# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

## July 2004


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# Editorial

After an extended dry spell we've finally had some rain over the last couple of weeks. Everything in the garden was starting to suffer and wither away so I was glad to see the rain, although I think we've had enough now!

Plants in my conservatory seem to be doing fine at the moment. I have paid a bit more attention to watering and feeding this year, and this, along with the absence of any really hot spells seems to have helped the plants. Currently, there has been a second flush of flowers on several Rebutias, Gymnocalyciums and Mammillarias.

# Announcements

The **Southampton Festival** took place over the weekend and the event was a success for us. Despite the unpredictable weather and the distraction of several sporting events on television, attendances were reasonably good and our plant sales table had busy spells on both days. Our display won a Silver prize which was accompanied by some cash!

On Sunday 25th July, one of our longest serving members **Ken Halstead** will be selling off his collection of plants (between 2pm and 4pm). The plants have been accumulated over many years o many of them are mature specimens. Ken will hopefully be present at today's meeting to provide some additional information, including directions to his house. (Ken lives in East Boldre, which is just under a mile from Beaulieu, off the B3054).

There are a number of events later this month:

Firstly, on Saturday 17th July, Portsmouth Branch will be hosting the **Zone 11 Quiz**. We need volunteers for Southampton's team, and of course any supporters will be most welcome!

On the following day (Sunday 18th July), **Oxford** Branch will be holding a **Cactus Show** at Witney, in association with the Mammillaria society. The event includes a lecture by Wolfgang Plein. Schedules for the show are available from the front table.

The following weekend (24-25th July), RHS Wisley will be hosting a **Cactus and Succulent Weekend. A**s well as lectures and demonstrations there will be cacti and succulent nurseries, suppliers and societies mounting displays, giving advice and selling a wide range of plants and accessories. Further details are available from the front table.

Finally at the end of the month, our branch will be manning a display and sales tables at the **New Forest and Hampshire County Show,** on the dates of 27-28-29th July. The show venue is New Park, which is situated on the stretch of the A337 between Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst. Entrance to the show is quite pricey (£12 for adults on show days, although there are discounts for booking in advance) but hopefully we will receive some passes to let exhibitors and helpers in for free. According to their website, this show attracts 100,000 visitors over 3 days.

# Last Month's Meeting

### *Plants of Interest*

In keeping with the main subject for this evening's talk, Paul Klaassen had brought along a large specimen of *Ferocactus pilosus* which he had purchased from a European nursery for 25 Euros (£17). When he bought the plant, it was already pot bound, with spines hanging over the edge of the pot, and it had been quite a task to repot something so ferocious. The flowers are cup

shaped but did not seem to open fully - John Pilbeam confirmed that this was normal behaviour for this species.

Philip Clemow then took the stage to discuss the plants he had brought along. *Gymnocalycium mesapotamicum* is usually single headed but his plant had formed a cluster. The plant had 6 white flowers. Next was *Notocactus rutilans* which Philip considered unusual because it is one of the few notocacti which doesn't have yellow flowers; the flowers are a silky pink and very impressive.

Next were some examples of Weingartia. *W. erinacea* has yellow flowers and the plant was covered with lots of wool. *Weingartia trollii* appears to be variable – he had sowed a packet of seed and had obtained about a dozen plants. The flower colours in this batch included orange, red, yellow and pink. The two specimens that he had brought along were 11 years old but they are slow growing and had remained single headed and were still in 4" inch pots.

Next was a cristate *Rebutia heliosa* (which we had seen a month earlier, as an entry in the mini show). The plant had now flowered and since the flowers emerged from the base of the plant, the cristate growth didn't interfere with the flowers.

The next plant, *Mammillaria rhodantha*, appeared to be growing dichotomously. Philip was sure this process had started suddenly this year, since the plant had a normal single head last year.

Finally we saw *Mammillaria microhelia* which Philip had discarded and put under bench a couple of years ago. It had now formed several offsets, along the two main stems and these could probably be used to start off some nice new plants. He liked the plant because of the neat spination and the little yellow flowers. However, the base of the old plant went brown and unsightly and he wondered whether this was to be expected. Peter Down said it was just a natural occurrence. John Pilbeam chipped in saying that things that were old did tend to get "a bit shabby round the bottom"!

