

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The changeable weather seems to have confused many of my plants – in the last week or so, I've had Rebutias, Mammillarias, Gymnocalyciums and Weingartias all in flower, yet at the same time, the mesembs are starting to awaken. Some of the cacti have managed three flushes of flowers this year. Currently the Aloes are also putting on a good show of tall spikes of orange-red flowers.

The most notable event of the month was seeing *Leuchtenbergia principis* in flower. This weird looking cactus with long thin tubercles tipped with equally long spines surprised me by producing a pale yellow flower which emerged deep from the centre of the plant. Because of the tangle of tubercles and spines, it's hard to notice the flower bud until it's almost ready to open.

Announcements

The branch put on a display at the **Sir Harold Hillier Gardens** in Ampfield, on 12th–13th August. Unlike previous years, we were located in the Education centre, which is in the building opposite the Visitors' centre. Our display featured a large variety of plants and we had over a hundred visitors on each of the two days, many of whom seemed quite interested in the various plants.

David Neville informed me that as of last week, the society has only received a 40% response to the request for members to return **Gift Aid** forms.

These forms were sent out with the June Journal and they allow the Society to claim a 28% rebate on your current and past subscriptions if you're a UK taxpayer. If you did not receive a form or have mislaid it, please get in touch with Margaret Corina for a spare copy.

Last month, I put out some maps with directions to **Fresh Acres** nursery, in Walberton, Sussex. Did anyone find time to visit the nursery? If yes, perhaps they would let other branch members know if there were any good plants to be purchased and whether a trip to the nursery was worthwhile.

The **Zone 11 Quiz** will be hosted by the Isle of Wight branch later this month. The Southampton team has not been chosen yet, but we will have to come to a decision soon! If anyone would like to be a part of the team or even just lend their support and travel out to the Isle of Wight, please let a member of the Committee know. Usually we catch a ferry from Southampton to West Cowes, where members from the Isle of Wight branch greet us and provide a lift to their meeting hall.

The **Zone 11 Show** will be hosted by Portsmouth branch and will be held at Widley, Waterlooville on the 23rd of September. Show schedules and entry forms should be available from the front table.

The 2007 Branch programme is being prepared so the committee have started discussing the choice of speakers for next year. If you have any comments about the meetings this year, or suggestions about speakers who you would like to see at our branch, please discuss this with Margaret or David Corina as soon as possible.

There have been reports of vandalism in the meeting hall car park (not necessarily during our meetings). It's been suggested that someone should go out occasionally during the meetings to keep an eye on things. If anyone has suffered damage to their car during one of our meetings, please report this to a committee member.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

It was Ivor Biddlecombe's turn to bring in some *Plants of Interest*. He mentioned that while looking around for things in flower, the most impressive plant he found was *Echinocereus brandegeei*. The specimen he had brought along was quite a size (15 inches diameter) and it was covered in vicious spines. The new spines are red but they fade to grey as they age. A few of the large pink flowers were already open and there were about 10 more buds coming on. David Neville mentioned that it was quite a feat to grow one with so many flowers. Ivor said the plant had flowered in previous years, but had done particularly well this year.

Next, Ivor described some of the experiments he had been conducting, growing crosses of *Lithops*. He had several trays of seedlings and mentioned that these had been sowed 4 years ago. First was an attempt to cross-pollinate *Lithops* cv. 'Stones Throw' (which looks like a slight variation on *L. lesliei*) with *L. lesliei* itself. He got all sorts of forms in between the parents, although the majority of the seedlings were like *L. lesliei*. He had hundreds of seedlings and once the markings started to appear, the seedlings could be grouped by their appearance.

Next was *L. steineckeana* which is perhaps an extreme variation of *L. pseudotruncatella*. He crossed these two species, and several seedlings came up true to the first parent. These were separated out although unfortunately only one of them survived. The majority of the seedlings came up looking like *L. pseudotruncatella*.

Ivor also grew seedlings of *Lithops salicola* which shows similarities to some forms of *L. hallii*. It is not the nicest looking plant since it tends to grow tall bodies, raised from the soil. However, where it grows, it gets flooded and so it seems to cope better than others *Lithops* species if over-watered. He had treated all the seedlings the same in terms of watering and feeding, and some plants had elongated whereas some had remained low-growing. It seems that different clones have different growth habits. The final tray contained lots of seedlings of *L. pseudotruncatella*, showing the large variation that was possible within a single group of seedlings.

