British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

We're halfway through summer but it doesn't really feel like we've seen anything of summer, does it? If you were add up all the sunny days we might just about get to a week or so. I've certainly been able to keep watering to just once a week or even less, which is quite unusual for the summer months. A number of cacti have flowered over the last month – including Notocacti, Gymnocalycium, Astrophytum and also Hildewinteria. Amonst the succulents, a number of Haworthias and Aloes have also flowered.

Announcements

A reminder that the **BCSS National Show** is now less than 2 weeks away. A number of members are due to go to Cambridgeshire for the event. If anyone wants to go but hasn't made any arrangements yet, please have a word with David Neville.

A couple of weeks ago, the Branch took part in the **New Forest Show**. As usual there was good interest in our stand and we also won a Gold Medal for our display – I am sure this is what has inspired Team GB at the Olympics ☺. Takings were down slightly compared to last year, but overall it was again a successful event for the branch,

The **annual branch dinner** will be held on Friday 24th August, and the venue will be the Luzborough Inn, near Romsey. We usually assemble from 7:00pm for a 7:30pm start. Please let David Neville know if you plan to attend.

Last Month's Meeting

Colonise and Populate

Geoff introduced out speaker for the evening - John Watmough, from Oxford Branch. John read out his title "Colonise and Populate" and explained what the title meant. He explained that in his first ever job when he started full time employment, he dealt with 2 old ladies who were the daughters of Reverend Spooner of New College, Oxford, who came up with the concept of spoonerisms – mixing up parts of words to create witty sayings. An example he gave us was the "Queer old Dean" which was formed from "Dear old Queen". Of course the students made up quite a few to go along with Spooner's creations.

Basically the talk was about how to make more plants. He suspected that we would know most of what he was going to tell us, but we might have few laughs and learn something new along the way. He would show us some real plants in the first half of the talk and then show slides in the second half.

He started with cuttings. Gasterias can make new plants from broken-off leaves. Some people thought it might be an adaptation to tortoises chewing bits off bits of the plant. Two examples he showed were *Gasteria pendulifolia* and *Gasteria bicolor*. If you are clumsy or have too many things in the greenhouse, then you can often break off bits of plants accidentally. *Tylecodon hirtifolium* is one of the best of the Tylecodons, and we also saw a piece of Kleinia/Senecio which had rooted. With an Othonna, he had broken off a piece at the wrong time of the year when the plant was dormant, but even that eventually took – normally when you take cuttings (whether deliberate or by accident) you should do it when the plant is in active growth otherwise it may not root.

Sometimes you cut pieces off a plant to tidy it up. He showed us a *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis* which he salvaged when one of the rosettes in the middle had died, and the plant had become unsightly. What Dutch nurseryman Cok Grootscholten does when he has a rare or valuable

Haworthia is to use a sharp-edged spoon to rip out the centre, and this forces the plant to throw up offsets. To illustrate this, John showed us a *Haworthia sordida* where side shoots had been forced to grow by cutting out the centre.

[By the way, Cok has put up huge galleries of his plant collection on the Internet : http://public.fotki.com/grootscholten/plant-collections/]

Not everything works. *Pelargonium cotyledonis* is a pretty caudiciform from Saint Helena – but for a long time, it was said that it's not possible to take cuttings of this. However, someone had recently succeeded, so it is worth having a go – maybe it just has to be at the right time of the year. David Neville said that *Dorstenia gigas* used to be difficult but a couple of years ago, Rene Geissler found a way of doing so. Of course when someone succeeds, it is important to spread the knowledge.

With Ceropegias, some have tubers and some don't. One with tubers is *Ceropegia conrathii.* In Gordon Rowley's encyclopedia there is a statement which says this is an intractable plant from Natal. However, you can take cuttings of leaf shoots with two pairs of leaves, use hormone rooting powder which contains fungicide and place these in compost - if they take, they will go on to form their own proper tuber, just like the parent. Ivor mentioned *Ceropegia woodii* which is easy to propagate since it forms corms off the stems. John mentioned that years ago when he moved house, he took all his plants to work and forced his colleagues to look after them. Despite leaving the *C. conrathii* on the top of a cupboard in the dark and forgetting about it for months, the plant survived. Tom Radford suggested that using vermiculite might be a good medium for some types of cuttings.

