

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

The temperatures are beginning to drop but it's been a pleasant start to autumn so far. A few mesembs are coming into flower and I also had a late flower on a *Rebutia* last month. This is the time of year when some of the *Haworthias* take on nice colours.

## Announcements

Ivor reported that our display and stand at the **Romsey Show** in September did very well, despite some bad weather on the day. There was good interest from the public, and we won a gold prize (and some cash!) for our display.

A provisional date of Friday 18<sup>th</sup> November has been set for the **Annual Branch Dinner** – please contact David Neville for further details.

A friend of Ben Turner's has 2 **greenhouses** (6' x 6' and 6' x 8') which are dismantled and ready for collection – these could be joined together and are available at a fairly low cost, please contact Ben for further details.

David has some supplies of the **BCSS 2017 Calendar** available for purchase at £5.50 – this represents a saving of £2 on the mail-order price. You can preview the featured images at:  
<http://society.bcsc.org.uk/index.php/calendar.html>

## Last Month's Meeting

### Plants of Interest

With reference to the cultivation evening in August, Adrian Bailey had brought along *Echeveria* cv. "Ballerina" where he had taken off the top to re-root it. The lower piece had formed 3 nice offsets and

the top part had also rooted down and put on a spurt of growth and produced a very nice plant.

Michelle brought along some pictures of her *Discocactus araneispinus*, which she had bought at the National Show. The flower buds develop very quickly and she took some time lapse pictures. The first picture at 1:10pm showed the bud developing, with further shots at 4:30pm and 7:30pm, and the flower fully open by 10:00pm. By the next morning it had finished flowering! There was a lemony scent to the flowers. David joked it was really good to have flowered it .... before it died in the winter! Michelle had also brought along a miniature (bonsai) fuchsia which was in flower.

Dot had brought along an assortment of *Aeoniums*. "Starburst" is a nice one but it doesn't offset. "Ballerina" forms several heads and turns into a sizeable plant. "Bronze Medal" is an American creation – it should be yellower than it was. It has thin stems which are quite sturdy. One purchased from Wisley was called "Torch Bearer" – it was nice and purple, but it hadn't done too well over winter, and one large plant has turned into a lot of smaller pieces. A lot of clones have "blush" in the name and we saw "Blushing Beauty" and Darley "Blush". "Voodoo" is from America, it looked like one of the other plants but its colours vary through the year. *Aeonium haworthii* "Tricolor" has a nice mix of colours and it also goes under the name "Kiwi".

### A Cactus Tourist visits Baja

Trevor thanked the branch for welcoming him back – he liked coming here. A lot of branches are lucky to have attendances in double figures, but he was a little nervous because there were so many people in the audience – he asked for no burping or booing from the back!

He said that the story started some years ago – he had been going to the USA and South Africa to look for cacti and succulents, and he had wanted to try something different. He had a friend in the US called Don Campbell from Grand Junction (Colorado) and they thought about a trip to Mexico - but Don was a bit worried and also couldn't speak a word of Spanish (Trevor wasn't much better). They

put together a shortlist of places to go to – Trevor preferred mainland Mexico to go and see plants like *Ariocarpus* and *Aztekium*, but Don preferred Baja California - he had fond memories because he went there for his honeymoon. Since they were using Don's car, they settled on Baja as the destination, hence the title "A Cactus Tourist Visits Baja". Trevor had been to many sites in the US with Don, and they were also accompanied by Trevor's wife Sue. She didn't like deserts, didn't like cacti, but she was interested in visiting the whales which can be seen off some of the coastal areas of Baja.

Baja is a peninsula which runs down parallel to the western side of Mexico and it is bolted onto the bottom part of California. It consists of "north" and "south" (norte/sud) halves, and from top to bottom, the distance is 1700km (1000 miles), although they covered around 3000 miles on their travels. The trip was in March 2007. Trevor mentioned he had 4 objectives for the trip (a) see whales and cave art, (b) find *Pachycereus schottii* f. *monstrosus* - the totem pole cactus (c) find *Machaerocereus eruca* (*Stenocereus eruca*) - the creeping devil and (d) find plants of *Echinocereus lindsayi* which was supposedly extinct at the type locality.

