

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

I hope people coped with the snow we had last week! Fortunately the weekend weather was a bit milder, so most traces of the snow have now disappeared. Of course, eleven months ago, we had similar weather, resulting in our January meeting having to be cancelled.

In contrast to recent years, temperatures have dropped to low levels in November, and it will be interesting to see how the cacti and succulent plants respond to this. In my conservatory, a few mesembs were in flower at the start of November, but right now I could only see *Crassula tecta* in flower.

Announcements

The branch recently took part in the **Zone 11 Quiz**, which was hosted by the Isle of Wight. Our team consisted of Geoff Card (captain), Richard White and Peter Down, and Ivor Biddlecombe also

attended the event. The questions turned out to be general knowledge questions rather than requiring good knowledge of cacti and succulents or botany, but our team did well and retained the mealy bug trophy. In 2011, it will be our turn to host the Quiz.

The **meeting in January** will consist of short talks presented by branch members, and we will have access to both conventional and digital projectors. We'd like members to bring along photos or plants, and talk about them for a few minutes. Digital pictures can be brought along on a CD or memory card or memory stick, and should be numbered/prefixed 001, 002, 003 etc. to ensure they are shown in the correct order.

Committee Reports – 2010

President's Report

It is a long time since we had a president's report at our AGM.

Last year I was greatly honoured to be asked to be president of the branch - only the third in our 56 year history. Having served in various posts on the committee for fifty years I thought I should let someone else have the benefit of being involved in the running of the branch. Several of the committee are getting a bit 'long in the tooth' so I invited three younger members to join in. To my delight they all accepted. Thank you Ben, Alice and Bill. They all travel a considerable distance, from Bournemouth, Wimborne and Verwood to attend meetings and we are very grateful for their interest and input.

If I am honest, I miss knowing exactly what is going on but I was allowed to represent the branch at the recent Zone quiz on the Isle of Wight, (which we won again, mainly due to Richard White's vast general knowledge!).

The branch continues to flourish and grow while many other branches struggle to keep their numbers. I have been asked not to steal the Chairman's thunder so I thank you all for your attendance and participation in our activities, especially the committee.

Best wishes for a successful growing year for 2011.

Peter Down

Chairman's Report

Since I took over the position of Chairman in January this year I have to say that I have fully enjoyed the experience. Some of the enjoyment has to be attributed to the continuation of good attendance numbers, which has been helped by the good speakers we have had at our meetings. We have also been lucky in having our shows being really successful throughout the year. This is undoubtedly due to our members producing plants of good quality & plenty of variety to exhibit.

Hopefully all these good points will continue for us in 2011 & my thanks for the support of all our members of our club, without which we would not be here.

My best wishes to you all,

Geoff Card

Secretary's Report

Following the major changes that took place in the committee at the 2009 AGM, I am happy to be able to report that the members of the new committee have worked well together in order to ensure that the branch continues to prosper. Attendance at meetings remains very good, and the friendly and relaxed atmosphere at meetings is something that we can all be proud of. During the year I have been asked by a number of our speakers, and also by officials of the national society, how we manage to attract so many people to our meetings; I am unable to give a sound reason for this, but I feel that everyone present plays a part in ensuring that our meetings are enjoyable and that even newcomers are made to feel welcome. Southampton Branch is currently one of the largest and most successful branches in the country, and I am sure we are all keen to maintain this success.

We have gained a number of new members during the year, although not all have yet attended meetings. We rarely, if ever, sign up new members at the shows and displays we attend during the year, but the committee is confident that it is our presence at these various events that attracts new members, and we are grateful to those members who attend and help on these occasions. For the first time this year we mounted a display at the Countryside Day at Sparsholt Agricultural College, and it was deemed to be a great success by all. The college have invited us to attend again in 2011.

I hope that the range of speakers that have visited us during 2010 has been to your liking. It is not easy to find new speakers, particularly ones who are willing or able to travel mid-week with the pressures of work and traffic delays to deal with. However, we can look forward to visits from several speakers who have not spoken at Southampton Branch in the past. Next year's programme has more of a bias towards cultivation and propagation, at the request of several members, and I look forward to receiving feedback from members in due course. The Workshop evening that we held earlier this year proved to be very popular, and so we will be holding another similar evening in the coming year. Copies of the 2011 programme are available at the AGM.

There are many other facets of branch activities that I could comment upon, but these are all likely to be covered in the reports of the other members of the branch committee.

In closing I would like to thank everyone for their help and participation throughout the past year, and I look forward to seeing the branch flourish in the coming year.

