

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

Summer seems to have exited with a bit of a whimper. Last week there were some chilly nights and I suppose we will have more of these in the coming days. September saw lots of rain and my garden plants have never look better. Indeed some plants put on a second spurt of growth, for example Rhododendrons started to form a new set of leaves, something they would normally do in June! Indeed this month has brought home how well plants do if they get regular and thorough soaking with water (a watering can, even daily, just isn't enough).

In the conservatory, a few Aloes and Haworthias are in flower, as are some Lithops and Conophytums. Some of the other mesembs seem a little behind with their flowering, perhaps due to the lack of sunny days recently.

## Announcements

The Branch took part in the **Romsey Show** in September, and our display was well received, even winning a prize of £60. Overall, quite a few people visited the event, so it was a useful event to add to our calendar.

**Portsmouth Branch** will be hosting a convention in October to celebrate their **60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**. There's a notice with additional information and a map on the front table. I have obtained tickets for those who requested them at the last meeting and will hand these out today. If you did not request

tickets but are thinking of going, it is still possible to buy tickets from Portsmouth branch.

The **Zone 11 Quiz** is due to be held on 13<sup>th</sup> November, and this year it is the Isle of Wight branch's turn to host the event. We won the Mealy Bug trophy last year when Portsmouth hosted the event so we will be sending over a team to try and retain the trophy. If you would like to come along and either take part or just support our team, please let one of the committee know. We go over on the hydrofoil from Southampton, and IoW members pick us up at West Cowes, so it's necessary to let them know how many people will be travelling.

The **December meeting** is only a couple of months away, and we'd again like members to bring along some food to share with everyone – the branch will provide the drinks. More details next month.

## Last Month's Meeting

### Plants of Interest

It was David Neville's turn to bring in some Plants of Interest. First was a *Cochemiea pondii*, which he said had been growing by the side of a Veltheimia whose flowers had got tangled into the hooked spines. Cochemieas are placed in the Mammillaria group, but they have an asymmetric flower which is unlike a typical Mammillaria flower. David said this is one of the best Cochemieas for flowers; it remains compact, and can be in flower for 8-9 months of the year, even at Christmas. The other Cochemieas are less attractive and rarely flower – one of the choicest is *C. halei* but that is slow-growing and difficult to flower.

Next was a plant of *Mammillaria saboe* v. *haudeana* (Lau 777) which was the best that he had managed to grow in 30 or so years of growing – it has been in an unheated greenhouse for three years and even survived last winter. The plant had grown nice and chunky and it had been a mass of flowers earlier in the year. It is normally attacked by red spider but so far they seemed to have kept away.

Next was a Conophytum with pink flowers – this had been a spectacular sight earlier in the day, but

less so now, since the flowers had closed for the evening, Some of his Lithops have already finished flowering, but he had brought in *Lithops otzeniana* which was covered in buds. Some of his other Lithops were not showing any buds yet. *Lithops pseudotruncatella* tends to be the earliest to flower.

Finally was a group of 4 Aloe plants – these were new hybrids, from Kelly Griffin in the USA. These plants were different from anything previously in cultivation, with amazing leaf surfaces and they have a complicated ancestry. His plants were a little open since they had been growing in shade. In response to a question from Tom Radford, David said these should not grow too large and would probably start offsetting. He mentioned that Stuart Riley from Plantlife (our speaker in October) had imported stocks of these plants and would probably bring some along for sale.

[ For some nice pictures of Aloes, try visiting : <http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/2921/> ]

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

### **South-West USA 2009**

It wasn't long after welcoming our speaker Ian Woolnough to the meeting that we all realised Ian's passion for cactus and that this was truly going to be a cactus evening (with the odd succulent thrown in to keep succulent enthusiasts happy). Over the next hour and a half, Ian would take us on a tour of the South-West USA, visiting the states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. The talk is the culmination of a three week excursion to the USA which took place at the end of April and beginning of May 2009 with a team of fellow enthusiasts. Ian has visited the states many times and carried out exhaustive and at times perilous studies of the native cacti in this corner of the USA.

We were greeted by a rather amusing slide of a derelict shop front where a rather antiquated sign read 'we are usually never open' and so forth. It became apparent that this was somebody's rather tongue-in-cheek joke because the shop had been closed for decades. Flying in and out of Los Angeles, California, the first stop was actually in Arizona and a view of the magnificent natural, wind-eroded rock formations known as Monument Valley.