Their first motel stay was at the Airport Motel 6 in San Diego and Trevor recommended that you should never book a stay at one of these places – the shuttle planes which commute to Los Angeles went over every 10 minutes and the flights started at 5:30am. In addition there was a railway line nearby, and because there was a crossing, each train had to toot as it went through the crossing. Next Trevor showed us some fancy car number plates – in the US you can choose pretty much anything you want as long as someone hasn't registered it before. One plate said "God is With You", another said "Planets" and Don's said "Cacti" – "Cactus" had already been taken! Over the road he saw a sign for "Body Shop" after showing us the typical Body Shop logo for his local branch in Northampton and one in Switzerland, he revealed this shop was not part of the chain - it was a sex shop which he was not allowed to investigate further!

They saw their first *Opuntia* on the waterfront - it was actually a metal sculpture of an *Opuntia*. Cabrillo Point overlooks the San Diego naval base, and the area near the lighthouse is famous for its cacti – the plant in question is common in Mexico but is rare in the US. It was *Bergerocactus emoryi* which is a sprawling cereus. It was growing on a steep slope and was very prickly. He used a telephoto lens to get pictures of the flowers. Nearby they found *Mammillaria dioica*, which is much

more common. It is a rather boring plant, quite variable and is found along most of the Baja peninsula. There was also a barrel cactus there - *Ferocactus viridescens* – this can flower when quite small, for example in a 5 inch pot. Some of the *Mammillarias* were growing near the *Ferocactus*, using it as a body guard. *Dudleya pulverulenta* is also found here and it is one of the largest growing *Dudleyas* - some plants sprawl out for a couple of yards.

They planned to set off the next day and we saw a picture of the fully laden car, which was fitted with a container on the roof. They drove straight across the border, it's fairly easy to cross from the US into Mexico and gain access to the Mexican freeway. The scenery and views they encountered were definitely different compared to the US. On the rock faces, they saw more *Dudleyas*, these were white-leaved examples of *Dudleya brittonii*. The plant also has green leaved forms, but the white ones are more popular in cultivation. He brought back seeds from the white leaved plants, and these produced a mixture of white and green leaved seedlings.

The first major town along the west coast of the peninsula was Ensenada, and a shop sign in English proclaimed they sold pain killers, viagra, antibiotics, diet pills and sleeping pills. This made him think that everyone would speak English but that wasn't the case - hardly anyone spoke English! Although a lot of Americans visit Baja, the Americans are used to speaking some Spanish due to the large number of Mexicans now residing in the US. They had to register their presence and found an official, who advised them that they had entered the country illegally - they were supposed to have registered at the border and then pay a fee in Ensenada. The official offered them the option of going back to the border to register - or they could just pay a fine, which was £5 each. They would also need to register with an actuary who was the official's brother in law and this would cost another £5. It was interesting experiences like this that made his wife resolve to never to go to Mexico again.

They saw an alcohol shop and a petrol station – in Mexico, these shops are regulated and controlled by the government. We also saw one of the street sellers who sell snacks along the roadside. Further down the coast, they were due to stay at the La Pinta hotel, they knew it was near the coast, but they didn't see any signs for it as they drove up and down the road. They eventually asked at a shop and got the owner to draw them a map. This helped them find it - it was a brand new hotel off Highway 1 (La Pinta, San Quintin), but the road to it was a dirt road

and there were no signs to it! We saw one of the plazas in the hotel and also the picture of another plaza at another La Pinta hotel – these were all very luxurious and elaborate. However some of the facilities were not up to scratch. He showed us a picture of a US motel bathroom and everything was well organised, with even a telephone next to the loo. The Mexican equivalent showed that the bathroom had been fitted with the loo along one wall and the toilet roll holder was fitted to the opposite wall, several feet away! In one of the hotels there was no hot water and in another, the red tap issued cold water and the blue tap issued hot water! Another picture showed a nice ramp for wheelchair access, but when you got to the top, this led to platform with three whacking great steps!

