

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

November 2008



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Editorial

British Summer Time ended a few days ago, so the evenings are drawing in rather quickly now. I had intended to water my plants sometime in October but the weather was never really up to it and I think now it's too late to take this risk. However there are some species (some of the mesembs and the haworthias) which might tolerate a drink even at this late stage so I'll wait for a suitable sunny day to arrive and perhaps give them a small amount of water.

There isn't a great deal in flower right now, although I did have the interesting sight of a Fenestraria with two different coloured flowers in the same pot (one was white, one was yellow). All I can assume is that there were two different seedlings in pot. A few haworthias are also in flower. Finally, at the BCSS National Show, I bought some small pea-sized bulbils of massonia. I had left them in a plastic bag and a few weeks ago they started to develop little green leaf tips. I decided they were telling me that they needed to be planted and so I put them in a shallow tray with some compost just covering the roots. They have all developed nicely and a couple have one inch long leaf shoots, which are still being held vertically.

Announcements

Please be aware that today's speaker is Jonathan Clark who was unavailable in September and hence swapped places with Tony Mace. Jonathan will be speaking about the Canaries.

I am sorry to have to report on the death of our Life President, Mrs **Doris Meager**, in October. An article from Peter Down acknowledging Doris's many contributions to the Branch is included later in the newsletter.

We have had good attendances at recent branch meetings and this does mean that the hall **car park** may sometimes be full. If you have problems finding parking space, please remember that the main church also has a car park – the entrance is on West End Road, which is off the main road just round the corner from Hatherell Close.

Our meeting next **January** will follow the usual tradition of **short talks** given by our own branch members. If you have plants you want to talk about or pictures that you wish to show, please let one of the Committee know.

Next month is our **Annual General Meeting**, which will be followed by an American supper. As is usual, there will be no table show, library or plant sales at the AGM. However, please do bring along some food or nibbles for the American supper. There will also be a lucky dip "bran tub" where members can exchange gifts. Further details of this are given on the back page.

Nomination forms for the Committee are available on the front table. Please do consider joining - we would certainly like to see some new faces on the committee!

A **TV series** which some of you may be enjoying is the BBC's "Stephen Fry in America", where Steven is attempting to visit all 50 US states. He is working his way to the West Coast and next Sunday's show is likely to feature Arizona so there may be a few cacti on view.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Ian Acton had brought along some a couple of *Plants of Interest*, and both were in full flower. First

was a *Frailea*, and there were 5 tiny plants in a two inch pot. Ian mentioned that he had brought them along since they're the smallest plant he's managed to flower. The plants were grown from society seed bought three years ago as *Frailea pyamea* v. *dadakii* but this variety is not listed in the Cactus Lexicon.

The flowers are pale yellow and cleistogamous which means they can self-fertilise without opening or even producing petals. Over the years he's grown them, his *Fraileas* have produced wishy-washy flowers only in long hot summers so seeing flowers is a rare event. The plants are easy to grow from seed but relatively short lived.

The next plant was *Opuntia salmiana*. This is possibly the smallest opuntia you can expect to flower in cultivation. It flowers in August or September and the pale yellow to pinkish flowers are about an inch across. This species is not to be confused with another species which is sometimes sold as *O. salmiana* but is actually *Cylindropuntia imbricata* which won't flower in this country. *O. salmiana* is interesting because the flower buds are indistinguishable from the young shoots and have areoles on them. In fact you can get flower buds growing on old buds. It's a very "friendly" cactus - one of those which leaps out and grabs you, so his advice was to keep your distance! The joints readily detach so the segments tend to break off easily and attach themselves to passing animals as a natural dispersal mechanism. Ian said this is a belt and braces approach to survival since it flowers readily as well.

Beyond the Chiricahuas

Our speaker for October was Doug Donaldson, who mentioned his talk would discuss a trip he and some members of High Wycombe branch went on in 1995, when they were attending a cactus convention at Tucson. They would visit the Chiricahuas which are a mountain range in the south eastern part of Arizona. The trip was a pre-convention event intended mainly for bird watchers and there were 10 members in the party, including 3 local guides.

