British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Our clocks changed several days ago, so it now gets dark at 5pm. I don't think I've noticed a frost as yet, but I'm sure that it won't be long before we do experience some freezing temperatures. I haven't watered my plants for a couple of weeks, so unless we have a sunny spell this coming weekend, that might be it for this year.

As regards plants in flower, it seems to be much the same as last month, with Conophytums, Glottiphyllums, an Aloe and some Haworthias in flower. In addition, *Haemanthus albifloss* has also started to bloom recently.

Announcements

Nomination forms for the **branch committee for 2018** are on the front table – we do have a couple of vacancies at present, so if you like to join the branch committee, please discuss with Dot or David.

The first meeting in January 2018 will be a **members evening** – if you have some slides or plants that you want to talk about for a few minutes, please let David Neville know. David is also putting together the **programme** of meetings for **2018,** so if there are any topics or speakers you would like to see featured, let him know ASAP.

Next month is our AGM followed by a Christmas social – as usual, the branch will supply the drinks, but we would appreciate people bringing along a **variety of food** to share with everyone. Please discuss with Glenn Finn. Also note that there will be no bran tub this year.

For **branch committee** members, I will want to publish your **annual reports** in next month's newsletter – so please send me your write ups by the end of this month

Last Month's Meeting

Cacti of the Big Bend

Hazel mentioned that she visited the Big Bend in June 2013. She was attending the 2013 CSSA (Cactus and Succulent Society of America) Convention which was being held in Austin, and one of the available options was to take part in an organised pre-convention tour of the Big Bend area. A map showed the relative locations of Austin and the Big Bend area within the state of Texas. She started by showing a few pictures of Austin. It's the State Capital of Texas and claims to be the live music capital of the world. There were large guitar sculptures placed in the streets and we saw "Vibrancy" and "Twinkle Twinkle Lonestar". As with any modern US city, the centre was packed with high rise buildings. We also saw the Lady Bird Lake, named after the wife of President Johnson. Hazel took a ride in a "bat boat" and we saw sunset over the lake. A bridge in distance was the Congress Avenue Bridge and Hazel explained the connection between the bridge and bats.

In 1982 the bridge was widened concrete supports were put under the bridge. These happened to be ideal for bats to roost in. And now, Austin is home to the largest colony of urban bats in the world. The bats are Mexican free tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) and they roost in the supports. The majority of them are female and they arrive in June and stay for 2.5 months to allow their youngsters to be born and grow up. The best displays of the bats are in August, when the bats fly around in huge groups. We saw some pictures of these swarms, but Hazel said that in early June, there are only 100k bats there, and the number swells to 750k to 1 million at the peak. In aggregate, that number of bats can eat 30 tons of insects every night, and this has made a difference to the surrounding agriculture, with less insecticides being needed. There were some concerns about rabies but only 1 in 47K bats have it so the danger isn't as high as one might imagine. The city is now proud of its bats.

She quoted some advice from a bat themed card – "Trust in your senses, Don't be afraid of the dark, Spend time just hanging around with friends, Get a grip, Enjoy the nightlife, Sometimes you've just gotta wing it, Guano happens!"

