

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial	1
Announcements	1
Last Month's Meeting.....	1
Branch Mini Show	1
Branch Committee Meeting	5
Snippets	5
Cultivation Evening	5
Next Month's Meeting	6
Forthcoming Events.....	6

Editorial

The summer solstice has passed – so the days will be getting shorter now – but of course it's still light until 10pm. We've had a lot of rain recently and this has helped the weeds in my garden flourish! In particular bramble grows very quickly at this time of the year.

Announcements

There are sheets on the front table for people to register their interest for the various branch trips that will be held in the coming months – the next visit is to the Oxford Branch Show, which, outside of the National, is one of the best cactus and succulent shows in the country. If you are interested in going to this, make sure you record your name on the appropriate sheet.

Last month, our chairperson Dot England hosted an **Open Day** and later this month Alice Jankovec will be hosting an **Open Day and Summer Garden Party**. Leaflets detailing directions to this are on the front table.

Next month we will be holding a **cultivation and propagation** evening and this will include a plant-swap table. The event requires audience participation so please read the article on page 5/6 of this newsletter for further details.

Ben asked me to provide an update about the name of one of the plants he's been selling at meetings: following on from Ian Acton's recent discussion of *Aloe mitrifomis*, the plant that Ben has been selling on the sales table as *Aloe mitrifomis* is actually *Aloe x nobilis* which is a hybrid between *A.*

mitrifomis and *A. brevifolia*. Ben had also brought along a variegated form which he got from Geoff Card (obtained at ELK) and he mentioned there are a variety of different forms with tighter teeth and different pustules, which look more like *A. distans*. *A. perfoliata* is a synonym of *A. mitrifomis* and *A. distans* is a form of *A. mitrifomis*.

Ben had also brought along some cuttings for the donations table – these were *Orbea variegata* and *Orbea variegata f. cristata* ex. ADMK 1100/196. The other Stapeliad he brought along to the cultivation evening last year was *Orbea maccloughlinii* (as identified by John Pilbeam), which like *O. variegata* also comes from South Africa.

Last Month's Meeting

Branch Mini Show

David started off the meeting and said that he would provide some guidance on the basics of judging and how to assess the entries in a show. Looking at the 10 classes, there were a total of 40 entries, but some of the classes only had a couple of entries.

He mentioned that several people in the audience have been to the BCSS Judges Course – apart from himself, Ivor Biddlecombe and Geoff Penrose had also attended. Every year, the society runs a judging course at Moulton in Northamptonshire, and he first attended when he was 20. The event consists of lectures from judges and then some judging tests set up by the National Shows committee. You have to reach a certain standard before you become a BCSS accredited judge, and after you achieve that, you can judge branch shows. There are separate tests for cacti and succulents, so you can do both or just one.

The branch has given members copies of the "Guide To Shows – 10th Edition" in 2014, and the classes in shows are all based upon the classifications and groupings documented in that guide. So this is considered the "bible" and David said he often has to refer to it to see if plants are eligible, especially with some subgroups - some of the plant groupings are quite large and it's difficult to remember what species are included where.

When a judge is face to face with a bunch of plants, he needs to check the specification for the class. For example, our class 8 said "Haworthia group, 2 plants not exceeding 5" / 12.75cm". The judge has to make sure that the plants are eligible - Haworthia includes several genera and all of those would be allowed to be entered. Then one would need to check that they comply with the pot size limit - occasionally there are classes with no size limit. With some pots, the size is written on the bottom, but to be sure, a judge could use callipers or a ruler. The measurement is supposed to be an internal measurement and from side to side (with a tolerance of 3mm or 1/8th of an inch. These days, people use fancy pots of an indeterminate size, so sometimes the judge will need to carefully check the size. Ivor had brought in a couple of callipers and there was also a size gauge. Do be careful if using these - you don't want to damage the plant!

If the class asks for 2 plants and only one has been entered, that would be invalid and the entry would be classified "NAS" - Not As Scheduled. Usually the class allows for plants from same group or genera, but very rarely the class may specify something different. For example Portsmouth have a class saying "6 different genera".