Philip handed over to Derek Prior who had brought along some "colourful" plants. First was *Echinocereus polyacanthus* var. *densus* which featured reddish orange flowers. The flowers remain open for several days. Next was a succulent, *Scilla violacea* which also goes under the name of *Ledebouria socialis*. Derek said he grew it for the attractive leaves, which are green and covered in darker green spots, with a purple underside. The green and white flowers are tiny but quaint.

Next was a *Pachyphytum* with green-tipped multicoloured (pink / orange / yellow) flowers. Derek mentioned he has another variety at home with more attractive silvery leaves, but the flowers on that were yellow and green only. We then saw a *Sedum* which would be easy to mistake for an Echeveria when not in flower. The plant had dainty white flowers and Derek said that the flower stems also look attractive as they formed.

*Echeveria* cv 'Doris Taylor' is a cross between *E. setosa* and *E. pulvinata* and it has large flowers compared to other echeverias. The leaves are hairy. Next was another hairy echeveria, with orange yellow flowers and blueish leaves. This was an ISI distributed plant (F042). *E. setosa* var *deminuata* had similar flowers but the orange colouring was deeper. The next echeveria was unnamed. It had a short flower stem and Derek wondered if anyone in the audience knew what it might be. *Echeveria tolimanensis* has fleshy leaves which are different in appearance from most other echeverias.

Derek said he had three different types of *Pachyveria* (hybrids between pachyphytum and echeveria). The example he had brought in was cv. "Kew Marble", which had green and white flowers flecked with tiny red dots.

Finally, Derek's pièce de resistance for the evening was *Rechsteineria leucotricha*. This plant is sometimes called *Sinningia leucotricha* and is a gesneriad with tubular red flowers which sit on the velvety foliage. It remains beautiful even after flowering because of the leaves.

## *Ferocactus*

John Pilbeam started his talk by mentioning that he is working on a new Ferocactus book (which David Neville is laying out). The book is being produced with society backing and is due out soon. The whole project was inspired by Derek Bowdery who had been nagging him for a while.

Although Ferocactus might make you think of large plants which only flower after dozens of years of cultivation, there are some species which will flower at 3-4 inches. John mentioned that the pictures in the book would be better then the slides he was going to show. Many of the photos

were taken in habitat and there were some wonderful plants featured.

In the talk today, he was going to give us a broadly alphabetical walk through the genus. He started off with a picture of Derek Bowdery. With strong UV light at an altitude of 6000 feet, Derek had acquired a good suntan, perhaps enough to have difficulty getting back into the US after their trip into Mexico!

He didn't have a picture of *F. alamosanus*, so we commenced with a photo of a cultivated plant of *F. reppenhagenii* which is a subspecies of *F. alamosanus*. It was beautifully spined. They had hoped to see this plant in habitat, but a week before they were due to venture out, they were told that police and military were out in numbers in the cannabis fields so they decided not to go.

The featured plant was pineapple sized, so somewhat smaller than Paul Klaassens's Plants of Interest exhibit. This species flowers at 7-8 inches, and they need more root room then you would think. We saw a close up of the fruit but sometimes this was hard to extract, especially if the spines were long. John mentioned that Ferocacti have lovely coloured fruit which ranged from red and purple through to white

Next, we saw a picture of the other person that accompanied him on the trip to Mexico, Bill Weightman, who is a great photographer, and a good grower in his own right.

*Ferocactus ancanthodes* (prior name is *F. cylindraceus*) grows in the Anzo-Borrego desert, in the southern part of California and Arizona. The featured plant was *F. cylindraceus* ssp *cylindraceus*. *Ferocatus tortulispinus* is the Baja California variety of *F. cylindraceus*. The twisted spines differentiate this from its relations. It is capable of flowering when a few inches in diameter.

John mentioned that if you do happen to buy plants of this species which have been raised in the Canaries, it's difficult to keep the spines stout. Also, the plants do need quite a bit of feeding - they were quite greedy plants.

The straight spined form is *F. lecontei* from Southern Arizona. It has red or yellow spines or sometimes in between, and grows 2' 6" to 3' tall. This plant is worth growing for the spines alone. A photo of a younger plant showed nice development of the spines.

