British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

For several weeks I've mentioned how dry the weather has been. Well, over the past few weeks we have perhaps had enough rain to make up for the earlier drought. It is nice to see things in the garden looking green. Several bedding plants which were reluctant to flower a month ago have reacted well to the extra water by putting on a good show right now.

Announcements

The Branch will be putting on a display and sales table at the Romsey Show this coming Saturday. I would expect it to be busy since this show is quite popular. Further details about setup and help manning the stand will be made at today's branch meeting.

High Wycombe Branch will be holding a convention on Saturday 2nd October, apparently coinciding with Ernst Specks making his last ever visit to the UK. Talks include Ernst Specks on "Tanzania the Western Part", Louise Bustard on "Glasgow Botanic Gardens, Past & Present", and Ernst Specks on "Angola a Little Slice of Succulent Heaven". There will also be plant sales, including Exotica offering a 20% discount on all sales during the day. Tickets are £14 and include lunch and refreshments. Further details from:
http://high-wycombe.bcss.org.uk/Convention_10.htm

A recent message from Tony Mace on the BCSS forum mentioned that earlier this week, between 40 and 50 show specimen plants were **stolen** from the **Richard and Wendy Edginton's** nursery in Flordon, Norfolk. These include a number of plants which visitors to the National Show will recognize, including large plants of Eriosyce, Echinocereus, Ferocactus, Thelocactus, Homalocephala, a 3 headed 3½ foot Oreocereus celsianus a big Euphorbia Horrida and a double headed Astrophytum. If you see any of these plants or are offered any for sale please contact the Edginton's immediately

Portsmouth Branch will be hosting a convention in October to celebrate their **60th Anniversary**. There's a notice with additional information on the front table. If you plan to attend this event, please let me know at today's meeting – I can order tickets and hand these to you at our next branch meeting. Portsmouth will also be holding their Autumn show at the start of next month, on 2nd October.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Mark Jakins had brought along some plants that he considered interesting. First was a plant (I think it was a Echinocereus) which re-kindled his interest in 2000 and which he had bought for just 15p. Earlier this year, it had flowered with a dozen flowers all open on the same day.

Next was *Mammillaria haageana* - a plant he had managed to kick down the stairs. The reason the plant happened to be on the stairs was that we was shuffling plants in and out of the greenhouse. This was followed by *Mammillaria rhodacantha* which had the nickname "Mr. Wiggle". Mark said that auxins in the plant make it grow towards the light and it takes about 5 days for the stem to get upright. However, after another 2 says gravity takes over and the stem starts to lean over again.

Echinofossulocactus is a superb plant even if n o one agrees on the name. Cliff Thompson said that there were just 4-5 species and the rest had been subsumed. The plant bodies have deep grooves and Cliff suggested this can cause problems with mealy

bug. Mark said that the next plant was ideal if you were a glutton for punishment. It had lots of very long spines and Cliff mentioned that it was *Thelocactus rinconensis.*

A plant of *Hoodia ruschii* was not in flower at the meeting, but Mark mentioned it had been in bloom two weeks earlier. He commented on how a search for Hoodia on the Internet now shows up hundreds of thousands of hits because of its perceived use as a sliming aid. Next was a nice specimen of a small headed Sulcorebutia. This clump had been grown from a small cutting handed out at one of our meetings. The flowers of *Stomatium geoffreyi* have a beautiful scent in the greenhouse.

Mark has also brought along some baby plants – he said these looked nice when young, and were a good contrast to the mature plants in the table show. Two of the plants were from Ivor Biddlecombe, one of these was yellow flowered *Lithops truncatella*.

The final plant was *Obregonia denegrii* which had a two tone colouring due to having been scorched. Mark said he had never thought that David Neville's comment earlier in the year about applying shading to protect plants as they awoke from their winter rest would have applied to his greenhouse!

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

Arizona Adventure

The speaker at our August meeting was Cliff Thompson from Portsmouth, who was fortunate to visit Peru in January 2009 in the company of a group of cactus enthusiasts. Peru is home to many widely grown species of cacti, but it is not a common destination for plant lovers, and it is many years since we had a talk at the branch from anyone who has toured the country to see the plants that grow there.

