

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The evenings are now starting to be dark by 8pm and we'll soon be at the autumnal equinox. The temperatures are cooler than they were a month ago and my plants seem to prefer these conditions more.

Announcements

A couple of weeks ago, the BCSS sadly announced that **Gordon Rowley** had passed away, at the age of 98. Gordon joined the society in 1946 and he was for many years the President of the BCSS, and he also edited many editions of *Bradleya*. He lectured at Reading University, where Nigel Taylor was one of his students. He was well travelled and has written over a dozen books. To those that knew him Gordon will forever be remembered for his enthusiasm, generosity, hospitality and humour.

The branch will be putting on a display at the **Romsey Show** on 14th September. I think we will have enough volunteers to help man the display and the sales tables, but if you happen to visit the show, do drop in and visit our stall.

On Saturday 28th September, **Portsmouth Branch** are holding their annual **Autumn Show** at Christ Church Hall, London Road, Widley, Waterlooville PO6 3NB. This is a good chance to see an extensive range of cacti and succulent plants without having to travel a long distance.

On September 21/22 **CactusWorld Live** will take place at Lullingstone Castle, the home of the World Garden, and home of BCSS patron Tom Hart-Dyke. There will be a large cactus & succulent show, a marquee containing lots of specialist cactus & succulent nurseries and sellers, tours of the World Garden, Mexican mariachi singers, Mexican food, and more. BCSS members and partners can get half

price admission by showing their membership card (issued with the March Journal). And due to this being our Branch's 65th Anniversary, we will be subsidising visitors to the event – just visit David Neville's stand at the event to have your name recorded and to claim £5.

Last Month's Meeting

At the start of the meeting, Michelle Fox-Rousell had some photographs to share with the audience. She mentioned that 12 years ago she had bought a large *Melocactus*. It flowered and after about 6 years, the cephalium at the top seemed to go brown and the plant sulked for a while and she almost gave up on it - but she then noticed that baby plants were forming in the cephalium. These eventually turned into small plants and then developed cephaliums of their own and one of these had flowered.

Next was *Cumarinia odorata*. This plant is related to *Coryphanta* and *Neolloydia* and is not that rare, but it's different enough to be placed in its own genus. Michelle had managed to flower it. Another picture she had brought along was of *Aloe striatula* in her garden – it had flowered after 7 years

Miranda Stevenson had brought along several cuttings of *Aloe arenicola* to give away. These were long stems. David said he had seen it growing in flat plains South Africa, it can be grown as a normal upright plant or as a trailing plant. Ben Turner mentioned there were also some *Tephrocactus articulatus* cuttings available.

Next was a plant from Geoff Card's collection. Ben said he had researched it, and it was the boxing glove opuntia - *Cylindropuntia fulgida* var. *mamillata* "Monstrosa" - this was going to be put on the sales table. It looks just like a boxing glove, and it remains compact, unlike the normal form of the plant.

Plant Focus Evening

Ben kicked off the **Aloe** session for the Plant Focus discussion. He mentioned there is lots of information available on the Internet, but it's not always accurate. Books tend to be better researched and are more authoritative. The book to get is *Aloes*:

The Definitive Guide (2011) which has 4 well known authors - Colin Walker, Susan Carter-Holmes, Len Newton and the late John Lavranos. Other books include Gilbert Reynold's publications of *The Aloes of South Africa* (1950) and *The Aloes Of Tropical Africa And Madagascar* (1966). For many years these were the go-to reference works for Aloe collectors. Reynolds made many field trips and published dozens of papers in the Journal of South African Botany.

A large selection of plants had been brought in by the members, and Ben started by picking out *Aloe polyphylla*. This is one of the most hardy aloes, along with *Aloe striatula*. It was still a young plant and had yet to develop the classic spiral pattern of leaves that it is famous for. It grows in the high altitude mountains of Lesotho in wet grassland, and the plant needs a constant supply of water, but also requires good drainage. Michelle says she had grown one from seed and after trying to grow it outside, it succumbed. The combination of cold and wet causes problems for most plants and David mentioned that when people do grow it outside, they usually need to place a plastic cover over the plant to protect it from excess water in the winter months. Paul Klaassen said that Paul Hoxey has been growing one outdoors in Cambridge for many years.