Next it was time to look at the trip from Austin to Big Bend. From Austin, they headed for the ring road around San Antonio and then the I-10. The distance from Austin to the Big Bend is 485 miles, so it's quite a journey, although they did have time to stop at intermediate points and stretch their feet. They went through a place called Junction, and Hazel mentioned exit 429 Harrell Road RM3130. The latter is a reference to "road to market", i.e. a farm road. As soon as they were liberated from the mini bus, they found *Echinocereus reichenbachii* ssp. *reichenbachii* - this is called the lace cactus. It's quite attractive and there were whole groups of them, so it was a good start. They also found *Mammillaria heyderi* - this is quite low growing, like a flat disc and it has 13-17 radial spines – it's quite a choice plant. They also found *Echinocereus enneacanthus* ssp. *brevispinus* - the species name is greek for 9 and the plant does have 9 spines per areole. There's actually 2 similar species in this area - *E. enneacanthus* which likes to grow in riparian vegetation i.e. alluvial soil near river beds - and *E. stramineus* - which grows higher up in the hills. *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* had formed nice plants and we saw a close up of the stems. In America, it's this plant which is called the "Christmas Cactus" because it has cylindrical red fruits on the plant in the winter months. We saw a banded grasshopper. Another *E. reichenbachii* had a spiny fruit bud. So they were already seeing quite a few nice plants. We saw a picture of the ground and were asked to spot the plant - it was a well camouflaged *M. heyderi.* A shot of the scenery showed it was dry here, but not barren, and there were a few trees around. A plant of *Echinocereus enneacanthus* ssp. *brevispinus* was happy growing in middle of rocks. With *Echinocactus texensis*, the red fruits stand out. This plant had some mottling and maybe it had some type of virus. This plant is perhaps more familiar under the alternative name *Homalocephala texensis* or also the common name of "horse crippler" cactus. Hazel mentioned these plants were being found right next to the road. We also saw *Echinocereus coccineus* and the caterpillar of the pipewine swallowtail butterfly. The butterfly is found in several areas and she's also seen it in Mexico. *Coryphantha macromeris* had quite large tubercles.

They carried on driving and were to the east of Fort Stockton, at the junction with Hwy 67. They saw more *Echinocactus texensis*. It appears these plants can get inundated in water at certain times and still survive that. Perhaps this is why they are easier in cultivation than some of the other plants. We saw another *M. heyderi* which was much more open in structure. The appearance of the plants does depend quite a bit on the growing conditions. *Coryphantha echinus* is the hedgehog cactus and it has a stout central spine. It showed signs of having been in flower, but the time they were there wasn't the best for flowers. *Escobaria vivipara* was seen here and it does not grow in the Big Bend. They found a bigger clump of *E. macromeris*, which was in good condition. A plant of *E. echinus* was also doing well. Often the best plants are found growing alongside "nurse" plants which offer some protection from the sun. We saw a small shrub and an Opuntia offering protection to three globular plants of *Coryphantha macromeris* and *Coryphantha echinus.* Several plants of *Mammillaria heyderi* were growing together, it seems this is reasonably plentiful. A close up view of the plant showed it was covered in grit - she mentioned that she doesn't like to move this out of the way or interfere with the plant when taking pictures. From Fort Stockton, they took Hwy 385 to Marathon and they were now getting close to Big Bend. *Hamatocactus (Ferocactus) hamatacanthus* was a decent size and was growing near the road. It doesn't like moisture. With *Coryphantha echinus* we could see the central spine more clearly on some plants. We also saw *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* in bud. There were plenty of plants in good health. Next was an arboreal *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* – it was growing in the crook of some tree branches, a metre off the ground. The plant featured a yellow flower and new spines were coming through. We also saw *Echinocereus dasyacanthus*, which is also called the rainbow cactus. Another *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* had 10+ heads. We saw the "Welcome to Marathon" sign. There was a flat topped mountain in the distance. They were on the I-90 and they continued south on Hwy 385 towards Big Bend. They were due to stay at the Chisos Mountains Lodge in the Big Bend Park. David Neville mentioned said he had stayed with Bill Weightman and John Pilbeam at Marathon - they had stopped there and there was only one restaurant, with a neon sign in window saying "Friday night was steak night". So they thought their luck was in - until an old lady came up to take their order. She said "ain't got no steaks", "ain't got no chicken" and they ended up having nuggets in the end!

Having arrived at Big Bend, a map from the park service shows a wiggly line which maps the southern boundary of the park. It turns out that this is the Rio Grande River - 118 miles of the river forms the boundary between Mexico and the USA. The Park covers 800,000 acres, and it was