*Sclerocactus* and a great variety of other cacti and succulents were to be found throughout this area. Ian pointed out that the SUV (4x4) they hired started out red but didn't stay that colour for very long! The next stop was the town of Barstow, California which was established during Mormon trek westwards of the 1800s. This is right on the edge of the Mojave National Preserve and Ian recommended that anyone wishing to visit the national parks should buy a universal pass which costs \$50 and allows entry to several places. *Opuntia ramosissima* is to be found in the surrounding area along with other shrubby cacti and plants that are adapted to survive the harsh desert environment. Joshua Trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) were to be found in abundance, with many mature plants exhibiting a great deal of character. These were joined by various species of Agave and the ever present Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*).

Rainfall is scarce in this region and plants have to cope with long periods of drought. Prior to Ian's visit some rain had fallen and certain plants such as *Opuntia basilaris* were looking nice and plump, having re-hydrated very well. After the rains have been various annual wildflowers suddenly and almost miraculously spring forth from the parched soil. This phenomenon also occurs in other Mediterranean climate zones around the world such as South Africa's Namaqualand. Other cacti to be found in this area included *Echinocereus engelmannii*, *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*, *Escobaria vivipara* and *Ferocactus acanthodes* var. *lecontei*.

The next stop was Kingston Peak where more *Echinocereus triglochidiatus*, exhibiting marvellous flower colour could be seen growing. These were combined with *Echinocereus mojavensis*, various *Ferocacti* and *Opuntia erinacea*. Grizzly bears were known to inhabit the area so the team had to be careful not encounter any of these fearsome predators. A wonderful *Yucca schidigera* was the next subject and this particular individual was in full flower. The desert trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*), a member of the *Polygonaceae* family is also to be found here. The next slide certainly pleased a number of succulent enthusiasts as Ian showed us *Agave utahensis* var. *eborispina* with very distinctive white tips.

The wildlife in the desert is surprisingly abundant with a number of butterflies and very well camouflaged lizards to be seen thereabouts. More *Ferocacti* and *Opuntia* were to be found alongside *Mammillaria tetrancistra* which is very difficult to grow cultivation. Huge *Nolina parryi* dominated the

landscape with many in bud and some in full flower. These plants were between six and seven feet tall and loved by the local insects. A rather unusual cristate *Ferocactus* was spotted growing right by the roadside as the team set off for Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ian really recommended Las Vegas as a great place to stay. Being the local city hub of the desert region it actually happens to be quite cheap to stay and eat there. We saw a view of the well-known Freemont Street at night with all the neon lights blazing out. From Las Vegas Ian set out for Zion in Utah. The underlying bedrock here is sandstone and we saw examples of the cross-bedding rock strata. Well-known rock formations in this area included The Checkerboard and The Wave, so if you don't like cacti there is an abundance of geology to enjoy in this area. Junipers (*Juniperis osteosperma*) and Bristlecone Pine (*Pinus longaeva*) could be seen alongside Wild Penstemon (*Penstemon sepalus*) and Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja angustifolia*). Again these plants co-exist alongside hummingbirds, blue jays, ground squirrels and all manner of other wildlife.

Large, spiny leaved *Furcraea*, possibly *F. macdougallii* or *F. roezlii*, could be seen and although both of these species are native to Southern Mexico, they have become naturalised in southern California and elsewhere within the USA. Masses of *Opuntia* covered in fruit provided a point of interest, however Ian did not say as to whether or not he tasted a sample. Bulbs were also seen amongst the cacti and this included the desert lily (*Hesperocallis undulata*), growing amongst *Escobaria vivipera* var. *arizonica* which marked the journey's passage into Arizona.

*Pediocactus paradinei* was the next genera encountered and these could be seen growing underneath pines and junipers, pulling their crowns down into the soil to escape the hot sun. Most plants were about one inch across and roughly the size of a golf ball. These plants were growing amongst limestone chippings in acidic, peaty soil that was certainly very free-draining. Some colonies were also to be found growing in grassland habitats where the soil is wetter in places. Spination was quite variable and most spines were yellow in colour. Some plants even exhibited fine white/orange-pink flowers.