David Neville

Treasurer's Report

This has been a very stable year with income just exceeding costs. Income has been significantly down on our major show events, although the hard work of members contributing to new shows has helped. On the whole these efforts go to on to subsidise the lecture evenings, which we are all very lucky to be able to attend for free. This flies in the face of standard horticultural club practice these days. I would therefore ask everyone to continue to kindly contribute freely to the raffle, plant sales and catering. The price of tea, coffee and cakes is to rise to 30p each next year.

We have a healthy financial state, and a vigorous and active membership. However the past few decades have not been kind to clubs and societies generally, and I know it was Margaret's wish that we should use the assets we have over the next decade to ensure we don't end up becoming increasingly fragile. The key to this, as with any society is to use our resources to reach out in imaginative ways, rather than expect new members to come to us, and not to forget the initial awe and fantasy that a scruffy Echinopsis can bring.

Mark Jakins

Display Manager's Report

Sparsholt Countryside Day: 15th May

We had a display at Sparsholt's Countryside Day for the first time this year. We put our gazebo outside of the greenhouses on a small lawn and this proved to be a good position as many of the public were using the path to get to the village fete area, and they had to go past our display to get there. Many stopped to buy plants and have a chat. This was a very well organised event with lots of things to see and take part in, and the students and staff made us very welcome. If we get invited I think we would all like to go again next year.

Whiteley Garden Fair: 29th and 30th May

We again put up our new gazebo and tables at this event. Unfortunately it rained and we discovered the gazebo covering was not waterproof, and did not keep our plants dry. Luckily the rain did not last long and we managed to carry on. The sale of plants was steady and it was worth doing, although it would have been nice if a few more of our branch members had visited.

New Forest Show: 27th, 28th, 29th July

I am pleased to say that this year the weather for the Show was fine on all three days, with no need for Wellington boots. This year the marquee was a bit smaller than last year and we were put in the main marquee. This allowed us to have room behind the display for sale plants. Sales of plants was not as good as last year but still worth doing. The display won a Silver gilt medal - not as good as we have done in the past - but as they do not give prize money to Society displays, it had no affect on branch funds. This year I provided magnifying glasses mainly for the children to see the seedlings but quite a lot of adults enjoyed seeing our plants in close up, and they were amazed at the beauty of some of our plants. Another improvement this year was the traffic in and out of the show, this was better organised and most people did not get held up for very long.

Solent Fuchsia Show: 31st July

This year the show was again held at Titchfield Community Hall, the main different to us was that it was a one day show on Saturday, not two days like last year. It was a nice friendly show to do but I am sorry to say it was not very well attended. I think one of the problems was not enough publicity - many people did not know it was on. Our display was small, only 6' long by 2' 6" wide, with a plant sales table of the same size. The sale of our plants was slow but we did make a small profit for branch funds

Romsey Autumn Show: 11th September

This was the first time we have been invited to the Autumn Show. On Friday Geoff, Dot Bruce, Jim, Peter and I arrived at Broadlands at 2pm, and I was pleased to see we had been allocated a brand-new tiered staging and plant sales table. This made it very easy to rig our back cloth for the display. I am pleased to say the judges gave us a Gold medal and £60 prize money, and with the sale of plants, this made it a good finish to our displays this year.

I would like to thank everyone who gave their support and help this year with a special thanks to Ian Acton for all the plants he has donated to be sold for branch funds. It would very nice if all branch members make a New Year resolution to come to at least one of our displays.

Thanks again to you all. I hope you have a Merry Christmas and all your plants grow well in 2011,

Ivor Biddlecombe

Plant Sales Officer's Report

The New Forest Show was rather poor for sales this year with takings of £863 which is the lowest it has ever been at this show - in marked contrast to last year where we had record takings of £1255.

We did not go to Hilliers this year but we did exhibit at the Romsey Show for the first time. Takings of £292 were reasonable for a one day show but I was a bit disappointed in that we did not seem to encounter any potential new members. However I think it is worth doing it in the future in the hope that we can build up interest over time.

Sales at branch meetings continue to be buoyant by historical standards, partly because we continue to have higher attendances than we used to but also this year there have been some new sellers which has added extra interest to the sales table.

I do not have figures for Whiteley or the Solent Fuchsia Society Show since I did not attend but takings are usually modest at these two events.

I would, once again like to thank all of you who brought sales plants to the various events and also those, Ian Acton in particular, who made donations of sales plants.

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

Librarian's Report

The simplification of the borrowing fees and the limiting of the displayed books to two boxes has proved successful and has been easier to manage. Requests for other books from the list have not been a problem. Thus these practices will be continued this coming year.

The level of borrowing has remained steady and as previously the newer books are borrowed more than the older ones. This year at the January meeting I feel it would be appropriate to undertake a stock check. This would be to ensure all listed books are in stock and highlight any books that are no longer relevant.