established in 1944. On day 1 they visited Dagger Flats and saw *Echinocereus stramineus* with its straw like spines. An orange millipede was a local inhabitant. They also saw *Echinocactus horizonthalonius* and *Echinocereus dasyacanthus*. There was a nice clump of 3 of the latter and we saw a picture of them with bands of colours up the body – this distinctive banding showing why it's called the Texas Rainbow cactus. The picture had *Agave lechuguilla* and some mountains in the background. *Opuntia phaeacantha* (the comanchica) forms nice robust plants. They also saw *Opuntia azurea* v. *diplopurpurea*, the diploid purple prickly pear. Although Hazel queried "just how can you tell it's a diploid, without doing a DNA test"? It was a crazy name. Anyway the plant itself had beautiful fruits and pads, and terrific spination. We saw the landscape at Dagger Flats, with the Dead Horse Mountains in the background. *Corynopuntia grahamii* was growing here, with new spine clusters on the pads. The desert marigold *Baileyi multiradiata* has stems and leaves which are covered in fine hairs to reflect the sunshine. The flowers provide seeds for birds etc. The Ocotillo (*Fouquieria splendens*) was in leaf, so they must have had some rain here recently. The whole place looks deserted, which of course it is. *Echinocereus stramineus* had some lovely fruits on it – did they look a little like a strawberry? The fruits have the colour, aroma and taste of strawberries, and we saw a closer view of the fruit. Something else also liked the taste since some of the fruits had been partially eaten. Outside the park, their guides did pick some of the fruits for them to try and they do taste like strawberries. Although *E. enneacanthus* also has red fruits, it's *E. stramineus* which is considered the true "strawberry" cactus.

The next plant they found was *Escobaria tuberculosa*. Powell and Weedin had written a book on the cacti of Texas which covered the plants growing in the park, but according to them, everything was in Coryphantha, they didn't really seem to recognise Escobaria. We would see later why this plant is called the cob cactus. They went further up the road to Dog Canyon Trail and 9 Point Draw. It was quite hilly here. *Yucca faxoniana* has dead leaves all the way down the stems. It was quite an impressive sight with 3 of the plants and the mountains in the background. The local name for *Dasylirion wheeleri* ssp. *wheeleri* is green sotol, due to the alcoholic beverage they make from it. The plant is heavily exploited by the people - it is used to feed animals, for straw, mats, roofs, baskets. The leaves are covered in fierce barbs and these have to be stripped off to allow the leaves to be useful. All the sotols are called spoon plants - if you pull off a leaf, the end which was attached to the stem is shaped just like a spoon. *Echinocactus horizonthalonius* was also growing here. They encountered their first Ariocarpus plant. Hazel mentioned that if you see an Ario here, you can be sure that it's *Ariocarpus fissuratus,* since there are 7 species of Ariocarpus in the genus, and the other 6 are only found in Mexico. The plant was not easy to spot, but this one had a bit of green and it looked quite good. They soon found another more impressive specimen. And then a plant with some wool and knobbly leaves which could be considered a show bench specimen. *Neolloydia conoidea* grows here and in Mexico – it's loosely related to Mammillaria. The scenery here was spectacular and it was a joy to be here and climb the hills. The temperatures were warm (30ºC) so it was a relief to get back to their minibus. Another *Neolloydia conoidea* had flowered and another one was sharing space with an Ariocarpus. The next plant they found was *Echinomastus (Sclerocactus) mariposensis*. It is quite a rare plant and is on the endangered plant list, and is protected under federal and state laws. Another Ariocarpus had leaves which were quite ridged - so there's a quite a bit of variation from plant to plant. Another Ariocarpus was more greenish. We saw another view of the scenery and there were some rain clouds in the sky. Next was *Agave lechuguilla* and some Hechtias. The latter are bromeliads with vicious teeth along their leaves. The agave is quite interesting - it has mottled stripes on the leaves. It's an attractive plant, apart from the fact that it's also called the shin dagger. The species name means "little lettuce" which is ironic given the actual nature of the plant. Next, she saw something which she thought was a clump of old dried grass - but it was *Sclerocactus (Glandulicactus) uncinatus,* and there was a green plant body under the tangle of spines. So it's quite a clever plant - the spines protect it from being eaten and also protect it from the sun. The plant has hooked spines on the areoles and has the common name cat's claw. It was also providing nursery facilities to an Ariocarpus. We also saw *Yucca rostrata*.

