

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

November 2005



### Branch Secretary

D & M Corina  
79 Shirley Avenue  
Shirley  
Southampton  
Hampshire  
SO15 5NH

(023) 80779057

### Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah  
29 Heathlands Road  
Eastleigh  
Hampshire  
SO53 1GU

(023) 80261989

vvshah@clara.co.uk

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## Editorial

Although the clocks went back last weekend to tell us that British Summer Time is officially over, the weather remains unseasonably mild. We have entered November but I don't think we have had any frosty evenings yet. I had turned on my central heating during a few cool evenings at the start of October but was forced to switch it off last week since the house was just too warm. Outside, many of the trees are only just beginning to drop their leaves and it feels quite pleasant, like the last days of summer rather than the middle of autumn.

Plants of mine which are in flower this month include Aloes, Haworthias and Conophytums and several mesembs, the most notable of the latter perhaps being *Glottiphyllum pygmaeum* which has long-lived yellow flowers. I also noticed a Weingartia in flower a few days ago, and a flower spike has started to form on *Clivia caulescens*.

## Announcements

The branch's **Programme** of speakers for **2006** is being finalised this month. If you have any favourite speakers or topics which you would like covered, please let Margaret Corina know right away.

Those who were present at the September meeting may have met Stefan Rau, who had brought along several bags of good quality sharp **grit**, for sale at £3 / bag. This sold very quickly, and a few of you may have missed out. If anyone would like to purchase this grit, please let me know and I'll pass the message on to Stefan.

Next month is our **AGM**, and nomination forms for the Committee are available on the front table. The present committee has not seen any changes of personnel for a long time and we really would welcome some new faces!

As is usual, there will be no table show, library or plant sales at the AGM next month. However, please do remember to bring along some food for the American supper. There will also be a "bran tub" where members can exchange gifts. Further details of next month's meeting are given on the back page.

## Last Month's Meeting

### *Plants of Interest*

There were no specific *Plants of Interest*. However, Ivor Biddlecombe had brought along a couple of trays of plants which matched the Table Show classes. One of the trays contained 13 Conophytum and Ophthalmophyllum plants, and the other contained a dozen Gymnocalyciums.

### *A Walk on the Wild Side – Part 2*

Eddy reminded us that his talk was going to be a continuation of the talk he gave us in July 2004. He also reminded us that he had been mugged within a few hours of arriving in South Africa, and this meant he had to rely on loans from his travelling companions John Ede and John Frew to get through the first few days. Fortunately the plane tickets were safe in his hotel room, and he was able to get replacements for lost credit cards and his passport.

At Port Nolloth, on the Western coast, they had arranged to stay in a nice holiday bungalow. They arrived in the afternoon and after a cup of tea, decided to go out to try and find the local eating places and the Spar supermarket. Everyone left the house - at which point they realised that the key to the front door had been left indoors, on the kitchen table. They looked around to try and see if there were any open windows, and within a few minutes, three heavily armed policemen arrived – a

neighbour had seen them acting suspiciously and climbing over walls! The nearest spare keys were 90 miles away in Springbok which would entail a two hour journey – each way. The door had two locks - a mortice lock (which was unengaged) and a Yale lock. After some perseverance, they were eventually able to deal with the Yale lock by using a bit of plastic!

They went up to the tarmac road to Alexander Bay (situated on the border with Namibia) and then travelled inland, following the Orange River. Derek Tribble had given them a list of various locations of interest. Despite the barren landscape, they were pleasantly surprised by the number of plants to be found. *Psammophora modesta* was a shrub 3" high and 6" across and it had sticky leaves which were covered in grains of sand. The pink flowers were just starting to appear. The plant was everywhere as was *Dracophilus dealbatus*. A 9" clump of *Senecio* couldn't be identified without flowers. There was also a 4" clump of *Othonna clavifolia* growing in very sandy/rocky soil and a 7" *Cheiridopsis herrei*, half buried in sand.