Three new books have been added: *Stapeliads* by John Pilbeam, *Growing Cactus and Succulents in the Garden* by Shirley Ann Bell and *Gymnocalycium* by Graham Charles. We received a number of donated books which were sold to interested members. We are now sold out of pens. Any future bulk purchase and resale of pens will require a decision by the committee.

Total revenue for the year ending September 2010 was £25.30, made up as follows:

Lending	£ 4.00
Sale of Pens	£10.80
Sale of Books	£10.50

Dorothy England

Publicity Officer's Report

First, the usual thanks to all who assist publicity by telling others of our activities. Radio Solent have again been invaluable by broadcasting details of our meetings monthly on their "What's On" spot.

Next year, how about bringing friends to some of the displays that Ivor organises. Seeing the plants at their best would surely be more certain to catch their interest.

Jim Roskilly

Newsletter Editor / Website Report

Things have been reasonably straightforward this year. We have had consistently high meeting attendances, so sometimes the monthly newsletters run out – they can always be viewed on our website,

but if you need a printed copy of any back issues, please let me know. Thanks are due to the members who during the year wrote up monthly meetings for me – this saves me several hours of work! Thanks are also due to members who provides snippets or articles of interest for inclusion in the newsletter – please continue to do this through the coming year.

During the year we tried the idea of getting people to wear name badges at our monthly meetings, and I hope this makes it easier for people to say hello to each other, and for new members to join in and mix with everyone more easily.

The branch website has space for more web pages so if you have pictures or articles which you would like to publish or share with the world, do let me know!

We sold a few more branch badges during the year. Tony Grech ordered some keyrings based on the badge design and kindly donated these to the branch - a few of these are still available for purchase.

Best wishes to everyone for 2011,

Vinay Shah

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Bruce had brought along some plants of interest. For the first, he said that the smell of the flowers was worse than *Stapelia variegata*. This was indeed another stapeliad, and he had two clones which looked the same but had two different names, so it was possibly either *Duvalia corderoyi* or *Piarranthus parviflorus*.

A *Neoporteria aerocarpa* which had previously flowered in the spring had decided to flower in November this time. This was only the second time that it had flowered. It had light pink flowers with silky petals. One of his old favourites is *Neoporteria villosa*. This usually flowers late into the year, and it is often in flower during Christmas. The featured plant was almost a foot tall and had magenta flowers.

Echeveria cv. 'Phyllis Collis' forms a typical rosette and had nice tall sprays of pink-red flowers.

Now for some weirdos – othonnas. These are winter growers and almost all have yellow flowers, although he did have one with a mauve flower. *Othonna herrei* is one of the more sought after ones because of the attractive knobbly stems. The

specimen on display actually consisted of 3 plants in a pot. *Othonna armiana* was of interest because it is named after the initials of a local member - Anthony Mitchell, from the Isle of Wight

Ivor Biddlecombe had brought along some plants that looked like Lithops but weren't – these were *Dinteranthus van zylui*. He had also brought along some Dinterops, which are hybrids between Lithops and Dinteranthus. He had tried creating his own hybrids by cross pollinating the parent species, but the seedlings seem to revert to the parents. Finally, he had brought along a leggy Lithops which had been found in a German nursery, but whose parentage or origins were uncertain.

Travels in southern Mexico

The November talk was given by our own David Neville. He mentioned that the pictures he was going to show had been taken earlier this year in March and April, when he went to Oaxaco in Mexico, with John Pilbeam and Derek Bowdery. In Mexico, they met up with a Canadian couple who have settled in Mexico, along with a couple of Americans, Myron Kinnach and John Trager.

The plants found in Oaxaca are somewhat different from those found in other parts of Mexico - there are not too many globular cacti, but there are lots of other plants, such as Echeverias, a few choice Mammillarias, and lots of columnar cacti which you don't see in other parts of Mexico. Also it's not really a dry desert landscape - they have quite a wet season and the plants are green and lush at that time.

He had only given this talk once before and was still jetlagged from his recent trip to South America, but he had put captions at the bottom of each slide which would help remind him about the subject. When travelling to Oaxaca, with most airlines, you have to take three flights - one to the USA, then another to Mexico City and then finally a flight to Oaxaca. However, they used Continental which has a direct flight from Houston to Oaxaca. This was well worth doing – he described Mexico City's airport as “a bit of a hell hole”.

David then showed a map of Mexico and further maps of Oaxaca State, showing the areas they visited. The capital city has the same name as the state, and lies south east of Mexico City.