Aloe plicatilis is now placed in the new genus *Kumara*. Ben mentioned that botanist Olwen Grace had done work using DNA analysis to study the evolution of the different Aloes and she had proposed splitting Aloe into *Aloe*, *Aloidendron* and *Kumara* (tree aloes) and *Aloiampelos* for climbing or crawling plants. *A. plicatilis* comes from the southern part of South Africa and it has a characteristic fan leaf arrangement. It is one of the tree aloes and can eventually reach a few metres in height.

Aloe dichotoma, the quiver tree, is now placed in *Aloidendron*. It grows in the northern part of South Africa and Namibia. It has lovely yellow flowers. *Aloe ramosissima* is closely related but it branches more and looks bushier. Both of these will eventually grow very large, but they make nice plants when young. *Aloe pearsonii* is another plant from the Richtersveld - it has vertical stems of neatly arranged leaves and grows to waist height. It goes red when grown in strong sunlight. It is quite rare so you hardly see it for sale and it's also difficult to propagate.

Aloe haemanthifolia grows in the Western Cape. It's a cremnohyte i.e. it is adapted to growing on cliffs and in crevices. It prefers to grow in shade. Bruce mentioned it is tricky to grow and he doesn't water

it at all between June and August. It can develop a red colouring along the edge of the leaves.

A specimen of *Aloe erinacea* had white teeth along the edge of the leaves. The teeth can vary in colour and it is related to *Aloe melanacantha* which has black teeth. *Aloe longistyla* comes from the Cape and is tricky to keep on its roots. Bruce said he grows it in a shallow amount of soil by using polystyrene in the bottom of the pot – it also seems to grow OK in seed trays but not in deep pots. It has large flowers compared to the size of the plant.

The incurving leaves of *Aloe peglerae* were closing in on itself. One of the smallest of the Cape Aloes is *Aloe humilis*, and a couple of forms had been brought in. The leaves can be covered in white protuberances of varying length. We saw *Aloe humilis* v. *echinata* and also a selected clone obtained from Stuart Riley, with pronounced white tubercles. Another plant in this group is *Aloe brevifolia*. There are different forms of it around and some are very attractive. The size and width of the leaves can vary greatly, giving the plants different appearances. He showed us a white variegated form, again obtained from Stuart Riley. This plant is one of the parents of *Aloe x nobilis*. Many different forms of this cross exist, with different sized heads and forms. cv. "Darley Dale" is an Abbey Brook clone without pronounced teeth or markings. There are also variegated forms of this plant. *x nobilis* is a cross between *A. brevifolia* and *A. mitriformis* (= *A. perfoliata*). *Aloe comptonii* is a blue leaved version of *A. mitriformis* / *A. perfoliata*.

Aloe aristata is a popular plant – it can be hardy when grown in warmer zones and if kept dry in the winter. There are a number of selected cultivars and we saw the "Cathedral Peak" form which he had obtained from Margaret Corina. Geoff Penrose mentioned that some articles claim *A. aristata* is closely related to Haworthia and indeed some forms do look like Haworthias. Another cultivar is the "Mount Gin" form which has more pronounced ends to the leaves and better markings/spots. We also saw an *Aloe variegata* x *Aloe aristata* cross, again obtained from Stuart Riley.

When you grow plants from seed, you can sometimes get strange results - Ben showed the results of sowing BCSS seed which was supposed to be *Aloe parvibracteata* (a maculate aloe) - but some of the plants which came up seemed to have a different parentage, *Aloe striata* perhaps. If Aloes are open pollinated, you can't guarantee what the other parent was.

Now for the Madagascan Aloes. There are some interesting plants from the island and Frenchman

Jean-Bernard Castillon has written some books and articles on them. *Aloe haworthioides* is one of the smallest Aloes but it can form large clumps - it grows on moss patches. *Aloe descoingsii* is another miniature. *Aloe rauhii* has been used to create a lot of the modern hybrids. Examples of some of these modern hybrids had been brought in, including *Aloe* "Donnie" and "Bright Star". Some of these hybrids are spectacular, and they can command high prices, especially when first introduced. We also saw "Snowflake" and "White Lightning". Ben mentioned he visited the Huntington Gardens in California and met Karen Zimmerman there - she is responsible for breeding many of the new cultivars. Kelly Griffin is another grower in the US who has created many of the new introductions. "DZ" is named after Karen's partner Debra Zimmerman. It's a complex cross, with the parentage listed as [A. 'Confetti' (A. 'Frank Reinelt' (Dick Wright) × A. 'Dental Work' (Kelly Griffin))] × [kz#1 (A. *divaricata* × A. *parvula*) Clone 1)]. David Neville mentioned that it was John Bleck who started off hybridising with small and colourful aloes in the 1980s. Another popular hybrid is "Christmas Carol" which was created by Kelly Griffin. *Aloe* "Snowflake" has almost white leaves and it was in flower.