Moving on Echeverias, he tries to grow plenty of *E. shaviana* for sale since it is always popular. It forms offsets and you can also root the leaves and the bracts. With *E. laui*, as far as he knew, the leaves can't be rooted. However, David Neville said that it had been done - Linda Labbett used to propagate this by using the young leaves from the flower stem and had a 50% success rate. John said that Stuart Riley was a good guide since he only tends to buy plants which he can propagate quickly vegetatively.

Some species of Tavaresia hail from Angola and don't like cold weather. He keeps his plant indoors during the winter months. He had a big plant 9" across but this started to rot at a very fast rate - "express rot" – but he was able to save a few pieces and placed these under the bed, through the winter. In the spring he had a look and some had rooted, eventually becoming a reasonable plant.

Everybody has a pot somewhere with pieces of Adromischus and he showed examples of leaf and stem cuttings of *A. kubosensis, A. maculatus,* and *A. diabolicus*. There are three Adromischus species which have a different growth pattern from the others. *A. phillipsiae* has big red flowers which are very different from the rest. *A. humilis* and *A. fallax* are the others which don't propagate from leaves. So with these, you have to chop up the plant and propagate from pieces of stem. It's possible that these may be diverging botanically.

Some plants make their own cuttings. Some Kalanchoes send out runners. One thing John did for the Mesemb Study Group was to request members to send him their unwanted plants for rescue and propagation. *Orthopterum waltonii* was one such plant, and his attempts to produce cutting had worked very well. He mentioned that his sale plants with orange labels were the MSG plants. Altogether, he received 240 plants from Spain and 192 from France.

A plant of *Encephalocarpus strobiliformis* was a tatty old plant, with the top being damaged, but it was still putting out good offsets. He took these off and potted them on, and as long as the parent kept doing this, it was worth retaining. *Agave patonii* is quite prolific and a small plant had already formed 4 offsets. A *Copiapoa laui* had a central stem which started going manky – he took this out and the plant formed lots of little offsets, which have started to root after only 3 weeks.

Escobaria laredoi has dark purple flowers - but his plant had become elongated and he was using it as a stock plant to produce offsets. John mentioned that with some plants you can take root cuttings and an example was an Euphorbia which had thick roots like an upside-down caput-medusae. Some Ceropegias have lumps at the bottom of the plant from which stems emerge, and you can divide these up.

Senecio acerifolius has purple edges to its leaves and it is a lovely plant. It forms a caudex-like structure which can be cut up. *Pterocactus tuberosus* comes from Patagonia where the Antarctic gales blast it. You have to mimic this artificially by chopping bits off, but leave enough areoles for next year's growths. This one flowered this year. Even if nothing is happening above the ground, they spend most of their time trying to make the underground tuber bigger. He had kept this

cutting because it's a cristate and was flat instead of cylindrical. The tuber was also cristate on one side.

Next was a fairly decent cutting of *Ariocarpus trigonus* which had decided to rot in the middle. He cut the plant down the middle and both the resultant pieces were growing as independent plants. He had seen Aeonium in Madeira and bought *A. glandulosum* and *A. glutinosum* from Specks – both were doing file. One of them was preparing to flower and since it dies after doing this, he was hoping it would send out an offset or two before the end. *Stultitia hardyi* is an asclepiad and there were pieces of this in the tray which he said the audience could help themselves to – by the time they got home it would probably have rooted! Grafting can also be used to make plant grow quicker and we saw an *Ariocarpus scapharostrus* with 11 heads.

It is worth growing plants from seed - you can get first pick of the seedlings and pick out any unusual ones and grow these on. As an example, a plant of *Euphorbia obesa* had gone monstrose and had a dozen heads. With *Mammillaria theresae* you have to get the seeds out somehow, since the flowers set seed which remain embedded within the plant body. The older the seed, the longer it's been there and the more viable it's supposed to be.

