

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

November 2010



Branch Secretary

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

Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah
29 Heathlands Road
Eastleigh
Hampshire
SO53 1GU
vvshah@clara.co.uk
(023) 80261989

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Editorial

The clocks went back last weekend, so the evenings will now begin to draw in – it is now pitch black at 6pm. I can only remember us having one frost so far, but that was enough to kill off the dahlias in my garden. Other summer plants are continuing to flower so there's still some colour around, despite it being November.

Last month, our speaker was Stuart Riley and he had brought along a selection of fancy Aloe hybrids, produced by Kelly Griffin in the USA. I succumbed and bought three for £20, and promptly managed to tip these over the next morning so had to perform some emergency repotting. This is when I discovered that each of the three plants already had a small offset growing near the base. Now, buying 6 plants for £20 sounds a whole lot better than 3 for £20, doesn't it? The ones I got were named "Pink Blush", "Diego White Lightning" and "Green Sand". Apparently that last one also goes under the name "Vito". Hopefully these small plants will develop into fine specimens by next year.

Announcements

A reminder that the **Zone 11 Quiz** is due to be held on the Isle of Wight, on Saturday, 13th November. If you would like to come along and either take part or just support our team, please let one of the committee know during today's meeting. We will go over on the hydrofoil from Southampton, and IoW members will pick us up at West Cowes. The fare on the hydrofoil is usually £12.40 but this is reduced to £9.40 for a group of four or more.

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 2011 Committee are available on the front table. We've had some changes to the committee in the last couple of years, but would still like to see more members taking an active part in the running of the Branch, so do please consider joining. If the thought of being on a committee is overwhelming, it needn't be – there are a variety of different tasks which people can help with, and some of these really don't take more than an hour or two of effort.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Ivor Biddlecombe had brought in a large selection of *Plants of Interest*. Some of the plants were hybrids, but Ivor said these were "old style" hybrids compared to some of the plants that Stuart Riley had on sale.

First were some *Astrophytums*. There were 4 *Astrophytum asterias* hybrids and also *Astrophytum capricorne* x cv "Super kabuto" and *Astrophytum* cv "Onzuka". Some of these were Japanese hybrids – however there are so many different types and names, it's difficult to get a positive identification on them.

Next was *Haworthia tessellata* which has pretty markings on the top surface of the leaves. He also had a miniature form, where the squares on the leaves showed up better. Another cultivar was called cv "Warty" and this had warts on the back of the leaves.

The Japanese also hybridise haworthias, and there were some nicely marked examples – *Haworthia* cv. kegani is a hybrid between *retusa* and *truncata*, and

Haworthia cv. *hakuma* has rough leaves in a mixture of colours. *Haworthia* cv “Sugar Candy” had whitish markings on the leaves. *Haworthia attenuata* cv “Broadband” has white markings on the back of the leaves. As long as you don’t overwater them, these are all quite straightforward to grow. We also saw *Gasteria variegata*, and a hybrid which seemed to be based on *G. glauca* – the leaves had a front smooth with a marbled effect.

Aloe rauhii cv Snowflake and *Aloe* cv Lizard lips are similar, but the latter has slightly darker markings. As they get bigger, they seem to show the white markings better. A hybrid marked “Bleck” looked similar to these plants, and from the audience, Paul Klaassen said that John Bleck was the propagator of Aloes, and that “Lizard Lips” was one of the first and most popular of his creations.

Oxalis cv “Ken Aslet” has yellow flowers, and each year the leaves die off. Unlike other *Oxalis* which can be invasive, this is more docile. When it’s wet the leaves collect a drop of water in the centre of the leaf and this looks quite pretty. It doesn’t like hard frost but is hardy if given a little protection.

There were three plants of *Mitrophyllum*, with the old leaves splitting and the new leaves starting to emerge. *M. clivosum* had dark interconnecting stems and looked quite attractive – the other species were *M. latibracteatum* with leaves in sheaths, and *M. grande*.