Aloe bowiea is a small grass aloe which is semi deciduous. The leaves resemble the grass that they grow in. Other grass aloes are fully deciduous and lose all their leaves. *Aloe nubigena* is a grass aloe and we saw a cross of *Aloe nubigena* × *kraussii* × *boylei*. There are separate books which discuss the grass aloes and there are many species of them. Some are not fully succulent and others are like a bridge between *Aloe* and *Kniphofia* (the red hot pokers). *Aloe cooperi* is a typical grass aloe and the leaves can get to a couple of metres in length.

Next were some beautiful plants of *Aloe striata*. This was a nice form, grown from BCSS seed sown in 2012. *Aloe reynoldii* is named after Gilbert Reynolds and it is similar to *Aloe abyssinica*, which is no longer a valid name. Tom McCoy is a protege of John Lavranos and he has explored the Arab peninsula and has written the book "*The Aloes of Arabia*".

Ben moved on to talk about some plants which had been brought in by Geoff Penrose and which included plants from northern Africa and Arabia. *Aloe sinkatana* comes from Sudan but some of the plants have been split off into a new species called *Aloe zubb*. I'm not sure how this name was chosen, but Ben mentioned that "zubb" in Arabic translates into slang for a man's private parts! *Aloe niebuhriana* comes from Yemen and *Aloe*

dhufarensis is from Oman. There was also a cross between *Aloe jucunda* and *Aloe somaliensis* - the latter has strikingly marked leaves and has been used in hybridising. We also saw *Aloe jucunda*. *Aloe sladeniana* comes from Namibia and Angola. It is similar in appearance to *Aloe variegata*, to which it is related. It's a small growing plant which is found amongst grass so it has a tall flower spike, to allow the flowers to be seen.

The session ended with a discussion about cultivation tips. David mentioned that Aloes are stronger and faster growing than most of the other plants we grow, so they will benefit from regular repotting. Examine the roots and give the plants enough room to develop strong roots. There is a downside to this - give them too much room and you may find that the plants grow too large to fit in your greenhouse!

At the end of the first half, Glenn Finn talked briefly about a large plant of *Agave americana* which was growing in a garden in Portchester and which had flowered recently. He had photographed the plant previously and had brought along the pieces of the huge flower stalk from the plant just to show how much energy the plant puts into flowering and producing seeds before the main rosette dies. The base of the stem was several inches across, and Glenn had to cut the stem into several sections.

After the mid-meeting break, we had an auction of some choice plants from Geoff Card's collection. The plants for sale included *Aztekium ritteri* and *Geohintonia mexicana*.

David then covered the cactus part of the evening, namely the genus **Gymnocalycium**. Numerous plants had been brought in, although the total number of plants did not match the number of Aloes we had seen in the first half. Does this mean that succulents are more popular these days? David said he wasn't an expert on the genus but would try and cover the basics. We did have a talk back in July 2017 from Graham Evans who did cover *Gymnocalycium* in quite some detail.

Gymnocalycium is a popular group of about 80 genera which grow in South America, in the countries of Argentina, Uruguay Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil. On the whole the plants are easy to grow, although a few of the species do require more attention. Several books have been published and two books that we have in our library are "*Gymnocalycium: A Collector's Guide*" (1995) by John Pilbeam and "*Gymnocalycium in Habitat and Culture*" (2009) by Graham Charles which is more recent and the best book that's available. The

classification within the genus is based on seed structure, and there are 7 main groupings.

The plants come in all sorts of sizes and this was evident from the plants that had been brought in. *Gymnocalycium saglionis* remains solitary and the plants can get to a foot across. Ivor had brought along some prize cards that he had won back in 2004! He mentioned that one of his plants had gone a bit strange and it was producing offsets from the epidermis rather than the base.

Gymnocalycium strigianum is much smaller and also tends to remain solitary. The plant body becomes darker if subjected to more sunlight and it usually produces white flowers although there are forms with shades of red and pink in the flowers.