The first place visited was the Pisco valley, at an altitude of 2500 metres above sea level. Peru is rich in columnar cacti, and among the most striking are species of Armatocereus, with distinctively shaped stems that almost look segmented. Growing here also were species of Trichocereus and Cleistocactus. There were many plants of *Melocactus peruvianus* growing on the valley floor, but interestingly all of the plants in this population were young and immature, without cephalia. Exploring further we saw *Armatocereus procerus* with 4 inch diameter stems, and species of Cleistocactus (or Borzicactus, as they are referred to in the New Cactus Lexicon). More *Melocactus peruvianus* were found, including mature plants bearing cephalia. An unidentified species of Corryocactus was found, but these plants are seldom seen in cultivation because they are fast growing and can become very ungainly. *Jatropha urens* was growing in the valley; this is a small shrub-like species armed on the leaves and stems with vicious stinging hairs that cause intense pain and irritation if touched. Stinging jatrophas can be found in many cactus habitats throughout the Americas, and must be avoided at all costs. *Cumulopuntia sphaerica* has large rounded joints, and we saw big sprawling plants of this low-growing, ground-covering species. There was very little plant life in this area other than cacti.

Travelling elsewhere we saw a solitary plant of *Backebergia militaris* – probably the most majestic and imposing species of Peruvian cacti. This is a very rare plant in collections, probably because it is such a large growing species and it is difficult to produce a potted plant that even begins to show the character of mature plants in habitat. The group travelled on to another locality, at an altitude of 3000m, where the moisture from fog and clouds supported a much larger variety of plants, and the general area was altogether greener and more verdant. Mosses and lichens were abundant. Here we saw *Opuntia floccosa*, a species covered in white hairs, and a plant called Azorella which grows into large, green, low-growing mounds looking like giant moss. The beauty of this area was further enhanced by the appearance of some Alpacas, beautiful llama-like grazing animals that are increasingly popular in this country.

We moved to a lush green valley where deciduous trees grew among the rocks, and bromeliads enjoyed the moisture levels. Swallowtail butterflies were seen flying around here. On rocky slopes we saw a species of Weberbauerocereus - another genus of columnar cacti that are not widely grown in collections in the UK. At Arangay the group visited another lush green valley, with a river running through it. They were searching for plants of Oroya, but this area did not appear to be suitable for such plants. There were many different, non-succulent plant species growing here. At around 4000m altitude it was quite cold and the ground was wet with moisture. Potatoes were being grown in this area by the local people, and on rocky outcrops between the plantings of potatoes there were hundreds of oroyas growing. It seems likely that this area is wet for much of the year, so the oroyas must enjoy much more moisture than we tend to supply them with in cultivation. *Opuntia floccosa* also grew here. Among the other plants seen in this area

were Oxalis, and a 6 foot tall shrubby species of Lupin with purple-blue flowers.

The group then travelled from the town of Abancay to Sicuani, still at high altitude, where a large range of plants enjoy the cool, moist atmosphere. We saw a miniature species of Peperomia with green, disc-shaped leaves, looking much like Umbilicus. Even the steepest of hillsides were terraced by the local people for the cultivation of food crops. We then moved into the high altiplano where there was an abundance of *Opuntia floccosa*. Not nearly so obvious to the eye were numerous plants of *Lobivia maximiliana* -- this is a fantastically flowered species, and it has had many different names applied to it over the years. Numerous different wildflowers could be found growing here..... some of which Cliff was able to identify, and many others of which some knowledgeable audience members were able to identify. *Puya raimondii*, the largest of all the bromeliads, was growing on the hillsides. We saw giant puffballs measuring around 9 inches across, and more different peperomias growing in profusion. Another species of Azorella also grew here, forming beautiful tight green mounds.

Up on the altiplano there are lakes, and Cliff showed flamingos wading in the waters. Huge mounds of the white, hairy *Opuntia malyana* were growing on the flat and the gently sloping areas, visible from great distances away. Some of the largest were several metres across, comprising thousands of heads! *Opuntia floccosa* also grew here, with a more open aspect and less white in appearance. *O. floccosa* seems to be the more widespread of the two species. There were large herds of domesticated llamas grazing in the area. One of the most beautiful plants seen in this area was a species of rosulate viola, just 2-3 inches across. These amazing plants look like intricately patterned buttons, with tight, flat rosettes hugging the ground.