The Canadian couple (Jim and Mary) live on the outskirts of Oaxaca, and they made a series of trips ranging up to 3 days from this location. One was to Sierra Juarez where they would look for mixed

plants including Echeveria. They also visited the Sierra Mixteca which are high altitude hills to the west - then north to Cuicatlan towards the state of Puebla where there are forests of columnar cacti. Finally, they headed right down to the South coast where it is hot and humid and quite tropical. The Southern coast is also extremely dangerous because of the drug trade and gang wars - a mayor in one of the local towns had recently been shot so they were very wary of their travels in this area.

The first pictures showed that Oaxaca is a quite a colourful city. It is fairly modern in the centre, but there are signs of poverty further out on the outskirts. The pictures were taken on a Sunday, and since the people are fairly religious there weren't many people out on the streets in the morning. Wherever you are, you can see hills in the distance in all directions. Some of the buildings had a Spanish look to them. The Zócalo (plaza) in the centre of the town was surrounded by coffee shops and restaurants, and seemed to be popular with American tourists, as you could hear English being spoken. In the rest of Oaxaca, it was hard to find anyone who could speak any English.

We saw a picture of Derek Bowdery, taken as they walked around the zócalo. For some reason, shoe shine stalls were very popular. There were also musicians playing some nice music on something resembling a xylophone. It was mid morning and still fairly cool. The local Philharmonic orchestra was also performing and being filmed, and we saw Myron Kinnach taking a picture of this. Myron is the editor of the American Cactus Society's Journal and an expert in Echeverias, Crassulas, Peruvian cacti, Orchids amongst others. He is now in his 80's and rather unsteady on his feet but loves the Mexican people and the food, and this might possibly have been his last trip. We also saw a lady selling snacks with a tray balanced perfectly on her head, and no hands being used to support this. As they headed for the local market, they came across lots of street traders in the back streets - people were selling vegetables such as pepper, garlic, beans.

The main market was a covered building and we saw a stand selling cut flowers, and another one selling iced water and milk drinks. David advised staying clear of this - on a previous trip, John Pilbeam ended up spending 4 days in hospital from food poisoning. The flowers stall might have looked no different from one in our markets back home - but with the meat it was a different story with carcasses and trays of slices of meat being on offer. There were also various types of chorizo sausages on sale, in different shapes and sizes. Some of the

other stalls featured pulses and seeds, and various spices, including some dyed in dayglo colours. There were various dried goods, and also animals to eat, including rats. He didn't manage to take a picture of this because the person selling them was big and might not have appreciated pictures being taken! Some of the stalls were selling slabs and cones of some solid substance, perhaps some sort of wax.

There were also chillies of all types - to the Mexicans, different chillies are used in different dishes and it is important to use the correct one. There were huge selections of these in different sizes and shapes and with different flavours. They came across some American tourists on a guided tour and saw them gathered around someone selling deep fried grasshoppers - again there were many different types and sizes on sale. Some were tiny and others would have made a good mouthful. Although he is normally adventurous, he couldn't face trying one out. From the audience Alice mentioned she's had some before and said they weren't so bad. David offered to bring some back from his next trip, in time for our Xmas do! The grasshoppers were covered in different spices and flavourings, and it seemed that the locals were eating them whole, as a snack.

A short distance from the plaza is the Santa Domingo convent. This always has plants planted out, and the plantings are redone from time to time. On this occasion, there were Puyas (bromeliads) in regimented rows. Also in a couple of beds were *Agave titanota* - these were 12-15" diameter and in perfect condition. We saw a shot of John Trager - the curator of the desert Collection at the Huntington Botanical Gardens - looking happy to have seen these plants. The plants had lovely teeth and cuts on the edge of the leaves, and these would have rated highly on the show bench. The leaves tend to have a horn-like trim at the end of the leaf. Alongside here were Erythrina trees with red flowers but these would not be hardy in this country. They also found another Agave, *A. guiengola* - these come from the hot part of Oaxaca and had probably been collected and planted here. The plants had pale greenish-blue leaves with small dark teeth on the edges, although some of the plants had plain-coloured teeth. Some of the plants were 2½ feet across. They are very sensitive to the cold since they rarely experience temperatures below 10°C.