Plants in flower included *Jovibarba heiffelii* cv “Bronze Ingot” - by the time spring comes, it turns a beautiful bronze colour. The heads will die after flowering - but it offsets and will form a clump eventually. From the *Crassula* family, *Lenophyllum guttatum* has flowers which are almost bronze in colour, which is a rather unusual colour.

Finally. Mark Jakins had brought along a couple of *Rebutias*. Aware that these plants do not live forever, he had grown an offset – the unusual thing was that the offset looked totally different from the parent and was much more vigorous in its growth.

Agaves, Aeoniums and Haworthias

Stuart Riley was our speaker in October, and he said it was nice to come and give a talk to a well attended branch - around the country, numbers are dwindling but our branch must be doing something right. He mentioned that most of the talks he has done in the past have been on his trips, or on mixtures of plants, but he had decided to put

together talks on specific genera. He had picked out 6 genera and he gives two different talks, covering three in each one. He also stated that members tend to start growing Cacti and then progress to growing Succulents as they get older – he claimed it will happen to everyone eventually!

This was the first of his genera talks and covered *Haworthias*, *Agaves* and *Aeoniums*. *Haworthias* are plants that you tend to forget about and just grow under the staging. *Agaves* can take up a lot of room so you have to be selective in what you grow. He hadn’t thought much about *Aeoniums* but his interest grew after seeing a talk on them, and now one section of the greenhouse is devoted to them. The *Agaves* have pushed the cacti out - they grow faster and he has many variegated ones. With *Haworthias*, he hadn’t wanted to grow them under the staging, so had built staging at waist level with another shelf 3 feet higher, for the cacti. However, all the area got used up, so now he does have another 40 feet of plants underneath. He tries to thin them out but he can think of a reason for keeping each and every plant.

Now for some history. *Haworthias* were first described as *Aloes*, since they were found in the same regions and the flowers were similar in shape. In the late 1700s, the plant we now know as *Haworthia pumila* was described as *Aloe pumila*. Eventually, a frenchman named the genus after Yorkshireman Haworth. “*Pumila*” means small, which would have been appropriate in the *Aloes*, but it is out of place for a *Haworthia*, since it is one of the larger growing species. However, botanical nomenclature rules mean that even if a plant is moved to another species, the second (specific) name stays the same. *Aeoniums* were originally placed in the *Sempervivum* genus but there were enough differences to set up a new genus. *Aeonium* is Greek for “immortal”. *Agaves* were always named as such and is Greek for “noble”.

None of the habitats of these three genera overlap. *Agaves* grow in North America through Mexico and there are a few in South America. They are generally easy to grow and it’s hard to kill an *Agave*. Some of his get watered in the winter if there are strong winds through his louvre vents and if anything, these grow better than the others who are watered normally. *Aeoniums* are identified with the Canary Islands, but there are a few in Morocco and also some in Kenya, miles away from the rest. *Haworthias* all come from South Africa.

Aeoniums which are commonly found in garden centres include *A. arboreum*, *A. atropurpureum* and

also the dark leaved A. “Zwartkop”. The latter name has been spelt in a number of different ways and he has even seen plants offered under the name “Arnold Schwakof”! These plants can take a bit of frost but don’t like water on them in the winter. They are easy to propagate.

The commonest Haworthia is probably *H. attenuata*. One form called cv. “Broadband” was named during a conversation with John Pilbeam after a visit to ELK where the name “Wideband” was modernised to “Broadband”. There’s also a “donut” form, where the lines have turned into circular hoops, and others which have thick white ridges on the back of the leaves. The thicker the ridges, the better they look.

The agave that everyone is familiar with is probably *A. americana*, but he didn’t have one small enough to bring along. The ordinary green form is best grown outside a greenhouse, but the variegated ones tend to be slower and could grow in a greenhouse for years. Another popular species is *A. victoria-regina*. On a trip to Holland he was going to buy a trayful and was told they would become cristates, so he ended up buying 4 trays. These had been grown from seed from a crested plant, and he thinks some of the young plants were just about starting to show some unusual growth.

