

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

August has been very warm, with several weather records being set across the country. I'm afraid the constant hot weather has led to a few casualties in my garden, although within the conservatory, thanks to frequent watering most things have survived OK. There was a second flush of flowers on Rebutias, Mammillarias and Gymnocalyciums earlier in the month, but the only cactus in flower at the moment is *Borzicactus samaipatanus*, which has bright red flowers with purple anthers.

Announcements

Last week, our Branch participated in the **New Forest Show**, where we had a display and sales table. As in previous years, the event was a success and we won a Gold Medal for our display. The weather was very warm but we were fortunate to have several branch members helping out – thank you to everyone who took part.

Our next public event will be at the **Sir Harold Hillier Gardens** in Ampfield, where we will be putting on a display and have plants for sale, between 12th – 13th August. Although we have enough people to man this event for both days, please do drop in if you are passing by.

The Open Evening due to be held at **Fresh Acres** Nursery on 14th August has unfortunately been cancelled. However, members are still welcome to visit them during normal working hours. There are some maps on the front table, and I would suggest

that people travel up in small groups to minimise disruption to the nursery and also help share the costs of getting there. The cactus collection is being gradually run down but there should still be some good bargains there.

I would like to apologise to Tony Gretch's wife Rose for the incorrect reference to her in the last newsletter.

If you are a tax payer, please remember to return the **Gift Aid** form which was sent with the June Journal since it allows the Society to claim a 28% rebate on your current and past subscriptions. Some people did not receive the forms with their copy of the Journal so there are some spares on the front table.

Peter Down mentioned that he has received details of a cactus trip covering Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil which will be run during the autumn. The trip is being organised by Barry Glover and Willy Smith, please contact Peter if you would like further information.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

At the July meeting, we set something of a record with 3 different people having brought in *Plants of Interest*!

Peter Down said he was really a cactus enthusiast but he had somehow accumulated a collection of succulents, including small agaves, aloes and haworthias. In particular, he liked plants which formed rosettes. First was *Agave lophantha variegata* which had green and yellow striped leaves, with serrated edges. This was followed by the distinctive *Agave victoria reginae*. This is quite a variable species, and this specimen was a compact (short leaved) form with the leaves held close together in a tight bundle. The dark green leaves are covered in a pattern of white lines.

Next were a couple of unusual aloe hybrids - one which goes red in full sun and the other which

goes yellow. Peter didn't have a name for either of these plants – he had got them just for their unusual colours. Moving on to some hybrids, *Aloe* 'Snow Flake' is pale (almost grey), and *Aloe* 'Lizard Lips' has leaves which are an attractive mix of light green and dark green markings.

We then saw the green form of *Aloe erinacea*. There is also a form with black tips to the leaves which is called *A. melanacantha*, and indeed there was an example of the latter in the table show. These plants eventually form a stem but they look impressive in their young form.

We saw a variegated *Aloe broomii* which has nice upright leaves. *Agave variegata* cv. "Joe Hawk" was coloured green and yellow, and looked a bit like a *Sansevieria*. Keeping with the rosette theme, *Haworthia* cv. "Black Major" had dark leaves. Peter said the only haworthia which is perhaps darker is *H. sordida* which is almost black. Next was a plant which was part of an ISI distribution - a variegated *Haworthia limifolia* which was a striking combination of green and yellow. There was an offset forming, but it looked all yellow, and Peter was worried that it might not survive. *Agave filifera compacta* was a nice plant and *Haworthia marginata* had a nice red colouring on the outer leaves.

We then saw three more haworthias which had almost transparent leaves. These were *Haworthia cooperi*, *Haworthia cooperi* cv. Bryan Makin and *Haworthia cooperi* v. *venusta*. David Neville mentioned that the latter is one of the few hairy haworthias. The final plant was one which Peter said was screaming at him – it had been left in a corner of the greenhouse and he hadn't seen it for 18 months. It was a haworthia which was putting out offsets all around, including some from the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot. The plant has also pushed itself out of the pot.

With reference to Peter's comment about the plant trying to tell him something, **Ian Acton** mentioned that he also talks to his plants. He wasn't sure whether what he said could be repeated in the newsletter, but more on that later. He had brought along a couple of plants of *Pterocactus tuberosus*. In Borg's book, this plant is referred to as *Pterocactus kuntzei*, but the modern name is *Opuntia tuberosa*. These particular plants were propagated from a plant he got from the late Mrs. Margetson, in 1971. (By coincidence, on the front table, there was a picture of Mrs. Margetson taken in 1956 at a show held on the Common.)