We saw a couple more slides of *F. cylindraceus* ssp. *lecontei*, followed by *F. cylindraceus* ssp. *tortulispinus.* The latter remains small and does not get above 12"-15" tall. They found it only in one small valley. The flower is more yellow.

John didn't have a slide of *F. diguetti* at hand, but mentioned he did possess one showing a plant 4.5 metres tall, so this is one the largest-growing Ferocactus species. Eighty years ago, the same plant was 4 metres high, so it is a very slow growing plant. We also saw *F. diguetti* as a seedling, up to football size. This species has nice spination and is well worth growing.

If you did have a league table of which was the most boring Ferocactus, the next plant might be a candidate. *F. echidne* (like a porcupine) is straight-spined (and so not as dangerous as some of the others). It does clusters well, and flowers when quite small. They saw it in several places, so it is quite widespread. There is some debate about a variety *victoriensis* – the plants do intermingle – it's just a question on how sharp the ribs are, and the length of spine, but the variety seems valid. It's a low growing plant and will flower at 6-8 inches across.

In his view, the form known as *F. rafaelnsis* is just a different form of *F. echidne* with slightly narrower ribs. It occurs at Minas St. Rafael (a semi-worked mine), a place which is very difficult to get to.

On to *F. emoryi*, the variety from the south (Baja California) is variety *rectispinus* (the old name is *F. covillei*). The plant had very long spines – some 10" long and he couldn't extract seed even with both sides of a penknife extended! It was a superb plant, around 4 to 5' tall. Derek has flowered this at 15-18 inches tall. It is straight spined with a slight curve at the tip occasionally.

In Oaxaca (pronounced "Wahaca"), they were driven around by the cousin of their friend. He seemed to be only 14 years old and appeared to be determined to test the car's braking and suspension. On one of the rides, John thought he saw *Ferocactus robustus* – he turned around to talk to Derek and found that he had his eyes shut! John had a quiet word with the driver to slow down so that they could spot plants, especially at the bends with crosses and flowers! The plant he had seen was actually *F. flavovirens*. The heads were about 6 inches across. It tends to grow in the shade in gulches or natural washes. There were no

sign of flowers or old flower remains. It clusters heavily, but not as much as *F. robustus*, as we would see later in the talk.

If you only want to grow one ferocactus, it must be *Ferocactus fordii*. The plant in circulation and labelled *F. fordii* is now named variety *borealis*, which means northerly. To see the proper *F. Fordii* is quite a sight since it has much longer spines. It is not in cultivation as far as he knows, although he does have 2 seedlings in his greenhouse which he is trying to grow on. It is tough to grow when young.

*F. fordii* v. *borealis* occurs one third of the way down the Baja peninsula, near the coast and near the road. The flowers vary – from pinkly purple - to deep purple to pale pink. It is fully grown at 8" and usually remains solitary although it does offset occasionally. He has seen it in flower at 3" across in a 3.5" pot. Another photo showed one in the wild, bearing a pale pink flower. It was growing in very sandy/loose soil. They did not find any seed and suspected that ants take the seeds as they are attracted by the jelly in the seed pods. The biggest one they saw was football sized, with centrals only 1 inch or so long. We also saw one in cultivation in San Diego.

The real *F. fordii* proper has much longer central spines. The plant they found had no flowers, even though they had seen flowers on the northern variety.

Found in the centre of Mexico, *F. glaucescens* gets to 1 foot across. It grows in very little soil - in slabs of rock just growing from crevices with just a little bit of debris. This is a very dry area and the roots are sent a long way and can extend several feet. It's a bit grubby round the base. The next shot showed one just starting to offset. It will flower at 7-8 inches across. When it flowers in cultivation it is a knockout, with the blue colouring of the body setting off the beautiful yellow flowers. It offsets neatly round the base and makes a nice cluster. This species has white fruits.