The other thing to check is to make sure there is only one plant in the pot - you are not allowed to have multiple plants in a pot. Geoff Penrose asked what happens if a seedling is growing in the pot? Well, that would be down to the judge's discretion - if it was obvious the plant was a seedling, it would probably be ignored. The intention is really to prevent people from using multiple plants in a pot to make the specimen look larger or more mature than it really is. If somebody did that with Lithops you might be able to tell if the leaves had different patterns on them. It's rare for people to try and cheat but sometimes novices may not realise this rule exists.

David mentioned that classes with one plant per entry were easier to judge - multiple plants in a class adds some extra complications since the plants comprising the entry may well be different in quality. For a single plant, you want it to be in good condition and to be as mature as possible. Some plants are fast growers and can fill a 5 inch pot in a couple of years. Other are slower growing and it may take them years to get to a certain size. Generally, the best exhibits are the slow growing miniature species. Miranda asked what happens if there is a big gap between the neck of the plant and the edge of the pot? Well, the plant does not have to fill the pot, and a 4 inch pot in a 5 inch class would

still do well, if it was a rare or miniature growing species. David mentioned that plants like some of the Echeverias can grow very quickly and there's no real skill involved whereas one of the entries (*Crassula asusensis*) is always slow growing.

However, it is not just about slow or rare plants - the condition and how well the plant has been cultivated also come into the judging. You don't want scratches or broken leaves, and one would prefer the plant to be unmarked. Scorch marks indicate a problem during cultivation. And if the leaves are bright green, the plant may have been grown under the bench. Pointing to a *Haworthia truncata*, David said this was a lovely and flat *H. truncata*, which must have been well grown and in good light. You also need to look for signs of pests and diseases. The odd mealy bug may not matter, but if the plant is infected with mealy bugs or lots of green fly - it would be marked down and perhaps even have to be removed from the show.

If you have pairs of plants in an entry, you can sometimes have a strong plant paired with a weak one. The guide contains a recommended pointing system to try and choose between plants, and at the judges courses, one of the tests is designed to see how you apply the points. However David said he's never had to use the points system - and he's been judging since he was 21. If there are two really good plants that you have to choose from, just ask yourself - which one would you rather take home? When you get different people judging, you will sometimes get different results because it does come down to personal preference - it would be boring if the outcome was always the same.

Paul Klaassen asked was it possible to *not* award a first prize? David said, yes, if a judge really didn't like any of the entries, he could do that. He himself does try to always award all the prizes. At a National Show one year, there were only a couple of entries in a class, and neither were good enough for the stature of the show, so no prizes were awarded. So it is possible to withhold the prizes, but it's rare and really you don't want to discourage the people who have made an effort to actually enter the show.

The judge's job is to pick the top three plants in each class and he'll need to communicate this to the steward or show manager, who would then award the prize cards. For today's show we had letters of the alphabet next to each plant, for identification. The aim was for people to judge the classes, write up their results on the sheet on the back of the newsletter and then copy these results onto a spare marking sheet (available from the front table). The

spare marking sheets were due to be given to Vinay who would collate the results of all the audience, and work out their 1st/2nd/3rd choices for each class. In the 2nd half, David would give us his results for each class and we'd compare that against the average of the audience's results.

In response to a question from the audience, David said there are no points for flowers on the day of the show. Evidence of flowering is mentioned in the guide, but he tends to apply this rule in reverse - if a plant should be in flower at this time of the year and it is not showing any signs of wanting to flower or producing any buds, he'd wonder if there was anything wrong with the plant. It is nice in a public show if there are a lot of flowers on display, but it doesn't make the plant any better. Plants should be labelled and nicely presented (top dressing) and the RHS are quite keen on this, but it's really the plant you're judging. And if plants are labelled incorrectly - for example, at Portsmouth show, a plant called *Ortegocactus macdougallii* was entered in a class for *Coryphantha* (for which it is eligible) - but the plant was actually a *Mammillaria schumannii*, which was ineligible, so he had to NAS it. Plants shouldn't be marked down if the label is wrong - unless of course it causes the plant to be entered in an illegible class.