Above the ground, the plant is a tangled mass of weak pencil-thin stems. One of the plants had been removed from the pot, and this showed that underneath, it forms a large tuberous root, rather like a dahlia. He found that in the winter, he loses one third to one half of the stems but these are replaced by new growth in the spring. The flowers are solitary, and unusual in that they grow terminally at the ends of the stems without forming a bud. They are 2-3 cm across, and a dirty yellow brown colour, which is inconspicuous against the rest of the plant and thus easily missed. The flowers open and close each day and last around a week.

For propagation, he breaks up the tuber when it is large enough, again rather like a dahlia. The cuttings from individual stems can be made to root, but for him they do not readily form a tuber and hence are unable to survive the winter. The seed is reported to be flat and about 1cm across, but he has never seen any offered in a seed list. Finally - his words of encouragement to the plants – "Grow you buggers or else!"

The final group of plants were a mixed collection of insectivorous plants, brought along by **Tom Radford**. Although these were not cacti or succulents - quite the opposite since some grow standing in water – he felt they would be of interest to some of the members. First was a *Darlingtonia* – (cobra lily) which was growing in sphagnum moss. He had tried growing it in moss from his garden, but this almost killed it. He managed to find some sphagnum moss and using this enabled the plant to recover completely, and it had put on a lot of new growth in the last year. He used to keep these in the greenhouse but they did badly because it was too warm. He now keeps them in a cold frame in the winter and grows them outdoors in the summer. He waters them a little in the winter. The secret is to keep the moss happy - if that's growing, the plant should be fine.

He applied much the same treatment to a *Sarracenia* - again all the growth (the plant was 20" tall) was achieved this year. He grew it in a cold frame in the winter and in a pond (in about 2 inches of water) in the summer. It was growing in peat and perlite. Another example of the genus was *Sarracenia flava*, which was more red in colour. The colder the winter, the better they seem to grow the next year. In a greenhouse they were nothing like this size and just used to get smaller and smaller.

The final two plants were examples of *Nepenthes*. The first, *Nepenthes alta* was just a baby. The urns catch insects and contain a liquid which can be quite corrosive. He keeps these damp by standing them in little bowls of water. He doesn't spray his plants but other growers do mist them. He's found that he can let them go dry for a couple of weeks without any great damage. They have to keep above 5°C in the winter so these do need the protection of a greenhouse. These plants were also growing in a peat and perlite mix. The cups form on the end of the stalks and look unusual before they form. He waters the plants all the year around. And they can take full sun.

Cacti in Flower

Ian Woolnough was our speaker in July, and he mentioned that he used to give this talk using conventional slides but had recently decided to switch to using a digital projector. This was the first time he had given the talk in this new format. He mentioned that his camera was a 2 megapixel model and that the projector (a Sony VPD MX10 DLP unit) had been borrowed from work. He also stated that the use of the digital projector meant that he could put the plant names on the slides – this helps if your memory isn't very good!

He started by mentioning that seeing the insectivorous plants reminded him that it was a good idea to grow butterworts or sundews in a collection since they will catch the sciara fly which usually attack his seedlings. The first slide proclaimed the talk's title as "Cacti in Flower (or a prelude to dying?)". Ian mentioned that sometimes plants flower really well at the end of their lives, when they feel they need to produce seed before dying! Although plants can be propagated vegetatively, most cacti do flower and produce seed in due course.

Ian mentioned that there were 4 main types of cactus flower :

bee-pollinated - bowl or cup shaped

moth-pollinated - white, night opening, large

humming bird pollinated - often red, funnel shaped, zygomorphic

bat pollinated - large, robust, white or cream, lots of nectar and scented.

He started with some general information, stating that the fruit, seed, nectar and pollen are important sources of food. We also learnt that *Hylocereus undata* has 7200 ovules, so in theory it could form 7200 seeds!

The talk started with a picture of *Agave lechugea*, which was included for any succulent lovers since the rest of the plants were going to be cacti. We also saw a slide of plants at the Exeter branch show – the "Cacti in Flower" class contained a colourful display of 15 plants such as *Echinocereus* and *Rebutia*. Ian said that the range of flower colours in cacti was mostly yellow, red, and pink.

Acanthocalycium glaucum had pretty petals, the tips of which were red. *Ariocarpus fissuratus* was photographed at the "Big Bend" in Texas. The plants grow flat and are well camouflaged, so it is hard to spot them if they are not in flower. Different forms of the plant showed slight differences in the shape and colour of the petals. Ian mentioned that which some species, the petals can also change colour as they age.