Elsewhere we saw *Lobivia pampana*, forming solitary, tall specimens, and nearby were lots of ferns. Travelling on winding roads cut into the edges of the mountainsides we saw *Arequipa hempeliana* – these are unusual plants with small columnar stems, producing asymmetric, Matucana-like flowers. North of the town of Arequipa there is a large population of the beautiful *Oreocereus celsianus*, a species that is very popular and widely grown in collections. The photographs showed the plants growing on a hillside with a glorious blue sky overhead, but at this altitude clouds can pass overhead very quickly, and low clouds form a dense fog that can be very dangerous both when walking on foot, or when travelling in a vehicle. We saw carpets of Cumulopuntia, covering the ground, growing near *Corryocactus densiflorus*. Some of the Corryocactus bore fruits, which were large and covered in strong spines. Some bulbs were seen growing here too, including an unidentified species with long-tubed pretty red flowers. There were also Trichocereus or Echinopsis species growing here, some with flowers 8-9 inches across. More cultivated crops of potatoes were seen from time to time; they can only be grown at altitudes above 2000 metres. Another cactus that was encountered was an Erdisia; this is a relative of Corryocactus, but smaller growing.

Travelling from Arequipa to Moquegua the group passed coastal plains on which nothing at all seemed to grow. It was a barren and desolate terrain, but dramatic nonetheless. Large specimens of another columnar cactus, Neoraimondia, grew on the hillsides. Exploring and travelling further we saw *Arequipa erectocylindria*, and *Islaya (Eriosyce) islayensis* with amazingly dense, thick spines. Islayas are very slow growing plants that are highly regarded in cultivation, but even when grown well they never develop spination in European collections that even begins to rival the spines we saw on the plants in the wild. In some areas the terrain was like a moonscape, with nothing to be seen in any direction apart from barren grey rocks. The few Neoraimondias that were found seemed to be dying out; they were looking very stressed, with no sign of regeneration.

In dramatic contrast to the previous locality, the group moved on to find a green valley! Here they found some specimens of *Browningia candelaris*, growing at lower altitudes than usually expected for this striking species. We then saw a big, flat-topped mountain, with many Oreocereus growing on the lower slopes. Growing here also was an unusual small globular cactus which is seldom seen in collections – *Neowerdermannia peruvianus* (*N. chilensis* var. *peruvianus*), and a Weberbauerocereus in flower. The surrounding hillsides were covered in what appeared to be ancient but long-abandoned terraces. At the next stop we saw strange cylindrical holes in the ground, but their purpose was unclear; there was speculation that they could be burial pits as it was known that the local people used to bury their dead in an upright position, but Cliff felt that they were probably once used as food storage pits. Sand devils (dust devils) were seen whirling around in this area.

Back down at sea level we were taken to Puerto de Ilo on the coast. Cliff mentioned that this coastal town seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, but

that it was a very important port for the southern part of Peru. Moving on we saw small growing haageocerei sprawling on the sand, and partly covered by it. More islayas were found, looking different to those seen previously, this time with much thinner, lighter spination; it was thought that this form was the one originally described *as Islaya mollensis*. Some of the islayas were bravely clinging on to life, having had the sand around their bases blown away so that they toppled over, but the roots were still in the ground. Cliff showed some barren areas where there was absolutely nothing growing apart from clumps of tillandsias which grew on the ground. Heading north on the coastal road from Camana to Chala there was much beautiful scenery to be admired, with stands of large specimens of *Neoraimondia arequipensis* growing on the coastal slopes. Also seen was a different but unidentified species of Haageocereus with ginger spines, and slopes on which nothing grew other than many islayas. 500 metres from the sea we saw one Islaya with exposed roots that were 1 metre long!

