

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Compared to the warm and dry weather in June and July, things were perhaps closer to normal during August. Normally I would cut the grass in my garden every 3-4 weeks during spring and summer, but this year it's been much less frequent – so far, anyway.

There's not a great deal happening with my plants right now and I am still waiting for my conservatory to be rebuilt – it looks like this will happen in October. Whilst looking for replacement staging and shelving, I did find that a new company called Oypla seems offers some interesting and relatively low cost metal and plastic shelving solutions.

Announcements

This coming Saturday, the Branch will be putting on a display at Romsey Show. Ivor, Bruce and a couple of other members will be in attendance.

Portsmouth Branch's Autumn Show will be held on 6th October. Angie mentioned that the schedule is not up on their website, but David Neville can email a pdf of the show schedule on request.

On 29th September - the biennial MSG study group event will be held at Banstead in Surrey. If anyone is going to the event or needs a lift there, please record your interest on the sheet on the front table.

Oxford Branch are holding a special 60th Anniversary Celebration Symposium on 21st October. The speakers include Colin Walker, Martin Lowry, Paul Hoxey and Ian Woolnough. For those of you who were unable to visit the Oxford BCSS

Show in July, visit <https://tinyurl.com/Oxford60th> for some excellent images posted on flickr by Dr. Gillian Evison.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Ian Acton had brought along an *Opuntia* in flower and he had a couple of questions for the audience. How many members grow three or more different *Opuntias*? Does anyone else grow *O. salmiana*?

O. salmiana is possibly the only species of *Opuntia* which can be expected to flower well in cultivation at a young age and small size. Ian mentioned the plant he had brought along was potted as a rooted cutting into a four inch pot only last year, and it was already flowering well this year. He pointed out the fresh growth of stems from areoles on last year's fruit – this is a peculiarity of some species of *Opuntia*.

This species produces pencil thin cylindrical joints. It is a very friendly plant and the joints easily attach themselves to anything brushing past. This is a dispersal strategy, although in nature it's more likely to be thanks to passing animals rather than human beings. So please look - but do not touch!

Unfortunately there are a lot of rogue plants in commerce masquerading under this name. These invariably have much thicker joints and cannot be expected to flower so well, if at all, in cultivation.

Plant Focus Evening – Euphorbia & Mammillaria

David said since the “plant focus evening” was a new idea, he wasn't sure how many plants would be brought in by the members - however, he was pleased to see that a good selection of plants had been brought in for both genera. We would start with *Euphorbias* in the first half and cover *Mammillarias* in the second half. We would also spend a few minutes to discuss plant labelling systems.

Euphorbia is a huge genus. Does everyone grow some Euphorbias? It is one of the biggest and most widely grown genera. The plants range from tiny miniatures which will be in a 3-4" pot after 20 years to species which grow into giant trees in Africa - and everything in between. The most common species in cultivation come from Southern Africa, with other plants coming from warmer regions in East Africa and further north. Most of the South African ones are happy in a greenhouse, and with temperatures which might approach freezing sometimes. There are also the Madagascan species which need much higher temperatures - less of those had been brought in, because they are more demanding to grow. They need much higher temperatures in the winter, and you will need a hot box, or will need to bring plants into the house for the winter months.

There are one or two relatives of Euphorbias, although these are relatively few and far between. One genus is *Monadenium*, of which the majority come from Tanzania. These won't tolerate low temperatures - they need 10°C minimum. Geoff Penrose had brought in a plant of *Monadenium magnificum* which he said he kept at 40°F. David said this can eventually get to 10-12 feet tall and it will grow quite quickly if potted up. Other relatives are *Jatrophas*. These come from further north in Africa and also the Americas. *Jatropha podagrica* is from tropical America and is very popular. It has a lovely swollen caudex and young plants look the best. As they get older they become spindly and don't look as attractive. This plant had large leaves and had been grown in the living room. Another *Jatropha* plant had a missing name label. It was thin stemmed and David wasn't sure whether it really was a succulent.

