

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather over the last month has not been particularly memorable as far as summer goes but I for one am glad it hasn't got too hot (yet!) since I have a number of plants in pots in the back yard, awaiting planting out in the back garden. In the conservatory, there have been flushes of flowers on Mammillarias, Rebutias, Gymnocalyciums and Echinocereus. With the weather as it is, I am finding that watering around once a week is sufficient for now, but this will probably have to increase during July and August.

Announcements

Thanks are due to Tony Grech and his wife Rose for hosting an **Open Day** on the 14th of June. It was very interesting seeing how Tony had laid out his greenhouses in a relatively small space, and there were various other features in the garden to admire. His plants looked in great condition and many were in flower. There were also many outdoor bedding plants in bloom. Tony's plants were remarkably free of pests (at least compared to mine!) and one tip I picked up was that he uses Provado Ultimate Bug Killer. Having checked the Provado web site, it states that "pests controlled are whitefly, blackfly, greenfly, scale insect, mealy bug, thrips (including western flower thrip), red spider mite and lily beetle." I have got some and will see if it deals with red spider and mealy bug which is affecting parts of my collection.

The **Branch Dinner** will be held in a week and a half (on the evening of Friday July 11th) at the Luzborough House, Romsey. Please arrive by 7:30 for a 8pm start. Maps are available from the front table, please let David Neville know if you plan to attend.

Margaret has received raffle tickets which are intended to raise funds for the National Show. The tickets cost 20p each and there are several cash prizes, ranging from £25 to £200.

Our display at the **Sir Harold Hillier Gardens** attracted a reasonable amount of interest, but it was somewhat disappointing that the Craft Fair which was also being held that weekend did not lead to extra visitors for us, compared to others years. Anyway this remains a pleasant event for us to take part in, and several members of the public mentioned they were impressed by our display.

Later this month, the branch will be staging further displays at the **Solent Fuchsia Show** and at the **New Forest Show**. The first of these will be held on the weekend of 26-27th July, at Titchfield The New Forest Show will follow just a couple of days later. Unfortunately the show organisers this year have only allocated us 2 tickets per day which is inadequate, so we have had to purchase some extra tickets (at close to the full price!). Please contact David Neville and Margaret Corina for further details of these events.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Three people had brought along some Plants of Interest. First to describe his plants was Jim Roskilly. He started with *Albuca humilis*. This is related to the hyacinth and the greenish white buds open into flowers with frilly white petals and golden anthers. The leaves die off after flowering. Next was a plant which he had not been able to find any information on - *Hasseanthus nesioticus*. Our speaker Gillian and a couple of other experts in the audience identified this species as a subgenus of

Dudleya. Having looked on the Internet, it seems that it will go on to produce sprays of white flowers.

The next plant was kalanchoe with double pink pink flowers, a plant which is available at many garden centres. The species is *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, and the ordinary variant with single flowers is known as 'Flaming Katy' and is a deservedly popular house plant which is very floriferous and available with flowers in many attractive colours. Jim ended with a *Pelargonium oblongatum* – this was a white flowered plant which he had obtained from Margaret Corina.

Next it was my turn. Some of you may know of my interest in growing Clivias and I had brought in a 14" x 8" seed tray containing around 15 *Clivia miniata hybrids* which I had started off from seeds three years ago. All of the seeds had been obtained from a Chinese grower who I had first encountered on Ebay. The Chinese (as well as the Japanese) have spent many years breeding small broad leaved Clivias and there were some good examples of these in the tray. A typical South African Clivia has a ratio of 10 to 15 when comparing the length of a leaf to its width – by careful hybridizing and selection, some Chinese plants have a ratio as low as 3 or 4. These plants tend to be smaller in stature and are more suitable for growing in confined spaces. Other plants in the tray were variegated, with yellow lines running along the length of the leaf. A couple of the plants had golden yellow leaves. These are known as "Light of Buddha" types and they can either be mainly yellow or have bands of yellow growing across the leaf. These variegated plants look quite attractive even when not in flower.