A plant of *Sarcocaulon multifidum* was only 2" across and seemed to be endemic – they found forms with white or pink flowers. *Othonna furcata* was 9" across, and they also came across *Avonia prominens* growing in very sharp shale. It has more stems than *A. papyracea*. An Euphorbia was probably *E. peltigera*, and the first *Trichocaulon* they found was *T. dinteri*. The individual bodies were an inch across, and the plant always seemed to shelter at the base of rocks. A plant of *Pelargonium crassicaule* was 6" in diameter.

*Fenestraria aurantiaca* was well camouflaged, and one had to blow the sand away from the barely visible leaf tips to find it. The best time to see it is when the yellow flowers are blooming. Another specimen of *Sarcocaulon multifidum* had pink flowers 1" across and another *Sarcocaulon* growing at base of rock was *S. rigidum* or *S. patersonii*. One always finds *Conophytum*s in this part of South Africa, and the species prominent this area was *Conophytum saxetanum*. They also found *Adromischus glossianus* which is one of the *marianae* forms.

In the sand, they spotted the shells of a desert snail. These bury themselves in the sand and presumably only come out when it rains. A clump of *Euphorbia ramiglans* was 6" in diameter. A 4-headed *Trichocaulon dinteri* at the base of a rock was quite a find, and another plant of the same

species featured a couple of long seed pods. They also found *Tylecodon schaeferanus*.

They drove on and reached an ostrich farm. These birds were originally farmed for their feathers but now grown for their meat. *Lithops herrei* grows here, but it was on the other side of the farm. The mountains in the background were part of the Richtersveldt National Park.

*Pelargonium klinghardtense* was in flower and was 9" across and 7" high. There was a nice rockery of *Conophytum saxetanum* and they also found a beautiful 5 headed clump of *Trichocaulon dinteri*. Eddy said he finds this relatively easier than the other *Trichocaulon*s. *Cheiridopsis brownii* was growing in shale, and there was another nice grouping of plants – an Euphorbia, *Sarcocaulon multifidum*, *Psammophora* and *Juttadinteria deserticola* with smooth leaves. It was too early for flowers, and the buds on the latter were not yet open. They also found *Sarcocaulon fimbriatum* (perhaps *S. ciliatum*).

It was time to head back home - at 5pm in the evening, the dirt roads are tricky to navigate as the darkness draws in. The next day they wanted to visit a famous site (Augrabies) which is to the east of Port Nolloth. They asked the local land owner if they could walk around and found him to be very friendly. The first mountain ranges are 15 miles from the coast and the sea mists roll in twice a day. They travelled along the dirt road to Lekkerskring. The mountain sides are rich in varied flora and most of the good plants are found on the eastern side of the mountain.

*Crassula brevifolia* was 15 to 20" in diameter and was a beautiful colour red. *Haworthia arachnoidea* v. *setata* was growing in quartzite. They then found the plant they were really looking for, a 3" clump of *Conophytum stephanii*. The plants were clinging to the rock – there was no detritus and the plants rely on moisture from the sea fogs. Interestingly, any sunlight gets reflected onto the plants by the quartz. *Pelargonium echinatum* was 6" high and was growing in its own little niche. A plant of the slow growing *Anacampseros baeseckeii* must have been tens of years old. They found *Avonia prominens* again. A *Tylecodon paniculatus* bush was 4 feet tall, and they also came across *Conophytum meyeriae*, and species of *Nelia* and *Senecio*.

A *Spalmanthus* had beautiful flowers 1.5" in diameter. It has a caudex and makes new top growth annually. It grows reasonably well in this

country. A 3" clump of *Crassula columella* was a beautiful red colour. *Conophytum pageae* always has a "lipstick" smear at the central fissure. In another natural rockery, they found plants of *Anacampseros baeseckeii*, *Avonia prominens*, *Conophytum pageae* and *Tylecodon racemosus*. The latter has lovely pink flowers and grows and flowers easily in this country.

A picture of an outcrop showed a variety of plants and Eddy contrasted this with a photo of the exact same spot taken three years earlier, in 1995. Many of the plants from the earlier photo were missing in the 1998 picture. Eddy mentioned that after one good set of rains many of the plants would return.