Not often seen in cultivation but beautiful at any size is *Ferocactus gracilis*. The featured plant was 3 to 4 feet tall but it can get to 6-7 feet. Derek had to stop whenever they saw it. There was a *Lophocereus schotti* in the background. It clusters eventually, but is slow growing. We also saw a seedling with long red spines - 6-7" across, growing in a crack in the rock. It does look nice even when young. A spray of water in greenhouse makes the red colour come out nicely. Another variation is ssp. *coloratus* which occurs further south from the centre of Baja California and has wider spines. Do look for this wide spined form if you can. Derek has got it to flower from seed at about 8" across. The plant benefits from having the soil refreshed and being repotted regularly.

In 1992 John went with Charlie Glass to Oaxaca and Puebla, and found *F. haemantacanthus* growing in fields. The plants were large - 2 feet across, and 2 to 3 feet tall (they eventually get to 5 feet). However, they couldn't find it last year and suspected that the fields may have been cleared out. It has a reddish purple flower. The seed is obscure and the plants difficult to find and difficult to get to. It's not easy from seed either, so worth snapping up if you see it offered.

*Hamatocactus hamatacanthus* is now considered *Ferocactus hamatacanthus*) and grows on the border of the US and Mexico. It's easy to miss since it grows in long grasses which look just like the spines. The photo showed it growing next to a big yucca. The flowers are yellow. *Hamatocactus setispsinus* has been classified as a Thelocactus, and is a much smaller growing plant, with a red-throated yellow flower.

A photo of *F. hamatacanthus* ssp. *sinuatus* in cultivation showed a 10-12 inch tall plant with pure yellow flowers in a 7" inch pot. John remarked that Ferocactus cactus flowers do last a long time, from ten days to a fortnight.

If you like a large plant, then *Ferocactus histrix* may be worth considering. It looks rather like *Echinocactus ingens* – the featured plant was 2' 6" wide. It is wide right from the start - even seedlings are more wide than tall. It has straight yellow spines and flowers for weeks and weeks. Derek has flowered it when 10-12" across.

*F. johnstonianus* is a species from the island of Angel de la Guardia in the gulf of California. It is hard to come across a decent photograph of this yellow spined plant. Seed is now coming out from the US society. It is quite slow but worth the effort; it has good yellow flowers.

After the tea break, John carried on with a photo of *F. johnstonianus*, growing in a garden in California, and looking beautiful. John said that seeds offered in the US society were likely to be from that very plant, which was probably 20 years old.

*F. latispinus* is a cracker which everyone should grow, and is a species which flowers at a reasonable size. The spine colour varies from black to red to yellow. Usually, yellow spined ones give white flowers, and the red/black spined plants have purple flowers. Wide spines are a characteristic feature, and the plants never get very tall. A photo of a plant of this in cultivation had purple flowers and yellow spines which is unusual. The plant was 8 inches across. The spines are thick, strong and dangerous since they don't give way.

When in Mexico last autumn, they had 2-3 main objectives. One of these was to see Echeverias – since he's started work on a book on this genus. Another objective was to find a particular Ferocactus. In Oaxaca they met up with Canadian couple who generously gave up their villa to the visitors. They drove all day 12-14 hours along the coast, right across the south of Oaxaca, then down to the coast and across the south, and then through Guerrero along the coast road. This is very boring and all you see is coconuts. They went into Michoacan and at a place called Playa Azul –they stayed in the best hotel there but this was not up to much. However, in the sunset, the restaurant on the beach was fantastic; they enjoyed sipping drinks and eating fish caught earlier that day - large helpings for just 50p or so!

From there they went up to Infiemillo (which means *hell*, because of the heat). This was the site of a dam, and in the valley they saw *Backebergia militaris* and finally the plant they had really come to see: *Ferocactus lindsayi*. This is very rarely seen in cultivation, and seeds also rarely offered. The road was blocked off - apparently a bridge was down but they set off anyway. They eventually saw the plants on a hillside. Due to his hip, John didn't fancy the climb - but Derek and Bill clambered up the hillside.

It was reputed that this plant flowered in November; the weather there is like our early summer weather - around 80-90°F. One or two of the plants were still coming into flower. The plants were 2'6" - 3' tall, and he thought the small plants around the base were offsets and not seedlings. The plants were tapered and quite narrow at the base, probably because they have to start off in cracks in the rock before they can club out.