The next stop was the Vermillion Cliffs and Marble Canyon which is located right in the middle of Navajo Indian country. There is a section of Marble Canyon known as Navajo Bridge. Here more desert lily (*Hesperocallis undulata*) could be seen growing

alongside *Pediocactus* and *Opuntia*. Marble-sized *Pediocactus bradyi* was seen, some having pulled themselves right down into the soil with some plumped up and therefore more visible. One certainly had to have keen eyes to spot this species! More wildlife was to be found around and about including prong-horn antelope, horny toads and some extremely well camouflaged crickets. *Pediocactus sileri* was quite at home here growing in the uniquely friable and alkaline gypsum mud. It can get quite cold in this location and the nearby natural wonder that is Bryce Canyon is even known to experience snow. Bryce Canyon is believed by many to be more spectacular than the Grand Canyon. The nearest town is Kanab, Utah which is one of main urban hubs within the area and central to Bryce, Zion, Lake Powell and also the Grand Canyon itself.

Bryce Canyon is huge and the rock formations are like one massive labyrinth. As the Mormons who used to drive cattle through the canyon would say "it is one hell of a place to lose a cow". Bristlecone Pines (*Pinus longaeva*) can also be found in the area and certain individuals of this species are known to be more than 6000 years old, with one particular tree at a secret location declared the oldest living tree in the world. The next stop was Red Rock Canyon where it was actually snowing. Here *Sclerocactus spinosior* could be seen growing underneath Aspens (*Populus tremuloides*) and very well camouflaged as well. Some were suffering from moth and beetle damage. Next we encountered *Pediocactus simpsonii* growing in well-grazed grassland along with *Opuntia* and *Tephrocactus*. The area is grazed by bison which are farmed on the land.

The next place Ian came to was the enigmatically named town of Mexican Hat, Utah where he was greeted by some interesting *Trichocereae*. At Capitol Reef it was possible to see white tail deer and *Sclerocactus parviflorus* growing in almost pure rock. It seemed like that these rugby ball size plants would almost topple over before too long. *Sclerocactus wrightiae* was also spotted here, ranging in size from that of a marble to a golf ball. Growing nearby in a particularly muddy area was endangered *Pediocactus winkleri*. Ian is actively helping towards the conservation of this species by reporting on individual populations and counting the number of individual plants which would then be fed back to the local authorities. The plants here had once again almost pulled themselves down into the soil but Ian was happy to report that it was certainly a healthy population.

Passing what was believed to be *Agave filifera*, Ian's next stop was the town of Paige in Arizona which is very near to Lake Powell and the Valley of the Gods. Ian was pleased to say that the roads greatly improved from this location! More *Sclerocactus parviflorus* were seen here, along with evidence of smuggling and illegal immigration which of course caused a lot of danger and associated problems in the area. At Montezuma Creek (back in Utah) more desert lilies (*Hesperocallis undulata*) were seen but Ian didn't stop long, heading off into northern New Mexico where he encountered *Sclerocactus mesae-verdae* growing underneath some power lines in the glaringly bright gypsum sand. This area is often completely flooded which means the plants are happy to spend time underwater!

Ian's next stop was the very popular cactus and succulent nursery known as Mesa Gardens in New Mexico. This nursery produces an extensive seed list and seed is shipped all over the world. However international customers have to observe restrictions and import regulations. At the nursery Ian observed *Echinocereus fendleri* var. *fendleri*, *Echinomastus intertextus* and *Echinocereus coccineus* alongside mats of exotic *Opuntia cylindrica* 'Cristata'. Golf ball sized *Sclerocactus whipplei* was in full flower with deep purple blooms alongside more *Coryphantha* exhibiting distinctive double petals.

In south-east New Mexico Ian encountered more of the glaring white gypsum sand, an integral part of the landscape in much of this region. Various species of *Yucca* could be seen around this area with roots that penetrate deep and stabilise the soil. More of the very well camouflaged lizards could be seen if one was quick enough! *Yucca* fruit was also seen but not tried and from here Ian continued onto Anthony Gap where large ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*), various *Agaves* and *Escobaria sneedii* var. *sneedii* could be seen in abundance.

