

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has been reasonably mild over the past few weeks, and indeed it's been quite pleasant when the sun's been out. The trees have shed their leaves, but in the garden, I can see that the grass is still growing – having cut it in early November, I was rather hoping that it wouldn't need any more attention until next spring! Not too many plants are in flower right now, but I do have a good clump of *Schizostylis* in the front which is still opening spikes of red blooms. These are good to grow if you want some autumn colour from a low maintenance plant.

I haven't set foot in the conservatory for the best part of a month but I can see the orange flowers of Aloe cv. "Lizard Lips" and the yellow flowers of *Faucaria* from my kitchen window. The latter seem to open their flowers from early morning onwards, which is perhaps a little unusual - many mesembs tend to only open their flowers in the late afternoon.

Announcements

The **2009 Branch programme** has been prepared and copies of this will be available at the December meeting. We have again endeavoured to assemble a varied and interesting selection of speakers. The **Zone 11 programme** lists the meetings of all three branches in the Zone, this is being put together and will also be available in the near future.

The **meeting in January** will consist of short talks presented by branch members, and we are planning to have access to both conventional and digital projectors. We'd really like two or three members to share some photos or talk for a few minutes about any of your plants or plant-related experiences. If you'd like to do this, please let one of the committee know. Digital pictures should be brought along on a CD or memory card or memory stick, and should be numbered (or prefixed with) 001, 002, 003 etc. to ensure they are shown in the correct order.

Having recently reported on the death of our Life President, Mrs Doris Meager, I regret to announce that **Marge Puckett** passed away in October. She, along with her late husband Peter were active members of our branch for many years. I am also sad to report that a good friend of ours from Portsmouth Branch, **Brian Plunkett**, passed away in November.

A copy of this newsletter will be mailed to members who do not attend our monthly meetings, and I would like to remind them that copies of all the monthly newsletters are available for download from the branch's website. I'll also take the opportunity to mention that the branch recently commissioned a high quality enamel badge, and details of how to order this are also on the website.

Committee Reports - 2008

Chairman's Report

Over the last few months of last year (2007) the committee were getting worried about the falling numbers of members attending our meetings. I am

very pleased to say that that trend changed over 2008, we have several new members and we frequently have more than 30 at meetings. We are always pleased to see visitors and we often get some from Portsmouth branch and some from much further afield.

When I am on holiday I always check if there is a branch nearby having a meeting during my visit. Earlier this year I visited Barnstaple while on holiday in north Devon.

One of the highlights of this year was the National Show held near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire during August. There were some wonderful plants to see, lots of plants for sale but for me the best part was meeting so many friends from all over the country. Some were fellow travellers to Argentina and Bolivia but also lots from our annual 'pilgrimage' to the continent each Spring. Others met while giving talks around the country.

I (and all of us) have to give thanks to our hard working committee members for the success of our branch, especially those who give up several weekends a year to put on displays of our plants at various events.

Thank you to all of you for coming to our meetings ,buying raffle tickets, buying refreshments and buying plants (we get commission on plant sales). Some of us on the committee are getting a bit long in the tooth. It would be good to see some of the younger members taking a part in running the branch, please think about it.

I wish you all a peaceful Christmas and a good growing year (your plants not your waists) in 2009.

Peter Down

Secretary's Report

The Branch can congratulate itself on another successful year. Our membership has increased and so has the number of people that we see at meetings. Our Branch is one of those that seem to be thriving. Let's all work hard to make that state of affairs continue.

Thanks to David Neville we have had an interesting year of talks at our meetings, there are more to come. David has again arranged the programme for next year for us. We look forward to some visits by old friends as well as meeting some new speakers.

We have arranged for visits to four shows next year where we will mount a display and try and interest more people in our plants and hobby. If Whiteley Village is still in existence and holds a Garden Market we shall take the gazebo there for the weekend as well. We all need to thank those devoted souls who mount and man these displays for us. Without their efforts the branch would have a much lower profile. We probably would not have half the new members we have recruited and our finances would be looking decidedly unhealthy. It would encourage all of us who give our time to this if a few of our members took the time and made the effort to visit us at these various venues.