Agave albopilosa is a new discovery from Mexico, which has attracted a lot of interest. It’s like an *Agave victoria-regina* with furry white tufts on the end of each leaf. This was the plant which Paul Klaassen had described to the branch in his talk earlier in the year. Stuart said some agaves can be grown outside in the garden – his neighbour had sent off for some mixed agave seed, and ended up with a large *Agave salmiana* which was probably better than anything he’d grown. Agaves are monocarpic and unless the plant offsets, they will die after flowering. There aren’t too many species of Aeonium, but with Haworthia, *H. marxii* has caused some interest – it looks like a retusa type but has leaves with less succulence.

There are hybrids around of all these species. The Japanese have produced plenty of Haworthia hybrids, and are also examples from UK and also from Bob Kent in the USA. He showed us two of Bob Kent’s hybrids called “Bev’s Wonder” (named after his wife) but there are about 30 different types all with the same name so if you buy one of these by mail order you might get any one of the 30. In England, Joyce Cocozza has produced some good hybrids, including one called “Bradgate” which have nice pinks and browns if grown in sun.

With agaves, there are some hybrids too. *Mangave* cv. “Blood Spot” is a hybrid between a *Manfreda* and *A. macroacantha* – it produces plants with spotted leaves. The plants can be propagated by issue culture. Aeoniums are easy to hybridise, and this can occur naturally in the Canaries where species have been planted close to one another. He showed us an unusual agave from Oaxaca which he had bought in a Californian nursery and which he didn’t know the name of. He would show it to Derek Bowdery to obtain an identification. It had 10 offsets despite only being 3 inches across. Most agaves are easy to grow. Most plants tend to struggle if you put them in a large pot, but Agaves don’t seem to mind.

A newish plant from Huntington is on the ISI list – this is *A. victoria-regina* cv “Himesanoyuki” (Snow Princess). It is a compact clone with fancier markings on the leaves. With agaves, you can take off any offsets and propagate these but this can’t be done indefinitely since the parent plants get to a certain size and then stop producing new offsets. He had one *A. victoria-regina* which was still in its original 2.5" pot – it had been given to him by the late Sonia Barker-Fricker, and had taken 10 years to fill the pot. Haworthias will cross with Gasterias and he showed us an example of *Haworthia pygmaea* crossed with Gasteria – it had resulted in a plant with a rosette with nice textured leaves. A clump of a variegated *Haworthia otzeniana* had a stunning yellow head. It was probably not viable on its own. He was tempted to take all the heads off and leave just one green head and the variegated one - left as it was, it’s possible that the green growths would overwhelm the variegated one.

Propagating Aeoniums is easy. He showed us a hybrid which was offsetting easily by itself. He had already chopped off 20 heads from it and it still had another 30 heads still growing. With agaves, tissue culture means that desirable plants can be propagated in the thousands. Robert Wellens specialises in this, and he also produces variegated clones by exposing green plants to radiation at a local nuclear power station. This “artificial” variegation is not as regular or stable as natural variegation, but it produces some interesting plants.

After the break, Stuart switched to showing us some digital pictures. The first featured the only cactus we were going to see – it was actually a slice through an Aztekium, showing the interesting pink flesh colour inside the plant.

Next, we saw an outdoors show in the USA, with a mixed display of plants. *Aeonium* cv “Sunburst” can

grow to a foot across or more. We also saw *Agave americana*, a *Yucca* and *Senecio rowleyanus* growing in artistic arrangements. Haworthias started off grouped with Aloes and we saw the description of "Aloe" *pumila* in Curtis's Botanical Magazine. One can buy plates of hand drawn illustrations on the internet. He started collecting a few but hadn't got round to getting them framed because he was worried about whether exposure to light would affect them. The largest plants went into the centre of the magazine middle as a centrefold, and we saw an *Aeonium* described as a *Sempervivum* – *S. glandulosum* and *S. glutinosum* were amongst the early discoveries.