They stopped at an old dried-up river bed and found *Conophytum hians* and *Crassula deceptor*. The real reason for stopping was to admire hundreds of clumps of *Cheiridopsis pillansii* which were 6-7" in diameter. The plants had large fleshy leaves and quite a number were in flower – mostly yellow orange, but occasionally pink with a white centre. They also found a 7" clump of *Adromischus alstonii* with flower spikes, and a 9" *Pelargonium* with pink flowers.

The next day, they tackled another shale mountain. It was hard work - for every two steps they went up, they seemed to fall back one. *Conophytum schlechteri* only grows on this single mountain and they eventually found it. The sun hits the north side and the *Conophytums* prefer to grow in the shade on the south side. They also found a 4" clump of *Conophytum ectypum* which must have contained over a hundred heads. The presence of lichens indicated that there was fair amount of moisture here. *Conophytum bilobum* is variable, but the types here had velvety leaves. They also found *Crassula alstonii* with nice pink coloration and clumps of *Haworthia arachnoidea*, dark-leaved when growing in full sun. They also came across *Trichocaulon cactiforme*, and *Senecio longiflorus* which eventually grows into a 3 foot high shrub.

They took a wrong turning and ended up in a farmer's front garden. He was quite friendly and after taking them indoors, produced a large book pointing out where to find certain plants on his land. They found a *Hereroa* which was growing in reddish soil, and *Conophytum obscurum* growing in quartzite. They also found *Euphorbia hamata* and *Conophytum bilobum*.

It was now time to return to Port Nolloth and then back to Springbok via Umदाus. They found *Conophytum flavum* growing on a quartzite ridge.

It has large bodies, is very easy to grow, and produces yellow flowers. They found themselves walking all over plants hidden in the soil. Some examples of *Conophytum maughanii* were reddish in colour. *Albuca unifolia* (*Ornithogalum unifolium*) produces a flower first and a single leaf afterwards. They also found *Avonia papyracea*, a *Tridentia* species, a large *Pelargonium crithmifolium* (24" diameter and 15" tall) and *Cotyledon orbiculata* (15" diameter and 9" high).

In the distance they could see black objects against the hillside and on closer inspection these were the halfmens - *Pachypodium namaquanum*. All the plants were around 5 feet high, and all were facing north. There were crinkly leaves at the crown of the plant and the flowers were quite strange, yellow with a red tip. Unfortunately, there did not appear to be any regeneration of these plants. In this area, they also found shrubs of *Ceraria namaquensis*, *Sarcocaulon herrei* (12-15" diameter with over 30 white flowers), *Adromischus alstonii*, *Conophytum flavum* and *Aloe ramosissima*, 5 feet tall. In one spot, he estimated that there were 50 *Conophytum* plants in an area 12 inches square.

Having done the Richtersveld, they decided to have a day off and visit Augrabies Falls where the Orange River goes through gorges. They arranged to stay at Pofadder. There are crossings of the Orange River which lead into Namibia. A circular tour is called the Namies Loop and they would visit the Namiesberg and Hamsburg mountains, Platbakkies and then south to Vanrhynsdorp.

They arrived at Augrabies Falls and saw the Orange river. It was not in full flow since some of the water is used for irrigation. Grapes are grown in this area for the production of raisins. The rocks were very smooth due to the flow of the river water, and walking, even with the aid of a handrail was hazardous. They saw some animals there – a 9 inch long male cape flat lizard with a blue head. A ground squirrel kept turning away and was hard to photograph properly! They stopped to look at the *Aloe dichotoma* forests, which were very impressive, with plants reaching 30 feet in height. There were no young plants growing underneath them (except a few *Euphorbia* bushes) and Eddy explained that farmers kick out plants which they think will interfere with the growth of grass for sheep grazing.

They went on Pofadder and did the Namies Loop. They also went to Namies farm but he was the only farmer who refused them permission. They saw Weaver bird nests which are usually built in the

branches of trees. Up to 20 pairs of weaver birds live in the communal nest which is reused and made larger from year to year. The birds will build on anything - trees, telegraph poles, power lines. Eddy mentioned it was unwise to stand under the nests – not because of the birds – but because but cobra snakes also frequent the nests and can sometimes drop out!

They eventually found a low flat unfenced area that could be explored. There they found *Crassula columella*. In cultivation it grows leggy, but in habitat, it is a compact plant, grey-white in colour. They also came across *Avonia herriana*, and *Ebracteola fulleri* whose seed he brought back and offered through the Mesemb Study Group. This plant features a pink flower about an inch across.