The Branch Committee works hard for our benefit, without them the Branch would not be the same. We are grateful to all of them for their work and the effort they put in. We are all also aware that we have not had much new blood on the Committee in the last few years. If any member would like to become more involved with the organising of the Branch then please chat to one of the Committee members; you will probably find a very warm welcome.

May you and your plants flourish in 2009.

Margaret Corina

Treasurer's Report

I notice on looking back on my computer that I actually managed to start my report differently last year. In having drawn attention to this I am managing the same thing for 2008!

I would like to draw the same attention to the Gift Aid scheme as I did in 2007. This benefits the Society considerably; the amount of money paid to the National Treasurer is shown in the national accounts, which appear with your journal. The more of us who contribute to the Society's finances in this way will save ourselves money in the long run. This works by the cash from the government subsidising the annual subscription. We should have had to have a hike in the dues we pay if we were not getting this money.

On to the Branch finances. We have again shown a profit on our activities. This is in spite of the organiser of the spring event having gone bankrupt and not meeting our bill. We ended up being owed £350. I have put in a claim but doubt that any money will be forthcoming. Considering the sub-zero temperatures, snow and winds, it was not surprising that there were very few visitors to the

event. I would like to deliver a heart-felt thank you to those who turned up to help man the potting stations and display. We were not overrun by customers, which probably made us all feel colder! All the other events we attended did at least do more than cover the costs, albeit some by only a minimal amount.

The thing that has cushioned us the most is the interest payment on our deposit. As Treasurer it has been my goal to save enough for all of us to be able to continue to enjoy our monthly meetings without having to do the events that raise the money to pay for them. With a recession it will be harder to raise money at such events, we have already been noticing that. Hopefully our deposit will help us to continue even if the dreaded 'deflation' takes hold.

I will close with my usual thanks to everyone who has helped the Branch this year. All the people who set up and attend displays, and the ones who donate prizes for the raffle. I wish to thank also the people who buy and sell plants at meetings, those who provide the refreshments and those who consume them. All these activities contribute to Branch funds. Also a personal thank you to June Purseglove and Merilyn Prior who deal with the raffle at the meetings. The Branch is grateful to Colin and Lorraine Bielckus for auditing the books and producing the balance sheets for us.

I wish you all a restful Christmas, and hope you come back full of energy to support the Branch at the meetings and the events we have planned for next year.

Margaret Corina

Display Manager's Report

Our first display of the year was at Broadlands, Romsey on 22nd – 24th March. The weather at that time of the year was cold and showery, and this effected the numbers of visitors to the Show. Our display was very good and the prickly potting was enjoyed by the children who took part, and it was good to hear that several of them had kept alive the plants obtained in previous years. Unfortunately the low attendances meant the Show Organiser was unable to pay our expenses this year and this was a shame since in the past, this show has helped to keep our Branch funds healthy. Let's hope that if we have a show in Romsey next year, the weather is better and we'll make a profit from our efforts in putting on the display.

On 21st and 22nd of June we staged a display at Hilliers Arboretum, at Ampfield. We thought this year we would get a larger number of visitors since a Craft Show was being held in the Gardens that same weekend, but unfortunately most of the visitors to the Craft Show did not walk down to the lecture rooms where we had our display. This is small show in a nice area and quite comfortable to put on, although being away from the main entrance to the Gardens means that some of the visitors miss us. However, the ones that visited us were very complementary and said they enjoyed it. Plant sales were about the same as last year and just enough to make it worth doing again next year. If anyone has ideas on how we can encourage the public to come to our displays, please let me or one of the committee members know.