There is a specialist society called the "International Euphorbia Society" and membership costs £22 a year. You can join on the Internet or by contacting Bob Potter. David stated that all the plants are summer growers, although Adrian said that Dave Greenaway of Oxford Branch had classified some Euphorbias as winter growers (*cylindrica*, *loricata*, *royleana*, *regisjubae*, *balsamifera*, *ferox*, *enopla*, *meloformis*, *horrida*) and he goes on to say that in summer (May to August) he puts all of these in a shady part of the greenhouse and waters them sparingly; they are watered freely at other times of the year, save in mid-winter (mid-Nov. to mid-Jan). A lot of the Madagascan ones have annual foliage, some of the others retain their leaves. The Madagascan ones also grow in shadier conditions. A problem with the Madagascan ones is that people try and rush them into growth and end up killing them by overwatering before the plants have started to

grow. It is better to wait for signs of life and new growth before watering in the spring.

Next, Paul Klaassen issued a health and safety warning - he said he was allergic to Euphorbia latex. If you damage the skin of a Euphorbia you will see a white sap ooze out and if you get in contact with this latex, you can develop a nasty reaction. He worked at Hollygate for a while, and once he was asked to remove the branches of a large euphorbia from the roof of the greenhouse. Despite the plant being "dead", his arm swelled up to 3-4 times the normal size - and he had difficulty breathing after he drove from Hollygate back to Dorking. David said for others, the reaction might not be as severe, but care is still warranted. The sap of the plant is an irritant rather than being poisonous. All species contain the white latex, although *Euphorbia abdelkuri* has a yellow sap. After you finish repotting a Euphorbia, do wash your hands thoroughly. Ben mentioned he had read some story about someone who had toothache who broke off a piece of *Euphorbia ingens* and treated the tooth with that. David mentioned when you damage the skin of an Euphorbia, even the tiniest pin prick will release a lot of sap, which is usually under pressure. This is why you have to be careful - there could be a fine spray of this material which may come out from the plant, and you might not realise this. Angie suggested that when taking cuttings, they should be taken when the plant is dry rather than when it is turgid - to reduce the flow of the sap.

David said most of these plants will grow easily in a cactus greenhouse and will enjoy much the same conditions as cacti, i.e. bright sunny conditions. He picked up a nice plant of *E. decaryi* - this does prefer less light. The leaves will go dark if it gets a lot of light. One of his favourite plants is *Euphorbia bupleurifolia* - it has a stem like a pine cone and it will offset in cultivation. It has deciduous annual leaves. One of the problems with it is that it is very prone to red spider. It is a slow growing plant. Angie's plant was a 20 year old plant and she mentioned it hasn't grown much in that time, but it looked healthy. Like *E. obesa*, you get male and female plants with this species. It sets seed easily and develops the typical 3 celled seed pods and when they ripen the seeds are forcibly expelled, and can land a few feet away. Euphorbia pods can ripen quite quickly, so the best way of collecting the seed is to put muslin or stocking over the plant. The seeds germinate quite easily too. Ivor mentioned that in his view, vermiculite was the best medium to plant seeds in. Some of the *E. obesa* plants brought in were plants which the branch had given out to members in 2016. There are a few *obesa* hybrids around. Next was a cross between *E. susannae* and *E. bupleurifolia*. It grows annual stems and has

deciduous leaves, and is quite easy to grow. He also showed the *E. susannae* parent – it's a lovely small growing species, which grows near Calitzdorp in the little Karoo. The plants grow flat to the ground. There are different forms around, and the cultivation conditions can also make a difference to the plant's appearance. Some of plants with caudexes are referred to as TCPs (turnips, carrots, parsnips), and Ernst Specks nursery Exotica used to be the source for many plants from Africa. Ernst had discovered many plants in the wild during his travels and *Euphorbia maritae* from Tanzania is named after his wife Marita. The plant David held up had been newly purchased by Miranda, at the recent Oxford Show.

Because Euphorbias only produce three seeds in a seed pod, Euphorbia seed can't be produced en-masse. Therefore only a small number of seeds are likely to be offered each year. Species that branch can be propagated by cuttings, but some things like *E. obesa* will never normally branch. If you can't get hold of seed, then you have to buy plants. There are not that many specialist nurseries around, but one is William's Cacti, run by Craig Barber. Bob Potter of Toobees has stopped trading now. Alan Butler used to sell plants but he moved to Spain. Specks used to travel a lot in Africa and he built up relationships with the locals, allow him to get access to plants which were dug up and exported to him. He has closed his nursery but may still be supplying plants to the trade. CITES also doesn't cover many of these plants.