Stuart briefly covered books on these genera- some are good whilst others are heavy going. There is only one title on *Aeonium*, and this was written by American Rudolf Schulz - he covered the species and all the pretty hybrids too. For Agaves, he recommended "Agaves, Yuccas and Related Plants" by Mary Irish. For Haworthias, John Pilbeam's "Haworthia and Astrolaba" is the best but it has been out of print for a while so hard to come by. The newer book by Bayer deals with taxonomy and is less suitable for growers. The English are good at setting up little societies and there is a Haworthia society which produces a quarterly magazine – this is well worth joining if you are interested in the genus.

There are quite a few *Aeoniums* in his collection. They don't grow much in the summer months but start coming into their own around this time of the year. He tends to treat everything as a cactus so starts withholding water in October, but these plants would benefit from a later stop to watering. We saw hybrids called *A. cv* "Lemon and Lime" and *A. cv* "Lime and Yellow", and *A. cv* "Las Vegas". Some of these are the work of an American hybridizer called Jack Catlin (David Neville thought the correct name was John Catlin) who has produced many crosses of *Aeoniums* and *Echeverias*. Some of these can be found in the American equivalent of B&Q.

Cuttings of succulents need a bit of work compared to cacti which can just sit there. Sometimes they get leggy and need to be redone. *Aeonium nobile* is the largest and can get heads a couple of feet across, It forms masses of starry red flowers. This species will die after flowering and is best propagated from seed. A variegated form of *A. atropurpureum* had multiple heads, all showing slight differences from each other despite being attached to the same stem. There was a question on how to get rid of mealy bug. Stuart said that Provado will get rid of them – but it's best to wash the plants with a jet of water

and then follow up with Provado. The aerosol form of Provado works really well, but just remember that the propellant used is butane which is flammable and dissolves writing on labels. *Aeoniums* have spikes with clusters of pretty flowers, very similar to *Sempervivums* spikes with clusters all round the end. All the goodness goes into the spike and so flowering does mean it's the end for the plant. A Cactus & Succulent show in Cornwall gives a prize to the "plant most likely to die in the next year", so *Aeoniums* may be a good choice for that.

Aeonium "Copper kettle" is a colourful hybrid from the USA and can look quite different through different times of the year. Stuart said that rather than chopping off the top and rooting that and waiting for the bottom to sprout, you get more offsets if you slice nearer the top and leave some leaves on the bottom section. If subsequently, there are too many offsets on the bottom, take some off and leave around half a dozen or so. When you've chopped the offsets off - root them in either Seramis or ordinary cactus mix. They can be watered right away and should root within a month. He showed a Catlin hybrid being used as bedding at Huntington, with hundreds of colourful heads. There was also the odd cristate form, with crested heads. They used to have a plant shop at the Huntington where they sold spare plants to visitors but unfortunately, this service has now been closed down.

In his collection, as he acquired more variegated forms, they have tended to push the green ones out of the way. He now has a 14 foot section filled mainly with variegated agaves and only a few green ones amongst them. *Agave schidigera* "Shira ito no Ohi" (Queen of the white thread) is named because of the filaments on the leaves. Another one which used to be hard to come by but is now tissue cultured is *Agave iophanta quadricolour*. Next was a variegated *Agave attenuata* which he bought in the States for the shocking price of \$135. On a subsequent trip he found it in a garden centre looking a bit battered and was able to get the \$50 price reduced to \$25. Both have had the tops taken off and have 5-6 offsets coming through.