On into south Texas where much of the flora resembles that of alpine zones, the sacred peyote (*Lophophora*) and *Ariocarpus* were seen. Various *Opuntias* were in flower with a few natural hybrids amongst them. The heat was so intense it actually topped 100° Fahrenheit even at night. *Ariocarpus* could be brought quite easily in these parts for around four to five dollars for a nice big plant. In particular *Ariocarpus fissuratus* was quite abundant within the area. The next stop was Big Bend National Park where Ian encountered a large, non-venomous coach whip snake, whilst enjoying the serenade of cicadas. Further down the trail he did however encounter his first deadly venomous

rattlesnake that would come to feature heavily throughout the remainder of the journey.

At Dagger Flats Ian came across more *Ariocarpus* and *Echinocereus viridiflorus* var. *chloranthus*. Luck however was about to run out as the team managed to sustain a flat tyre as they arrived at the Santorin Canyon. Having managed to overcome this minor problem they set out for Terlingua, Texas where a further range of interesting plants awaited them including wonderful little *Epithelantha*, various *Mammillaria*, *Ariocarpus* and *Agave lechuguilla*, the aptly named shin dagger.

Heading back into Arizona Ian's first stop was the Coronado National Forest where *Coryphantha recurvata* could be seen growing under oak trees. On the road to Tucson the team saw *Opuntia* in flower with an array of yellow and orange blooms. These were joined side by side with the giant saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) which also happened to be in flower. The organ pipe cactus (*Stenocereus thurberi*) was seen alongside tuberous *Peniocereus greggii* that also has to be camouflaged in order to avoid grazing animals. A few *Cylindropuntia* were seen here as well, including *Cylindropuntia imbricata* var. *arborescens* and *Cylindropuntia acanthocarpa*.

At the next stop south east of Tucson the team saw *Echinomastus erectocentrus*. Further on at a location east of Florence and near to Holbrook, Arizona Ian encountered a population of *Sclerocactus whipplei* that was not seen in this area during his last visit four years ago. At Navajo Bridge condors had also started to return to the region after successful reintroduction programmes. *Pediocactus bradyi* was spotted here as well, even though the weather had taken a turn for the worse and sand was now blowing in from all directions. *Sclerocactus spinosior* var. *schlesseri* was found underneath bushes thereabouts.

At Panaca in Nevada the magnificent Cathedral Gorge provided an awe-inspiring sight. A drive along the famous Extra-Terrestrial Highway brought them to Tonopah and the Eastern Silver Peak. Here *Sclerocactus nyensis* could be seen, however, whilst looking for these plants one of the team was forced to make a sudden dive into an *Opuntia* to avoid and large and very vicious Mojave rattlesnake. *Sclerocactus polyancistrus* was also scattered about and once again very well camouflaged. The plants were growing very happily in the free-draining mineral rich soil and boasted big purple flowers some 12-14 inches across. These were dwarfed by yet more *Yucca brevifolia*, a real mainstay in this

corner of the United States. Lastly Ian showed us a number of different tracks in the sand made by various snakes, lizards and probably a bit of human activity as well. Just as these creatures made tracks Ian also had to make his own tracks at this point in order to get back to Exeter and thus concludes our south-west USA adventure.

*Ben Turner*

### Table Show Results

There were 12 entries in the table show at the September meeting.

	<b>Cacti – Gymnocalycium Group</b>	<b>Succulents – Mesembs (excl Lithops)</b>
Open	(1) A Sheader Gymnocalycium pungens	(1) B Beckerleg Glottiphyllum oligocarpum
	(2) A Sheader Gymnocalycium saglionis	(2) -
	(3) B Beckerleg Gymnocalycium horridispina	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) T Radford Gymnocalycium quehlianum	(1) B Beckerleg Conophytum tischeri
	(2) B Beckerleg Gymnocalycium vatterii	(2) T Radford Mestoklema tuberosum
	(3) A Sheader Gymnocalycium denudatum cv 'Jan Suba'	(3) T Radford Mitrophyllum sp.

*Ivor Biddlecombe*

### Branch Committee Meeting

A Branch Committee meeting was held on 20<sup>th</sup> September.

Our financial year-end is September 30<sup>th</sup>, so our finance secretary Mark Jakins was asked to prepare the year end accounts and run these by our auditors, so that they would be ready for review at the next committee meeting in November.

