

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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### Branch Secretary

David Neville  
6 Parkville Road  
Swaythling  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO16 2JA  
davnev@bopenworld.com  
(023) 80551173 or  
07974 191354

### Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah  
29 Heathlands Road  
Eastleigh  
Hampshire  
SO53 1GU  
sotonbcss@gmail.com  
(023) 80261989

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## Editorial

The evenings are now beginning to draw in and temperatures are also reducing, with a few chilly evenings, although it's not too uncomfortable. Plants are in good growth and some of the succulent genera actually look quite good at this time of the year.

I do have a few mesembs in flower at present, including Conophytum, Glottiphyllum, Lithops. Some Aloes and Haworthias are also in flower.

## Announcements

The display we put on at **Romsey Show** was a success, although rain the day before turned the exhibitor car park into a mud bath. Plant sales were good and we also won a gold medal and some prize money, so thanks are due to all those who worked at the event.

The Branch **Annual Dinner** will be held this Friday (6<sup>th</sup> October), at the usual venue of the Luzborough Inn, just outside Romsey. Maps are on the front table. Please let David have your name if you wish to attend.

Our meeting hall is being refurbished at the end of this month and we may have no access to the kitchen at the November meeting. Glenn will endeavour to serve refreshments from the main hall, but it might make things a little crowded, please bear with it since it's only for one meeting.

At the January meeting, we usually have members present short talks or show some slides. If you have any topics that you can talk about for 10-15 minutes, please have a word with David.

## Last Month's Meeting

### *The Beauty of our Plants*

David Traish said that he had been growing plants for many years. Within London, his Branch (originally, North Surrey) used to hold shows and the same plants tended to be brought in, year after year. But why weren't the public coming in to the shows? The shows were frequented just by their members and were not attracting the public. As is often the case, the show was held in a church hall.

Well, he always wanted to change things. He was a photographer - surely we could present our plants in a better way to publicise the hobby? When he started, the magazines of the time had pictures of plants in the desert but they were just dried up plants. So he put this presentation together 6-7 years ago. He wanted to photograph the plants in different ways and show things that you might not have noticed. He mentioned that he used to go to his greenhouse in the winter, find a plant and take it indoors while trying to avoid the wife, and then take it to the bathroom and examine it with a magnifying glass. Well, she used to wonder what the hell he was doing!

This talk would show some of the things he enjoys and finds attractive. There would be an introduction to shapes and body forms and body colours. Other items covered in the talk included artistic gardens and outdoor uses of plants. Some images might answer the question "Why did you start growing these plants?". There are plants that can be grown outside all year round. He showed a stylised picture of a typical cactus book featuring a picture of a plant and technical text. Does something like this attract new members? Things have changed in the last few years and books now have some very good photographs, but that wasn't true 10 or more years ago. Most of the books looked like the slide - they are very technical, offering a description and a distribution map. Many books follow that format and the photography is not very exciting. Now, this would be OK for something like *Bradleya* or for a scientific work, but it's not going to turn anyone on. David mentioned lots of people grow orchids and admire them - but orchids are not so interesting

when not in flower. To the contrary, many of our plants look fantastic all year round.

We started with body shapes, and some Rebutias at Southfields Nursery, consisting of multiple spheres. Southfields produce some lovely hybrids with a large variety of flower colours, although his tendency is to avoid hybrids and deal with genuine species. We saw the criss-crossing brown and white spines of *Mammillaria marcosii*. This image was "photostacked" - this involves using a camera connected to a computer and taking lots of pictures at different depths of focus - software then combines these individual images to produce a composite image where the full depth of the object is in focus. We saw *Ferocactus glaucesens* at de Herdt (Belgium) with really red spines and yellow flowers. *Pachypodium namaquanum* looks fantastic if studied in close up - the markings on the body are very intricate. People grow Bonsais but we have our own candidates - *Pelargonium curviandrum* forms a caudex. He had photographed the white flowers using a macro lens he described how having the flowers in a diagonal alignment - with the flowers not overlapping - produces a better arrangement - composition and framing is an art in itself. The sun shining over plants can produce interesting images and we saw *Cephalocereus senilis* looking beautiful in the sun. Since then the plant has unfortunately lost its roots so he's taken a top cutting and is trying to re-root it. If you go into the greenhouse in March and look at the new growth on cacti, there are lovely bright colours to the spines, often different from the colours you see in the rest of the season. We saw *Cotyledon orbiculata* at the National Show in 2004 - the form of the leaf and the colouring is unusual and it can be impressive on a good specimen.