The doorway to the convent was very ornate, and this was also the case inside, although parts of the building were awaiting renovation. We saw a shot of Myron and Derek looking out of one of the

windows, with the hills in the distance. It turns out that they were taking pictures out of the window which overlooked a formal garden, planted out with mainly native plants. Unfortunately, the garden was closed on Sundays, so this was the only way to get a view of the plants. They saw *Agave guiengola*, *Agave stricta* and *Nolina gracilis* which has finer leaves than the commoner *Nolina (Beaucarnea) recurvata*. This was quite a modern garden. There were numerous columnar plants and cycads, and also *Echinocactus ingens*. There were also Plumerias (frangipani) in flower. These are not native and are related to Pachypodium. They have fragrant flowers in white, pink and pale yellow, and a common species is *Plumeria rubra* which grows into a big shrub. They made their way out and on the street, saw some balloon sellers, selling balloons of all shapes and sizes. These are very popular everywhere, and not just with children - teenagers and young adults also seem to buy them.

On their first journey out, they went to the Sierra Mixteca, up into the hills and the pine belt. Jim and Mary had wanted to show John Pilbeam the locality for *Echeveria pinetorum* which is a very rare species and not widespread in cultivation. John had never seen it growing in the wild, and they eventually found it in a dried condition. The plant dries back almost to a corm, and it was just restarting growth, with dried leaves surrounding some green growth in the centre. The plants would go on to form big rosettes in the wet season. As they headed back to the city, they came across areas where pines and oaks were growing together. The deciduous trees had lost their leaves and were laden with bromeliads. Some of these were in flower, with colourful spikes, some of which were upright and others pendent. We saw an example of the genus Bromelia, and also Tillandsias of various sizes, some just an inch high. It was hard to identify these if not in flower, and even then it was difficult. Under the oak trees they found some agaves - and we saw a nice example of *A. potatorum*, growing in a shady location. There were nice markings on the leaves from the imprints they make on each other as they develop. These were large plants, up to a metre across.

Next was a two day trip into the Sierra Juarez range of hills. Down in the valley, they saw agaves with yellow flower spikes, some of the inflorescences were 20 feet tall. Climbing the steep hills, their VW combi had overheated, so it was a good reason to stop. The Agave proved to be *A. atrovirens*, which is not in cultivation for a reason - in the next picture we saw Derek Bowdery standing next to one, and the plant must have been some 8-9 feet across. Even

if you wanted to grow one in this country, they are not able to withstand cultivation outdoors or in an unheated greenhouse. They came to a rocky outcrop and found *Sedum oaxacanum*. Growing under the shrubs were *Echeveria nodulosa*, with a faint edging of red on the leaves. The cultivar of this in collections is 'Painted Beauty', which is a selected clone with nice purple markings on the leaves. These were quite short stemmed plants growing in the shade, alongside spanish moss.

There were lumps of rock with moss growing on them, and John Trager got up onto the rock for a closer look, and found plants of *Mammillaria deherdtiana* subsp. *dodsonii* in amongst the thin layers of moss. It was the dry season so the plants were shrunken and a couple inches across, with signs of having flowered. There were plenty of these plants, and also some seedlings, so despite the harsh environment, they seemed to be doing OK. In a sheltered spot, they found more plants in better condition, including some with the magenta flowers open. David said he had received an email from Jim and Mary a month ago saying that they had just had their first sunshine in 47 days - so in the wet season it can actually be quite undesert-like. He also showed a picture of some cultivated ground. This is a worry since the habitat is constantly being wiped out. Even at this time of the year, the view was quite green and lush, not like a cactus or succulent habitat at all!

Continuing after the mid-meeting break, David mentioned that as you proceed into the Sierras, the roads degrade from tarmac to dirt tracks. These were still OK to travel on, just as long as you don't meet something coming the other way. They found a *Peperomia* with small leaves, about 1 cm long, with red undersides. There are many species of *Peperomia* in Oaxaca but he didn't know the species that well. Up in the Sierra, we saw a view overlooking the village of Benito Juarez. The villages tend to be nicer than the towns, with more fields, less dust and generally more flowers and plants in the gardens. They found more examples of *Agave atrovirens* - these plants were a rich green colour compared to the paler bluish-grey ones seen at lower altitudes. They found some rocks with moss and again found *Mammillaria deherdtiana* subsp. *dodsonii*. They also found some more beautifully flowered bromeliads - these were a lovely sight with their red flower spikes. There was also a rat's tail cactus - *Aporocactus martianus* which is similar to *Aporocactus flagelliformis* which is found in cultivation - growing in the tree. These plants were in flower and the stems were hanging down and some 5-6 feet in length. They also came across a

Furcraea bedinghausii which is a member of the Agavaceae - this was a big plant some 15 feet tall and endemic to the area, although they only saw one example.