We were invited to put on a small display of Cacti and Succulents by the Solent Fuchsia Society at Titchfield Community Centre on the 26th – 27th July. We were allocated an area of 12' by 2'6" and this caused me a bit of a problem as my folding tables are 9' by 2' 6". However, by using two trestles and a small top, I was able to get over this problem. The show was quite well supported but plant sales were not that high. However, it was an easy display to stage, and we were able to give out information on our branch's activities

We started to put up our display at the New Forest Show on Monday 28th July, and since this was the next day after our display at Titchfield, things were a bit hectic at home with plants for one display being packed away while plants for another had to be picked out. When I arrived at the Horticultural marquee I was told we were not in our usual place by the entrance to the marquee, but instead in the main area with the rest of the displays. This turned out better for us as we had more room and it was easier to break down at the end of the show. The weather was dry and sunny, and a lot better than last year, when we had all the mud! Plant sales were very good but as we had to pay for extra tickets to allow the stand to be manned over the three days, we just about broke even. It was a enjoyable show to attend and was good publicity for the branch.

Please accept my sincere thanks to all who gave me their help during 2008 and I hope you all have a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Ivor Biddlecombe

Plant Sales Officer's Report

The sales year started off at Broadlands Easter Show as usual. Because Easter was very early this year the weather was very cold - I remember trying to work out how long the gas bottle for our heater would last. Unsurprisingly sales were very poor (£624) compared with previous years.

We put on a display at Hilliers as usual which was very enjoyable; I was able to have a look round the Gardens this year, and also bought a lot of plants from the garden centre. Plant sales (£197) were very modest but this is to be expected at this event.

The New Forest Show was much better than last year weather-wise but plant sales were only slightly up at £958; they seem to be remarkably consistent at this show .

I do not keep a record of sales at branch meetings but these were probably up on previous years because we have had increased attendances but overall sales are still small compared with the public shows.

I would like to thank all of you who brought sales plants, and particularly David Neville with his impressive selection of plants from continental nurseries. For those of you who do not know, anyone can bring plants for the sales table, just make sure each plant has a price label with your initials on. We charge a 10% commission at branch meetings and 15% at shows.

Bruce Beckerleg

Newsletter Editor / Website Report

The number of newsletters I print each month is an indirect measure of how busy we are at each monthly Branch meeting, and this year I have run out of spare copies on some occasions! So that must be a good sign. If you need a copy of a newsletter and do not find any in the box at the front table, do let me know and I'll print off some extra copies.

Our website is hosted as a subdomain of the Cactus Mall, and at the end of last year, hosting was transferred to a service provider. This was relatively painless, and we were even allocated extra web space. Our presence on the web is worthwhile and during the course of a year, we usually get a few people contacting us after finding us on the web.

A notable achievement during the year was to complete the design of the new branch badge, and to

get them made as well. They turned out quite well. I know that most of our regular attendees at the monthly meetings have already bought one, but I hope we'll sell a few more – it is one of the few ways of directly associating with our branch.

I would like to thank all those who acted as scribes to write up branch meetings, and also those persons who provided articles or snippets for inclusion in the newsletter. We could do with more variety and content each month, so please have a think and make an effort to contribute a few lines that the other members will find interesting.

Best wishes to everyone for 2009,

Vinay Shah

Publicity Officer's Report

First I would like to thank all members who have in any way drawn the attention of the public to our activities. I would particularly thank Ivor as the Commander-in-Chief of staging our public displays.

It's been a year of varied fortunes publicity-wise. Radio Solent have, as usual, supported us 100% on their *What's Happening* spot. It was some 2 or 3 years ago I was told by the Hanover Buildings Echo Shop that there was now a £2.50 per entry charge for the previously free weekend freebie community news items. A few months ago I was chatting to the present Echo shop staff and mentioned it was a pity they now charged for the community news, as £30 a year made it a non-viable proposition for us. They informed me there had never been a charge for the service and the chap who gave me the information previously was either on the fiddle or they would like to know what he was on so they could get some. As a result details of our meetings appear, under West End, in the issue before our meeting.

On the downside we did not get any reports in the *Echo* or *Romsey Advertiser* this year on our various displays. Such reports depend on how much "big news" is about at the time as such reports are stocking fillers when other news is scarce. Finally seasonal greetings and best wishes for 2009.

Jim Roskilly

Librarian's Report

My first year - or rather part year from February 2008 - as branch librarian and I have questions. We have a fine selection of up to date books that certainly eclipses the collection available to

members at my previous branch and yet they are seldom borrowed.