At Platbakkies, they got permission from 2 farmers on either side of the road. On the South side, there were a number of interesting plants in the farmer's front garden. There was a group of 3 plants of *Ihlenfeldtia excavata*, 4-5" in diameter, growing in gritty soil. *Moorea serpentina* (from the Iris family) has nice flowers. *Ferraria* (spider plant) is also a member of the Iris family and it flowers before producing leaves. There were crickets everywhere and we were shown one which was 1½ inches long. Some do grow to 4 inches long. There were 100's of clumps of the red flowered form of *Anacampteros alstonii* (*Avonia quinaria subsp. Alstonii*) each around an inch in diameter. There was *Conophytum pageae 'subrisum'* and a 6" inch clump of an orange flowered *Cheiridopsis*. There was also a spectacular 15" clump of *Cheiridopsis dendritica* - not a dead head in sight and it was easily capable of winning 1<sup>st</sup> prize in a national show!

In response to a question from the audience, Eddy said these plants were not tended or watered, they were all growing wild. Many of the farmers do know what they have growing on their land, and a few do protect some of the plants. One had put out some acacia branches to protect *Euphorbia symmetrica* from grazing sheep. They continued looking for plants and came across the hairy *Anacampteros karasmontana* and a clump of *Crassula deltoidea* 2" across.

A 7" red/black centipede was a temporary distraction. They found a 4" clump of *Stomatium alboroseum* growing on the side of road. The karoo violet (*Aptosimum procumbens*) has striking purple flowers with nice markings and grows everywhere. He saw a movement in the distance and ran in the opposite direction, and then slowly made his way

back. He saw the last 9-10 inches of a puff adder, which is one of the most poisonous snakes in South Africa. Fortunately these are lazy and lethargic snakes.

Other plants they found here included *Conophytum pageae 'subrisum'* which was much plumper when growing under a bush, *Herrea* species, *Crassula namaquensis*, *Crassula columnaris* with nice yellow flowers, and *Stomatium patulum* which opens its flowers late in the afternoon.

After moving back to Vanrhynsdorp, they found *Euphorbia hamata* in flower, and a *Cephalophyllum* species with red flowers. There were lots of holes in the ground and these were due to *Bulbine mesembryanthemoides* which pulls itself into the ground, and is only spotted because of its yellow flowers. *Trachyandra tortilis* was 6" in diameter and height. *Conophytum uviforme* was growing under a bush, and they also spotted *Argyroderma delaetii*.

*Aloe krapohlina* is one of the winter flowering types but the whole plant is no more than 12" high. It is a beast to grow from seed. The next photo showed a predator, a 3" long caterpillar. Eddy mentioned that on a previous trip, they had found 100's of these crossing the road. Clumps of *Conophytum minutum* were 3" in diameter, and they also came across *Conophytum uviforme* and *Conophytum calculus*. *Tylecodon wallichii* was 15" inches across and was in beautiful condition. These are poisonous to sheep, and farmers normally kick these out of the ground. *Argyroderma congregatum* was growing in quartzite. *Crassula columnaris v. prolifera* throws offsets to propagate itself, unlike the normal form which dies out.

They went over a dried up river bed and found the soft-bodied *Conophytum subfenestratum*. There were also impressive 6" clumps of *Dactyloopsis (Phyllobolus) digitata*. Tiny white flowers appears at the junction of the leaves. They also found *Conophytum calculus*, *Argyroderma fissum*, and the reddish *Oophytum oviforme* which had nice pink flowers with a white centre.

They parked at the top of Vanrhyn's Pass and looked over the Knersvlakte. This is a pebble-strewn plain, concealing a wide variety of succulent plants. They climbed over a fence and found a *Crassula clavata* with lovely red colouring to the leaves and nice yellow flowers. Cultivated in this country, it is dull green in colour. Eddy noticed he was being watched - by an Agama lizard which was about 9 inches long and doing an

excellent job of merging into the background of brown coloured rocks.