I mentioned that the plants growing as a colony in the seed tray had grown larger than other plants grown in individual pots. I believe this is due to the free root run which the plants in the tray seem to like. David Neville asked whether the flowers were the same as a normal *Clivia miniata* – on the whole yes, they are the same form and orange colour, although sometimes the blooms can be smaller.

Tom Radford mentioned that he has a Clivia plant which he overwinters outdoor each year. The plant loses all its leaves in the winter and grows new ones each year – although it has survived it does not flower. Ideally Clivias need a dry and cool rest over the winter but they would not like temperatures approaching freezing. In my experience they grows new leaves faster than they lose old ones. A *miniata* will typically flower once it has developed a fan of around a dozen leaves, which is around 5 years from seed.

I had also brought along some laminated prints of a First Day Cover issued in South Africa in 2006 celebrating the genus Clivia. The six stamps featured fine artwork displaying the forms and flowers of the six species known so far, namely *C. gardenii*, *C. nobilis*, *C. caulescens*, *C. miniata*, *C. mirabilis* and *C. robusta*.

[see <http://www.sapo.co.za/philately/clivia.htm>]

The final plant had been brought along by Paul Madison. The growing point on his *Notocactus magnificus* had died and then the entire body had gone hollow – indeed there was a pencil standing right through the centre of the plant. However, the plant had managed to form an offset, so now there was a bright green offset attached to the side of the dead body – an unusual pencil holder !

Thanks are due to David Neville for providing the following notes on Dr Gillian Evison's talk.

Euphorbias for You

The speaker at last month's meeting was Gillian Evison from Oxford. Gillian is well-known as an expert grower of both cacti and other succulents, particularly of those species that are most challenging and highly prized in cultivation. She has won numerous awards for her plants at National Shows, and some of our own branch members may well remember that she used to enter our own branch shows in years gone by, when we held an Annual Show at the church hall in The Avenue.

Gillian introduced herself as an enthusiast for all succulent plants, but said that even from her earliest days in the hobby she had been charmed by succulent euphorbias. Her presentation for the evening was using a digital projector, and she would be showing not only some of her best plants, but also some of her earliest plants, with reminiscences and comments about them. But before the slides, Gillian spoke a little about some live plants that she had brought along with her, inviting members to have a closer look at them during the interval.

The screen presentation had been prepared by placing the plants in arbitrary groupings, the first of which was the caput-medusae group – those plants with a main, central head and with numerous smaller branches radiating from them. The first plant we saw was *E. flanagani*, and Gillian said that this was the first *Euphorbia* she ever grew. The thin, often straggly branches can make for an untidy plant, but we saw the plant covered in flowers and looking most attractive. We then saw a cristate plant of the same species, which she said used to be quite

common and popular in cultivation, but which is now seldom seen. It is a very thin-stemmed plant, but can make a nice specimen given due care and attention. A much more chunky and somewhat slower growing species that is in the same group is *E. inermis*; in this species the stems are much stouter, and the large white flowers on the specimen we saw made a very impressive sight. Ultimately much larger growing is *E. clavarioides* var. *truncata*, and Gillian mentioned she had cherished her own small plant of this until she saw the huge specimen that appeared at a couple of National Shows, with many hundreds of heads!

We then moved on to what Gillian called 'bushy species'. The first of these was *E. mammillaris*, a common plant in cultivation, probably due to the fact that it is both easy and fast growing. Nonetheless this is a pretty plant and worth growing. *E. grandicornis* was shown next, commonly referred to as the Cow Horn Cactus! The unusual shape of the stems of this species make it easily identifiable. We then saw *E. virosa*, which makes an impressive plant. The name *virosa* refers to the toxic sap. Apparently in 1983 the publishers of a series of books called The Euphorbia Journal offered their subscribers a free plant of *Aeonium lindleyi* because it is reputed to be an antidote to the effects of Euphorbia latex. Another of Gillian's early plants was *E. globosa*, which she said was not the most exciting of species, although it does have a different growing habit than most members of the genus. *Euphorbia aeruginosa* caused a sensation when it became available in cultivation because it has such beautifully and colourfully patterned stems. It is a very decorative plant, but proved to be relatively easy to grow. We saw a picture of some of the *Euphorbia* classes at the 1979 National Show, and it is clear that this species was very popular at that time!