We moved on to look at spiky plants. *Aloe erinacea* has stunning spines on the leaves. it is variable and there are some stunning forms around. *Agave parryi* is a beautiful plant with striking leaf forms and colours - this was taken at the Hollygate reference collection. Next was *Leuchtenbergia principis* - there were many colours in the image with the red/brown spines and bright yellow of the flower. Some of the outer petals are darker, almost matching the spines - the colours do vary, depending on the time of day when you take the picture - this was late evening. It's quite an easy plant to grow. *Haworthia limifolia striata* has pronounced white marks along the leaves and it's a beautiful plant - if you saw a daffodil like that you'd buy it, said David. "But the flowers don't compare too well!" added David Neville.

*Mammillaria duwei* has lovely spines and a round body. With a photostacked image, we could see the

lacy spines - when you get close to anything with a macro lens, you have reduced depth of field. This is one of plants he admitted taking to the bathroom, for closer study with a magnifying glass. When kids come to a show or event, their hands always shoot out and want to touch the plants - but then they get pricked! Well if you want to touch plants, then *Mammillaria carmenae* would be a good choice. Its spines display some complex shapes when viewed up close. We saw another close up of a *Mammillaria* showing newly emerging spines which were deep red in colour. This was a picture he was considering using in his ARPS submission. *Mammillaria plumosa* has fluffy feathery spines which don't look that interesting at a distance, but close up the brown and white spines form some wonderful shapes. Under a microscope (x40 or x50 magnification) there's even more to see.

*Astrophytum asterias* "Super kabuto" is a choice cultivar with heavier white markings than the normal *asterias* and it's a spectacular plant to grow. However it does tend to dry out and is not a reliable plant for him, although he had owned this one for a few years. He grows it in a clay pot. Next we saw the unmistakable *Echinocereus grusonii* - this example was growing at De Herdts. Next was *Echinocereus ingens* growing at Manor Nursery in Sussex. Now closed down, they used to have some wonderful plants being grown in an open area under glass. The flowers were 3-4 inches in diameter. We saw another example of *E. grusonii* - David mentioned he had amassed 30-40 pictures of *grusonii* at different stages of growth since it is so photogenic. A *Discocactus* was lovely when small - the flowers have a lovely scent.

He found *Ariocarpus* very attractive, and *Ariocarpus fissuratus* had an almost purple tinge to the body - and in species like this, the flowers enhance the body. He visited Hans Biesheuvel's Lakerveld nursery in Holland and there were lots of *Eriosyce*, many of which were grafted - *Eriosyce aurata* is especially attractive. We also saw an *Astrophytum* hybrid with 7 ribs. *Echeveria laui* was at De Herdts. *Melocactus levitestatus* had a bright red cephalium - unfortunately there are some plants that just can't be grown in our greenhouses without maintaining the high temperatures they need, although he does grow *Dorstenias* and *Pachypodiums*. *Phyllobolus resurgens* has a woody caudex, which is rare for a mesemb. *Ferocactus stainesii* had intense red spines - sometimes spraying the plants with water just before you take a picture does intensify the spine colours. *Dioscorea elephantipes* is always interesting to look at, with the classic look of the caudex becoming apparent once the plant begins to age. *Copiapoa* are amongst his favourite plants and

we saw *C. haseltoniana* offsetting. We also saw an Echinopsis hybrid offsetting. He mentioned one instance of a show at Croydon when not many people were coming in, and he decided to go home and get his large Echinopsis which he knew was in flower and he put it near the door – the plant was 15-18" across and it had 50 flowers open, all at once – it was literally covered in flowers.

Now for some strange but interesting shapes. We started with *Lithops atzeniana*. The “arachnoidea” types of Haworthia such as *Haworthia bolusii* was offsetting. With *Copiapoa barquitensis*, he liked the brown colour of the epidermis. *Mammillaria camptotricha* cv. *marnier-lapostollei* has very curly spines. *Pleiospilos compactus* has yellow flowers and he needed to “frame” the plant to get a better image. He has a liking for huge Mammillarias and we saw *M. parkinsonii* with a dozen heads. We saw close ups of his grafted *Epithelantha micromeris* which showed that the spines are white and blue when viewed up close. *Notocactus magnificus* was in a 18" pot, it has large yellow flowers and is easy to grow, and for him it flowers its head off 3-4 times a year. *Aeonium schwarzkopf* has black leaves which makes photography difficult, but he uses a ring flash to photograph the dark leaves. He prefers to use natural light when he can, but sometimes when the plants are in shade he uses flash. In this case he set the flash manually to have a fast roll-off.