Gymnocalycium horstii var. *buenekeri* was a very large plant. It forms pink flowers. It can take temperatures just below freezing but it is not as cold-tolerant as some of the other species - it doesn't like to get too cold. Plants such as *G. mihanovichii* and *G. stenopleurum* are at the other range and will only get to a size of 2-3 inches in diameter - they also do not like full sun. *Gymnocalycium*s are summer flowering and also have the advantage they flower in 2-3 batches, so you can have flowers for an extended period, compared to other cacti. They need more moisture in the growing season and also don't like the winter rest. The smaller *gymnos* are not lovers of full sun.

G. spegazzini can take full sun - they are normally squat plants which can get up to football size. They grow depressed in the ground as does *G. cardesianum*. The latter is variable and some forms have impressive spination. Some of the plants have outward pointing spines whereas others have spines which curve over the plant's body. And as occurs with other genera, the new spines can often emerge with a vivid colour which fades as the spine grows and ages.

David mentioned that *Gymnocalycium* is popular with certain German and Czech enthusiasts who like to visit new habitats, find "new" plants and publish their discoveries. The difficulty is in knowing whether these plants are truly new species or just varieties of existing species. In the last 10 years, there have been new discoveries published every year. Many of these newer discoveries are miniature plants, suitable for growing if you have limited space.

Gymnocalycium berchtii has a grey or brown body and limits itself to a couple of inches in diameter. *G. bodenbenderianum* can get to a few inches across

- it is an attractive looking plant which tends to remain solitary. *G. stellatum* is solitary but can form clumps after many years. You'd be doing well to get it to a size of 10 cm.

A seed raised *G. buenekeri* was a nice plant but this is a fast growing species, so it would need to be larger before it could be considered show worthy. *Gymnocalycium carminanthum* (*G. oenanthemum*) grows to a few inches across. It has red or pink flowers. *G. uruguayense* is a neat plant which has nice yellow flowers. *G. leeanum* is another yellow flowered species. *G. bruchii* is a small bodied plant but it can form quite large clumps over time. *G. quehlianum* produces off-white flowers with hints of pink and red within the flower. It will produce many flowers in a season and will offset in due course. *G. gibbosum* can form big heads eventually - it has white flowers. Other plants that had been brought in included *Gymnocalycium monvillei* and *Gymnocalycium castellanosii*. *Gymnocalycium baldianum* is very popular in cultivation - it's a floriferous plant which produces blood red flowers. There is also a variety of it with white flowers (*G. baldianum* v. *albiflora*).

David mentioned that one advantage of *Gymnocalycium*s is that the dead flowers detach easily, so it's relatively easy to clean up the plant each year.

On to cultivation, David mentioned they tend to be much slower growing than the Aloes we had looked at earlier. They will grow in a typical cactus mix of John Innes mixed with grit, and acidic compost is recommended. Good drainage is required, especially with some of the smaller growing plants. They don't need deep pots either. David recounted how Chris Webb's plants used to be really heavy - they were planted in large clay pots and he used lots of grit in his mix. Both Paul Klaassen and Ivor had used trolleys to bring in some of their larger *Gymnocalycium* plants.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on October 1st and will feature Vicky Davis, who will talk about the topic of ex-situ conservation. This is the process of protecting an endangered species, variety or breed of plant outside its natural habitat – for example, safeguarding species by keeping them in places such as seed banks or living collections.

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 14 th	Sep	Southampton	Display / Plant Sales @ Romsey Show, Broadlands, Romsey
Sat 14 th	Sep	Isle of Wight	Adventures into Borneo - Hazel Taylor
Sat 21 st	Sep	Portsmouth	Succulent Senecios - John Foster
Sat 21 st	Sep-	Kent	Cactus World Live @ Lullingstone Castle/World Garden DA4 0JA
Sun 22 nd	Sep		
Sat 28 th	Sep	Portsmouth	Autumn Show at Christ Church Hall, Widley, PO6 3NB
Tue 1 st	Oct	Southampton	Ex-situ Conservation of Cactaceae in the UK - Vicky Davies
Sat 12 th	Oct	Isle of Wight	Gardening Through the Year - Helen Mount
Sat 19 th	Oct	Portsmouth	Lophophoras (includes cultivation) - John Watmough
Tue 5 th	Nov	Southampton	Agaves for the Collector - Kathy & Keith Flanagan
Sat 9 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	Topic to be confirmed
Tue 12 th	Nov	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting – Chilworth Hall
Sat 16 th	Nov	Portsmouth	Agaves and their Cultivation - Kathy & Keith Flanagan
Tue 3 rd	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social

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