As they left Tucson, they visited the B&B Cactus Nursery. They saw a crested barrel cactus, a Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*), a huge *Echinocactus grusonii* - it was early June so the flowers had gone - and also a cristate saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*).

Doug showed us a map of the area of the route they would take to the south eastern corner of Arizona. After leaving Tucson, they would head for Willcox and then on to the Chiricahua National Monument.

They would then move on to Portal and return via Douglas. We saw some pictures of saguaros taken from the car, in many different shapes and sizes. There was also a nice shot of an agave with a large flower spike, and an artistic shot of the flowers silhouetted against the sun. Another shot showed the carcass of a dead saguaro and a *Fouquieria* in the background. Doug mentioned that saguaros are hit by lightning strikes (thunderstorms are frequent in the summer months) and the plants also have shallow roots so can be toppled over if there are flash floods followed by high winds. Next we saw *Ferocactus herrerae*. *F. wislizeni* also grows in this area and it's possible that some of the plant were hybrids created by cross pollination and hence intermediate in appearance. We also saw another shot of a group of saguaros growing on the hillside.

Their first stop was at Willcox and we saw a photograph at a petrol station forecourt, showing a price of \$1.289 per US gallon. Doug mentioned an American friend was recently complaining about the price having reached \$4 a gallon! We saw *Fouquieria splendens* and a close up of its flowers. Doug mentioned that he saw all the men taking pictures in the ladies loo and he wondered what was going on - and later learned that someone had spotted a black poisonous spider.

Moving on, we saw a shot of the entrance to the Chiricahuas monument. The mountain ranges are 40 miles long and 20 miles wide, although on their tour they only covered a small part of that. The rock formations were created around 27 million years ago from a volcanic eruption. We saw a small alligator juniper - when the plant matures, the patterns on the bark resembles the skin of an alligator. He brought back seeds of this and managed to germinate them, and now has a 6 foot tree but the bark has not formed the characteristic patterns yet. We then saw a blue dagger yucca, and *Penstemon barbatus*, with a pink flower. We also saw the banana yucca (*Yucca baccata*) with its fruit. Doug mentioned that George Montgomery (now Curator of Botany at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum) was one of their guides and was able to name many of the plants they came across. Without a guide, you would waste a lot of time looking for plants so it is helpful to have someone who can lead you right to them. We also saw *Echinocereus pectinatus* and *Opuntia engelmannii*.

Doug showed some of the views of the park, including a view called the "Sky Islands" with parts of the columns of rocks visible through the early morning mist. They also found *Echinocereus triglochidatus* growing here. There are some

spectacular rock formations in the park, and we saw a large rock balanced on top of a column of rock. Other rock formations included "China Boy" silhouetted against the sunlight if you stood on a particular spot, and "Punch and Judy" and "Kissing Cousins". At the other end of the trail, cacti were growing in the ridge and there was a river bed which was dry at this time of the year. They found *Ferocactus acanthodes*, growing straight from the rock.

They moved on to Portal, and stayed there for about a week. Portal is a village of about a 100 people and has a post office, library, cafe and a lodge and 3-4 houses - and that's it. We also saw pictures of the lodge where they stayed and the post office. This apparently is famous because there's a person here who collects scorpions and posts them from this particular post office. They attended a lecture one evening at the library - and emerged at around 10 o'clock at night. It was pitch dark and most of them bumped and tripped into the Cottonwood tree growing outside. Doug also took a picture of a yellow sign in the post office window, warning the locals that the cafe would be really busy. Later he found this notice was due to the presence of their party of 6!