He also has 2 plants of *Mammillaria goldii*. These have flowered together but he has been unable to set seed on them. He also grew Blosssfeldia from seed in a Petri dish and it took around 2 years for him to see the dots of the seedlings. A few survived and the plants at the front were 12 years old and were growing in Oxford clay! *Thelocactus multicephalus* had been grown from seed, and three of the seedlings had had three heads - which ones do you keep? As an aside, Oxford branch member Martin Doorbar holds the national collection of Thelocactus. Some plants seed themselves and Talinum is an example. This hails from Africa and many species are miniatures. Frailea was given as an example of a species that was hard to grow from seed.

The next plant was a beautiful double headed *Astrophytum asterias* which he had grown from seed for around 20 years. Unfortunately it had a split which made it unsuitable for showing. Ever since it was discovered, he had always wanted *Astophytum (Digitostigma) caput-medusae*. Although completely different in shape from the other astrophytums it has the same flower. You can buy it online but it is very expensive. Eventually he got 10 seed for 10 euros from a Czech seller. Five of these came up and one survived. He was pleased to see the plant go on to form a tuber.

John said he sowed his seeds in little pots and then seal them in polythene. He uses Chinosol to ward off fungus. You have to watch them periodically. Cacti don't mind being kept this way for the best part of a year, but mesembs do not like sealed up for a long period, so those need to be looked at more often. There were examples of Gibbaeum, Muiria, *Faucaria candida* (white flowered), and *Vlokia ater*. He also had a pot of *Dinteranthus vanzylii* (Emerald form), with the surface covered in pieces of ground glass. He was trying to mimic the quartz patches that they grow in, in habitat – the quartz collects condensation while letting light through.

We resumed after the mid-meeting break with a slide show. First was *Copiapoa laui,* which we had seen "in person" in the first half of the talk. Next was a view of *Copiapoa montana* upside down. He had the idea that one day he will do a talk on plant roots since it's an important part of any plant. A picture of a Gymnocalycium featured a bee in the flower and he mentioned that one of the problems with greenhouse cultivation was that you couldn't be sure that your seeds were the original species if bees were cross-pollinating. He keeps a dozen or so Mammillarias and said that he has seen bees going just from one Mammillaria to another while avoiding any other plants that might be in flower.

Islaya is now in Eriosyce and we saw the typical flower of this species. They form hollow pink berries which are quite big and they rattle when you shake them. Sometimes when you open them, the seeds have already started to germinate and tis phenomenon is termed vivipary. It is not very common in cacti but it does happen with a few plants. Rebecca mentioned tomatoes do it and Ben mentioned some Amaryllids also do it.

Lophophora jourdaniana is supposed to have a red flower and it has little spines on the newer growth. Some people think it might be a hybrid and he gets very poor seed germination from it. Some hybrids are like that. We also saw the caespitose forrn of *Lophophora williamsi*. This grows true from seed, so it's considered a variety rather than a form. Next was a plant which Hans Biesheuvel said was a Lopho-turbin, with one of its parents being *Lophorora turbinicarpus*. Given Hans's size, he's not a man you'd argue with. He has tried to create the hybrid himself but has never had any success.

With *Mammillaria goldii*, his attempts at producing seed were unsuccessful. People have said even if they do get seed, it's hard to germinate. Paul Klaassen mentioned that he had been told to soak the seeds for 24 hours in super-saturated sugar

solution - this mimics the seed being in the body of a rotting plant. *Mammillaria hernandezii* is another difficult plant for seed. The plant likes to flower in November and his decided to rot. It was one of the first experimental mericlones so might have been weaker than one grown from seed. Rotting is a always a potential problem with late flowering plants - rot can get down between the bud and into the body of the plant. As the plant died, he had the task of sorting the seed from some rotten smelly mush. He managed to get 300 seeds from it and sent this in to David Rushforth for the society seed distribution.