Astrophytum asterias has yellow flowers, sometimes with a red centre. The petals have a silky sheen. *A myriostigma* had cream/yellow flowers with a little black tip to the petal, visible on close examination. *Austrocactus coxii* has orange-yellow. The flowers emerge at the end of the stems, like *Pterocactus*. *Austrocactus patagonicus* has pale pink flowers.

Aztekium ritteri was growing on a graft. Ian mentioned you may not even see the buds forming since they form in the wool so sometimes it is a surprise to suddenly see the pink or white flowers. The flowers tend to have a pleasant smell. A *Blossfeldia* was also growing on a graft. It had yellow flowers. Even small plants can flower very well.

Cleistocactus smargdiferus has a green tip to the flowers, which is a unique feature. *Cleistocactus baumannii* has red flowers. These plants tend to flower in sequence over a period of time. This is important since the humming birds need food over a period of time, not just in one flush. *Cleistocactus hyalacanthus* has flowers with a lovely colour, and it is also very spiny. *Cleistocactus strausii* has very silky spines and red flowers.

Copiapoa flowers tend to be mainly yellow. He was excited when his plant of *C. grandiflora* formed a red flower bud but when the flower opened, it was yellow. *C. humilis* has a pink outer edge to it, and changes colour as it ages. There was an impressive *C. laui* at the last National Show which he thought might be grafted, although David Neville thought it should have looked better if it had been on a graft. These plants need quite a lot

of water during the growing season. *C. krainziana* was flowering when cricket ball sized. There are lots of myths about the size a plant needs to be before flowering, but Ian thought a lot came down to the particular clone you happen to be growing.

The flower of *Denmosa rhodocantha* contained many anthers – there was a lot of pollen there! *Echinocactus horizonthalonius* was photographed at “Big Bend”. Luckily for him, this plant was flowering in September - usually the flowers are out in July or August. He collected some seeds, and mentioned that one has to be quick about this since the ants are also out gathering the seeds. An *Echinocereus* flower had the characteristic green stigma. *Echinopsis ancistrophora* var. *kratochviliana* has a nice body, and we also saw a number of flowers of beautiful hybrids; *Echinopsis* “Sonnet” is a Schick hybrid which has white flowers with a pink mid-stripe.

Eriosyce crista has red flowers. The plant is almost impossible to spot without the flowers. *Eriosyce laui* has yellow flowers, with a purple brown stripe on the back of the outer petals. The plant was on a graft and it is not easy to grow, and rare. *Escobaria minima* forms pink flowers which open in a nice group. *Ferocactus wislizeni* has orange flowers, and each seed pod can contain a couple of hundred seeds.

Gymnocalycium bruchii flowers are the same size as the plant bodies – it can flower when the size of a 1p coin. *G. hypochlorum* was sheltering under a bush. There are lots of hybrids or varieties of *G. baldianum* around these days. They are normally red but there are some white ones and also all the colours in between. In habitat, the plant was growing in shale and leaf litter along the side of the road. *Gymnocalycium ferrarii* does not have a red flower – they are pink! This was growing in igneous rock, rather like granite with clay underneath.

Krainzia. (now in *mammillaria*) *longiflora* has nice flowers. He had plants with red spines and white spines, but the flowers are the same. *Lobivias* tend to have long flower tubes – they grow amongst bushes and need the long flower tubes for the flowers to extend over other plants. *Lobivia arachnacantha* was a tatty looking plant but flowers are nice. There are white, red, yellow and pink flowered forms. *Lobivia aurea* would be hard to find in habitat without the flowers. It is easy to grow.

Lophophora echinata had pure white flowers. *Maihueniopsis pentlandii* is a member of the opuntia family. An unnamed *Mammillaria* had striking “candy striped” flowers, the petals were white with a pink midstripe. We also saw *M. carmenae* and *M. roseoalba*. Even cristate plants can flower, and a plant he had obtained from Pat Delaney had a line of pink flowers along the extended growing point. – it might be a *M. wildii*. *M. humboldtii* has nice white spines and *M. napina* has fantastic flowers. *M. schiedeana* has small flowers and neat spines. *Mammillaria surculosa* has yellow flowers which Ian said had a scent of citrus, reminiscent of Fairy washing up liquid. *M. senilis* had red flowers and needs full sun in the winter. *M. theresae* has pink flowers, although there is also a white form.