Next, they moved on to Cave Creek, three miles down the road. Cave Creek was a dried-up river bed in the dry season, but a torrent of water in the wet season. We saw a close up of a Road Runner bird, taken with a 500mm lens. The villagers said these are actually quite tame and will come nearer for scraps of food. They found a nice example of *Cylindropuntia spinosa* in flower. He brought some cuttings back but finds it difficult to flower here. They also found *Opuntia basilaris*. Some of these plants were growing in areas which would be flooded at certain times of the year. They also came across *Opuntia leptocaulis* and another unidentified opuntia in flower. They found many examples of *Echinocereus triglochidatus* growing in many locations - some were quite big plants and they were also quite variable. We also saw a parasitic plant called squawroot (*Conopholis americana*) growing on some of the plants.

Doug showed us the entrance to a funnel web spider nest and said that he spent many hours trying to entice the spiders to come out by poking twigs into the holes, but never succeeded. One member of their party - Michelle Bell - asked him what he was doing and eventually just walked off. When back in England she posted him a slide of one she had managed to photograph.

Further up the creek, they did actually come across some water. They found more plants of *Echinocereus triglochidatus* here. He also took a picture of a tarantula hawk wasp. These insects paralyse the tarantula spider and then lay their eggs on the back of the spider. The larvae eventually hatch and feed on the paralysed spider! In the sunlight the wings of the wasp glistened with bright coppery hues. It was in this area that George beckoned him to behind some rocks and showed him a 2 inch tarantula spider.

They continue to Paradise, which was quite high in altitude. He pointed out their guides - Mark Dimmitt, George and Malca Moore (?) in a group picture. They found a 3 foot *Ferocactus wislizeni* and also *F. herrerae* - again some of these plants might be hybrids since the spination was intermediate. He was standing on a slate ridge and got quite worried when he heard what he thought was a rattle snake. He quickly made his way out and George explained out that the noise was from a harmless cicada insect, some of these make sounds just like a rattle snake.

A ferocactus with a yellow flower was not *F. wislizeni* which has a reddish/purplish flower. Another plant resembled *Ferocactus latispinus* with its flat spines but it was two feet tall and it supposedly grows in a different locality. It had finished flowering but was nevertheless a lovely plant. They also found *Mammillaria blossfeldiana*, *Dasyliirion wheeleri* and *Coryphanta recurvata* with 8 heads. They would not have found the latter plant without the guides having led them to it. They also found *Agave triangularis* and *Opuntia engelmannii* with a red throat to the yellow flower. There were more examples of *Cylindropuntia spinosa* which seemed to grow everywhere. He liked the flowers a lot and showed us a close up of one. His plant, grown from a cutting has only flowered once in 10 years - it just seems to produce more pads. We also saw more *Echinocereus triglochidatus* and an unidentified *Mammillaria*. There was also a picture of a poisonous lizard.

They carried on up to Rustlers Park and we saw another shot of the "Sky Islands" in the morning mist. We saw *Agave parryi* as well as *Echinocereus triglochidatus* growing here. These must be hardy plants since it must get very cold here in the winter, with snow present as well. Fires occur in the area due to lightning strikes and we saw a badly burnt agave still trying to flower. The ground here was covered in pine needles and it was hard to spot plants unless they were in flower. Some clumps of *Echinocereus triglochidatus* were well established

and 2-3 feet across. We saw an unidentified agave and a mature alligator juniper (*Juniperus deppeana*) which was probably hundreds of years old and displaying the gnarled bark.

Doug recounted the story of how he tried to do the right thing when he returned home to the UK and decided to disclose his plants at the customs red channel. They let him keep the two plants he had collected in habitat and confiscated the two grafted plants he had bought at nurseries! This was the opposite to what one would have expected. Doug ended the session with a picture of the highest toilet in South-East Arizona, although his description of it's condition can't be printed!

Resuming after the mid-meeting break, we saw an early morning of the group enjoying breakfast at 6am. They then set off from Portal, heading down towards the Arizona/New Mexico border and the Geronimo trail and Slaughter ranch. Rodeo is a town on the border with New Mexico and we saw an old railroad sign – the railways and mining being of much importance in this region in days gone by. We also saw a fantastic sight of a field of yuccas in flower. Doug said the flowers were edible and used in salads but the petals were often covered in small insects! They stopped at the monument which marks the surrender of Geronimo in 1886 – the monument itself was erected in 1934. Indeed the name Chiricahua is derived from the name of one of the Apache tribes.