In the second half of the meeting, David took us through the results :

Class 1 – Mammillaria Group - 2 plants, 12.75cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	G	B	A	M
Audience	G	B	A	M

Entry M was NAS, because the schedule asked for 2 plants and only one plant had been entered. There wasn't much else to discuss - none of these were perfect plants, but there was agreement on the best ones. David mentioned the *M. albilanata* was quite old.

Class 2 – Parodia Group - 2 plants, 12.75cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	G	B		
Audience	G	B		

Again there was not much to choose from in this class. He actually preferred one of the *Parodias* from entry B but it was paired with a weak *Parodia nivosa*. Some of the plants were Peter Down's and they had been raised from seed Peter had collected in Bolivia over 20 years ago.

Class 3 – Gymnocalycium Group - 2 plants, 12.75cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	G		
Audience	G	B		

On hearing David's assessment being the opposite of the audience, there were shouts of "you slipped up". David said with entry G – *Gymnocalycium horridispinum* shouldn't be tall and slender like this – it's normally a really big strong growing globular plant. Ivor said that it was 30 years old and had always grown like that, and David wondered whether it was an unusual clone. It was paired with a *G. mihanovichii* which was also around 30 years old. In the other entry, *G. spegazzinii* is a wonderful thing – it is always solitary and this one is probably at least 15 years old. Bruce said he had got it from Southfields in 2002. It is a slow growing plant and there are all sorts of forms around - it is a choice plant, and although not a miniature it is always rated by judges.

Class 4 – Rebutia Group - 1 plant, 16.5cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	G		
Audience	B	G		

David mentioned that *Sulcorebutias* are always slower growing than *Rebutias*, and in the entry that won, the plants were probably 2-3 times as old as the *Rebutia*, but there was really nothing wrong with either of the entries.

Class 5 – Echinopsis Group - 1 plant, 16.5cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	A	G	
Audience	B	A	N	G

After hearing David's assessment of 1-2-3, Ivor mentioned that entry G should not have been placed, it was NAS, since the pot was too big! A few people had spotted this. David again contrasted a healthy and striking looking plant which was exceedingly common and fast to grow versus another plant which was twice as old.

Class 6 – Any Cactus - 1 plant

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	G	O	
Audience	G	O	B	

The audience had placed *Mammillaria bombycina*, *Mammillaria perbella* and a Copiapoa – the latter was a bit marked but it was still a very old plant. David mentioned the Echinocereus was quite nice but it had mealy on it. The *M. perbella* is a slow growing dichotomous plant. *M. bombycina* varies tremendously, but this is one of the nicer forms with all the white wool and the radial spines – the most difficult thing with it is repotting, thanks to all the hooked spines. One of the other plants looked like it had been stressed at some time but was now growing well, and David suggested cutting out the old thin stem – within a year or two, the new heads will take over and it will look a whole lot better. And the *Notocatus magnificus* looked like it had a pause in growth, making it look like someone had grafted *N. magnificus* onto *N. magnificus*!

Class 7 – Crassulaceae Group - 1 plant, 16.5cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	G	O	
Audience	B	G	O	

With agreement between the audience and David, there wasn't much to discuss here. *Crassula alstonii* doesn't look that exciting here but in habitat it was one of his favourite species – it's almost white and forms solitary heads which look like snowballs.

Crassula ausensis is another slow growing species. The Echeveria was a lovely thing. It is well worth growing, but one needs to treat it hard to keep it compact and get good colour on the leaves – it came from Oaxaca in Mexico.

Class 8 – Haworthia Group - 2 plants, 12.75cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	H	G	
Audience	B	G	H	

David said there was very little to choose between the plants in 2nd and 3rd place. The *H. comptoniana* was slightly odd but it was very old. Geoff Penrose cited that “a big bad one may beat a small good one”.

Class 9 – Euphorbia Group - 1 plant, 12.75cm

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	G	M	
Audience	B	H	G	

There was agreement on the 1st being awarded to *Euphorbia cylindrifolia*. *E. suzannae* is quite nice

(3rd). The audience had given 2nd to an *E. capsaintemariensis* but David said it's really quite a small plant. David had given 3rd to *E. graniticola* which he really didn't really know that well. Paul said it was expensive at Specks - but then most things are. It was Miranda's plant, purchased from Toobees and it was plant from Mozambique. David said Euphorbia is a massive genus and so many are not in general cultivation, so it can be a hard class to judge when you encounter plants you don't know that well.

