found in them. Nevertheless, many species are named in the text and

illustrated, so the book will be of great interest to those who have visited the area or aspire to do so in future, and may help us to understand more about the origin and the needs of the South African succulents in our collections.

### **Read All About It!**

Bob Potter is talking to us about Ethiopia in the June meeting. None of the books in our library focusses solely on Ethiopia, but we have several books on succulent genera such as *Aloe* which will no doubt appear in his talk. More directly relevant is “**Aloes and Lilies of Ethiopia and Eritrea**” by Sebsebe Demissew and Inger Nordal, 358 pp., which is available online as a PDF file for reading or downloading at:

[http://nhm2.uio.no/botanisk/nbf/temp/Sebsebe et Nordal 2010 Lilies – SCREEN 20091220.pdf](http://nhm2.uio.no/botanisk/nbf/temp/Sebsebe_et_Nordal_2010_Lilies_-_SCREEN_20091220.pdf) It appears to be a preliminary or pre-publication version of “Aloes and Other Lilies of Ethiopia and Eritrea” published by Shama Books in 2010.

*Richard White*

## **Next Month’s Meeting**

Our next meeting will be held on July 3<sup>rd</sup> and it will feature a talk by Terry Smale on “Cultivation of Cacti and Succulents”. Terry runs his own nursery and is an active member of the Mesemb Study Group, and his previous presentations to the branch have been well received – I am sure we will receive some useful advice and information.

The July Table Show will consist of **Gymnocalycium Group** (cacti) and **Stapelia 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 *Gymnocalycium* group includes *Brachycalycium*, *Gymnocalycium* and *Neowerdermannia*.

The *Stapelia* group is very large and includes subgroups such as *Caralluma*, *Echidnopsis* and *Hoodia*. It includes plants from *Caralluma*, *Duvalia*, *Huernia*, *Orbea*, *Piarranthus*, *Stapelia*, *Tavaresia*, *Echidnopsis*, *Hoodia*, *Larryleachia*, *Psuedolithos* and *Trichocaulon*.

## **Forthcoming Events**

Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Portsmouth	Christmas & Easter Cacti - Schlumbergera, Rhipsalidopsis, Hatiora (Dr Mark Preston)
Sat 30 <sup>th</sup>	Jun	Southampton	Branch visit to South West Cactus Mart, Portishead Youth Centre, Bristol
Tue 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Cultivation of Cacti & Succulents - Terry Smale
Sat 14 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Isle of Wight	Keith Grantham Slide Show – SW USA 3
Sat 21 <sup>st</sup>	Jul	Portsmouth	Mexico 3 (Cliff Thompson)
Sun 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Garden Party - hosted by Alice Jankovec, West Moors, Dorset
Tue 24 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 26 <sup>th</sup>			
Sat 28 <sup>th</sup>	Jul	Southampton	Branch visit to Oxford Branch Show - Old Mill Hall, Grove, Wantage OX12 7LBW
Tue 7 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Southampton	Plant Focus Evening – Mammillaria & Euphorbia
Sat 11 <sup>th</sup>	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening (Members only)
Sat 18 <sup>st</sup>	Aug	Portsmouth	No meeting

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