They went on to Douglas, the town sign indicating an elevation of 3990m. Doug showed us a photograph of a "Cultural Crossroads" mural, featuring paintings of a Mexican, a red Indian and a cowboy. Many people had saguaros and other cacti planted out in their gardens and we also saw a *Echinopsis* (a south American cactus!) in flower, featuring 25-30 pink flowers. The next canyon is Guadalupe Canyon and they visited this, seeing many flowering annuals growing by the roadside, including datura and the poached egg plant, *Limnanthes*. There was also an assortment of Mexican/Arizona poppies, an *Agave multiflora*, a dried-up opuntia and *Mammillaria craigii*. In one of the holes in the rocks, he took a picture of a horned lizard. A plant with soft and absorbant leaves is known as the mexican nappy plant.

They also found *Opuntia violacea* although the plants were greener than those in other parts of Arizona. *Echinocereus pectinatus* was only visible in the scrub when in flower. They also saw *Agave schottii* in flower, followed by *Yucca baccata* and a close up of the plump fruit which looks just like a

bunch of green bananas. We also saw a cactus wren's nest and the bird itself in the distance.

He also had a picture of a tarantula spider showing it's defence mechanism when irritated. The spider flicks hairs off its back using its legs. These cause irritant and when scratched cause further irritation.

They went into the state of New Mexico to have dinner one evening with one of the guides. There was some building work being done on the houses and in the rocks in the yard was a real rattlesnake! One had to be careful walking in the garden since the overgrown grass hid many cacti – they found *Ferocactus herrerae*, *F. wislizeni* and *F. rectispinus* some 2 feet tall. They also found *Coryphanta vivipara* v. *bisbeeana* and *Echinocereus fendleri*, and a member of the deadly nightshade family, and an iris. On their last morning in Portal, a plant of *Peniocereus greggii* decided to flower. We also saw a picture of a pomegranate tree, one of his favourite fruits. Doug mentioned there were lots of humming birds around due to the feeders but they were hard to photograph. However, we did see one he managed to take through a long lens – a Ruby Topaz.

They caught the US80 on the way back from Portal and drove through the old mining town of Bisbee. The mine is now closed but we saw a shot of the excavations. He also caught sight of a red-tailed hawk. The plants of *Opuntia violacea* here were more purple. A seedling of this which he got back though customs was growing green pads until he put it outside in the summer months when it did start to turn purple. Heading back to Tucson they found *Lophocereus schottii* and *Mammillaria microcarpa*. There was also a picture of a chuckwalla (a lizard) which he didn't take himself but was given to him by one of the members of their party.

As they approached Tucson, there were nice views of saguaros on both sides of the road. The Santa Catalina mountains provided an impressive backdrop. We saw some pictures of the Doubletree hotel which is where the convention was being held. On one of the evenings, a Mexican band was playing and they were entertained to some songs by Chuck Hanson and Charlie Glass. Doug finished his talk with a picture taken at the hotel, of a huge palm with the moon in the background.

Vinay Shah

For those of you interested in the Chiricahuas, here's some more information:

http://www.americansouthwest.net/arizona/chiricahua/national_monument.html

Table Show Results

There were 11 entries in the table show at the October meeting. Thank you to Jim Roskilly for noting down all the names!