After the mid-meeting break, we had moved on to 9 Point Draw. There are lots of different types of environment in these areas. We saw *E. enneacanthus* and a heavily spined *E. texensis*. They found another nice specimen and poured some water over it, in order to get a better photograph of the red spines - these appear more vivid in the presence of moisture. Around the plants, they saw cracks in the mud so there were signs of recent water around the plants. Another scenic view showed the mountains in the background. As they were walking around, they spotted an interesting hole in the ground. It seems it was a tarantula den. Certainly no one in the party dared to poke a stick and find out. There was

also an ants nest, with the ants having collected a seemingly fine grade of soil.

Moving on from 9 Point Draw, on day 3 they visited Old Ore road. They found a plant which they were told was *Coryphantha echinus* ssp. *robustus*, although the Cactus lexicon doesn't recognise that plant. It is supposed to be bigger growing and clusters more than the original species. Next was one of the mysteries of Big Bend. It was the grave of someone called Juan De Leon, who was born in 1908 and who died in 1932. He was out riding on his mule, but the mule arrived back at the stable without him and there was blood all over the saddle. No one was ever caught for his murder. There was running of contraband over the border so perhaps he got caught up in that - it seems that many present day issues existed even back then. *Opuntia rufida* has reddish glochids. It is called the blind prickly pear - apparently in high wind, the glochids can get into the eyes of cattle and blind them. *Corynopuntia aggeria* is called the dog choya - the stems are shaped like dog dropping and they attach themselves to your foot! A nice clump of *O. rufida* had some fruits on it. *Opuntia x Spinosibacca* is a naturally occurring hybrid of *O. aureispina* and *O. phaeacantha* - it only seems to be found in Big Bend. The spines have 3 colours. In this area they were near a geologic feature in Big Bend National Park called Ernst Tinaja, a deep natural water hole dug out of the bedrock over the millenia by erosion and to get to this they encountered a disused river bed with weathered rock. The folds in the rock and the layers of sediment formed interesting features. Some of the scenery was described as majestic.

The desert willow - *Chilopsis linearis* - is not really a willow, but it has very nice white/pink flowers. A plant of *Echinocactus horizonthalonius* had just flowered, and another one was an impressive 4-5 inches tall. With *Fouquieria splendens*, the detail in the stems is amazing - the white background, black stripes and the green leaves are interesting to look at. More specimens of *Corynopuntia aggeria* showed it can be a very spiny plant. The spines when they first form are a very attractive red colour. One of the plants was in flower. *Echinocereus chisosensis* is named after the locality. It is quite rare. They found a little treasure in the middle of a dog cholla - it was *Echinomastus warnockii*. It was exciting to have found quite a rare and endangered plant. They found more Coryphanthas with the central spines. At the Rio Grande village, they went to the visitor centre and the hot springs. There was a plant of *Hibiscus denudatus* in flower here. Although they'd come to see the hot springs, she was able to take a nice picture of *Epithelantha bokei* - three plants had lined up in between two pieces of rocks like peas in a pod - it was a cute picture. These were well protected in the shade. And they found another one growing on its own. This plant's surface feel quite smooth, unlike *Epithelantha micromeris.* These plants were in very good condition and looked beautiful. They went back to the Chisos Mountains lodge.

At the visitors centre in the Chisos basin, their guide said "why don't we go for a walk in the evening?" Well it seemed like a good idea if it meant seeing more plants. They came across Agave x gracilipes - John Pilbeam helped identify this. The leaves featured some beautiful spine formations - it was a lovely plant. There were some signs at the start of the trail, which were Mountain Lion and Bear warning notices. And when do these animals come out? At dawn and dusk! There was various advice written on the signs. For a lion, you were supposed to gather up any children, stand together, appear large, wave your arms, shout aggressively, and throw stones or sticks (and report the sighting to the authorities). The sign also mentioned "act safe" - avoid early morning or evening hiking and do not show fear. Do not crouch down or run away - if you run from a predator in the cat family, it triggers a chase response in them. The advice for the bear wasn't much different. Don't leave packs or food unattended, avoid carrying smelly food or toiletry items, carry out trash & left over food, if you see a bear keep a safe distance, if a bear approaches scare it away, shout and wave arms and throw stones, and never feed a bear, and report all bear sightings. One member of their party did saw a bear moving in the undergrowth early one morning. *Opuntia chisosensis* looks distinctive - it has yellow spines growing in all directions. They had their first sighting of *Echinocereus russanthus* - the photo was taken late in the day, with dusk approaching, but the plant had reddish spines. The species name is actually due to the red flowers. They also found a three headed one. Why don't people grow it in cultivation? Well, the flowers are small and not terribly impressive.