Among the next group of plants discussed, referred to as 'cactus-looking species' was *E. stellaespina* from South Africa. This is a marvellously chunky plant that produces amazing multi-pointed thorns, but it does have a tendency to develop unsightly brown marks and blemishes around the base and lower parts of the stems. Another even larger growing species is *E. horrida*, and Gillian showed a huge specimen of the variety *striata* that was entered in a giant pot at the 2004 National Show. However, although this is generally seen as a fast and large-growing plant, there are some much slower variations around, and Gillian said she has one plant that is 30 years old and it is still in a 12 inch pot – it is a very compact form. We then saw *E. stellata* and *E. squarrosa*, two plants with a similar

growing habit – they develop a main caudex from which numerous flattened branches develop. Similar in habit but much rarer and highly sought is *E. micracantha*; this species has wonderful slim brown spines on the stems. She mentioned that she uses unglazed clay pots for those species with tuberous roots, to allow for extra drainage as they can be prone to rot if over watered. Gillian said she could remember seeking *Euphorbia obesa* as she had seen a picture and wanted to grow this strange and wonderful looking plant. Nowadays it is a common species and it is sometimes even seen for sale in garden centres. However, she said that it is hard to grow well, particularly because it just has a single stem and so any marks have nowhere to hide.

Extremely similar in looks, although often flatter, is *E. symmetrica*, and the only sure way to tell these two species apart is by the flowers. A related plant is *E. meloformis* which can develop a dense network of thorns from the old flower stems, but the amount of thorns produced varies tremendously from one form to another. This is a very old plant in cultivation, having been described as long ago as 1789! *E. suzannae* is a very neat and attractive species, producing a tight cluster of short stems. It is also seen as a variegated plant, and a cristate form is also popular in collections. *E. bupleurifolia* is a quite different looking species, reminiscent perhaps of a pineapple. It produces slender annual leaves which are very prone to attack by red spider mite. This species is tolerant of low winter temperatures.

The next group of plants were described as challenging South African species. The first was *E. schoenlandii*, which is a challenge because it is sensitive to excess moisture, but if grown well it makes a fantastic, strong plant. Also included here were *E. fusca*, and *E. suppressa* which looks like a miniature form of *E. gorgonis*, but is again very sensitive to excessive moisture. One of the most difficult is *E. namaquensis* which has evil smelling latex and was described as extremely sensitive in cultivation. *E. namibensis* is not often seen, but it has a very long tap root. *E. multiceps* will develop into a very tight mound of stems, but it is not easy to obtain, nor to grow successfully for any amount of time.

The Madagascan euphorbias were simply not in cultivation in the early days, but now there are many species available to collectors, and many of these plants are amazingly different to the African species that have long been popular although of course they do require higher temperatures if they are to be grown successfully. A number produce annual, deciduous leaves, which is something quite different

to the African species. The first we saw was *E. millii*, the common crown of thorns. Nowadays there is a range of large flowered Thai hybrids available in garden centres etc, and they can make a spectacular show. *E. didierioides* has been around for a while and it makes an attractive plant. *E. decaryi* was exciting when it first appeared, since it is such a different looking and amazingly low-growing plant. It turned out not to be too difficult to grow, proven by a massive plant that was exhibited at the 1996 National Show. A related plant, described in the NCSS Journal in 1970, is *E. capsaintmariensis*. *E. cylindrifolia* var. *tubifera* produces a large caudex-like stem. Among the most beautifully leaved of all euphorbias is *E. francoisii*; it produces nice thick stems, and there are forms available with a myriad of differently coloured and patterned leaves. Gillian observed that this species seems to prefer limey water. She also mentioned that to catch the elusive seeds of this and other Euphorbia species she wraps a small piece of cling film around each seed pod. When she sows seeds she pre-soaks them for 24 hours to aid and speed germination.