Travelling from Chala towards Nazca we saw the only species of Eulychnia that is not found in Chile, and that is *E. ritteri*. The plants were growing on the flat desert, and had pink flowers. Growing nearby were more islayas and some haageocerei. Many of the islayas had been stripped of many of their spines by the abrasive effect of wind-blown sand, but still some of there were in flower, and a few bore the large, fleshy pink fruits that are typical of this group of plants. The fruit are large and mostly free of internal flesh, which means that they are lightweight and blown around easily by the wind, which is how the seed is distributed.

Peru is a country rich in cactus species, and Cliff entertained us with his recollections and observations of an exciting and interesting trip around the southern part of this fascinating country and its unique cactus flora.

David Neville

Table Show Results

There were 30 entries (a record?) in the table show at the August meeting.

	Cacti – Mammillaria Group	**Succulents – Euphorbia Group**
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Mammillaria petterssonii	(1) T Radford Euphorbia cylindrifolia
	(2) T Grech Mammillaria geminispina	(2) B Beckerleg Euphorbia valida
	(3) T Grech Mammillaria plumosa	(3) A Sheader Euphorbia pugniformis
Intermediate	(1) T Grech Mammillaria albilanata	(1) T Radford Euphorbia cap-saintemariensis
	(2) J Roskilly Mammillaria neopotosina	(2) T Radford Euphorbia ambovombensis
	(3) T Radford Mammillaria carmenae	(3) B Beckerleg Euphorbia sp.

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Earlier in the year, the long dry spell between spring and summer put many garden plants under stress due to lack of water. The product described below might offer relief against such weather. A local supplier who stocks this product is InExcess (West End), who are selling 1kg bags for £4.95.

Phostrogen SwellGel

This is a water-storing crystal which absorbs water when you water your plants, then releases it again as the compost dries - similar to a sponge. This lengthens the time between waterings and helps plants grow better because there is less fluctuation in the availability of moisture. Plant roots can also grow through the gel where they can take up water directly.

In tubs, pots and containers the rate of application is suggested as 1g per litre of compost. SwellGel is biodegradable, and is inert, thus making it suitable for use with any plant species. SwellGel will continue to absorb and release water for two years or more.

Vinay Shah

Jim Roskilly provided the following article.

Through the roof - plant breaks free

A special plant has become a novel tourist attraction after it burst through the roof of its home in Kew, West London. Experts at the Royal Botanic Gardens say the *Agave abrupta* will flower for the first time in 15 years after it outgrew the Princess of Wales Conservatory. More than six metres tall, the so-called century plant is due to sport bright yellow-green flowers in approximately two weeks' time. It matures slowly and dies after flowering but continues its lineage by producing offsets at the base of the stem throughout its life.

Prof**.** Stephen Hopper, the Kew director, told Horticulture Week: **"**Visitors who come to Kew over the next month will get a rare opportunity to see a truly impressive botanical occurrence.**"** Native to tropical America, it was introduced to Europe in 1561. The fermented juice of the agave plant is used to make the drink mescal.

Daily Telegraph, July 2010

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 5th of October, when Stuart Riley will be talking about 3 different genera – Agaves, Aeonium and Haworthias. All of these are quite attractive succulents, and Stuart also usually brings along a good selection of plants for sale.

The October Table Show will consist of **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 20th September.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11th Sep	Isle of Wight	Flowers of the Sea - Mrs Simpson
Sat 11th Sep	Romsey	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show
Sat 18th Sep	Portsmouth	Cacti, Succulents & their Problems - Tony & Suzanne Mace
Mon 20th Sep	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat 2nd Oct	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Autumn Show @ Christ Church Hall, Widley, Waterlooville
Sat 2nd Oct	High Wycombe	High Wycombe Convention @ Great Kingshill Village Hall
Tue 5th Oct	Southampton	Agaves, Aeoniums & Haworthias - Stuart Riley
Sat 9th Oct	Isle of Wight	Richtersveld Round Up Part 1 - Rodney Sims
Sat 16th Oct	Portsmouth	**60th Anniversary Convention - Haworthias (Stirling Baker), Lithops (Dr Jonathan Clark), South America (Graham Charles)**
Tue 2nd Nov	Southampton	Travels in Oaxaca, southern Mexico - David Neville
Sat 13th Nov	Isle of Wight	Zone 11 Quiz
Sat 20th Nov	Portsmouth	Cactus Oddities - Stuart Riley

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