There's not much of this plant in cultivation. There were no mature seed pods when they were there, not that you are allowed to collect seeds in Mexico these days. It was cracking plant and rare. Derek did manage to raise one from seed a few years ago - but thieves (who must have been knowledgeable) took this plant. It flowers at around 8". It is straight spined, not hooked.

Another species to recommend for cultivation is *F. macrodiscus*. This grows low on the ground and can probably be run over by a tank – it is tougher than old boots! It grows in Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico, and is probably tender. Most Ferocacti can take low temps since they come from a fair height, although the ones that grow in the southern part of Baja California might be tender e.g. *F. santa-maria*, *F. townsendianus*. This one was a foot across and it grows big , while remaining flat on the ground – macrodiscus means large disc. It makes very little height in the wild. A close up showed nice patterning on the buds. A photo taken at the reference collection at Hollygate showed a plant about 9-10" across, and we also saw one of Derek's plants in a 5" pot, in flower.

*F. macrodiscus* ssp *septentrionalis* (also means northerly) is another big flat plant. The flowers are supposed to be brownish pink, but on this plant they were a standard pink.

He found that *F. peninsulae* is very ordinary in the wild and hence he didn't take many photos of it. Sometimes it has fine hooked spines. Derek has grown it from seeds collected in the 80's and has flowered it when up to a child's football size. It has good spines if grown in good light, and beautiful flowers. *F. townsendianus* is reckoned to be a more southerly subspecies of *peninsulae*. It often turns up in collections of mixed cactus seed.

A plant classified as *F. peninsulae* ssp. *santa-maria* might be a good species in its own right. It is low growing and occurs in one spot on the west coast well down the peninsula of Baja California, so it might be tender. It has yellow flowers compared to the reddish flowers on *F. peninsulae*. It grows in a very arid area right down onto the beach, above the waterline.

We saw Derek posing with *F. pillosus* - which comes in a variety of shapes and sizes and heights. The featured plant was 9-10 feet tall and had solitary stems. More often, you see clusters which can be 10-12 feet across. The flowers are peculiar – the cup shaped flowers never open fully. The plants have beautiful spination and they are propagated by Dutch growers in the Canaries.

We saw another picture featuring a Mexican gardener (even shorter then Derek) posing with a plant at Fitz Maurice's.

*F. pottsi* has sometimes been confused with *F. alamosanus* or *F. reppenhagenii*, which is surprising since although close in geography, they are such different plants. This species does not have much spination. It makes a huge plant, up to 2ft to 2ft 6 high and 18" across. The flowers are quite small.

*F. recurvus* is similar to *F. latispinus* and might be a subspecies, according to Nigel Taylor. However, the flower colour is different and the growth habit is much more columnar, so John believes it is a different species.

One of the other reasons to go to Mexico was to take a photo of a species of which they had no photos at all. The plant in question was *F. recurvus* v. *greenwoodii*. At the site they also found *Ortegocactus macdougallii* - he assured us that the spots which often occur in cultivation also occur in the wild. They found F. *recurvus* v. *greenwoodii* nearby. The latter had a "glassy" yellow flower, which was different from *F. recurvus*, but the buds do look similar and the plants are clearly related. However, the central spines have almost no width at all. The flowers are beautiful. They pulled into a garage to get fuel, and one of the locals told them that they use the plant for sweets. The middle is cored out and soaked in sugar, then chopped up and eaten.

*F. robustus* is a real monster – it grows as big as Volkwagen combi or a camper van. It is not free flowering, with just the odd flower here and there. Each stem is 4-5 inches across, but there are 100's of them in a clump. In cultivation it marks up at the base very easily, and may need some extra heat (it comes from a hot/arid area). Each of the individual stems in the clump is probably a couple of feet tall. He couldn't really recommend it for cultivation.

On the other hand, *F. schwarzii* is quite good for cultivation - he likes the ribs and the markings on them. The length of spination varies from plant to plant. Nice clear yellow flowers are produced when the plant reaches around 6-7" diameter.

*F. viridescens* has yellow or green flowers and he had no idea it made clusters as large as in the featured picture – he was bowled over by it. There were black remains of the old heads in the centre. Usually, it is a solitary plant, and gets to 9-10" across and rarely more than a foot. It doesn't get very tall either. It is a quick grower and we saw another one in flower at 5-6" across.