For those that are interested, there are some excellent pictures of *Lithops* cultivars at : <http://lithops.info/en/gallery/cv-images.html>

Thanks are due to David Neville for providing the following write-up of last month's talk.

Cacti in Northern Mexico – Part 2

The speaker at our August meeting was Terry Smale, who travelled down from Surrey to give us the second part of his talk based on a trip made to Mexico around 20 years ago. We had enjoyed the first part of the talk back in 2004.

The trip was undertaken in late March and early April, just prior to the time of year when the main rains fall in central Mexico, and this part of the trip covered the southernmost areas through which the group travelled. The group of 6 people travelled around in 2 hire cars and stayed in local hotels.

This part of the trip began around the famous area of Huizache Junction in the state of San Luis Potosi, north into the Jaumave Valley – another cactus-rich area – then out to Gaudalcazar and Balnearas de Lourdes and east towards the mountain range.

At Huizache we saw *Coryphantha pulleiniana*, a species that is not commonly seen in cultivation. The plants were small and single-headed, but underground they have a large tuberous root. Also here grew *Astrophytum myriostigma*, which is very pleasing to see in the wild because it is such a popular and widely grown species in collections.

But Huizache is perhaps best known as the locality where large, multi-headed clusters of *Lophophora williamsii* occur in big numbers. These clumps are very low-growing, the top of the heads are often flush with the soil, so the bulk of the plant is underground. Terry speculated that the large numbers of heads on the plants in this region might be due to the fact that local people slice the heads off to dry them for use in religious ceremonies, and this would encourage the development of a greater number of heads than would be usual. It is possible that the plants in this area are simply prone to offset more freely than clones in other areas. We also saw *Thelocactus tulensis*, a none-too-exciting species, which Terry observed tended to vary from one locality to another. Another species that is always a pleasure to see is *Ariocarpus retusus*, but although this is one of the choicer species in cultivation it is extremely widespread and numerous in the wild, and on stony or rocky hillsides it can often be found in many areas of Mexico.

Less commonly seen is *Sclerocactus* (formerly classified as a *Glandulicactus*) *uncinatus* subspecies *crassihamatus*; it does not occur in large populations in habitat, and is also encountered infrequently in collections in the UK. Much commoner is *Opuntia microdasys*, and Terry showed us a large plant of the yellow-spined form, flowering beautifully. Although many opuntias are not best suited to cultivation in small glasshouses, they do undoubtedly produce very beautiful flowers.

Near the town of Tula we saw larger-headed forms of *Thelocactus tulensis*, looking markedly different to those we had seen near Huizache. Once again in this region there were numerous plants of *Ariocarpus retusus*, exhibiting considerable variation in the shape of the tubercles. *Mammillaria perbella* subspecies *microthele* (often seen in collections labelled as *M. microthele*) forms dense, multiheaded clusters and these were common in this area. *Mammillaria magnimamma* is a much larger and faster growing species, and the form growing here had a markedly strong central spine; this plant has in the past been given the name *M. centralifera*, although the name is no longer accepted since these plants are just geographical variants of a very variable species.

In the area around Palmillas, growing amid limestone chippings, we saw the diminutive *Turbincarpus pseudopectinatus*. Miniature species like this are difficult to find in the wild, particularly since they tend to be in small, localised populations, so unless one is directed towards them by previous visitors to the area it is possible to wander around and not find them at all!

Travelling towards the Jaumave Valley Terry observed that the development of annual leaves on the small bushes and scrub was more advanced, so there had probably been some rain in recent weeks. We were shown a beautiful cycad growing amid typical cactus terrain – it was *Dioone edule*, a species that is sometimes seen in cultivation. Plants of *Astrophytum myriostigma* in this area were much fatter and rounded than those seen previously, and were in wonderful condition. Growing amid limestone rocks were plants of *Mammillaria klissingiana*, and amid the bushes were small plants of *M. baumii*. Growing here too was *Thelocactus conothelos*, magnificent plants around 5 inches across, with magenta flowers.