They headed north towards Puebla and Cuicatlan and spotted a few cacti growing along the rock sides. They found *Mammillaria albilanata*, which in some areas was thick on the ground - it starts to offset as it grows larger. The plants looked much the same as in cultivation, and there was some natural variation. They also found an *Agave potatorum* which was greener than the ones under the trees. Above the road, they started to see columnar cacti. *A. potatorums* were growing everywhere amongst the scrub. They also found a pretty, colourful sedum which according to Myron was probably *Sedum pachyphyllum*. The hills become packed with more and more columnar plants, and there were some Yuccas here too. They took pictures of the first groups of columnar plants they found, but they needn't have bothered since they were going to see many more over the next few days. A mimosa had pink fluffy flowers. They also came across a jatropha, perhaps related to *Jatropha urens*. The stems are covered with tiny stinging bristles which are a hundred times worse than a stinging nettle. These plants need to be avoided since if you touch them, you get a nasty stinging rash and blisters which weep for days.

They pulled up in a safe spot off the road and in the distance could see the tops of a few cacti. On the ground were large ugly clumps of *Coryphantha* - these plants had probably been trampled by grazing animals. They also found *Opuntia decumbens* which was spreading and flat padded, with purplish brown blotches near each of the areoles, and golden yellow flowers. *Tillandsia recurvata* was colourful when exposed to the sunlight - the reddish tinged plants would turn green again when the foliage grows in the trees and shades the plant. Amongst the scrub, they found multi-branching plants of *Pilosocereus quadricostatus* which produces a pseudocephalium near the top of the stems, once mature. There was extra wool where the flowers grow. The plants always looked bigger if Derek was in the photographs, but these were 15-20 feet high nonetheless.

They came across *Ferocactus recurvus* usually remains solitary and doesn't grow that large, and does not have the attractive coloured spination which many of the others do. *Mammillaria carnea* when growing under the shrubs had dirty yellow flowers, but in the sun the flowers were pinky purple - it was strange how the colour varied. The

Opuntias here were growing on tall woody trunks and according to Myron these were *Opuntia tomentosa*. *Myrtillocactus schenkii* was just a branching green plant which doesn't have much going for it. *Pachycereus weberi* which produces candelabra type stems as the plant grows larger. They are very distinctive and one of the largest columnar cacti found in Southern Mexico. Some were really big plants, and they form a hard woody stem as they mature. The spines also get wider spaced apart and eventually drop off, and hence there is no armature on the lower part. Although dry and brown in the spring, in the autumn, this area would be green and lush, with just a few cacti heads popping up through the tree foliage. *Escontria chiotilla* tends not to be grown in cultivation, it only flowers when very large. It is a distinctive plant with a crazy snake-like shape.

A smaller *Ferocactus recurvus* some 6" across had flowered and had three unripe seed pods. They climbed up a steep slope covered in cacti and shrubs to the top, where *Mammillaria huitzilopochtlii* was supposed to be found. They spread out to search for these on individual hills and he was lucky enough to come across some plants which were golfball sized. These plants did not have the usually distinctive black central spines. There were vertical cliffs which went up 60-70 feet up above his head and there were Mammillarias and resurrection plant (*Selaginella*) growing on the cliff sides.

Another of agaves from this area is *Agave macroacantha* - we tend to see it as a solitary rosette, but in the wild they form multi-headed clumps. The ones in cultivation are selected forms with short and stout leaves, the ones they saw here had long, narrow leaves. Heading north past Cuicatlan, they came to a big bedded rock dome where they found the columnar *Neobuxbaumia tetetzo*. *Mammillaria dixanthocentron* also grows here on the rocks, alongside Opuntias. The best forms have long central spines, and there was white wool in the axils of the new growth. They found an attractive bluish green Agave a metre across and this seemed to be a long leaved form of *Agave macroacantha*.

They reached the city of Tehuacan, in the state of Puebla. This is quite a nice city, although more ramshackle around the outskirts. The civic offices were in an ornate building on the zócalo, and had a porch, which was beautifully decorated on the ceilings and walls. There were some paintings featuring cacti and also some of the ancient Mexican gods. A person sweeping the streets was using long palm fronds - there was no need for brooms. There

were balloon sellers here too. After eating their meal they walked back and took some pictures of the buildings which were illuminated at night.

They headed further north to Esperanza, which is a place which Derek Bowdery wanted to visit. The landscape looked unpromising, with nothing apart from a few agaves and dasyliroids. As they walked around, they found *Agave potatorum* growing in the grass. A species of *Coryphantha* had shrunk into the ground since it was the dry season, although some of the younger plants looked healthier. Here they found what Derek had been hoping to find - *Mammillaria napina*, which is the choicest and most sought after of all the Mammillarias. It has a large swollen root and forms only small heads an inch or so in diameter, with large spectacular flowers. There were plenty of plants here. The flower buds appeared in between the dense spines. In the shade of surrounding plants, they were a bit healthier.