*F. wislizeni* is common in the Southern states of the US and across the border in Mexico. The one found in the States is *F. wislizeni* and two subspecies (herrerae and tiburonensis) grow further south. *F. wislizeni* gets to 5'-6' tall, and he's been told that there are lots of distorted, monstrose and cristate forms of it in the wild. It flowers at around football size. We also saw a photo showing a ring of yellow fruits.

Ivor mentioned his plant formed buds late in the year and doesn't make it into flower. His plant is now 2 feet tall - it does grow well if you feed it. John suggested a move to California, but Ivor retorted that if he did go, he wouldn't be taking the plant with him!

The *F. wislizeni* ssp. *herrerae* often found in cultivation is a selected form with shorter black spines. The spines are barely hooked. Finally we saw *F. wislizeni* ssp. *tiburoensis* in habitat and also in flower. It is found on Tiburon Island, situated between the Mexican mainland and Baja California.

This was an interesting and well-delivered talk, with John illustrating some of the more important members of this impressive genus. It was also nice to hear of some of the content of the new Ferocactus book he's working on. Hopefully he will have encouraged several of you to try growing some of the species he picked out.

*Vinay Shah*

### *Table Show – June*

There were 13 entries in the June table show.

| | Cacti – Parodia Group | Succulents – Crassula Group |
|---|---|---|
| Open | (1) G Finn<br>Notocactus scopa | (1) I Biddlecombe<br>Echeveria tolimanensis |
| | (2) P Clemow<br>Parodia prestoensis | (2) G Caxton<br>Crassula elegans |
| | (3) I Biddlecombe<br>Parodia ritteri | (3) P Clemow<br>Echeveria tolimanensis |
| Intermediate | (1) G Finn<br>Parodia sp. | (1) I Biddlecombe<br>Crassula hirtipes |
| | (2) P Clemow<br>Parodia gracilis | (2) P Clemow<br>Craasula cv.Jade Necklace |
| | (3) I Biddlecombe<br>Parodia penicillata | (3) J Roskilly<br>Echeveria cv. Topsy Turvey |

*Ivor Biddlecombe*

## Next Month's Meeting

Next month's meeting will feature a talk by Colin Jewell, titled "Colour in my Greenhouse." This meeting was re-arranged after the original speaker was forced to cancel, so do pencil it into your Branch/Zone programmes.

The August Table Show will feature the **Mammillaria Group** (cacti) and the **Euphorbia Group** (succulents).

The **Mammillaria** group contains 13 genera, including *Mammillaria*, *Bartschella*, *Cochemiea*, *Dolichothele*, *Mamillopsis*, *Mammillyodia* and *Solisia*.

The **Euphorbia** group only consists of one genus – *Euphorbia*.

A reminder for Committee members that there will be a Committee meeting on Monday, July 19th.

## Forthcoming Events

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fri 16th Jul | Isle of Wight | "Our Collection" – Tony and Suzanne Mace |
| Sat 17th Jul | Portsmouth | Zone 11 Quiz |
| Sun 18th Jul | Witney | Oxford Branch Cactus Show @ Langdale Hall, Witney |
| Mon 19th Jul | Southampton | Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue |
| Sat-24th Jul | Wisley | Cactus and Succulent Weekend, RHS Wisley |
| Sun 25th Jul | | |
| Tue-27th Jul | Brockenhurst | Display & Sales @ New Forest Show, New Park, Brockenhurst |
| Thu 29th Jul | | |
| Tue 3rd Aug | Southampton | "Colour in my Greenhouse" – Colin Jewell |
| Fri 6th Aug | Isle of Wight | Buffer Supper and Open Evening @ Robin Goodredge |
| Sat- 7th Aug | Ampfield | Display & Sales @ Hillier Visitor Centre, Ampfield |
| Sun 8th Aug | | |
| Sat 21st Aug | Spalding | BCSS National Show, Springfields Exhibition Centre, Spalding, Lincolnshire. |
| Tue 7th Sep | Southampton | "Brazil" – David Neville |

Branch website: http://www.southampton.bcss.org.uk