E. flanaganii produces thin stems atop a central stem. He has seen washing up bowls filled with this plant, and it is affiliated to *E. pugniformis*. *E. stellata* and *E. squarrosa* are similar looking plants with a caudex topped with many stems. It takes many years to develop to the size of plant he was holding, and this had probably been dug up in habitat and imported. Ivor asked David to look at a very large *Euphorbia obesa* at one end of the table and as David handled the plant, it turned out this plant had rotted and had no roots at all. David said it was unlikely it would re-root. *E. meloformis* or *E. valida* form a networks of twigs over the round body - these are the remains of the inflorescences. These remains harden over time and become woody, and they protect the plant from predators.

In terms of pests and diseases, mealy bug can be a problem on some plants - the sap doesn't seem to deter them! Paul asked what pollinates the plants in the wild? When in Madagascar in 2016, he saw fields and fields of *E. quartizicola* in flower, and yet he never saw any insects land on the flowers, even when observed early in the mornings.

David finished by showing some literature on the genus. The *Euphorbia Journal* consists of 10 volumes and is in our library. It is a magnificent piece of work. One volume of the 6 volume series the *Illustrated Handbook of Succulent Plants* covers Euphorbia and lists all the species, but there are no pretty pictures. White, Dyer and Sloane's *The Succulent Euphorbieae* is a historic 2 volume set which costs around £250 – it's mainly in black and white and dates from 1941, but it's still sought after.

After the break, we had a short session on plant labelling - Adrian, Richard and myself had talked to Graham Charles at the Oxford Show about this topic. Richard White first showed the old embossed Dymo tapes, but the lettering is too large for some plant names. The more modern system uses laminated plastic tapes and these units are available as handheld units (with a keyboard) or as a PC attached unit. The Brother machines cost £25 - £60 depending on the feature set. The handheld units are battery operated and can be carried around, into the greenhouse or garden - but the PC versions are perhaps more flexible since they can use any font on your PC. Original Brother tapes cost £20 for a 8 metre tape, but clone tapes are widely available and cost around £4. The machine does waste 1 inch of the precious tape at the start and end of each print operation so it's best to print several labels in one go. Assuming your labels are 50-60 mm long, you'll probably yield around 120 labels per tape so this works out as 17p per label using the original tape or 3.5p per label if using clone tapes. The tape is supposed to last many years and several people said they have been using the system for several years without any reports of the labels fading or peeling off.

Graham Charles needs to produce thousands of labels and he uses a different system. He uses a laser printer to print onto A4 plastic label sheets. He got one of the label companies to design a custom size (60mm x 12mm) of label for him. These are available in polyethylene plastic or polyester plastic, and Graham uses the polyethylene material in matte finish which is a little thicker. The matte polyester material is thinner and closer in thickness to normal paper. Once printed, the labels are fully water resistant. A sheet of around 60 labels is expensive if bought in quantities of less than 10, but the cost drops to 60p a sheet if bought as a pack of 100 sheets. So this works out as £60 for 6000 labels, i.e. around a penny each. With this system there is the inconvenience of having to print all 60 labels in one go, although it is also possible to print a partial page and feed the label sheet through the printer more than once. Being on a computer gives you a wide

choice of what information to print on the label and what font style/size to use so it is quite flexible - especially if you already have a database of your plants on the computer. Whether the longevity of these labels matches the Brother tapes remains to be seen.

We resumed the discussion about plants and David now covered Mammillaria. It's a huge genus, and it is one of the most popular cactus families - amongst the cacti, David said he sells more Mammillarias than any other genus. There is a Mammillaria Society which can be joined for £13 per year, and they distribute free seed each year. There is a huge selection of plants to choose from, from tiny miniatures which will be in a 3" pot forever to huge clumps which can grow to a size of 2 or 3 feet across. David said we sometimes get contacted by people who have grown these large clumps and need to move them on - as people accumulate more and more plants, they eventually want to move away from the larger plants and focus on the smaller ones.