For Day 4, bearing in mind the weather, they had 2 plans. They had hope to visit the Mariscal Mine (an old mercury mine) - but this idea had to be cancelled due to heavy rains the previous day which had left some roads flooded. So Plan B was to visit Study Butte, Lajitas and the Big Bend Ranch State Park. They found *Echinocereus russanthus* again. Hazel mentioned she's trying to grow a seedling of this species currently. They also saw *Yucca rostrata* - the inflorescence is carried high up above the leaves and is a characteristic of this species. We saw a close up of the flowers as well. The ground indicated that rain had fallen, it had got muddy and

then it had dried up. A large plant of *Echinocereus ennecanthus* was fascinating - it was growing out evenly in the shape of a ring. It was benefiting from a nearby nurse plant and we saw a closer view of it. Since it had rained, they also caught sight of some rain bugs - these come out immediately after some rain. They were velvet mites - members of the Trombidiidae - and they have a velour effect on their backs. They are only seen after rain and they are 3-4mm across. They found some lovely big clumps of *Coryphantha macromeris. Cylindropuntia imbricata* had some good fruits on it, with vestigial leaves as well. Jim Mauseth has recently done an article for the Journal explaining how leaves on Opuntia flower buds can increase the plant's photosynthetic area significantly. We saw some tree type cacti and you get Opuntia wood from the dead stems. They also came across algae, which was growing due to the rain. Big Bend has 5 seasons - autumn, winter, spring followed by dry summer and then wet summer. They shouldn't really be having all this rain in the 2nd week of June, the rains normally only start in July, and there have been years of drought where there's been no rain at all.

Coryphantha macromeris ssp. *runyonii* has reddish black spines, and is more attractive than the normal species. Next was a 3-headed *Echinocactus horizonthalionus* or perhaps it was a group of seedlings. We saw *Echinocereus dasyacanthus* with 6 heads. This was an interesting area and the presence of what looked like a low wall made her wonder if a railway had previously been here, perhaps to support the mining operations. The landscape was also different here, with reddish brown stone much in evidence. They came across a brown-looking Ariocarpus fissuratus - there was hardly any green at all. Perhaps the plants were taking up iron from ground? Or is it struggling? Another plant was similar - the centre of the plant looked normal but there was a yellow tinge all around the edge. Next was a 6 inch tall *Echinocactus horizonthalionus* - it was a lovely plant. *Selaginella lepidophylla* is found here and it's the "resurrection plant" - it had rained recently so the plant was opening up. *Escobaria tuberculosa* had some lovely fruits on it, and you could clearly see the old stem on this plant. The areoles and spines fall off the older growth, and they then look like corn cobs, hence the common name "cob cactus". They also found some large land snail shells in this area. They had not seen these inside the Big Bend Park itself - she didn't think they were fossils, they looked much more recent than that. One of the local wild flowers is *Allionia incarnata* - it has pretty little pink flowers. It also has hairy leaves for UV protection. *Yucca elata* grows its inflorescence closer to the leaf. We saw Dead Horse Mountain in the background. The road from Lajitas to Presidio is 50 miles along HWY 170 and is said to be very scenic. However, they stopped only a mile up the road. *Coryphantha ramillosa* is another endangered plant which is hard to find. There are fossils here from the Cenozoic and Cretaceous periods, so it's an important area for Paleontology. They came across another Ariocarpus and again the plant had yellow brown coloration. *Coryphantha ramillosa* was seen again. There were fossils lying around and impressions of shells in the rocks. They could also see brownish deposits from the ground and this was probably responsible for the brown colour in the Ariocarpus. *Echinocereus stramineus* was growing on a stony slope. The feature of interest here was an ammonite - these died out at the end of the Cretaceous period, around the same time that the dinosaurs disappeared. A very good looking Ariocarpus was shielded by some Selaginella on either side and these were probably capturing some water for the plant. Hazel said she likes to keep a record of the environmental impact and usually takes some pictures of animal manure or droppings, these are a source of fertiliser for some plants. In this case, these might have been left by illegal immigrants of the 4-legged kind - donkeys and cattle walk across the river and leave their manure here before returning to Mexico. They hadn't seen many cacti in flower - but it was exciting to see a *Coryphantha macromeris* with an open flower. And a bee was visiting the flower. It's amazing that any bees were there since there were hardly any other flowers in the area.