The beach was practically empty. He photographed some ripple marks in the sand, and wondered what sort of creature might have made the marks. We also saw sand dollars – these are a flattened type of sea urchin. He found *Dudleya anthonyi* and a *Ferocactus*. The green plants of *anthonyi* were growing with *Dudleya cultrata*. We also saw the white form, alongside some baby plants. The ground was quite difficult to walk on. A shot showed the three nicer *Dudleya* species you see in this area. A dirt road led off to a national park. They went down to an area famous for its cacti - El Socorro. The first cactus they saw here was *Mammillaria dioica* and they saw more of these, along with *Mammillaria louisae*. Plants of *Echinocereus brandegeei* were very dry. They also found *Echinocereus maritima*. In cultivation this makes a nice cluster but it flowers badly, and the same appeared to be true in habitat. *Ferocactus fordii* was identified thanks to it being in flower. He also showed us some nice sunrises and sunsets, prompting David to ask if this was the end of the talk!? “You don’t get off that lightly” was the response.

They knew a location for *Mammillaria brandegeei* and drove south of El Rosario, to a rubbish tip. Unfortunately it seems common practice in Mexico for people to drive out to the wilderness and just dump their rubbish in any convenient spot. One of the plants they saw was *Myrtillocactus cochal*, which was in flower. The flowers are small but highly scented. They also came across *Mammillaria dioica*, and then found *Mammillaria brandegeei*. Some of the latter were sunken into the ground, and others looked quite good, but some of the plants looked like they had been stamped on. If you go in a drought year, the plants are in poor condition and can be quite small. His friend Colin Cutler went to the same spot in the following year, and took pictures of the same plants which were in much

better condition! He’s found this himself, having been to Mexico for 3 springs in succession. A bit of rain in the prior weeks can make a huge difference.

At El Rosario, you can stay at the Baja Cactus motel - it is notable for having a nice cristate *Ferocactus*. In this area is an interesting plant which was named the boojum by Godfrey Sykes from the Desert Botanical Laboratory, Tucson, Arizona. The name comes from Lewis Carroll’s poem “The Hunting of the Snark” which is about a mythical dangerous animal. The scientific name is *Idria columnaris* (or *Fouquieria columnaris*), and it is also called the Cirio. Some of the plants branch and they make a good nesting place for eagles. Some bend over and resemble elephant tusks! We saw a baby one – and Trevor suggested that if one cut off all the thorns it might fit in a suitcase. We saw Tina Wardough’s plant which won 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the 2012 National Show – this had been brought back by Doug Rowland in the 1970s. It never grew any taller for him or while Tina’s grown it, but it does grow leaves and stems. Parts of the plant were used in buildings and walls in nearby Catavina, and they also saw the wood used in a bar. Their hotel booking allowed free margaritas and these were served in glasses in the design of a tall cactus, *Pachycereus pringlei*, which is found in this area. *Ferocactus gracilis* is also in this area, and they found a medium sized specimen, and then larger and larger examples. They can grow to a height of 3 metres, although they didn’t find any that big. We also saw *Pachycereus pringlei*, which is a common cereus in this area. It is night flowering and pollinated by bats and every hotel seemed to have had lots in their gardens. They also found a cristate example on the way to a rock art site.

The rock art images were supposed to date from 2000 years ago, but some have been modified in the intervening years. They were very strange and abstract and one couldn’t be sure what they depicted. Trevor wondered whether they were influenced by hallucinogenic experiences. Some gnarled trees in this area were *Pachycormus*. Catavina did not have a petrol garage run by the state so they had to fill up in the old fashioned way, using a funnel. They found plants of *Yucca (valida?)*, a few *Ferocactus gracilis* and also *Ferocactus cylindraceus* ssp. *tortulispinus*. South of Catavina was a hybrid group of *Ferocactus*. One of the things they encountered every so often were army checkpoints - some of these were staffed by mean-looking serious soldiers. They were a bit worried about the vehicle needing to be searched, but it seems that the searches were mainly for drugs and their roof box was never searched. Some of the soldiers seemed very young conscripts. He took

some pictures of a cactus garden at one of the checkpoints - despite Mexico's tough laws on the digging up of endemic plants, these plants had obviously been brought here from somewhere else.