| | Cacti – 3 Cacti | Succulents – 3 Succulents |
|--------------|---|--|
| Open | (1) B Beckerleg Mammillaria albicans Ariocarpus retusus Copiapoa longistaminea | (1) J Roskilly Echeveria agavoides cv. "Ebony" Aloe peglerae Aloe erinacea |
| | (2) T. Grech Pachycereus schottii (monstrose) Astrophytum myriostigma Cephalocereus senilis | (2) B Beckerleg Aloe deltoideodonta Euphorbia valida Glottiphyllum oligocarpum |
| | (3) T. Grech Mammillaria hahniana Echinopsis kermesina Astrophytum myriostigma | (3) T. Grech Euphorbia lactea Ardomischus cooperi Euphorbia sp. |
| Intermediate | (1) B Beckerleg Copiapoa cinerea Mammillaria saboe Escobaria leei | (1) B Beckerleg Crassula suzanne Euphorbia mosaica Haworthia sordida |
| | (2) J Roskilly Copiapoa laui (cristate) Cereus peruvianus (monstrose) Uebelmannia pectinifera | (2) J Roskilly Adromischus cv. "Little Spheroid" Aloe cv. "Lizard Lips" Crassula ausensis ssp. Titanopsis |
| | (3) | (3) J Roskilly Bulbine frutescens Haworthia blackburniae Anacampseros buderiana |

Ivor Biddlecombe

[Thanks are due to Peter Down for providing this obituary. Members who have been with the branch for a dozen or more years will remember Doris, but newer members may be unaware of the role she's played in our branch.]

Doris Meager

(Life President, Southampton & District branch, BCSS from 1993 to 2008.)

Earlier this month Doris had a very bad fall in her nursing home, and died a few days later. She was 99 years old, in great pain and blind.

Doris was one of our first members in Southampton in the mid 50's. She came along initially to support her husband George. He was a tireless worker for the branch. He was a loyal committee member, then

branch treasurer (a job which he handed to me for 14 years), and then chairman. He was involved in many plant displays and spoke to many gardening clubs, singing the praises of our plants. In 1972 he stood down through ill health, and Doris became our chairman (she insisted that she was a chairman not a chairperson or even worse a 'chair'). Sadly George died in 1973, just about when he was due to retire. It seems a very long time ago, January 1974, that I wrote a tribute to George.

Doris was our chairman until 1993 when she retired from activities in the branch and became life president. At our 40th. anniversary party in March 1994, Gordon Rowley, the then chairman of the National Society presented her and David Phillips, the retiring secretary, with a very nice engraved vase each.

Doris was a midwife by profession and many babies in the Millbrook and Shirley districts of Southampton were brought into the world by her. My wife Yvonne was also a midwife, at Lyndhurst, they would discuss the latest techniques and how things had changed together.

Doris will be remembered for her friendliness and love of cooking. She always produced a feast after a committee meeting and although we had all had a meal before the meeting we felt honour bound to do justice to the 'spread' !

She was an active Christian and attended, and was very involved with the URC church in the Avenue. We used their hall "the Avenue Hall" for our Annual shows for many years but they recently built a covered way between the church and the hall and we could not get our plants into the hall after that.

Doris was very involved with the local professional and businesswomen's organisation and was chairman of that as well for some years.

I and many others feel privileged to have known her as a kind, jolly, Christian lady and our condolences go to her daughter Jill and son Barry.

Peter Down

P.S. Some of our members went to the woodland burial ground at Hinton to support the family on 27th October.

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of 2008 will be held on December 2nd. 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.

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 Dot will be willing to accept back any library books which you wish to return).

Finally, for Committee members, a reminder that a Committee meeting will be held on the 17th 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. Alternatively, reports can be emailed to my email address, as shown on the front of the newsletter.

Forthcoming Events

| | | | | |
|-----|------------------|-----|---------------|---|
| Sat | 15 th | Nov | Portsmouth | AGM |
| Sat | 15 th | Nov | Reading | "Cactus Hunting in the South of France" – David Neville |
| Mon | 17 th | Nov | Southampton | Branch Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue) |
| Fri | 21 st | Nov | Isle of Wight | "Agave, Haworthia and Aeonium" – Stuart Riley |
| Tue | 2 nd | Dec | Southampton | AGM and Christmas Social |
| Sat | 6 th | Dec | Portsmouth | Christmas Social / American Supper |
| Fri | 19 th | Dec | Isle of Wight | AGM & Christmas Social / American Supper |
| Sat | 20 th | Dec | Reading | "Sharon and Others – Part 3" – Eddy Harris |
| Tue | 6 th | Jan | Southampton | Members' Evening – short talks by branch members |

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