There has been a low level of borrowing - eight people borrowed 20 books - and a few purchases of old books.

Reading the reports of my predecessor there have been good and bad years for borrowing in relative terms however generally the use of the library has traditionally been low and indeed each report has included an appeal to make more use of this facility. My short experience and review of previous reports I believe suggests an examination of the library. Perhaps the committee could issue a survey of members in terms of their needs and opinions on this situation.

Total revenue for the year was £14.60, as follows:

<u>Source</u>	<u>2007/8</u>
Lending (Philip)	£ 3.00
Lending (Dot)	£ 4.60
Sale of surplus books	£ 7.00
TOTAL	£14.60

Dorothy England

Pots & Sundries Report

After much deliberation at Committee meetings it was decided to try and dispose of the Branch's stock of pots. This has been achieved and the profit obtained is shown in the accounts, a healthy £63.00.

I still hold the copies of the Green Cultivation Booklets that we sell; they seem to be in demand at all the venues we go to with our displays.

The Branch will continue to supply the label marker pens for as long as there is a need for them. If you want to purchase one (or two) just let me know and I will bring it to the meeting. They sell at £2.20 each and are the best around.

Margaret Corina

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Jim Roskilly had brought along several plants, including some miniatures. *Crassula ausensis* ssp. *titanopsis* and *C. tecta* were both in flower. The former has warty leaves which resemble a *titanopsis*, and the latter also has textured leaves. *Anacampseros buderiana* just finished flowering and there was also *A. rhodesica* which can go on to form a caudex. *Adromischus* cv. "Little spheroid" was in flower – it forms spherical dark green leaves. *A. diabolicus* has pale green leaves. Jim had also brought along a couple of *Othonnas*, including *O. herrei*. These should be kept dry all through the summer, and they will start to put out leaves when they need watering.

Jim had also brought along *Sempervivum* cv. "Amanda" and *Jovibarba heuffelii* for comparison. The *sempervivum* propagates by sending out runners whereas this particular *Jovibarba* forms offsets which emerge from within the main rosette. Ivor mentioned that there are also differences in the flowers – *Sempervivums* tend to have flowers which are different shades of pink, and *Jovibarbas* have yellow flowers.

Next was a large-headed form of the fluffy *Mammillaria plumosa*. This plant can be quite variable in appearance. Jim mentioned that it tended to form pale yellow-green flowers which appeared quite late in the year.

Next were a set of three photographs which Jim had taken with a portable microscope, made by a company called Veho. This microscope offers 200x magnification and plugs into a PC, with software provided to allow you to take still captures or movies. The three plants which Jim had photographed were *Mammillaria humboldtii*, *Rebutia heliosa* and an *Echinopsis*.

Jim finished with a *Sansevieria* – the same plant he had brought in at July's meeting, when he had asked if anyone knew why a strange pointed growth emerging from the main stem. It turns out that was a new shoot, and the plant was doing this for a second time.

Derek Prior described his plants next. He had brought in a plant which he had bought 3-4 years ago and which had done nothing until he repotted it into a 4" pot, at which point it took off and started growing more vigorously. The plant was identified the plant as *Senecio kleiniformis*. David Neville

mentioned that if you looked closely at the flower with a magnifying glass, you would see that it was comprised of lots of smaller flowers – Senecios are members of the Compositae.

The next plant had had 11 tiny leaves on it when he bought it, but these had grown into stems which eventually produced their own leaves. It was a Euphorbia and David Neville suggested it might be *E. tuberculata* or *E. schumannii*(?).

Next was a bulbous plant which forms attractive leaves with a bluish tinge. This was *Massonia pustulata*, named after the pimples which form on the leaves. It produces a strange white flower in the centre of the plant and this lasts for a couple of weeks. The stamens usually have yellow pollen but he had one plant which formed green pollen. Derek followed up with a plant with yellow flowers which he had picked up at one of our meetings. It was identified as *Othonna euphorbioides*, a plant which Anthony Mitchell had propagated and handed out.