With *Mammillaria zephranthoides*, his plant used to win prizes at shows but it went rotten a couple of years ago. He was able to save some offsets and propagate them. It also produces lots of seed on long red berries and has pretty white flowers and judges seem to like it.

Pelecyphora is another genus where the seed is hidden inside the plant. Every now and then you find the seed pods. It is quite temperamental and not easy to grow, as well as being a favourite of red spider. The flower is a rather average bloom. He wondered whether a lot of these small cacti from Mexico are botanically related or share the same pollinator since the flowers are a rather similar shape and colour.

Pterocactus seeds are rather like "Pringles", with a membrane surrounding the central seed to aid distribution. "Do they come in all flavours?" asked David. *Pterocactus australis* is a southern one. With Pterocactus, the rule is if bits fall off then you can prune it, but if it is more compact then leave it alone. Rene Geisller grew a lot these and John got cultivation advice from him. He grows them in his cold greenhouse. It got down to -19ºC a couple of years ago and these plants didn't mind it. Others which didn't mind low temperature were some of the Echinocereus and Gymnos. Neowerdermannia are used to low temperatures and Oroyas are from high altitudes. Some Rebutias and Sulcorebutias are OK too. John said that Gillian Evison had shown them pictures of Delospermas which were growing on mountains and completely covered in ice during the nights.

Rebutia einsteinii in the wild would be growing in between bits of rock. Strombocactus is a genus he would have labelled as difficult but he was not so sure now since he had 50 seedlings in a 2" pot. Keeping them alive long enough to make viable plants might be difficult.

His plant of *Tephrocactus alexanderi* developed a slimy black mould and had to go. It is quite easy from cuttings but sometimes they fall apart. *Maihueniopsis darwinii* is best grown from cuttings rather than seed and the example had a nice orange-peach flower. A cristate flower was from *Wilcoxia schmollii.* The plant itself has soft and hairy bodies. All Wilcoxias have Echinocereus flowers with the green stigma. These plants are scramblers with tuberous roots like dahlias, but in between the tubers are mealy bugs. The plant stems need to be trained and you can propagate from the bits you cut off. The cuttings go on to form proper tubers.

Aloe vera has been in cultivation for 5000 years so it is surprising that there aren't more strains around. They are cold sensitive, coming from the Yemen originally. *Aloe barbadensis* was grown on Barbados commercially in the 18th century but it's just a variant of *A. vera*. Paul Klaassen said it also grows natively in Malta but he was told that all the plants there were sterile. It is propagated commercially by cuttings.

With *Ceropegia rendallii*, he tried stem cuttings but never got them to take. Either they won't or he was doing something wrong. The main plant was dead now. *Ceropegia stapeliiformis* was much easier – you could cut it anywhere and root the pieces – there wasn't much differentiation between the root and the stem. *Dendrosicyos socotrana* was a plant which Gillian Evison gave it to him – she suggested he grow it over a radiator where you grow things like your pseudolithos. He couldn't believe that something with leaves on could be grown like this so moved it to the greenhouse but the leaves wilted and so he put it back on the radiator and it perked up. It needs loads of heat and water and in the conditions present in Southern California, nurseries can grow these to 10 feet in three years. The hairs visible on the leaf stems are not irritating.

With Duvalia, he grew some seedlings of *Duvalia corderoyi* because he was writing an article about Justus Cordyroi, the great grandfather of one of Oxford's members, and he was gathering up all the plants named after him. This is not difficult at all, but the plants do not like deep compost so they should be grown in shallow compost only half an inch deep. Tom Radford said he successfully grew these types of plants in pot saucers.
Euphorbia schoenlandii is easy from seed. He doesn't grow many Euphorbias because just down the road is Mary Stone who has a great collection of this species. *Echeveria carnicolor* is a common one with red flowers. *Graptopetalum suaveolens* is a very easy and common plant. It sends up young plantlets on stalks and is easy to reproduce. A plant

with dudleya-type flowers was actually a Hasseanthus. It forms a caudex and has annual growths. If you grow it from seed, it first comes up and then disappears and you tend to throw the pot out as a failure. Next year you try again and the same thing happens. Well what's happening is that the plant is forming tiny caudexes which are like clay-coloured pin heads. So it's best to keep the pot and just be patient. Once they get going they will turn into a decent enough plant. The featured plant was *Hasseanthus nesioticus* (from the island of Santa Cruz in California).