A variegated *Haworthia emelyae* was a nice plant and we also saw a close up of the flower. The yellow-brown flowers of *Opuntia clavarioides* almost match the body colour of the plant. With *Dorstenia foetida*, the branches look like hands stretching out. It sets seed quite easily. His plant of *Dorstenia gigas* was photographed a few years ago. It's got really big now and he keeps it outside. He can hardly lift it - just how do you get it to a show? It has flowered for him, although not every year.

In the second half, we started with some “new born” - photographs of seedlings of *Astrophytum* hybrids. These are often more colourful than the eventual plant will be. We moved on to “flowers”. *Gymnocalycium* buds were photographed with a macro lens. Next were some white flowered Conophytums. *Conophytum obscurum* has pink flowers. *Drosanthemum hispidum* has magenta flowers. We also saw another *Drosanthemum*, which is sometimes confused with *Delosperma*. *Mammillaria luethyi* is one of the newer *Mammillaria* discoveries and it has a large bicoloured flower which is almost rose-like. The body is quite attractive as well, consisting of white tipped tubercles.

*Errorcactus herrerae* has striped flowers, and the flower colour can vary between yellow and orange-red. *Astrophytum capricorne* has an impressive yellow flower. David showed us the same image as a black and white negative and this made the mass of stamens much more obvious - they are less visible in the colour picture because their yellow colour blends in with most of the flower. We also saw the flowers of *Echeveria setosa* and *Rebutia heliosa*, followed by another *Astrophytum capricorne*, an Echinopsis hybrid and *Echinocereus rigidissimus*. *Gymnocalycium achirasense* has large flowers which can vary between shades of pink and white - the picture had been edited to improve the colour and contrast. Some Conophytums have orange flowers. You can actually see a reflection in some of the glossy flowers of mesembs. The next picture was an example of composition, with two flowers arranged in a diagonal - there are certain physical structures (shapes) that humans find appealing and this image was better than just 2 random flowers.

With *Selenicereus*, he grew his in a large pot under the bench and trained the stems along the bench and the rest of the greenhouse. The flower was several inches across and photographed in the afternoon. An Echinopsis had a pink trumpet shaped flower and interesting stamens and stigma - this was a Southfields hybrid. Next was his *Pachypodium brevicaulis*. It can look stunning with the sun coming through the plant and you can see the veins in the leaves. It's actually difficult to photograph due to the size of the plant. Also, this was an old photo, he could probably take a better picture now. *Echinocereus delaetii* had hairs around the buds. The picture of *Notocactus warasii* had come out well with the sun on the flower, and it would probably be in his ARPS application. A picture of *Lithops lesliei* had been photostacked using CombineZM software, to get the petals in focus. *Tylecodon buchholzianus* has a small but beautiful tubular flower, you can see a lot of detail with a macro lens. *Cotyledon orbiculata* has pendent bell shaped flowers. *Piarranthus decorus* has a 5 petalled textured flower with fine hairs and intricate patterns on the petals. Many Euphorbias have interesting flowers and we saw *Euphorbia decaryi*'s flowers in close up. *Crassula deceptor* has small flowers, only 1/16" across and the picture we saw produced has also been produced using CombineZM. Next was the flower of *Pelargonium alternans* - this picture actually had an error in the image (a stray piece of leaf) due to the software bringing in data from an image that it shouldn't have used. David explained this can sometimes happen.

Now he uses a slightly different technique which was illustrated by the image of *Lithops dorotheae* which had been processed by Helicon Focus photostacking software. So two pieces of software are involved - one controls the camera remotely via a USB connection - you set the front and back position for the image and the remote control software then decides how many pictures to take and it takes images between those limits with different focal points, to achieve the best depth of field with the minimum number of images. After the pictures are taken, the Helicon software combines the multiple images to produce one final image with the extra depth of field.