Finally, he showed the results of growing *Stapelia hirsuta*, from seed obtained from Doug and Vivi Rowland. Despite the reputation of Stapelias, this was a plant whose flowers did not have a strong smell. The flowers are star-shaped and the petal reflex as the flowers age. There were yellow veined sections on each petal. He had grown 10 of these plants, had sold 3 and the remaining 7 had all flowers this year. They were 5½ years old. David Neville mentioned the flowers are variable in appearance and vary from cream to brown, with different intensity of markings.

There was also a *Yavia cryptocarpa* on the table. I wasn't sure who had brought this plant in, but Peter Down mentioned that he and Geoff Card had seen this plant in habitat, growing , on vertical cliff faces at an altitude of 12,000ft between Argentina and Bolivia. In habitat the plants form small flat buttons, but in cultivation they are grown on grafts and look totally distorted.

The final *Plant of Interest* had been brought in by Ian Acton. Ian mentioned that at October's meeting, Doug Donaldson had shown a picture of a plant which he thought was an Agave, but couldn't identify. Ian thought that the plant could possibly be *Beschereria yuccoides* which is a member of the Agave family. Although the type location is Mexico it probably crosses into the USA. When it flowers, it puts up a spike 2 metres high, with bright red bracts.

It can be propagate from suckers or possibly seeds. He thinks it should be winter hardy in Southern

England - his plant spent winter on the patio last year with some protection from the lee of the house. He got his plant from a garden centre at Batsford Arboretum, near Moreton-in-Marsh, but he has seen plants for sale more recently at the RHS Wisley Plant Centre.

The plant should go on to form a rosette 2-3 feet across. David Neville mentioned that he has seen rosettes of a similar-looking plant growing in Cornwall – these were 4-5 feet across and carrying stems up to 10 feet high.

This wasn't quite the end – Ivor Biddlecombe mentioned that he had brought along several Lithops plants, including some of the cultivars. There was one Lithops which he had been unable to identify, and he was hoping that someone at the meeting might have a clue as to which species it was.

Thanks are due to David Neville for providing the following write-up of last month's talk.

The Canary Islands – Wild and Tamed

Jonathan Clark, the speaker for the evening at our November branch meeting, had travelled down from Reading to talk to us about the Canary Islands. He began by asking for a show of hands of how many people in the audience had been to any of the Canaries, and a proportion of around 30% held their hands aloft. Many people, of course, visit these islands for their year-round sunshine, but relatively few explore those areas that are less aimed at tourism, where a considerable number of native succulent plants can be seen growing in their natural environs.

Jonathan's first trip to this fascinating group of islands off the western coast of north Africa was to Tenerife. This island is dominated by a dormant volcano, Mount Teide, which is well worth a visit to enjoy the amazing views from the highest point on the islands, and perhaps to take a cable car ride to the very top, although there is frequently a very long queue. Jonathan held up a copy of a book called 'The Wild Flowers of the Canary Islands' by David and Zoe Bramwell – this is recommended as a useful reference to anyone visiting the islands.

Our speaker explained that the north of the island, where he was staying in the town of Puerto de la Cruz, tends to have much higher rainfall than the south of the island, where the climate is more or less desert-like. Most of the main tourist resorts and the most popular beaches are in the southern part of the

island, where sunshine is almost guaranteed for the most part of the year.

We saw pictures of a selection of plants growing in the botanic gardens at Puerto de la Cruz. Large growing opuntias are not popular in most UK collections, but bedded out they make an amazing spectacle and the beautiful flowers that we saw made them even more worthwhile. A small plant of the large growing Mexican cereoid *Neobuxbaumia polylopha* looked very healthy. *Cycas revoluta* is popular as a pot and/or house plant nowadays, but we saw large specimens that few of us would be able to house in our greenhouses.