They also found the red leaved *Sedum stahlii* which is easy to grow, and the rare *Ferocactus haematacanthus* - this was a 6-7" diameter plant with lovely purple-pink flowers. *Mammillaria mystax* was 4" in diameter and flowering with magenta flowers in March/April. *Agave salmiana* was suffering in the dry season with leaves dying back, and it was growing alongside a football sized *Mammillaria mystax*. An *A. potatorum* growing in the open had incurving leaves - these were really good looking plants which were well worth introducing into cultivation with beautiful symmetry and lovely short wide leaves.

Mammillaria haageana was only an inch and a half across, so it was very hard to find. Next was a shot of Jim, Mary and Derek standing around a 2 feet tall *Ferocactus haematacanthus*. These almost invariably remain solitary and they are not plants you are likely to encounter in collections, although Derek has managed to flower it in his greenhouse in Norfolk.

A shot of view in the distance showed a train snaking around the hills. David mentioned there are no passenger trains in Mexico, so these are used solely for the transport of goods. Much of the area has been cultivated, so you have to go into the hills to find the plants. They found more examples of *Ferocactus haematacanthus* and also *Ferocactus robustus*. This makes heads no more than 4 inches across, but it offsets profusely to form ground hugging mounds up to 6 feet, consisting of hundreds of heads. A few of the heads featured yellow flowers. These were hefty plants, but not the most

exciting of Ferocacti, and he has not heard of it flowering in cultivation.

They came across about as good a form of *A. potatorum* as one could imagine, with short compact well-spined leaves. This was growing alongside another Agave, possibly *A. triangularis* - this was a good looking plant with very long spines on the tips of the leaves. Both these plants were 15-20 inches across. At the top of the hill, they found sedums and *Mammillaria haageana* sized around an inch across and with magenta flowers - some plants had brown central spines and others had cream centrals. The hillside was covered with what appeared to be millions of cerei - there were row after row of plants of *Neobuxbaumia tetetzo*. They turned the corner and found *Cephalocereus columna-trajanii* which was a big heftier stemmed species. The plants had cephaliums and have lots of wool when mature - they look rather like *Cephalocereus senilis*, but are less hairy. These plants are rarely cultivated, although there were lots growing here. A plant of *Nolina gracilis* was 8 feet tall and was likely to have been of considerable age.

Elsewhere they found more *Pachycereus weberi*, with the upper parts of the stems covered in spiny fruits. These were huge stemmed plants and magnificent to see. On the way back to Oaxaca, they stopped at Laguna Encantada, the enchanted lake, near Juxtlahuaca which is a picnic spot. Here they found a plant identified by John Pilbeam as *Mammillaria halbingeri*. There were a handful of plants growing on the rocks, along with dormant resurrection plants. *Echeveria subcorymbosa* was growing on vertical rock, facing away from the sun - these were small plants a couple of inches in diameter. They went to look for *Echeveria helmutiana* which is a plant which is not in cultivation in the UK or Europe. They eventually found the purple leaved plants, which he had never seen before. It was an honour to see this rare species. Unfortunately, there's no possibility of collecting plants or seeds since it's worth more than your life to be caught in possession of collected material in Mexico.

For the final part of the trip, they travelled south east from Oaxaca towards the Gulf of Tehuantepec. They found *Cephalocereus totolapensis*, *Neobuxbaumia tetetzo* and *Escontria chiotilla*. *C. totolapensis* is a distinctive species, with a ring cephalium for each year's growth. It is rarely seen in cultivation and extremely susceptible to the cold. South of Nejapa, they found *Mammillaria albilanata* and *M. nejapensis*. These are common in collections and they were growing in the trunk of an old tree, almost as epiphytes. Another *M. albilanata*

was covered in leaf litter and had fruits developing. Heading towards the coast they found some interesting rocky terrain and 2-3 of them waded through the dense shrubs and found *Cephalocereus apicephalum* which only grow to 4-5 feet so it is a miniature cereus. The edges of the rocks were very sharp and you could easily cut your hands or shoes on them. Later in the year, the trees would be in full leaf and so it would be quite shady. The geology was quite unusual. They continued down to the coast and ended up down at the beach at Playa de Cangrejo, near Tehuantepec. They had avoided the towns because of the drug cartels, and decided to chill out here. There were a couple of ramshackle bars which served food and drink, and there was hardly anyone on the beaches. There were frigate birds flying overhead and scavenging fish from the fishermen, and also pelicans and vultures. They found a place in the shade and spent some pleasant moments relaxing and catching up on their couple of weeks of travelling around.