The talk moved on then to show some of the choicer Madagascan species, many of which are relatively slow growing, miniature plants. These included *E. cremersii*, a small caudex forming species with attractive glossy leaves, and *E. suzannae-marnieriae* which is one of the most recently introduced species to cultivation. *E. waringae* is worth growing for its long, thin, dark green leaves and well developed caudex. *E. rossii* is particularly spiny and very distinctive in its branching habit, it produces annual, slender leaves. And *E. primulaefolia* is a beautiful miniature plant with primula-like foliage and a large swollen caudex that is entirely subterranean in habitat, but which is raised above the soil in cultivation to prevent rotting.

Gillian then talked about a some plants that she called "Madagascans for the masochist"! These are among the most difficult and challenging in cultivation, and are recommended only for the experienced grower who wants a real challenge! *E. tilcarensis* looks like it should be ready to grow, but it seems willing to rot off at the earliest opportunity. *E. quartzitica* has long been revered in collections and has a reputation as being very difficult, but a recent foreign visitor to the country who has seen this species growing in habitat showed pictures of it growing in almost alpine conditions where it receives lots of water! Perhaps this is where we have been going wrong in cultivation, but it may be a risky strategy....

Some of the choicest and most prized euphorbias originate from Somalia, and Gillian showed us pictures of some of the best. One of the first available was *E. piscidermis*, offered generally as a grafted plant, and it is a wonderful and bizarre looking miniature. Similar in shape but much more difficult, and expensive to obtain, is *E. turbiniformis* – it is an incredibly unusual and beautiful plant, but sadly for most people it is short-lived. *E. horwoodii* is another attractive species, but it is seen in two distinct growth forms; the immature form is globular and beautifully marked, but if you are able to grow it long enough it will develop into a multi-branching and somewhat less attractive plant. On grafts it always branches and looks like the mature form. *E. gymnocalycioides* is another wonderful looking species, producing a small, slightly flattened, tuberculate stem, but it is not easy to grow and it always tends to have a very weak root system when grown on its own roots. One of the longer known species is *E. columnaris*, still uncommon in collections but a very good-looking plant. *E. sepulta* is perhaps less difficult than some of the others, but still requires careful attention; it too never seems to develop a really strong root system, and it is very prone to fungal infections. *E. phillipsiae* and *E. phillipsioides* share similar and easily confused names but they are quite different – of the two, the latter is the best and most revered. Among these choice Somalian species are a few that prove to be almost impossible to grow successfully in cultivation in the UK. *E. globulicaulis* is a small growing plant that few people even manage to keep alive in their collections, let alone grow successfully. *E. hadraumatica* is a real miniature, which Gillian described as being "here today, and gone tomorrow!".

She finished the talk with pictures of a couple of plants that are among her favourites. *Euphorbia decidua* is a beautiful plant with a central caudex/stem from which slender annual stems develop. It is not easy in cultivation, and is not freely available, but it is well worth seeking out. *E. abdelkuri* is well known and admired in collections, with its distinctive whitish stems that look rather like molten wax. It is at its most attractive as a young plant, tending to become somewhat greener in old age.

In closing the talk Gillian briefly discussed cultivation. She said that she uses a soil-based compost, to which she adds a clay-based aggregate called Ultrasorb for drainage and aeration. This product is available online from a company called Gardens Direct, but the same thing is offered by

Tesco for use as cat litter, marketed under the name Tesco Premium Cat Litter Light.

One of the main diseases that euphorbias are prone to is a white mould, a fungus infection, which tends to be worst on the young growth at the tops of stems. It is at its most prevalent in the damp months of autumn. One of the ways Gillian avoids this problem with some of her plants is to bring them indoors in the autumn, where the humidity is much lower, and she keeps them there on bright windowsills until the following spring. One of the best cures for the fungal infection seems to be to use athletes foot spray!

At the end of the talk our Chairman thanked Gillian for her excellent presentation. He commented that it was one of the best specialist talks we had had at the branch, and the generous applause from the audience confirmed their appreciation of the evening.

David Neville

Table Show Results

There were 15 entries in the table show at the June meeting.

| | Cacti – Parodia Group | Succulents – Crassula Group |
|--------------|--|--|
| Open | (1) B Beckerleg Notocactus magnificus | (1) B Beckerleg Graptopetalum suaveolens |
| | (2) T Grech Notocactus leninghausii | (2) J Roskilly Crassula ausensis |
| | (3) J Burnay Notocactus magnificus | (3) J Roskilly Adromischus halesowensis |
| Intermediate | (1) B Beckerleg Parodia andreana | (1) B Beckerleg Dudleya brittoni |
| | (2) J Roskilly Parodia microsperma | (2) J Roskilly Adromischus diabolicus |
| | (3) - | (3) J Roskilly Adromischus cv. 'Little Spheroid' |

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

[The following is a repeat of the article from last month.]