Jonathan explained that he and his wife had not hired a car, so they travelled around on the local buses that he had found to be cheap and reliable, or occasionally by taxi. One of the places he sought out, the Valle de Orotava, was listed in the Bramwell book as a locality for *Greenovia aurea*. While looking for the *Greenovia*, a number of other succulent plants were encountered including tall growing aeoniums on the rocks, along with *A. spathulatum* in short rosettes, tiny clusters of *Monanthes* that seemed to seek out the shadier and more protected niches in the rocks, plus *Aichryson bollei*, a small growing, semi-succulent member of the Crassulaceae. When found, the *Greenovia aurea* were in moister, more humid conditions than most of the succulents that grow on the islands; they commonly occur at higher altitude and benefit from moisture in the cloud band.

On another expedition our speaker travelled to the area of Adeje to walk along the Barranco del Infierno – a famous canyon with a wide range of succulent and other flora to be seen amid the dramatic scenery. Here we saw *Aeonium urbicum* producing large solitary rosettes atop stout stems. Large clusters of *Aloe vera* are clearly not native to the islands, but they have been popular in cultivation for centuries and there is no knowing how long ago or by whom these plants were originally introduced. *Agave americana* is even more widespread and common throughout the Canaries, and can become a real nuisance, but the imposing flower stems are enjoyed by many who see them. Many succulent species of *Euphorbia* occur naturally on the islands, and in the Barranco we saw *E. regis-jubae* forming a thin-stemmed shrub. Far more impressive though are the huge, thick-stemmed clusters of *E. canariensis* which can grow to 8ft or more tall and 10ft or more across! These stunning plants can be seen growing in flat areas, and up through the hillsides onto incredibly steep rock faces near the top of the many of the mountains. Also seen in the

Barranco, and in various other places around the island was *Senecio kleiniae*.

Another popular place to visit is a village near the north coast called Icod de los Vinos, famous for a huge and reputedly ancient specimen of *Dracaena draco* that grows there. The tourist information says the tree is at least 1000 years old, but this of course is difficult to prove..... or disprove. This impressive species is native to the islands and plants can be seen in many gardens, but wild plants are few in number because of mass development. Along the coast towards Punta de Teno Jonathan found many specimens of the charming *Aeonium tabulaeforme*. This flat-rosetted species is justifiably popular in cultivation in the UK, but there is nothing like seeing it growing on vertical rock faces in its natural surroundings. Growing nearby was *Monanthes polyphylla*. Heading on to Masca, we saw *Greenovia dodrentalis*, along with *Aeonium canariense* and more different species of *Monanthes*.

Jonathan showed slides of a cactus garden near Los Cristianos, at which a good range of globular and columnar plants had been bedded out among soil-filled pockets in the lava rock. Since I had visited this place in its hey-day some 15 years ago, and 2 or 3 times subsequently, I had made a point of revisiting it during a trip to Tenerife in April of this year. I reported to the meeting that this former tourist attraction is now more or less defunct, with the plants abandoned and unwatered, and most of them dead or in their final throes of life.

Jonathan then showed a number of slides taken on the much smaller island of Gomera, viewable from the western coast of Tenerife. He said that this is a very mountainous island and many areas are inaccessible by vehicle. When he was there in the 1980s there was not a good bus service and so travelling around without a car was not easy. He noted that the plants of *Euphorbia canariensis* growing on this island appeared to have a whiter cast on the stems than those he had seen on Tenerife. On Gomera he saw *Greenovia diplocyla*, but the plants were more dormant than those on Tenerife, and the rosettes were more or less fully closed. Growing alongside the greenovias were small clusters of *Monanthes laxiflora*.

We then jumped to Gran Canaria, the second largest island after Tenerife. We saw just a few pictures of plants in habitat on this island, but were shown many taken in a cactus garden called Cactualdea. *Adenium obesum* was growing well and in full flower, with its attractive and distinctive red and

white blossoms. Needless to say, as with all large, outdoor plantings of cacti, *Echinocactus grusonii* was well represented, with many large, mature specimens to be seen. We saw a large, multi-headed plant of *Ferocactus robustus*; this species produces heads only 10-12cm diameter, but clusters freely even as a young plant. We also saw mature, flowering plants of *Pachycereus pringlei*, commonly known as the cardon. This is one of the tallest of columnar cacti, growing larger than the more famous saguaro, *Carnegiea gigantea*. Also here we saw large, flowering specimens of *Neobuxbaumia polylopha*.