We also saw some more Conophytums in flower, including night flowering ones. David mentioned the flower centres were almost fluorescent if viewed in the right light. The flowers of *Soehrensia formosa* show some nice colours. We saw a close up of *Dorstenia foetida* - it forms a bloom which actually consists of a tight cluster of smaller flowers. *Dorstenia barnimiana* is quite a tough plant and easy to grow - the plant is smaller than some of the other *Dorstenias*, and the flower is elongated. *Huernia somalica* has a circular ring around the centre of the flower. *Ceropegia radicans* is interesting - he couldn't call it beautiful but it was attractive. He also considered *Ariocarpus fissuratus* as very attractive. In his opinion, *Ceropegia woodii* is an under-rated plant - the leaves have stunning patterns and colours on them and the flowers are quite exotic. *Ariocarpus furfuraceus* has white flowers. The flowers of *Pseudolithos dodsoniana* are quite dark in colours and they feature some dangly hairs - these must be there to somehow attract insects for pollination.

Now for some leaves. *Euphorbia bongolavensis* has leaves with vivid red stalks. The leaves of *Adenia lindenii* have a beautiful shape. *Bombax ellipticum* forms a caudex which becomes well marked with age. The leaves are rounded in shape. A *Kedrostis* also had shaped leaves. *Pelargonium cotyledonis* is an easy plant to grow - the leaves are rounded in shape and they have deep veins running all over them. Unfortunately, mealy bug really like it! We saw the leaves of *Euphorbia decaryi* through a macro lens, with the rich colours being apparent. *Sinningia canescens* has felty/furry leaves - it's actually quite a tough plant. *Zygosicyos tripartitus* has a textured caudex and multi-lobed leaves which are fabulous. The leaves of *Adenia globosa* have veins - it forms lots of spiky stems which are well marked. *Avonia alstonii* (*Avonia quinaria* subsp. *alstonii*) is now back to being called an *Anacampseros*. The stems are covered in papery sheaths, giving them a silvery appearance. The

leaves of *Dorstenia gigas* are beautifully veined whether viewed from the top or the underside. *Uncarina roeoesliana* has soft leaves and yellow flowers. However the leaves have an unpleasant smell if you handle them. He has seen them growing in habitat in Madagascar.

Now the theme moved on "collections". We saw the cactus displays at the 2004 and 2008 Chelsea flower show. These are put on by Southfields, and it's a great display of colour, even if the variety of plants is somewhat limited. He showed us the South African display the show, and this had a much larger variety of interesting plants on show. Next we saw a collection of Conophytums from the National Show 2004 - these was Terry Smale's themed display. We saw pictures of De Herdt in 2006, with rows and rows of Cacti and Succulents. We also saw plants of *Lophophora* and *Obregonia*. The owners were pretty old even back then and the Nursery has since closed. Next was Cok Grootsholten's nursery and collection, taken in 2008. There were lots of *Hawortias*, *Echeverias*, *Dudleyas* and *Astrophytums* on view. Unfortunately his collection is also being run down.

We now saw David's own collection. He had 15' x 8' and 12' x 8' greenhouses, and we saw some large cacti and mesembs as well, with plants being segregated by size and temperature requirements. A *Haageocereus* was quite large but it had not flowered yet. He recollected an instance when he had a huge plant of *Euphorbia decaryi* and some ants got into the compost. He repotted the plant in some new compost, but there were sciara fly in the compost, and they got at the plant and it eventually died.

Next he showed pictures of gardens. Lullingstone Castle is well worth going to. Although not fabulous for succulents, there are quite a lot of things growing outside and plenty of other plants to see. Next were the Barbara Hepworth Gardens. She is a famous sculptor, and there were several succulents and cacti such as *Mammillaria* and *Cereus* out in her gardens. The Jacques Majorelle Garden is a botanical garden and artist's landscape garden in Marrakech, Morocco. There is particular emphasis on the colour deep blue, with several buildings and walls and sculptures painted in this colour. We saw a *Beaucarnea* there and other plants such as *Agave* and *Cereus*. Cactus Joe is a nursery in Nevada, and there were some nice plants of *Echinocactus polycephalus*. We also saw Chestnut Lodge at Cobham (now closed). There were plants such as *Agaves* and other succulents laid outside and also in greenhouses. We also saw the Tresco Abbey Gardens at the Isles of Scilly - the weather there

allows a large selection of plants to be grown outdoors.