In this area there were a trio of plants named after Professor Compton. *Crassula comptoniana* (now *C. namaquensis* ssp. *comptonii*) was growing in grit and had soft pink grey leaves and short yellow flower spikes. *Crassula rupestris* has scented white flowers. They found masses of *Conophytum swanepoelianum* ssp. *proliferans*. The individual heads were very small, but the clumps were 3-4" across and growing in grit pans at the edge of the escarpment. Individual plants of *Anacampseros comptoniana* were only ¾" across. These were also growing in grit pans containing no more than ¾" of grit. *Conophytum comptonii* was also growing in the grit pans. He had trouble identifying the next plant, until Gordon Rowley's new book on Crassula helped him to identify it as an annual Crassula – *C. dichotoma*. It has orange flowers and is a pretty little plant. Also found here was *Lampranthus maximiliani* which is a creeping mesemb.

They headed back south to Cape Town and went across to Worcester, where the countryside is totally different. It is much greener. They found a Stapeliad growing amongst rock hyrax droppings, and species of Crassula and Bulbin, and *Adromischus filicaulis*. The lichens on the rocks indicated there was more moisture here. Eventually it was time to head back to Cape Town. It was September, and the tops of the mountains were capped in snow.

Eddy ended by showing three slides which he said were his best memories of the trip. The first was of the Matzikama mountains, taken from a nursery in Vanrhynsdorp. Next, the Aloe Dichotoma forest with 30 feet high trees which were hundreds of years old was striking. Finally, the plants of *Pachypodium namaquanum* at Umdaus were also a unique spectacle.

Vinay Shah

### Table Show – October

These were the winning entries in the October table show.

|              | Cacti –<br>Gymnocalycium          | Succulents –<br>Mesembs                      |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Open         | (1) G Finn<br>G. chiquitanum      | (1) B Beckerleg<br>Glottiphyllum oligocarpum |
|              | (2) B Beckerleg<br>G. hybopleurum | (2) J Roskilly<br>mesemb sp.                 |
|              | (3) P Clemow<br>G. intertextum    | (3) P Clemow<br>Cerochlamys pachyphylla      |
| Intermediate | (1) P Clemow<br>G. mihanovichii   | (1) J Roskilly<br>Conophytum pubicalyx       |
|              | (2) B Beckerleg<br>G. gibbosum    | (2) P Clemow<br>Faucaria tuberculosa         |
|              | (3) J Roskilly<br>G. ragonesei    | (3) J Roskilly<br>Conophytum cupreatum       |

Ivor Biddlecombe

## Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of 2005 will be held on December 6<sup>th</sup>. This will be our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the **Christmas Social**. After receiving some reports from this year's Committee and choosing the Committee for next year, we'll get on with the real business of enjoying some food and drink and chatting with fellow branch members.

Drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food for the buffet table.

There will also be a "bran tub" lucky-dip. Simply bring along a wrapped present (suggested value is £2 or therabouts) and place it in the tub at the start of the meeting. Later in the evening you'll get a chance to take a present out of the tub. If you're the last person to draw from the tub, we'll have to hope that the present you pull out is different from the one which you put in!

In order to give the Committee members a chance to participate in the festivities, there will be no plant sales, sundries sales, table show or library at the December meeting. (Although Philip will be willing to accept back any library books which you wish to return).

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Finally, for Committee members, a reminder that there is a Committee meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November. **Please bring along your annual reports** so that these can be included in the December newsletter. Any format (handwritten, typewritten, or as a file on a floppy disk) is acceptable.

## Forthcoming Events

|     |                  |     |               |  |
|-----|------------------|-----|---------------|--|
| Mon | 14 <sup>th</sup> | Nov | Southampton   | Branch Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue) |
| Fri | 18 <sup>th</sup> | Nov | Isle of Wight | Society Slides                                 |
| Sat | 19 <sup>th</sup> | Nov | Portsmouth    | Annual General Meeting                         |
| Sat | 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Dec | Portsmouth    | Christmas Social                               |
| Tue | 6 <sup>th</sup>  | Dec | Southampton   | AGM and Christmas Social/American Supper       |
| Fri | 16 <sup>th</sup> | Dec | Isle of Wight | AGM and Christmas Social/American Supper       |

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