Mammillaria hernandezii comes from Southern Mexico, the individual heads are 2" across, and the biggest clump he has seen was only 3" across. It produces large showy purple-pink flowers with a long throat. Stuart Riley often brings back plants of this from his trips to the USA, but it's a challenging plant to grow. One that's been around for less time is *Mammillaria luethyi* - it was originally found in Sonora, and it shouldn't be difficult to grow but it is. It has finger like tuberous roots and large flowers. Others to watch out for are *M. theresae*, *M. saboe*, *M. haudeana* and *M. goldii* - all have large showy flowers. *M. goldii* has been known for 30 years but it is still hard to get hold of, and very difficult to grow successfully. The newest of all the Mammillarias is *M. bertholdii* - it is also large flowered but grows 100s of miles from where the others grow, in Southern Oaxaca. It is available on grafts at the moment but these plants look bloated - in habitat they are flat-growing plants.

Other miniature plants are found in the lasiacantha group - these are *M. lasiacantha*, *M. magallanii*, *M. denudata*, *M. roseocentra* - the heads rarely exceed 2-3 inches in diameter, and the plants remain single headed. Another difficult one as it grows older is *M. napina* - it has a napiform root and needs free draining compost. You are unlikely to see *M. napina* more than 3-4 inches in height, but they produce glorious flowers. *Mammillaria hahniana* has a couple of different growth forms - the plant David held up isn't a form that's common in the UK - usually the UK ones are singled headed and can get to football size - but this one was dividing dichotomously. This offsetting form is more

common in the USA, although we are starting to see more examples of it in the UK over the past 10-15 years. The purple-magenta flowers are formed in rings around the plant. The main flowering time has now passed.

Another interesting group is the Ancistracanthae - very few plants had been brought in, due to their difficulty in cultivation. They are hook-spined large flowered plants. *Mammillaria boolii* is generally weak rooted and susceptible to overwatering, but worth seeking out. *M. sheldonii* and *M. microcarpa* are other examples. *M. guelzowiana* is another favourite, with large magenta flowers which are really showy. It is also slow growing and susceptible to overwatering. With all these plants, it is best to grow these in a gritty, free-draining mix. Next was the long-spined form of *Mammillaria geminispina* - this can go on to form clumps up to 3 feet across with 100s of heads. It was offsetting around the base. *M. parkinsonii* does look similar but it splits dichotomously and also the flowers are different - *M. geminispina* has purple-pink flowers, *M. parkinsonii* has paler sandy-pink flowers.

The specimen of *Mammillaria bombycina* was a 2 headed plant and this will eventually grow larger. It's a handsome species with lots of wool in the axils. You get this wool on some of the Mammillarias but one good blow and it will disperse and not regrow. And if you water your plants from overhead, then that will also disperse the wool. You also don't tend to see the wool in habitat either - it forms and then disperses. Plants like *Turbinicarpus* are very woolly in collections but not so in habitat. Related to *M. bombycina* is *M. perez-de-la-rosae* - it is a miniature more compact form of *bombycina*. The featured plant was growing lots of offsets and it will eventually form a magnificent clump. It was a beautiful spined plant with silver radials and pink flowers. Variety *andersoniana* has short straight spines. Another plant of *perez-de-la-rosae* had larger heads. The spine colour varies and some forms are really attractive.

The Dolicothele group tends to have large golden yellow flowers - and the flowers are usually highly scented of lemon / citrus. *Mammillaria camptotricha* has a slightly smaller white flower but *M. longimamma*, *M. melaleuca*, *M. sphaerica* have the yellow flowers. They are worth seeking out - when the best smelling ones are in flower, you can smell the scent before you notice the flowers, even in a 12' greenhouse.

Perhaps the most spectacular of all the flowers of the Mammillarias are in the Cochemiea group - all come from Baja California. There are half a dozen

or so species, including *Mammillaria maritima*, *M. pondii*, *M. poselgeri* - the rarest is *M. halei* which has straight spines. They form large showy red or orange-red flowers almost like Christmas cacti. *M. setispina* is related and has white spines. *M. viparina* grows on cliffs, so the stems prefer to hang down in a pendulous fashion. *M. matudae* also leans over. Another one is *M. pilcayensis*, where the stems start to lean as they get older - they grow on sheer rockfaces and steep slopes. *M. parkinsonii* is a slow growing plant which dichotomises. A plant of *M. perbella* was also splitting. Someone from the audience asked if it is a rare plant, and David said not really.