In the Jaumave Valley (which is a much larger area than the name might imply) growing on flat limestone areas we saw a dense population of

Obregonia denegrii, with hundreds of plants of varying sizes almost covering the ground! Because this is one of those species that is prized in collections we tend to think that it must be scarce in habitat, but apparently there are many areas in this region where obregonias grow in massive numbers. *Neolloydia conoidea* is another widespread species, but in this area the plants are noticeably different, with little or no central spines – this is the form that was given the name *N. grandiflora* in the past. Coryphanthas are notoriously difficult to identify, but Terry thought that the plant he showed growing here was *C. vaupelianus*. It was a clump with large, golden-yellow flowers. We also saw a beautifully spined specimen that was probably *C. delicata*.

Ariocarpus trigonus was shown growing almost buried in slate and grit on a hillside – this is not an easy species to grow well in cultivation because the tubercles frequently become marked. Nearby was *Ferocactus echidne*, which is usually a solitary species, but here the plants were clustering. Here too was *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* subspecies *sinuatus* (formerly *Hamatocactus*) – this is another plant that is rarely grown in UK collections. *Mammillaria viereckii* is a small-headed species that clusters freely in cultivation; Terry found very small plants growing in the shade.

The group headed back towards Huizache, and then east towards Guadalcazar. Amid bushes Terry showed plants of the Indian Paintbrush, a semi-parasitic plant. Further along the road we saw *Turbincarpus* (formerly *Gymnocactus*) *saueri* subspecies *knuthianus* and *Coryphantha georgii* (provisional ID) with very nice spines.

Heading towards Balnearies de Lourdes, the locality for *Calibanus hookeri*, we saw some attractive cholla-type cylindropuntias; these are the type of plant that are easily admired in the wild but which are just not suited to pot cultivation. *Myrtillocactus geometrizans* was commonly used at one time for grafting stock, and is still popular in Continental Europe, but it is ultimately a very large growing species, and we saw plants in flower, growing near *Ferocactus hystrix*. Also in this area was *Thelocactus bicolor*, another very widespread and variable species – the plants here had very short, stout spines and bodies. *Mammillaria nana* is tiny in the wild, rarely growing to 1 inch across, so it is a delight to find. Much easier to spot are the dark greyish plants of *Thelocactus hexaedrophorus*, which make magnificent stout specimens.

As the group travelled around they stopped whenever they noticed any interesting plants from the car, or as they spotted likely looking sites. We saw *Mammillaria zephyranthioides*, *Ferocactus glaucescens* and *Mammillaria compressa*.

Travelling on another road we were shown *Stenocereus dumortieri* in flower, and another couple of attractive species of *Coryphantha*, one of which was probably *C. radians*. *Pachycereus* (formerly *Lemairocereus*) *marginatus* is a distinctive looking plant, and it is commonly used as hedging by local people. Near San Luis de Paz we saw a large and impressive plant of *Coryphantha erecta*, along with *Echinocactus horizionthalonius*, *Mamm. zephyranthioides*, *Ferocactus macrodiscus* and the beautifully flowered *Cylindropuntia rosea*. Rather less popular with some members of the audience was a picture of a Coral snake – when looking for cacti in the wild, one has to keep an eye out for such unwelcome surprises!

On the road to Cadereyta we saw a form of *Mammillaria perbella* which was at one time known as *M. cadereyensis*, forming dense clumps by dichotomous division. Also here was *M. parkinsonii*, which grows into magnificent clumps both in the wild and in collections. Another attractive species to see in habitat is *Astrophytum ornatum*, in some areas this can grow to a metre or more in height. But one of the most exciting things to see in the wild must be *Strombocactus disciformis*, and we saw pictures of it growing densely in shale, from small seedlings to mature plants.

Stenocacti are even more difficult to identify than coryphanthas, and we saw pictures of several specimens for which no-one was brave enough to guess an appropriate name.

In the Barranca de Metztitlan we saw pictures of the Barranca's most famous residents – huge stands of *Cephalocereus senilis*. This is the only place that this enigmatic species grows. Large plants are quite unlike the small specimens that we generally see in our collections because they have no hair on the older parts of the stem, but seedlings photographed amid the mature plants looked just like those raised in cultivation.