Jonathan closed his talk by saying that the Canary Islands are a marvellous place for succulent enthusiasts to go to see some of their favourite plants growing in habitat, and that there are many other introduced species of cacti and succulents to be seen growing in public and domestic gardens. He recommended that anyone who has not been should make an effort to go because there is much of interest to be enjoyed. The audience responded with a hearty round of applause.

David Neville

Table Show Results

There were 11 entries in the table show at the November meeting. Overall results for the year are listed later in this newsletter.

	Cacti – 3 Cacti	Succulents – 3 Succulents
Open	(1) T. Grech <i>Echinocereus</i> sp.	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Lithops optica rubra</i>
	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Echinocereus hancockii</i>	(2) T Grech <i>Lithops</i> sp.
	(3) -	(3) -
Intermediate	(1) P Clemow <i>Echinocereus russanthus</i>	(1) B Beckerleg <i>Lithops bromfieldii</i>
	(2) B Beckerleg <i>Echinocereus dasyacanthus</i>	(2) P Clemow <i>Lithops marmorata</i>
	(3) T Grech <i>Echinocereus morricalii</i>	(3) T Grech <i>Lithops</i> sp.

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held at 79 Shirley Avenue on 17th November.

A provisional set of accounts for 2007-2008 were available and these were discussed. The branch suffered financially from not receiving payment from the organiser of the Easter Show at Broadlands, and we only made a marginal profit at the New Forest Show, due to the cost of buying additional tickets (we only get a meagre allocation of 2 free tickets per day). Nevertheless, the year has been another successful one for the branch.

David Neville mentioned that the Programme of Events for 2009 was almost finalised, with only one speaker left to confirm. David also mentioned that he had managed to get in touch with Roy Trickett and had received confirmation that a show would be held at Broadlands next Easter, and that we had been requested to put on “Prickly Potting” again.

Other events for next year such as displays at Hilliers and the New Forest Show were also discussed. We have not yet confirmed a event at Whiteley Village, although rumours that the site would be closed down and redeveloped do not appear to be correct, at least for now.

Ways of increasing utilisation of the Branch Library were discussed, and it was agreed that more would be done at branch meetings to draw members’ attention to the books contained in the Library. Currently, the fee charged to borrow books in the library is related to the purchase price of the book, and Dot wondered whether lending would increase if the borrowing fee structure was simplified and held at a lower level for all books. It was agreed to try this approach over the coming year.

Arrangements for December’s AGM and the meeting in January were discussed. One or two committee members have pictures they can show at the January meeting, but ideally we’d like to see branch members participate by bringing in some slides or digital pictures.

Vinay Shah

Snippets

Stratification – The tale of a plant which might have had a name

I was weeding amongst the runner beans earlier in the year – that is before the rabbits caused devastation – when I espied the unmistakable cotyledon leaves of a member of the *Opuntia* family. This raised the question: where had the seed come from?

I have three species of *Opuntia* which produce flowers, namely *O. microdasys*, *O. rufida*, and *O. salmiana*. The first two only flower spasmodically, and have never set seed. In contrast, *O. salmiana* flowers profusely, but does not usually set seed in cultivation and never in my greenhouse. It is possibly self-sterile with all the plants hereabouts having been propagated from the same clone.

A couple of years ago the Society seed list offered "Opuntia spec. mixed hardy", the year before "Opuntia hardy species", in 2000/01 "Opuntia...winter hardy" and back in the 1990's "Opuntia...hardy". Several species of *Tephrocactus* have been listed also from time to time. Being unorthodox in my approach to cactus growing and having the space, I have subscribed to these offers.

The due ritual of sowing was followed each time. Seedlings have germinated, grown into adult plants and bloomed all around, but never, oh never, in the pots labelled *Opuntia* or *Tephrocactus*. After a year or more of futile waiting, the pots had been emptied onto the vegetable plot. Is this the clue?