Our librarian Dot England mentioned that library book borrowings were down compared to recent years. Perhaps this is because new members are unaware of the fine selection of books that are

available to borrow. Efforts would be made to highlight these at future meetings or by publishing book reviews in the newsletter.

Due to our continued good meeting attendances, some editions of the newsletter had run out. A few people had requested copies of the missing editions so some additional copies of newsletters from April through August had been printed.

The committee discussed recent events we had taken part in, such as the New Forest Show, the Solent Fuchsia Show and Romsey Show. The New Forest Show remains our biggest event of the year – sales this year were lower than last year, despite there being good attendances at the show. This was felt to be due to a poor arrangement and layout of the horticultural tent. We did at least win a silver medal for our display. The Fuchsia Show was quieter than in previous years, despite only being on for one day. At the Romsey Show we won a £60 prize for our display. The judges did however comment that the labelling on the plants could be better, and also the display would be better if we used similar pots for the plants. This of course is hard to arrange since our plants come from a variety of different members.

The Zone Quiz was due to be held at Isle of Wight, and a provisional team was decided, although it would be good to encourage some of the regular members to come along. Next year, the quiz is due to be hosted by our Branch. Mark Jakins mentioned he could design a multi-media themed quiz, so we took him up on this offer.

David Neville has been working on the programme of meetings for 2011. He had several ideas for speakers and in addition we will try and hold another cultivation meeting, following the success of the one held earlier this year. Alice Jankovec and Mark & Rebecca Jakins were thinking of hosting Open Days next year.

Arrangements for the Christmas Social (in December) were also discussed.

We have been using the meeting room at St Winfrid's Church in Totton for committee meetings since March, and it was agreed that we would make a donation to the church to acknowledge our appreciation of this facility.

*Vinay Shah*

## Snippets

Jim Roskilly provided the following article :

### ***Plant Pot that tells you when it needs watering***

By the time an ailing house plant sends out a distress signal, it is usually too late.

But the days of wilting stems and yellowing leaves could soon be over thanks to an 'intelligent' pot which tells you when the plant needs some help.

The 'Tulipe' pot glows bright red at the base when its sensors detect that temperature, light or moisture are not at optimum levels.

The pot is not yet commercially available, but designer Natalie King, 22, is hoping it will catch the imagination of an investor.

Her invention was inspired by her partially-sighted but green-fingered grandfather. Miss King dedicated her university project to solving the problem of helping him keep his plants healthy.

She hopes that it will be equally useful for beginners who might need a little help to keep their plants alive. The working prototype, which took eight months to complete, contains moisture and temperature sensors in the base and a light sensor on the outside. These can detect the conditions required for any indoor plant grown from seed.

Miss King, from Callington, Cornwall, said yesterday: 'My grandfather had always been a keen gardener but he suffers from age-related macular degeneration, which reduces his central vision. 'I

found that about 50 per cent of people over the age of 75 will suffer from it, and I wanted to do something to help. 'The pot is designed to give feedback, which I hope will make gardening easier and encourage people to have a go. She added: 'My grandfather thinks it's a great idea - he's very proud!'

Miss King is now working as a designer for Chanel after her plant pot helped her graduate from her Industrial design course at Brunel University, West London, with a first-class honours degree.

*Daily Mail, 29 July 2010*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, where our own David Neville will be talking about one of his trips to Mexico. Mexico is home to a large variety of cacti and succulents so we should see a good variety of plants!

The November Table Show will consist of the **Echinocereus** group (cacti) and **Lithops** subgroup (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.

The Echinocereus group consists of *Echinocereus*, *Morangaya* and *Wilcoxia*.

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

## Forthcoming Events

Sat	9 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Isle of Wight	Richtersveld Round Up Part 1 - Rodney Sims
Sat	16 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Portsmouth	<b>60th Anniversary Convention - Haworthias (Stirling Baker), Lithops (Dr Jonathan Clark), South America (Graham Charles)</b>
Tue	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Travels in Oaxaca, southern Mexico - David Neville
Mon	8 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Committee Meeting
Sat	13 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Isle of Wight	Zone 11 Quiz
Sat	20 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Portsmouth	Cactus Oddities - Stuart Riley
Sat	4 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue	7 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper
Sat	11 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper

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