Mammillaria luethyi was on a graft and had fantastic flowers. It is a relatively new discovery. *Mammillaria guelzowiana* has spectacular magenta flowers, although this particular picture had been taken just as the buds were starting to open. A few days later, and the display of flowers would have been much more impressive. *M. sheldonii* has a large pink flower.

We moved on to Matucana, which have fantastic flowers – the featured plant was *M. myriacantha*. *Miqueliopuntia miquelii* has pink flowers and is a member of the opuntia family. *Neoporteria* are now classified as *Eriosyce*, although most growers seem to prefer the old name. Many have bicoloured pink / yellow flowers which are very attractive. *Neoporteria floccosa* has red/pink flowers and *Neoporteria chilensis* has red flowers and green seed pods.

We moved on to *Notocactus* and saw some plants which were well camouflaged amongst dried grass and twigs. *Notocactus scopia* is a popular plant well worth growing, and *N. acutus* had 10cm wide yellow flowers with red stigmas. *Notocactus uebelmannianus* forms flowers which are either yellow or purple – however, when visiting a nursery, he was able to find a plant with pink flowers.

Opuntia basilaris is not the easier thing to flower, but it has pink flowers with a red centre. The photograph had managed to capture a bee pollinating the flower. *Opuntia cordobensis* has greenish-yellow flowers, and we saw a close up of the bud of *Opuntia quimilo*. *Ortegocactus macdougallii* has nice yellow flowers but the bodies tend to mark up with brown patches in

cultivation. David Neville said they also mark up in habitat!

A plant growing in side of hill, which was almost hidden by cobwebs proved to be a *Parodia rigidispina*. An *Eulychnia* (or maybe a *Trichocereus*) was covered in what appeared to be red flowers - however these were the blooms of a parasite known as quintral (*Tristerix aphyllus*) which lives inside the tissue of the cactus. We were at the letter P so we were shown a close up of a passion flower.

Pediocactus braydii has cream flowers. He was in America in April and found two populations with flowers. Without the flowers these would have been hard to find. *Pyrhocactus umadeave* forms a shell of spines and some specimens look spectacular. We moved on to Rebutias. *R. albiflora* has been used for many interesting crosses. *R. perplexa* has small heads but forms masses of pink flowers. *Soehrensia bruchii* had red flowers as did *S. Formosa*. *Stetsonia coryne* is a tall growing columnar plant from Argentina and Bolivia. *Strombobocactus disciformis* has white/cream flowers. Sulcorebutias are very floriferous and we saw *S. canigueralii* and a pale pink flowered form of *S. rauschii*. *S. senilis* has long curly spines.

We moved on to *Tephrocactus alexanderi* and *Thelocactus hexaedrophorus*. *Thelocactus bicolor* ssp. *schwarzii* has lilac flowers with a red centre. *Trichocereus candicans* and *T. pasacana* have large flowers, as does *Trichocereus spachianus* which is likely to be bat-pollinated.

Turbincarpus pseudopectinatus is distinctive with its neat spines. *Turbincarpus schwarzii* featured several white flowers. *Weingartia neumanniana* had a tatty dark body due to scorch, but had nice yellow flowers. *Weingartia trollii* had red flowers, although they appeared orange on the screen. *Wilcoxia poselgeri* forms thin stems as does *Wilcoxia schmollii*. We finished at the letter Z with *Zygocactus truncatus* (the Christmas cactus) but the final picture was of a skull at the Tilcara museum, in the Jujuy province of Argentina.

Vinay Shah

Table Show – July 2006

There were 18 entries in the July table show.

	Cacti – Echinopsis Group	Succulents – Aloe Group
Open	(1) T Grech Echinopsis kermesina	(1) J Roskilly Aloe erinacea
	(2) P Clemow Echinopsis obrepanda ssp. calorubra	(2) J Roskilly Aloe peglerae
	(3) R Courtney Lobivia hybrid	(3) J Roskilly Aloe sinkatana
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Lobivia famatimensis	(1) J Burnay Aloe peglerae
	(2) -	(2) T Grech Aloe sp.
	(3) -	(3) T Grech Aloe glauca

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A committee meeting was held at 79 Shirley Avenue on 11th July.

Recent meetings and events were discussed. The Show at the Common had been well organised and everything had gone smoothly.

Our meetings seem to be well attended at the present time, and it is encouraging to see some new faces each month.

Apparently, our old meeting hall at Bangor Road has been knocked down and replaced by a slab of concrete!

The Branch Dinner was attended by 13 people.