We saw some *Haworthia sordida* seedlings. Moving on to some asclepiads, *Huernia pillansi* is a pretty but rather treacherous plant because it rots quickly – so it's best to take cuttings regularly. *Lavrania perlata* does quite well in shows. It used to be in the genus Trichocaulon, but since they don't have a hairy stem, they were put into a new genus. It is easy from seed – the plant produces double horned seed pods and the seed should be sown soon after the pod splits.

John mentioned he had an email from a Chinese chap who was studying in Oxford and who was due to return home after finishing his degree. He wanted to donate his plants to the Oxford branch since it was a charity. When asked how many plants, the answer was about a hundred, but this turned out to be 100 pots of 16 plants per pot of Lithops, all properly labelled with their full names and Cole numbers. They had all been grown on one window sill. We also saw some of his own efforts at growing lithops. He particularly likes the unusual coloured non-standard cultivars.

A Monadenium was a tangle of stems but it was just one plant. You can pull it out of the pot and tear bits off. If you like a mesemb with a caudex, Phylobollus may be worth a try. These are winter growers. Piaranthus forms the stapeliad seed horns and can fill the greenhouse with rosebay willow herb seeds which get everywhere. *Tylecodon hertefolia* is a beautiful plant and not one he'd break up or take cuttings from because it looks better when grown as a large specimen plant. You need to have to have a show in November show to see this at its best. Tylecodon racemosus is a plant where you can break bits off quite readily and just stick it in a pot and off it will go. We ended with a picture of some pictures showing his attempts at seed-raising which featured a heated propagator and various 2" pots full of seedlings.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 13 entries in the July table show.

	Cacti – Echinopsis	**Succulents – Aloe**
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Chamaecereus 'Shot Scarlet'	(1) J Roskilly Aloe erinacea
	(2) -	(2) T Radford Aloe stricta
	(3) -	(3) B Beckerleg Aloe haworthioides
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Acanthocalycium peitscheriana	(1) B Beckerleg Aloe erinacea
	(2) -	(2) T Radford Aloe jucunda
	(3) -	(3) J Roskilly Aloe sp

Ivor Biddlecombe

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on September 4th and will feature Stuart Riley who will be talking about plant collections, nurseries and shows in the USA.

The September Table Show will consist of the **Gymnocalycium** group (cacti) and the **Mesemb** group excluding Lithops (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 **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 specifically excluded, but plants belonging to the Argyroderma, Cheiridopsis, Conophythum, 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*

A reminder for the committee that a committee meeting will be held on Monday 13th August.

Forthcoming Event

Thu 9th Aug	Isle of Wight	Open Evening at Mark Bulloch, 28 Western Road, Shanklin
Mon 13th Aug	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat 18th Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting
Sat 18th Aug		BCSS National Show – Godmanchester, Cambs
Fri 24th Aug	Southampton	Annual Branch Dinner
Mon 27th Aug	Portsmouth	Display/Plant Sales @ Emsworth Horticultural Society Show TBC
Tue 4th Sep	Southampton	"Shows, Collections and Nurseries in the USA" - Stuart Riley
Sat 8th Sep	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Sat 8th Sep	Isle of Wight	"Arizona Byways" - Trevor Wray
Sat 15th Sep	Portsmouth	"Socotra" - Bob Potter
Tue 22nd Sep	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Autumn Show @ Christ Church Hall, Widley, Waterlooville
Tue 2nd Oct	Southampton	"Conophytum" - Terry Smale
Sat 13th Oct	Isle of Wight	"Bats" – Graham Street
Sat 20th Oct	Portsmouth	"Conos & Other Mini-Mesembs" - Derek Tribble

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