Terry showed so many different species in numerous different localities that I have included here just the highlights of the talk that he presented, but the range of plants encountered was impressive and we were all left with a very good

impression of the wonderful range of plants that can be seen in Mexico during just a couple of weeks travelling around.

David Neville

Table Show – August 2006

There were 24 entries in the August table show.

	Cacti – Mammillaria Group	Succulents – Euphorbia Group
Open	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Mammillaria petersonii</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Euphorbia valida</i>
	(2) T Grech <i>Mammillaria</i> sp.	(2) T Grech <i>Euphorbia caput-medusae</i> (<i>cristate</i>)
	(3) T Grech <i>Mammillaria hahniana</i>	(3) T Grech <i>Euphorbia obesa</i>
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Mammillaria lenta</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Euphorbia mosaica</i>
	(2) J Burnay <i>Mammillaria bocasana</i>	(2) T Grech <i>Euphorbia</i> sp.
	(3) J Roskilly <i>Mammillaria plumosa</i>	(3) B Beckerleg <i>Euphorbia caput-medusae</i>

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

A printing error spotted in a back-number of the Society Journal (*before* David Neville became editor)

Printing Error

“ sexperienced by most individuals who indulge”

Ian Acton

Garden centres sell "plants sure to die"

Garden centres were accused yesterday of exploiting weekend gardeners by selling plants that will not survive a British winter.

Glorious displays of trendy plants, many originally from tropical countries, are too frequently being offered to customers with inadequate information about their care, say critics.

Olive trees, bougainvillea, banana plants, cannas, palms, tree ferns and grasses from hot climates were all named yesterday as being among those items that customers are encouraged to buy.

Monty Don, the presenter of the BBC Television programme *Gardeners' World*, was amongst those to speak out yesterday. He said, "The problem is deep-rooted in that chains of garden centres are dedicated to supply rather than demand. ... If you have plants to suit your garden centre, it doesn't mean it will suit a garden. There is no doubt that some garden centres don't consider the garden-worthiness of plants and fail to tell people that the chances of raising this plant healthily are limited."

Gillie Westwood, of the Garden Centre Association, denied that people were being tricked into buying unsuitable plants. "I think that's an outrageous claim," she said, "It's not in our members' interests to sell plants that won't grow in our climate and there's an abundance of information for people to tap into."

Article in *The Times*, 26th August 2006

Next is an extract from an advert spotted by Ivor Biddlecombe. Apparently the NeOpuntia cactus fibres are prepared from Opuntia pads (the plants themselves are cultivated in the Mediterranean). The fibres seem to work by binding with fat in the stomach, which then prevents the fat from being absorbed by the body. The company which has developed this material is planning to licence it for inclusion in many ordinary foods.

NeOpuntia – Nature's fat collector

Say goodbye to unsightly bulges with NeOpuntia. NeOpuntia capsules contain the remarkable fat-isolating capacity of cactus fibres. A study has shown that when take daily with meals for one week, NeOpuntia absorbs over 28% of all fatty acids! It does this by isolating and binding fat in the stomach, allowing it to be eliminated naturally.

Advert in Daily Express, 14th July 2006

Next Month's Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 3rd October, and will feature a talk by Angie Money about her trip to Chile from 3 years ago. I think we can expect to see a few copiapoas!

The October table show will feature **3 Cacti** and **3 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.

A reminder for Committee members that a **branch committee meeting** will be held on the 18th of September.

Forthcoming Events

Fri 15 th Sep	Isle of Wight	Zone 11 Quiz (hosted by Isle of Wight branch)
Sat 16 th Sep	Portsmouth	"Continental Nurseries and Collections" – Ian Woolnough
Mon 18 th Sep	Southampton	Committee Meeting (@79 Shirley Avenue)
Sat 23 rd Sep	Waterlooville	Zone 11 Show – Christ Church Hall, Widley, Waterlooville
Tue 3 rd Oct	Southampton	"Chile 2003" – Angie Money
Fri 20 th Oct	Isle of Wight	"Deserts of the South West USA" – Malcolm Pym
Sat 21 st Oct	Portsmouth	"Cinderella Succulents" – Bill Morris
Tue 7 th Nov	Southampton	"A Continental Experience" – Doug Donaldson

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