Resuming after the break, they went to Bahía de los Ángeles which is a remote tourist resort on the East coast. They went there to see *Ferocactus gracilis* ssp. *gatesii* and saw it right away – because someone was growing it in a flower pot. It is supposed to grow on the islands off the peninsula. They booked a trip on a panga (boat) and got up early for this, and spotted a heron in the water. Their boatman didn't speak a word of English! They saw sea eagles and sea lions and made their way to Isla Ventana, which is named after "window", due to an interesting coastal rock formation. *Mammillaria insularis* grows here and has also been found on the mainland. It looks much nicer in cultivation. Tourists were also coming up to island in their powerboats. It is inadvisable to sleep on the beach – you'll be attacked by midges. The boatman took them to another island to find some *Ferocacti*. There were plants all over the place and Don was so excited at seeing the cacti with their bright red spines that he ran up the scree on the beach, while carrying two heavy cameras and a tripod. He fell over and hurt his ankle. They put some ice on Don's foot and went to a medical centre, who said it was possibly broken, and they advised him to go for an x-ray, but that was several hundred kilometres away. Don couldn't drive due to the bad ankle, so Trevor took over. The mission San Borja is in the middle of the peninsula and this area is famous for *Cochemia setispina*, whose red tubular flowers are said to be pollinated by hummingbirds. The mission was being repaired and we saw a shelter made from cactus wood.

If you want to see whales, San Ignacio is the place to visit. There was an unusual feature of a lake surround by date trees. It was Easter time and there were groups of young people on the street, holding up some quite interesting messages – "don't give out alcohol", "no cohabitation". To get to the lagoon where the whales are found, they had a two hour drive down a dirt road. There was an interesting toilet there – it was all very clean but there were instructions telling you how to use the facility, including having to bring over some water to flush. They used a panga to go into the lagoon which is seven miles wide. Large gray whales come here to give birth, and the mother whales take their babies up to the boats and the whales also do some spy-hopping, where they emerge at 90° from the water and check their surroundings.

Now for *Pachycereus schottii monstrosus*. Around Ignacio, they found plants of *Echinocereus brandegeei* with distinctive flattened spines. One plant was in flower, but the flowers were yellow and not the expected purple colour. It turned out that the flowers belonged to the look-alike plant *Opuntia invicta*, which is a fiercely-spined cholla. A picture showed the two plants growing next to each other and they do look very similar. The spines on the opuntia are very sharp and dangerous. The old man or "senita" cactus (*Pachycereus schottii*) forms bristles at the top of the stems. The flowers are salmon pink but can also be yellow. The moth which pollinates the flowers lays its eggs in the flower, so the larvae hatch and eat the seeds later. A *Pachycereus schottii* covered in red flowers turned out to be a plant covered in bougainvillea. The monstrose plants they were looking for grew at El Arco, and although it was a straight road, parts were a dirt track and there were sometimes nasty obstacles such as big holes in the road. You have to watch out for this throughout Mexico – don't drive at night - and even during the day, take great care. El Arco is a ghost town these days. He found plants which he thought were the monstrose form, but they had been hacked down to the ground. They went to another location and eventually found them. By this time, Don had got fed up of Trevor's driving and he resumed driving, despite his injury. DNA analysis of the *Pachycereus schottii monstrosus* plants suggest that all the plants growing here are derived from the same plant. What happens is that the plants grow into tall stems, which eventually topple over, these stems re-root and produce new upright stems, spreading the plants over a distance.