Preparations for the New Forest Show were discussed. The Hilliers weekend was scheduled for 12th-13th August. However, the Fresh Acres open evening on the 14th August was going to be cancelled due to non-availability of staff.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Last month, Ian Acton submitted an article discussing the presence of the cactus moth in Australia. Here's a response from David Corina. In addition, Margaret Corina found a related article published in *The Amateur's Digest* (a Canadian Publication) and I have placed a few copies of this on the front table.

Cactoblastis from Australia?

[A reply to Ian Acton]

As most of you are aware, many species of *Opuntia* (including *Nopalea*) as well as *Agaves* were transported round the world to suitable climates where they were intended to serve as food for the cochineal beetle (a close relative of the dreaded mealy bug) and possibly emergency fodder for cattle. (In the case of the *Agave*, this was for fibre – not tequila!) We all know what happened, the *Opuntias* ran amuck, especially in Australia, where they took over vast areas of, mainly, Queensland and New South Wales.

After many attempts at control, including the dreaded mealy-bug, and scouring the world for a predator, the moth (or rather, eggs of) *Cactoblastis cactorum* were introduced from Argentina, where it is not particularly rampant. Of critical importance was an assurance from US Department of Agriculture that its caterpillars (the active agent) were specific for *Opuntias* and did not appear to attack anything else. This was especially important in the light of the cane toad fiasco in Australia.

The countdown seems to have been as follows:

1839 – prickly pear plant taken to Scone (Australia) where it flourished. Visitors begged bits for hedges and the like. Plants soon engulfed homesteads, then ranches!

1884 – Brisbane Courier newspaper calls for control measures.

1900 – Plants cover at least 4 million hectares.

1914 – First *Cactoblastis* eggs sent from S. America, did not survive shipment. War halted further work.

1924 – Queensland & NSW Commission set up. Rid us of this pest!

1930 – Further *Cactoblastis* eggs sent, breeding finally established. 3 million eggs released, started to control the *Opuntias*. Thriving black market appears for the eggs!

About this time the Commission announced that the spread of the plant had been halted.

1989 – *Cactoblastis* reported from Florida.

The control measures still continue to this day.

What appears to have happened recently is that *Cactoblastis cactorum* has appeared in the Florida Keys, together with other species of moths that attack *Opuntias*. Most of these other moths are already endemic in Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. I cannot find any information on how the *Cactoblastis* moth had found its way back to America; perhaps someone else could fill in this information for us!

If you are really interested, at the time of writing of the article from which this summary is taken (2004) the following sites were given for more information :

http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/bfly/cactus_moth.htm

<http://linus.socs.uts.edu.au/~don/larvae/pyra/cactor.html>

Phew!

David Corina

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 5th September and will feature Eddy Harris who will be talking about Mesembryanthemums.

The September table show will feature the **Gymnocalycium** Group (Cacti) and **Mesembs - excluding Lithops** (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 Gymnocalycium Group includes *Gymnocalycium*, *Brachycalycium* and *Neowerdermannia*.

The Mesemb family is large and includes over 120 genera, the names of which are listed in the Handbook of Shows. Lithops are not allowed this month, but plants belonging to the *Argyroderma*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophytum*, *Faucaria* and *Nananthus* subgroups are allowed. Some of the more common eligible species include: *Argyroderma*, *Gibbaeum*, *Pleiospilos*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophytum*, *Ophthalmophyllum*, *Faucaria*, *Glottiphyllum*, *Lampranthus*, *Trichodiadema*, *Aloinopsis*, *Fenestraria*, *Frithia*, and *Titanopsis*.

Forthcoming Events

Fri	4 th	Aug-	Portsmouth	Portsmouth & District Branch @ Southsea Show
Sun	6 th	Aug		
Sat	12 th	Aug-	Ampfield	Display and Plant Sales @ Sir Harold Hillier Gardens,
Sun	13 th	Aug		Jermyn Lane, Ampfield
Mon	14th	Aug	Sussex	Freshaeres Nursery - Open Day (cancelled)
Fri	18 th	Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening
Tue	5 th	Sep	Southampton	"Mesembryanthemums" - Eddy Harris
Fri	15 th	Sep	Isle of Wight	Zone 11 Quiz
Sat	16 th	Sep	Portsmouth	"Continental Nurseries and Collections" - Ian Woolnough
Sat	23 rd	Sep	Waterlooville	Zone 11 Show - Christ Church Hall, Widley, Waterlooville
Tue	3 rd	Oct	Southampton	"Chile 2003" - Angie Money

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