Now they were in the Big Bend Ranch State Park, which is a different area from the national park. They enjoyed some refreshments in their minibus. Hazel mentioned that the Big Bend area shouldn't be taken lightly - people do die since you can't survive long without water. While they were there, a geology student who had gone out hadn't come back and it was determined he had passed away. *Opuntia azurea* – the diploid variety - is an attractive plant, it made her almost feel enthusiastic about Opuntias. *Mammillaria pottsii* had a fruit on it – it's a difficult one to grow in captivity. *Echinocereus stramineus* was in flower and we saw some straw-like dead grass to allow comparison with *E. stramineus's* straw coloured spines. We *saw Thelocactus bicolor* growing near an Opuntia - it has attractive spines. We again saw *Mammillaria pottsii*. It started raining at this point. They saw *Escobaria tuberculosa* and *Corynopuntia aggeria* - the dog cholla - although this plant was virtually spineless. It shows the tremendous variability in the plants even when it's the same species. We saw some more scenery from this part of the Big Bend.

On day 5, they went back towards Marathon. The scenery was quite misty after the recent rain. They saw *Arbutus xalapensis*, which is related to heather but can form a large shrub or tree depending on the amount of water available. It has bell shaped flowers which turn into bright red berries. *Thelocactus bicolor* ssp. *flavidispinus* has paler coloured spines than the normal species. She also saw *Peniocereus gregii* with a large fruit on it. The berry turns red when ripe. The plant is extremely hard to spot normally since the stems are quite thin and inconspicuous - most of the plant consists of a big tuber under the ground which Hazel said could weigh up to 55kg. They also saw *Coryphantha robustispina. Echinocereus davisii* is the smallest Echinocereus and is indeed one of the smallest cacti in the world, only reaching 3cm after several years. We saw three pictures side by side of various plants of *Echinocereus davisii* which they had found. They also found *Escobaria hesteri*. Both these plants prefer growing in soil consisting of novaculite, which is a type of microcrystalline quartz deposited during the Devonian period 390 million years ago. Because the plants only like that soil, they have a limited distribution. *Mammillaria heyderi* ssp. *meiacantha* has 5-9 more robust spines. We saw *E. hesteri* in fruit, and *Nolina texana* which has grass-like leaves. The plants here do rely on each other. We saw *Echinocereus viridiflorus* ssp. *cylindricus*, *Echinocereus coccineus* (the claret cup), 3 opuntia seedlings, and another *Echinocereus viridiflorus* ssp. *cylindricus.* A grasshopper was well camouflaged.