BEF Pots / Sundries

At one of the committee meetings held last year, it was decided that the branch would sell off the stocks of sundries that are currently stored in Margaret's loft since we did not have volunteers to take on the post of Pots & Sundries officer. (If anyone out there does fancy this job, please let one of the committee know!)

One of the main items we have in stock are BEF pots which are very long lasting and quite hard to find these days. If you want to purchase any of the items listed below, please let Margaret Corina know.

| | |
|--------------------------------|------|
| 2" inch square BEF pot (black) | 8p |
| 2¾" square BEF pot (black) | 15p |
| 3½" square BEF pot (black) | 25p |
| 4" square BEF pot (black) | 45p |
| 8½" BEF pan (terracotta) | 150p |
| Label marking pens | 120p |

Vinay Shah

[I spotted the following article in the Times at the start of the month.]

West African Miracle Fruit makes everything taste sweet

Would you like to turn all bitter and sour foods into delicious desserts? You can - by chewing on a red berry from West Africa before you eat.

The berry, called *Synsepalum dulcificum*, has become known as the "miracle fruit" because of its ability to change the taste of foods in your mouth. When you eat the flesh of the fruit, a molecule binds to the taste buds on your tongue and stops you from sensing any sour or bitter flavours. For up to two hours, lemons and grapefruits will be transformed to taste like sherbet. Most fruit and vegetables will seem like sweets, and even vinegar turns into a sugary drink.

Although people in Britain have only recently started taking advantage of the berry's miraculous properties, tribes in Africa have eaten it for hundreds of years. A French explorer known as the Chevalier des Marchais first documented the berry in 1725.

The Times, 5th June 2008

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on the 5th of August and will feature our own member Ian Acton who will be giving a talk (using digital pictures) on South Africa.

The August Table Show will consist of the **Mammillaria** group (cacti) and the **Euphorbia** group (succulents). Please note that members are allowed to submit more than one entry in any of the classes, and that points will be earned for each placed entry.

The Mammillaria group contains *Mammillaria*, *Bartschella*, *Cochemiea*, *Dolichothele*, *Krainzia*, *Leptocladodia*, *Mamillopsis*, *Mammilloidia*, *Oehmea*, *Phellosperma*, *Porfiria*, *Pseudo-mammillaria* and *Solisia*.

The Euphorbia group only contains *Euphorbia*.

A reminder for Committee members that a committee meeting will be held on 21st July.

Forthcoming Events

| | | | | |
|-----|------------------|------|---------------|--|
| Fri | 11 th | Jul | Southampton | Branch Dinner – The Luzborough House |
| Fri | 18 th | Jul | Isle of Wight | “What I Did Last Winter” – Paul Klaassen |
| Sat | 19 th | Jul | Portsmouth | “Lophophoras” – John Watmough |
| Mon | 21 st | Jul | Southampton | Branch Committee Meeting @ 79 Shirley Avenue |
| Sat | 26 th | Jul- | Titchfield | Display/Plant Sales @ Solent Fuchsia Show, Titchfield Comm. Centre |
| Sun | 27 th | Jul | | |
| Tue | 29 th | Jul- | New Forest | Display/Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, New Park, Brockenhurst |
| Thu | 31 st | Jul | | |
| | | | | |
| Tue | 5 th | Aug | Southampton | “South African Miscellany” – Ian Acton |
| Fri | 15 th | Aug | Isle of Wight | “What I Did Last Winter” – Paul Klaassen |
| Sat | 16 th | Aug | Portsmouth | No Meeting |
| Sat | 16 th | Aug | Godmanchester | BCSS National Show |
| | | | | |
| Tue | 2 nd | Sep | Southampton | “Canary Islands – Wild and Tamed” – Jonathan Clark |

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