A few cristate plants had been brought in. We saw the long ribbon-like form of *M. elegans* - it has multiple growing points, so it can grow very quickly compared to the non-cristate plant. *M. haageana* is the new name for *M. elegans*. A single headed plant of *M. albilanata* will probably never offset. However, another plant of *M. albilanata* owned by Ivor had got damaged, and it had gone on to form multiple heads. Some forms of *M. albilanata* do offset. *Mammillaria lenta* will form large white flowers with a greenish-yellow stigma. It always forms a flat low growing clump. A white spined plant which is popular was *M. plumosa* - it's one of the old favourites. It's a very popular plant and several different forms exist.

David asked if anyone belonged to the Mammillaria society? Paul Klaassen was the only one who put his hand up. Paul recounted that Mammillarias come in all sorts of spine colours and at a Mammillaria society meeting, they were asked to bring in plants grown from French grower Michel Lacoste's seeds - 80% of the plants were white spined, so perhaps Michel had a bias towards the white-spined examples! *Mammillaria elongata* is another popular plant, but it is very variable, with plants being available in every spine colour from white to yellow to red and brown. It is easily propagated and grows quickly. Peter Bircher mentioned he had grown one as a bedded-out plant. A relative of *elongata* is *M. microhelia*, which is another plant we gave to members in 2013. *M. densispina* is larger headed and Ivor had brought in a mature specimen which David said was in very good condition. *M. schiedeana* is related to *M. plumosa* and it has lovely golden spines. It has a fat neck with a tuberous root so needs care with the watering and it is quite slow.

David ended the meeting by thanking everyone for bringing the plants in. Would people like to see the meeting format repeated next year? Most of the audience put their hands up. David asked for genera

to discuss, and Aloe and Gymnocalycium was mentioned. We did not get a chance to discuss the collection of Mammillaria books on the front table, but the library does have several books covering Mammillaria, including of course the excellent books which John Pilbeam has produced.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 14 entries in the August table show, and 3 entries for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – Echinopsis	Succulents – Agave
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe Echinopsis hybrid	(1) B Beckerleg Agave quadricolor
	(2) I Biddlecombe Echinopsis multiplex	(2) I Biddlecombe Agave quadricolor
	(3) B Beckerleg Echinopsis klingleriana	(3) M Stevenson Agave lophantha tricolor
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Lobivia famatimensis	(1) I Biddlecombe Agave victoria reginae
	(2) I Biddlecombe Echinopsis hybrid	(2) I Biddlecombe Agave victoria reginae
	(3) -	(3) M Stevenson A. americana medio-picta

Cacti/Succulent in Flower
(1) B Beckerleg Thelocactus wagnerianus
(2) I Biddlecombe Aeonium sp.
(3) I Acton Opuntia salmiana

Ivor Biddlecombe

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on October 2nd and it will feature a talk on *Gasterias in Habitat & Culture* by Tony Roberts.

The October Table Show will consist of **Echinocereus Group** (cacti) and **Lithops Subgroup** (succulents), along with "plant in flower". 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 *Echinocereus* group includes *Echinocereus*, *Morangaya* and *Wilcoxia*.

The *Lithops* subgroup includes *Dinteranthus*, *Lapidaria* and *Lithops*.

Forthcoming Events

Sat	8 th	Sep	Isle of Wight	Post Cards of the Isle of Wight (Richard Salter)
Sat	8 th	Sep	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show, Broadlands
Sat	15 st	Sep	Portsmouth	Cultivation of Cacti & Succulents (Terry Smale)
Tue	2 nd	Oct	Southampton	Gasterias in Habitat & Culture (Tony Roberts)
Sat	6 th	Oct	Portsmouth	Portsmouth Autumn Show, Christ Church Hall, Widley, PO7 5AU
Sat	13 th	Oct	Isle of Wight	To be confirmed
Tue	16 th	Oct	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat	20 st	Oct	Portsmouth	Thelocactus - The Forgotten Genus (Martin Doorbar)
Tue	6 th	Nov	Southampton	Around The Collection (Stuart Riley)
Sat	10 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	Eastern Cape (Rodney Sims)
Sat	17 th	Nov	Portsmouth	Aloe! Aloe! (Rodney Sims)

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

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