The Sul Ross State University in Alpine has a lovely flower bed with succulents in it and cacti being grown in a greenhouse. There, we saw *Lophophora williamsii* being grown behind some heavy bars as if they were in prison – it's illegal for individuals to grow these plants due to them containing mescalin - you risk a $5000 fine and a year in prison if you are found with the plant. Other plants included a Ferocactus, with a label saying it was collected in 1995, and *Echinocereus coccineus.* They went north to see a particular plant - *Sclerocactus intertexta*. It was raining so the plants looked quite fresh. These pictures were taken with her compact camera, she didn't want to risk the rain getting into her SLR. The plants had spherical body and some were elevated above the ground level on a pedestal-like tap root - it's called the pedestal cactus for this reason. *Yucca elata* had characteristic white fibres on the white edges of the leaves. Castolon is a historical site, which used to be a cavalry post and then a trading post. *Larrea tridentata* is also known as the creosote bush - it can tolerate a reduction in soil moisture of 85% and it's a very drought resistant plant. There's a specimen of it in the Princess of Wales conservatory at Kew. Mount Castolon is 3000 feet tall. African buffel grass was a pest here, it seeds and spreads more readily than native grasses. We saw some pictures of rapid flowing water, showing how dangerous it can be to cross a road after heavy rainfall. They went to Tuff Canyon - the rock here is compacted volcanic ash and it's actually quite soft and wears away easily. We saw a few scenic views of Tuff Canyon followed by some local inhabitants - a common side blotched lizard and a southwest earless lizard. A male was brightly coloured in full mating colours. They found a flowering *Echinocereus enneacanthus* and Hazel had her picture taken with a *Ferocactus hamatacanthus* for a "I was there" picture. A white tailed deer found in this area isn't really a desert dwelling deer, but a relic from the ice age. We saw *Baileya multiradiata* (desert marigold) with a skipper butterfly. A group picture featured everybody who had been on this trip - Hazel said it had been a very enjoyable experience. And the talk ended with a picture of the sun setting in the west.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were only a few entries for October - 8 entries in the table show, and 1 entry for "Plants in Flower".

	Cacti – Echinocereus	**Succulents – Lithops Subgroup**
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Echinocereus brandegii	(1) B Beckerleg Lithops dorotheae
	(2) -	(2) I Biddlecombe Lithops olivacea
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Echinocereus rigidissimus	(1) B Beckerleg Lithops bromfieldii
	(2) -	(2) I Biddlecombe Lithops bromfieldii
	(3) -	(3) M Fox-Rousell Lithops dorotheae

	Cacti/Succulent in Flower
	(1) B Beckerleg Lithops marmorata
	(2) -
	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

Books and Things

The last time I wrote about the branch library, there were Rebutias in flower, so it must have been a while ago. But (since you ask), my Monkey's Tail Cactus *Cleistocactus colademononis* is in flower again (or perhaps that should be "still"), so it's time for another bit about the library. I'm resisting the temptation to rename this item "The Monkey's Tale".

New books in the library

As you will have noticed in last month's newsletter (you do read every word, don't you?), Vinay mentioned a new book which the branch has acquired for the branch library. The details are:

"Mammillaria – Now and Again" by John Pilbeam (2017), published by John Pilbeam, 244 pp. I say 244 pages, because that's the number printed on the last page, but the last two pages are blank except for the page numbers. I don't know what bibliographic compilers will make of that. But regardless of whether there are 242 or 244 pages, John Pilbeam has produced another superbly illustrated book on Mammillarias, in the style to which we have become accustomed. The photographs, many of which were taken in the field, take up more space than the corresponding text entries. There is no attempt at a systematic comparative description of species, but the text is very varied and informative, occasionally including notes on their cultivation, and picking out interesting issues such as whether John believes that a particular species is or is not distinct from another. One effect of this is to reassure those of us who are reluctant to change our labels when the "correct" name changes, according to received opinion – your label is just a tag to connect your plant with the range of views as to what it should properly be called! (If you do add a new name to your label, don't remove the old name, and especially don't remove any field or collection numbers!) This book is a signed copy, thanks to the powers of persuasion of David Neville, who gets a mention in the Acknowledgements. John says at the beginning of his Introduction that it has been 36 years since his first Mammillaria book, with others in between. Presumably his next volume will be entitled "Mammillarias Yet Again". But don't wait until that appears, you won't go wrong by having a look at this one.

List of books in the library

I have updated the list of the books held in the branch library, and printed copies of this list will be made available to members in the new year. Vinay will also use this list to update the on-line listing of library books which appears on our website at http://www.southampton.bcss.org.uk/library.html later this month.

Read All About It!