Class 10 – Any succulent - 1 plant

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	NAS
Judge	B	H	G	
Audience	G	B	A	

David mentioned the one cactus/one succulent classes with no pot size limit are the hardest to judge, because you can have a huge variation in the sizes and genera that people will enter. Here he though the audience had made a mess of the judging. They had placed the Trichodiadema 1st and given a 2nd to *Euphorbia meloformis*. He had given 1st Euphorbia, 2nd to a *Pachypodium namaquanum* and 3rd to the Trichodiadema which he said was ever so easy to grow, and not deserving a first despite its apparent age. Another entry - *Euphorbia atrispina* – was really handsome, but it is ever so easy and like a beginners plant, which look best when young and goes on to produce large mounds in habitat – so it's really not a good choice for a show plant. Other plants worthy of mention were *Aloe aristata* (one of the hardier ones) and a Gasteraloe hybrid called “Cosmo” which had a nice red colouring on it. It wondered whether it had been grown outdoors, but Ben said no. It is an aristata hybrid, and exposure to sun and lack of nutrients can cause the red colouring, making it look nice – normally, it's a dark green and lush thing. The Pachypodium is usually a winter grower but this one seemed to be in growth now - Tom Radford said he waters it all year round, and stops it from going dormant. David said he once had *P. namaquanum* which is winter grower grafted into a *P. lameri* which is a summer grower and the combination was a winter grower. Tom mentioned this was a plant he got from Margaret Corina's collection. And Ivor mentioned that the Trichodiadema was previously Ken Etheridge's and Margaret Corina's plant.

All the audience did quite well – but overall, Tom Radford was the closest to David's scoring.

Vinay Shah

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was hosted by Dot England on 28th June.

A new book (Cacti and Succulents of Baja) has been added to the branch library. David mentioned he had been sent several books of raffle tickets to sell, to raise funds for the BCSS National Show.

Brighton Branch had sent David some publicity leaflets which they had printed and handed out to the public - they said this had encouraged several members of the public to attend their meetings. We discussed how these compared to the leaflet we hand out with our plant sales.

Recent meetings and events were discussed. The weather at Sparsholt had been poor and attendance from the public was lower than in previous years, and this reduced our plant sales to a low level. However it was felt we should continue to support the event next year.

Member attendance at the Branch Mini Show in June was quite low, a number of people were away on the day and some had informed David in advance. And although the weather wasn't great, there was a reasonable turnout for the Open Day hosted by Dot.

Although Alice was not present at the committee meeting, she had confirmed that she intended to go ahead with the Open Day/Garden Party in July. Arrangements for the New Forest Show were discussed – as usual the branch receives a limited number of tickets so we will buy some extras to cover the people who need/want to attend.

The next branch meeting (in August) will be a cultivation evening and David mentioned several topics which we'll try and discuss on the day. In addition we will again hold the "plant-swap" event where people can exchange or buy cuttings and seedlings.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Glenn Finn had recently taken some pictures of an Agave plant growing at the home of Ian and Janet Sandford, White Hart Lane, Portchester, Fareham, and here's the story behind the plant:

While spending holidays in Alicante in Spain, Ian and Janet used to water the plants in their garden. Ian noticed that a plant in their neighbour's garden

never used to get much water so he used to spray that plant too. His neighbour noticed this, and as a thank you, gave Ian a cutting of the plant. Well that was 25 years ago. The cutting stayed in a 12" pot and grew to about 2 feet high, but Ian took a cutting of the plant and planted it in his front garden, in open soil and you can see what happened to that plant!

<http://tinyurl.com/hpwf39e>

If you look close enough, you'll see that Ian has had to put corks on the ends of the leaves to protect people coming into his garden!

Glenn Finn

Cultivation Evening

Topics planned for the Cultivation and Propagation evening in August are:

PROPAGATION - Bruce Beckerleg will show us various propagation techniques that he uses to produce new plants to tempt us on the sales tables.