Stratification is the process of overcoming dormancy in seed, usually by a period or cycle of chilling. Some species of plants and particularly those from alpine regions will not germinate without chilling. This signifies to them that more suitable growing conditions are on the way. Even cactus seed offered as hardy or winter hardy is likely to originate from areas where natural chilling occurs. For example, I have seen overnight frost in November on plants of *Opuntia phaeacantha* in Big Bend National Park, Texas.

Stratification may be imitated by consigning the seed, pots and all, to the refrigerator for a few days. Some tactful negotiation may be required beforehand if matrimonial harmony is to be preserved; the beer might have to stay warm for a few days as a concession.

Ian Acton

Here's a quick preview of the Branch Programme for next year.

Branch Programme 2009

6 January	Short talks by branch members
3 February	'Jardin Exotique, Monaco' David Neville
4 March	'Travels in Patagonia' Anna & Martin Sheader
31 March	'Round and About' Eddy Harris
11-13 April	Display/Sales/Prickly Potting @ Spring Garden Show, Broadlands (Easter w/e)
5 May	'Mini Judges Course' Cathy Darbon
9-10 May	Display/Plant Sales @ Sir Harold Hillier Arboretum, Ampfield
2 June	'Plants from our Collection' Kathy & Keith Flanagan
7 July	'The Genus Echeveria' John Pilbeam
18-19 July	Display and Plant Sales @ Solent Fuchsia Show, Titchfield
28-30 July	Display and Plant Sales @ The New Forest Show, New Park, Brockenhurst
4 August	Succulents of South Africa' Alice Vanden Bon
1 September	Cacti & Succulents from A to Z' John Ede
6 October	Special Event - Talks from Marlon Machado and Florencia Senoret
17 October	Zone 11 Quiz (@ Portsmouth)
3 November	'A Taste of France' Suzanne & Tony Mace
1 December	AGM & Christmas Social

Table Show 2008 – Overall Results

Open Section– Cacti (The Challenge Cup)

T Grech	28
B Beckerleg	25
P Clemow	9
J Roskilly	7
J Burnay	6
A Sheader	4

Open Section– Succulents (The Gateway Vase)

B Beckerleg	35
J Roskilly	30
T Grech	12
J Burnay	4
P Clemow	3

Intermediate Section–Cacti (The Bangor Cup)

B Beckerleg	34
J Roskilly	14
J Burnay	13
P Clemow	9
T Grech	7

Intermediate Section– Succulents (25th Anniversary Paperweight)

J Roskilly	44
B Beckerleg	32
J Burnay	15
P Clemow	12
T Grech	11

Ladies Cup (highest points total/Female entrant)

J Burnay

Ivor Biddlecombe

Next Month's Meeting

Our first meeting of 2009 will be held on January 6th and will feature short talks by branch members. If you have a subject that you would like to talk about (even if only for a few minutes), please let a Committee member know as soon as possible.

We will have access to conventional and digital projectors, so members are welcome to bring along slides, or a CD or memory card or memory stick containing digital pictures. You can also bring along live plants if you want to talk about those!

There will be no table show at the January meeting.

*Best Wishes for a
happy Christmas and
a merry New Year!*



Forthcoming Events

Sat	6 th	Dec	Portsmouth	Christmas Social / American Supper
Fri	19 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	AGM & Christmas Social / American Supper / Quiz
Sat	20 th	Dec	Reading	"Sharon and Others – Part 3" – Eddy Harris
Tue	6 th	Jan	Southampton	Members' Evening – short talks by branch members
Fri	16 th	Jan	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction & Members' Slides
Sat	17 th	Jan	Portsmouth	"Chile Now and Then" – Angie Money
Mon	19 th	Jan	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting (@ 79 Shirley Avenue)
Tue	3 rd	Feb	Southampton	'Jardin Exotique, Monaco' – David Neville
Fri	20 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	no meeting
Sat	21 st	Feb	Portsmouth	"Weed & Belen 89/90" – Suzanne & Tony Mace

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