Next were some random topics. We saw a spider in close up, his bookshelf full of cacti and succulent books, and his Silver Medal from the Surrey Country Show many years ago. He also showed some pictures of society events. We saw a crowd of people at Havering Cactus Mart, and people on a visit to the Biesheuvel nursery. Another picture showed people having assembled for one of the “cactus crawls” – basically trips to Europe to see some of the nurseries there. An artistic shot showed rain on top of a flower.

He briefly discussed his ARPS submission. You have to put together a panel of 15 pictures and there are certain rules to observe for the selection of the 15 pictures and symmetry in the submission. He initially applied for “fine arts” and the panel said the content was technically good but they suggested he was better off applying for the “applied” section. When he reapplied using their advice, they suggested he would be better off in “fine arts”! Anyway he's assembling a new selection of 15 images and hopes to re-apply in due course. He ended with a final picture featuring *Notocactus magnificus* – this was one of his favourite images.

*Vinay Shah*

## Table Show Results

There were 12 entries in the September table show, and 7 entries for “Plants in Flower”.

	<b>Cacti – Gymnocalcium</b>	<b>Succulents – Stapelia Group</b>
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe <i>G. saglionis</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Huernia primulina</i>
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>G. saglionis</i>	(2) T Smith <i>Stapelia hirsuita</i>
	(3) B Beckerleg <i>Gymnocalcium sp.</i>	(3) M Stevenson <i>Huernia sp.</i>
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg <i>G. occultum</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Trichocaulon flavum</i>
	(2) I Biddlecombe <i>G. baldianum albiflora</i>	(2) -
	(3) T Smith <i>G. ambatoense</i>	(3) -

### Cacti/Succulent in Flower

(1) C Weston <i>Adenium obesum</i>
(2) T Smith <i>Graptopetalum bellum</i>
(3) M Fox-Rousell <i>Melocactus sp</i>

*Ivor Biddlecombe*

## Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held at Dot's on 26<sup>th</sup> September.

Our financial year end is 30<sup>th</sup> September and Alice said that she was waiting for some bank statements, but the data was almost ready to hand over to our accountants.

The new Pilbeam book on *Mammillaria* has been purchased for the Branch library. There is also a new book called “Succulents of Southern Africa”, which Richard will keep his eyes open for.

Recent meetings and events were discussed. Our presence at Romsey Show had been a success financially, but rain on the day before the event had turned the exhibitor car park into a mud bath, and there were long delays to enter and exit the site.

Ivor has stated that he needs help putting on the external displays and Bruce has agreed to store some of the staging materials and bring those to the events.

There was some discussion of events and meetings for the programme for next year. David Neville will be working on finalising the 2018 programme in the coming weeks, so if anyone has a preference for speakers to invite or topics they are interested in, please have a word with David.

The branch is short of committee members (and the existing committee is not exactly getting any younger!) So a push will be made to try and encourage branch members to play a more active role, and to consider joining the committee.

Vinay Shah

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on November 7<sup>th</sup> and it will feature a talk by Mark Preston on Epiphytic cacti. It's the first time I can remember a talk being given on this subject at the branch, so it's something to look forward to. Cultivation of these plants requires different treatment compared to normal cacti and succulents. Apart from the Christmas and Easter cacti that we've all seen in shops, I expect Mark will also cover genera such as *Ephiphyllum*, *Rhipsalis* and *Selenicereus*.

The November Table Show will consist of **Copiapoa Group** (cacti) and **Echeveria 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 10<sup>th</sup> Edition* (contact me if you don't have a copy of this).

The *Copiapoa* group includes *Copiapoa* and *Pilocopiapoa*.

The *Echeveria* subgroup includes *Dudleya*, *Echeveria*, *Graptopetalum*, *Pachyphytum* and *Tacitus*.

## Forthcoming Events

Fri	6 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Southampton	Annual Branch Dinner (Luzborough, SO51 9AA, 7:30pm start)
Sat	14 <sup>th</sup>	Oct	Isle of Wight	Southern Namibia (Rodney Sims)
Sat	21 <sup>st</sup>	Oct	Portsmouth	Asclepiadaceae (Tom Radford)
Tue	7 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Southampton	Epiphytic Cacti - A General Introduction (Dr Mark Preston)
Sat	11 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Isle of Wight	title to be confirmed (David Neville)
Sat	18 <sup>th</sup>	Nov	Portsmouth	Echeverias, Aloes and Gasterias (Stuart Riley)
Sat	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue	5 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat	9 <sup>th</sup>	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting followed by American Supper

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

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