GRIT - With various types of grits and aggregates available to use in compost mixes or as top dressing it can be difficult to know which to use. Richard White will discuss some of the options available. Why not bring along a sample of the grit and aggregates that you prefer to use? If you would like to raise any queries about composts we can discuss those too. If you would like to share the formula for the compost you use, bring a sample along and let us know why you like it.

GROWING COMPARISONS - Each year the branch supplies free plants to all members so that we can compare from time to time the differing results we all achieve. Please bring in any or all of the plants that have been distributed in recent years so that we can assess one another's growing regimes and perhaps determine the best way to grow each of the species! The plants handed out in previous years include: *Echeveria lilacina*, *Mammillaria albilanata*, *Mammillaria microhelix* (2013), *Mammillaria glassii* v *ascensionis* (2014), *Frithia pulchra* (2015).

IDENTIFICATION - If you have any unnamed plants and would like to get them identified please bring them along to the meeting so that some of our more experienced growers can attempt to provide the correct names.

CULTIVATION & PEST PROBLEMS – If you are having problems growing any particular plants, or do not know what might be wrong with some of them, you can bring them along and we will endeavour to determine what the issue could be.

FERTILISERS – What type of fertiliser is best? How often should we feed our plants? What strength should we use? Should we avoid any particular types or formulations?

ANY QUESTIONS? - If there are any aspects of the hobby that you would like to ask about, or any topics that you would like us to discuss, you can raise them on the evening, or you can speak to David Neville about it in advance of the meeting.

SWAP TABLE FOR CUTTINGS & SEEDLINGS

Please bring along any cuttings, offsets, seedlings, rootable leaves etc. that you would like to swop with other members. Last year we had a large selection of offerings from a number of our members and we promised that we would arrange a similar opportunity this year. All offerings will be laid out in trays and punnets (if you want to charge a nominal fee for each item please make this clear on the evening), and we will supply bags etc. to put them in. The more people that participate by bringing along surplus plant material, the more successful the Swop Table will be. (Please note that we are not looking for mature plants to swop, just cuttings, seedlings etc.) If you have any queries

about the Swop Table please speak to Dot England or David Neville.

David Neville

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be on the 2nd of August and this will be a cultivation and propagation evening – read the previous article for more details!

The August Table Show will consist of the **Parodia** group (cacti) and the **Euphorbia** 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 table show classes use the classifications from the *Guide to Shows 10th Edition* (contact me if you don't have a copy of this).

The *Parodia* group includes *Blossfeldia*, *Brasilicactus*, *Eriocactus*, *Frailea*, *Notocactus*, *Parodia* and *Wigginsia*.

The *Euphorbia* group includes plants from *Euphorbia*, *Jatropha*, *Monadenium*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 9 th Jul	Isle of Wight	What I Did Last Winter (Paul Klaassen)
Sat 16 th Jul	Portsmouth	Caudiciforms (Bob Potter)
Sat 23 rd Jul	Southampton	Branch visit to Oxford Branch Show - Old Mill Hall, Grove, Wantage
Sun 24 th Jul	Southampton	Garden Party - hosted by Alice Jankovec, West Moors, Dorset
Tue 26 th Jul-	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ New Forest Show, Brockenhurst
Thu 28 th Jul		
Tue 2 nd Aug	Southampton	Cultivation & Propagation, with demonstrations & discussions
Sat 13 th Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening at Geraldine & Stephen Woods (Members only)
Sat 13 th Aug	Portsmouth	Display / Plant Sales @ Denmead Horticultural Show
Sat 20 th Aug	Portsmouth	BCSS National Show , WG Animal Centre, PE29 2NH
Sat 20 th Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting
Sat 3 rd Sep	Portsmouth	Display / Plant Sales @ Hayling Island Horticultural Show
Tue 6 th Sep	Southampton	A Cactus Tourist in Baja (Trevor Wray)
Sat 10 th Sep	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show, Broadlands
Sat 10 th Sep	Isle of Wight	Dahlias (Ron Tomlin)
Sat 17 th Sep	Portsmouth	Photographing plants (Tom Radford)

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

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