Now for the creeping devil, *Machaerocereus eruca*. They found specimens at a rubbish tip. The plant grows at the front, dies at the back and roots itself as it goes along, so the plants appear to travel along the desert. One stem was approaching a *Mammillaria dioica* and it was likely that the *Machaerocereus* would just grow over the top of the *Mammillaria*. Also growing here was a local *Ferocactus* endemic - *Ferocactus santa-maria* – this flowers in the autumn and has fruits in the spring. They also found another site for the creeping devil, with plants growing down by the seaside. He decided to tell an embellished story at the Explorer's Meeting of how these plants have a death wish and grow into the sea and people from the Mexican government come along and turn the plants around.

Behind a bush, they found *Mammillaria halei* – this is supposed to only be found on one of the islands, but this plant was on the mainland. It was a red flowered plant and Trevor attempted to show what it

looked like in cultivation, at the Zone 6 show – but David said the plant at the show was *M. setispina* which has hooked spines, whereas *M. halei* only has straight spines.

While in this area, they drove along and found more creeping devils, but a great deal of the area is being converted to agriculture, with things such as fruit trees and strawberries being grown. Prickly pears are also grown as a vegetable – they were being collected in wheel barrow, after which the spines would be taken off (they had seen this in Neuvo Leon) and the green fruit is then diced up into strips where it looks like runner beans. The church at Santa Rosalia is quite curious – it is normal on inside, but on the outside there are sheets of iron riveted together. It turns out that the owner of the local mine was very rich and he commissioned Eiffel (of Eiffel Tower fame) to design and build the church. Not far away, south of Loreto is where *Mammillaria hutchinsonia* v. *albissima* grew – we also saw the plant in cultivation. They decided to go into the mountains (Sierra de San Francisco). It is cold on the West Coast and they encountered some rain and even snow once. Little boojums grow here and they found an almost cristate Ferocactus and also *Echinocereus engelmannii*, growing a very long distance away from its home in Arizona. At Santa Rosalia, a sign on a shop selling goods said “how many”, “what colour”, “almost free”. The date palms growing here were introduced by missionaries. They also saw a frigate bird. A restaurant menu mentioned “we don’t speak English - but we won’t laugh at your Spanish”. Eating at this place gave him a bad tummy so perhaps they got their revenge on him. North of Loreto was another road, which was partially washed away. They found *Mammillaria albicans* f. *slevinii* and we also saw *M. albicans* in cultivation. *Mammillaria poselgeri* was also found here. Along the roadsides were memorials to people who had died, one saying “riding the sky”.

On the coast further south were some really scenic places, including Todos Santos. There was an interesting plant growing here, with yellow flowers – it turned out to be *Aloe vera*. There are a lot of air plants (Tillandsias) growing in the trees, on telegraph wires and on barbed wire. They saw signs saying “Zona de ganada” and wondered if this meant zone of goats – actually it signified livestock. “Zona de neblina” meant zone of fog and the tillandsias rely on this for moisture. His favourite Mexican sign was “Mas vale tarde que nunca” which means better late than never.

At Santa Rosalia, on the way back, they found interesting plants of the caudiciform *Pachycormus discolor*. Some of these were growing completely flat to the ground, due perhaps to the very strong winds coming in from the Pacific. *Mammillaria dioica* and *Mammillaria blossfeldiana* were found here. The later was found with one flower and then three flowers. The plants don’t look as good as they do in cultivation. They approached Catavina and on the right hand side of the road they saw a party of people standing in a circle in the field. This party had been looking for *Echinocereus lindsayi* and had just found it. The team was led by Juergen Menzel and Trevor asked if he was the Menzel of *Pediocactus peeblesianus* f. *menzelii* fame. “Ja Ja” came the answer and Juergen was pleased that his discovery was known about. They chatted with him later in the hotel and Juergen was able to tell him where to find some interesting *Pediocactus* back in Arizona. He now lives in California and takes parties on habitat tours. They found around half a dozen plants of *E. lindsayi* in the area and Trevor showed how it looks in cultivation. Colin Cutler went to the site the following year and was able to see the same plants. So the plant is not extinct at the type locality. But once people know it’s there, it will be collected, although there are plenty of seedlings around.