Next we saw a couple of variegated *Beaucarnea recurvatas* – one had white variegation, and the other had yellow variegation. *Agave americana* with a central yellow stripe occasionally sends out streaked offsets, and *A. americana striata* sometimes sends out yellow offsets. Each offset tends to be slightly different. An agave with wavy leaves was *A. gypsophila* although it does sometimes go under other names – the leaves were quite short for their width. If the variegation is on

the outside of the leaves and there is some green in the centre, they are easy to propagate via tissue culture. But propagating a plant with a yellow centre would have to be done the old fashioned way. We saw a form of *A. americana* with tight tiny teeth which looked quite different from the normal form. Occasionally one of these plants flowers and requires a pane to be taken out of the green house to allow the tall flower spike to grow. He fitted some polystyrene round the spike to provide some protection. Some spikes are like telegraph poles and some are like red hot poker. Once it flowers, that's the end for the plant.

Stuart proceeded to show collection of variegates from various sources. Some go for as high as \$750 on the internet. Agave "Pinky" is a variant of *A. filifera*. We saw *A. titonata* with central variegation and *A. filifera* also with central variegation. A variegated *A. victoria regina* was not as good as some of the examples from the States. Stuart mentioned that some of these plants originate in Asia, from places such as Thailand, and supposedly only show the variegation when grown in tropical conditions. Various forms of *A. utahensis* are popular and we saw 3-4 different forms – some have long central spines and others have twisted spines. A variant with a dark coffee coloured central spine goes under the name "Eborispina". We saw a couple of cristate agaves – *A. victoria regina*, and *A. filifera* – these can be obtained for about £20-£30 from growers in Thailand. At the Huntington Gardens in Pasadena, we saw a couple of *Agave attenuata* cultivars - *A. Myron's Magic*' and *A. 'Emery Stripy*'. These are quite fast growers and not difficult to grow and easy to propagate if you're willing to chop the centre out.

We saw *A. utahensis* growing at the south rim of the Grand Canyon. It can take snow and cold and is reasonably hardy. An example of *A. victoria regina* was an open-looking plant with white edges on the leaves – this was at Miles Anderson's, in Tucson. We saw another variation with lime green in the centre, this was from Cok Grootscholten in Holland. A plant which he nicknamed "you must be stupid" – because it cost him \$150 - was *Agave parryi huachucensis*. It has since produced a few offsets and has now paid for itself. He hoped that the white edged *A. victoria regina* will turn up in quantities after being tissue cultured. We saw a shot of a McDonalds restaurant - not because it was anything special, but because an agave planted outside (*A. desertyi*) was in flower. All along the flower spike were thousands of bulbils – in effect, the plant was producing its own cuttings. It would nice if a variegated one would do something like that!

Another agave with a flower spike lying on its side gave a chance to see the flowers close up. They are quite pretty even though the flowers have no petals. The colours can vary. We saw *Agave bracteosa* at the San Diego Botanic Gardens with not an offset in sight, but the plant has since been tissue cultured and available for around \$28. The label said the habitat was Oaxaca, which David Neville questioned. We saw a plant of *Agave parryi truncata* which was almost white and shaped just like an artichoke and another example from Holland had just a single central spine and looked even better. From the States, he brought back the largest one he could fit in a suitcase which was about 6" and proceeded to say that he could fit around 500 plants in a suitcase. How do you keep a straight face when returning home with all these plants? Stuart said he always comes through the red channel. The last time, he had \$300 of permits and there was no one to give them to! He never risks going through the green channel and makes sure he has the appropriate phyto certificates with him.

We saw *Agave bracteosa* which has thin leaves, and *A. americana* with a white central white stripe which had been planted out. He mentioned that the offsets come up quite a distance from the plant. At a nursery in Las Vegas, we saw a variegated *Agave murpheyi*. He brought one of these back after removing it from the bucket sized pot. We also saw an "urn" type *A. americana*, *A. murpheyi striata* and *A. parryi truncata*. Stuart said it was fairly easy to buy these plants and then take them to a Fish and Game centre to get the phyto certificate. We then saw 5 slides from American National show, including a crested *A. stricta* and a good example of a *Mangave* "Blood Spot" which was compact and well spotted. We also saw a *Haworthia* cv "Chocolate" at an open show at the Huntington.