Our speaker for today's meeting is Dr Mark Preston who will talk on Epiphytic Cacti – A General Introduction. We do not have many books in our library which cover these plants. We do have F.R. McQuown's *Fine Flowered Cacti* (1965) which is mostly about Epiphyllums (or Disocactus if you are trendy). It's mostly about Epiphyllum hybrids (he used to breed his own, with cultivar names prefixed by "London"), but also includes other epiphytes such as Aporocactus (also now Disocactus, if you are a lumper) and Rhipsalis. Another book on Epiphyllums, recently added to our library as mentioned in the April 2017 Newsletter, is *Epiphyllum* by Frank Süpplie, which is mostly pictures of named hybrids, but has a page or two on cultivation. Not in our library are several other slim volumes by the same author, on *Epiphyllum, Schlumbergera, Rhipsalis and Lepismium*, and a book *Christmas Cacti* by A.J.S. McMillan & J.F. Horobin (1995), which includes species and hybrids of Schlumbergera.

Returning to what is in our library, you might be interested in Franz Buxbaum's *Cactus Culture Based on Biology* (1958), which includes a chapter on the cultivation of epiphytic cacti, and has several photographs of them, including *Zygocactus* (now *Schlumbergera*) *opuntioides* and *Chiapasia* (now *Disocactus) nelsoni*, which, together with a cutting of *Disocactus 'Ackermannii'* from my grandmother, piqued my interest in these plants when as a schoolboy I borrowed a copy of this book from the Portsmouth City Library. According to Buxbaum (who seems to have been an early pioneer of hydroponics, illustrating some epiphytic cacti in "water culture"), epiphytic cacti in general hate root disturbance, drying out of the roots and alkaline conditions (high pH). Despite this, my grandmother grew a far better Christmas Cactus than I have ever done, using chalky Portsmouth soil and hard tap-water!

Conophytums and mealy bugs

Nothing to do with the branch library, but you may have seen the penultimate episode of the BBC2 TV programme Gardeners' World on 20th October, in which Terry Smale made a significant appearance talking about Lithops and Conophytum. He showed some nice examples, including the diversity of Conophytum shapes and flower colours, waxing

lyrical about *C. burgeri*. He explained their culture (no water from the end of March to "some time in July") and how to re-pot them, using a compost made from equal parts of coarse sharp grit and John Innes No. 3. He also showed how to pollinate them – he pulls out one of his own hairs to emulate the proboscis of the pollinating insect (this is not something I intend to do very often!) The programme (2017 Episode 30) is still available, until about 20th November, on BBC iPlayer on your smart TV or set-top box or online at https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b09b6fnj/gardeners-world-2017-episode-30. If you're impatient, you can skip forward to about 16 minutes from the start, but if you do, you'll miss an interesting piece on building your own cold frames from twin-wall polycarbonate sheeting and scrap wood such as redundant fork-lift-truck pallets.

Also nothing to do with the branch library, I was reading the latest (September) issue of The Alpine Gardener, the journal of the Alpine Garden Society, where I was intrigued to read an article by David Way on the possible use of hydrogen peroxide as a horticultural fungicide and pesticide. With the more effective insecticides now being banned or not available to amateurs, I suspect this would justify further investigation. It was previously used by commercial glasshouse growers, and might be effective to control rotting of cuttings and bulbs and to kill aphids. I immediately thought about mealy bugs, although these are not mentioned in the article. Apparently the 4.5% or 9% solutions available from chemists are safe to apply directly to plants, and are ecologically friendly as the substance breaks down readily into water and oxygen. I think I might give it a try. Anyone else up for it?

Richard White

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of the year will be held on December 5th. This will be our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the **Christmas Social**.

After receiving reports from branch officers, and electing next year's committee, it will be time to dig into some food and refreshments! Drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food for the buffet table.

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.

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11th Nov	Isle of Wight	title to be confirmed (David Neville)
Sat 18th Nov	Portsmouth	Echeverias, Aloes and Gasterias (Stuart Riley)
Sat 2nd Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Tue 5th Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat 9th Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting followed by American Supper

Branch website: http://www.southampton.bcss.org.uk
Facebook : https://www.facebook.com/southamptonbcss