With this, Trevor’s checklist was done. The next picture we saw was of them queuing up to return to the USA. In the queue, you could buy anything, and if you bought fast food, the sellers walked after you and delivered it to your car. Eventually they came to the border and a sign featured some stern questions - do you know what is in your vehicle, have you been asked to drive this vehicle for someone else, did you borrow this vehicle, have you recently purchased this vehicle, did you loan this vehicle to someone while in Mexico. If you have answered yes to any of these questions, your vehicle may contain contraband drugs - notify the inspector.

Trevor updated us on Don. After dropping them off in San Diego (where they wanted to visit the zoo) he drove back home. He hadn’t bothered getting his foot x-rayed yet. He returned to Grand Junction in Colorado which was a 1000+ mile drive, via a *Sclerocactus* site. However, his leg was hurting and it was snowing so he didn’t even get out of the car. After getting back home, he was persuaded to see a doctor. He had an x-ray and he was told the thin bone in his right leg going to the ankle had a significant fracture and was indeed broken - so he driven several thousand miles in that state!

Trevor wrapped up the talk with some scenery shots from the trip. The islands are beautiful and tranquil, and they saw several interesting cacti, but the cacti on the mainland of Mexico are better. A sunset picture to end the talk was followed by one more picture of a cactus, *Ferocactus cylindraceus* ssp. *tortulispinus*. Overall his trip lasted 2.5 weeks and that was about as long as he would have wanted to spend there.

Vinay Shah

### Table Show Results

There were 13 entries in the September table show, and 9 entries for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – Gymnocalycium	Succulents – Mesembs
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe Gymnocalycium saglionis	(1) B Beckerleg Conophytum sp.
	(2) A Mant Gymnocalycium saglionis	(2) I Biddlecombe Conophytum angustum
	(3) B Beckerleg Gymno. hybopleurum	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) T Radford Gymno quehlianum	(1) I Biddlecombe Conophytum lydiae
	(2) B Beckerleg Gymno sp.	(2) T Radford Conophytum elisae
	(3) I Biddlecombe Gymno mihanovichii	(3) B Beckerleg Cono herreanthus

### Cacti/Succulent in Flower

(1) B Beckerleg  
*Crassula alstonii*

(2) T Radford  
*Cynanchum* sp.

(3) B Beckerleg  
*Frithia* sp.

Ivor Biddlecombe

### Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November and will feature Alice Vanden Bon who will give us a talk on South Africa. This was the talk which Alice was due to give last year, but which had to be cancelled due to bad weather

The November Table Show will consist of the **Mammillaria** group (cacti) and the **Agave** group (succulents). 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. In addition there is a class for any flowering cactus or succulent plant.

The *Mammillaria* group includes *Bartschella*, *Cochemiea*, *Dolichothele*, *Krainzia*, *Mamillopsis*, *Mammillaria*, *Mammilloidia*, *Pseudomammillaria* and *Solisia*.

The *Agave* Group includes *Agave*, *Beaucarnea*, *Calibanus*, *Dasylyrion*, *Dracaena*, *Furcraea*, *Hesperaloe*, *Hesperoyucca*, *Manfreda*, *Nolina*, and *Yucca*.

Note that a branch committee meeting will be held on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October.

### Forthcoming Events

Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Isle of Wight	Alpine Plants (Robin Alabaster)
Wed 12 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting (at Dot's)
Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> Oct	Portsmouth	Grafting Part 2 / Growing on cactus seedlings (Cliff Thompson)
Tue 1 <sup>st</sup> Nov	Southampton	South Africa First Class (Alice Vanden Bon)
Sat 12 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Isle of Wight	Czech Collections (David Neville)
Fri 18 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Southampton	Branch Dinner - details TBD
Sat 19 <sup>th</sup> Nov	Portsmouth	Zone 11 Annual Quiz – hosted by Portsmouth Branch
Tue 6 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting followed by American Supper
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social

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

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