Two popular species of *Haworthia* are *H. maughanii* and *H. truncata* - the fancier the pattern on the leaf tip, the more desirable they are. Some of these plants are quite pretty and in the US shows you would easily win a prize. At Cok Grootscholten's we saw a pale-edged *A. victoria regina* which was 2 foot across – subsequently, it flowered and died. We saw examples of a variegated *A. titonosa* and *A. bracteosa* - his motto was – if it's large enough, cut the centre out you'll get 3-4 offsets in due course.

We also saw some examples from Rob Wellens and his tissue culture nursery – a trayful of variegated *Haworthias* after a trip to the nuclear power station. Some of the more desirable creations can be sold for a couple of hundred Euros to Japanese and Korean

collectors. With variegated *H. maughanii* plants, the pattern on them is identical after tissue culture – all you need is a piece of flower stem 1/3rd of an inch in length, so the plant doesn't even need to be harmed.

We saw a variegated *H. bayeri* growing on its own roots - despite having no visible green section. This was followed by pictures of different forms of *H. pumila* / *H. marginata*, including the "Donut" form with circular ring marking, and a picture of 4 artificially variegated *H. maughanii* with an imposter, which was a variegated *Frithia pulchra*. We also saw a hybrid *Haworthia* from Hiroshi Kobayashi – the initial leaves are not representative of what the plant will look like when mature. We saw two variegated *H. truncatas* - one was an artificial creation and the other a natural cultivar. *H* cv. "Pale Peace" was a cutting he was given in Holland and seems to be a cross between a *retusa* and a *truncata*. We saw the colourful *H.* cv "Hakuma" grown under different conditions and some more examples of *Haworthias* with "donut" rings on the leaves.

He finished with Bob Kent's collection in the USA. Bob and Bev are a couple in their 80s who don't like their picture being taken but he had managed to take one surreptitiously. They have a collection of amazing hybrids. Many are just random insect pollinated seedlings. Bob doesn't sell the plants, but does give bits away occasionally. We saw a variegated *H. bayeri* and some *H. pumila* hybrids which looked like they were glazed in a kiln – these were creations after years of selective breeding. Another plant looked like an *Ariocarpus*. We saw a variegated *H. maughanii* "Volcano" and a final example with a totally orangey-yellow head in the centre of a clump. He ended the slides with a picture of a weird conifer.

After the end of the talk, he was asked about the winter temperatures he uses for the Agaves. 4°C perhaps 0°C on occasion. Had he tried them totally cold? The answer was "No" – some of the ones from Mexico wouldn't like it.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 16 entries in the table show at the October meeting.

	Cacti – 3 Cacti	Succulents – 3 Succulents
Open	(1) T Grech	(1) T Radford
	(2) B Beckerleg	(2) T Grech
	(3) T Grech	(3) J Burnay
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg	(1) B Beckerleg
	(2) T Grech	(2) T Radford
	(3) T Grech	(3) T Smith

Ivor Biddlecombe

Snippets

Stapeliads by John Pilbeam

This book newly published by the BCSS and written by John Pilbeam is now available to borrow from our library.

It consists of a gallery of some 686 pictures of all 57 genera of this group of succulent plants.

It has chapters on cultivation, location data and a useful checklist of species. The greater part of the book is a lavishly illustrated commentary on genera and species. While making the point that there is debate in the area of taxonomy John Pilbeam does not seek to be definitive but more presents the reader with an opportunity to review the alternatives.

Dot England

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of 2010 will be held on December 7th. 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 our next Committee meeting was brought forward by a week and will be held on 8th 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

Mon	8 th Nov	Southampton	Committee Meeting
Sat	13 th Nov	Isle of Wight	Zone 11 Quiz
Sat	20 th Nov	Portsmouth	Cactus Oddities - Stuart Riley
Sat	4 th Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue	7 th Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper
Sat	11 th Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper

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