At the end, there were a few questions from the audience. David said the temperatures were generally very hot. Travelling and staying in Mexico is very affordable, but you do need someone who speaks Spanish – there were roadblocks everywhere and the police were quite unfriendly.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 7 entries in the table show at the November meeting.

	Cacti – 3 Cacti	Succulents – Lithops
Open	(1) B Beckerleg Echinocereus nivosus	(1) B Beckerleg Lithops otzeniana
	(2) -	(2) T Smith Lithops sp.
	(3) -	(3) T Smith Lithops sp.
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg Echinocer. dasyacanthus	(1) B Beckerleg Lithops bromfieldii
	(2) J Roskilly Echinocereus gentryi	(2) -
	(3) -	(3) -

Ivor Biddlecombe

Branch Committee Meeting

A branch committee meeting was held on 8th November.

The accounts for the year were being prepared. Mark had brought along some provisional figures which indicated that the branch had again made a profit for the year. The figures were flattered because we received generous prize money from the Romsey Show and some free tickets for the New Forest Show. The relative contribution of each external event we attended was also assessed. There was a discussion about our monthly meetings and whether the funds raised from the monthly raffle and the sale of tea/cakes were sufficient to cover the cost of the speakers and the hall rent. We remain against charging an entrance fee and it was agreed to leave the raffle cost as is, but to increase the price of the tea/cakes from 25p to 30p.

David mentioned that next year's programme of events was almost confirmed. There were one or two speakers whose dates needed to be agreed, and also some external events whose timing needed to be confirmed.

It was also discussed whether the branch should buy a present for the speakers. Most only charge travel costs and give up their time, so it might be nice to give them a bottle of wine or something similar as a token of thanks. It was also suggested that we should take photos at the meetings and put these on our website.

Details for taking part in the Zone 11 Quiz at the Isle of Wight were discussed. It will be our branch's turn to host the quiz in 2011, and Mark Jakins had suggested that we should consider designing the quiz using a multimedia approach.

Vinay Shah

Here's a preview of the branch meetings for next year. In addition, we will be putting on displays at various venues; these are listed in the printed version of the branch programme, which is available from the front table.

Branch Programme 2011

4 January	Members' Medley Short talks by branch members
1 February	Tresco Abbey Gardens Ben Turner
1 March	Succulent Miscellany - plants & slides Suzanne Mace
5 April	Cultivation & Propagation Workshop
3 May	Bolivia Peter Down
7 June	The Island of Socotra Bob Potter
5 July	Propagation of Cacti & Succulents Tony Roberts
2 August	Cultivation Masterclass John Pilbeam
6 September	Agaves Through the Ages Colin Walker
4 October	Zone 11 Multimedia Quiz
1 November	The Little Karoo Rodney Sims
6 December	AGM, followed by Christmas Social

The following article is a timely reminder that the society seed list will be distributed with the December Journal :

Snippets

It's Nearly Time for the Society Seed List Again - Why Not?

I have just got around to reading an editorial by Bill Keen published last year in the Journal of the Haworthia Society. Bill described how, as a schoolboy, he had raised his first plants from seed. Strangely, this struck a familiar chord, as he mirrored my own experiences a few years later.

My first experiences with things succulent (yes, that did include girls) began in about 1954 with a packet of "mixed cactus seed" purchased from a local department store. This probably originated from Kenneth Harle's nursery. The address included a London postal district number, which imparted an aura of quality and respectability on goods for sale in northern shops at that time. This packet produced a single plant of *Agave americana* which surprisingly demised during the first winter, one *Ferocactus* which languished a little longer but never grew into its adult ribbed form, and a number of *Opuntia*, probably from the *O. engelmannii/phaecantha* complex which were despatched after a couple of years because of the space they occupied.

The next packet purchased a year later yielded about fifty *Delosperma echinatum* and nothing else. So much for "mixed cactus" seed! Fortunately the Cactus and Succulent Society of Great Britain, which was one of the precursors of the present society, came to the rescue when I joined in 1956. This made spasmodic offers of reliable seed. I was hooked and have remained so ever since.

Now five greenhouses later and well into retirement I am building up another collection, again from seed. I still have a few of the plants purchased during the intervening period, but there is something special about growing from seed. Bill Keen suggested a number of reasons, such as "financial something magical fascinating" and finally "why not?" For my part, this includes the satisfaction of writing the word "seed" and the date on the back of the label. Roughly translated, this means "all my own work".

Hopefully we shall soon be receiving the Society seed list with the December journal. If you have never tried seed raising before, why not do so now. There may be disappointments: some seed may not germinate and sometimes common varieties are

substituted for the choice names printed on the packet (before receipt by the Society, I would hasten to add). However, there will still be a tremendous feeling of satisfaction when those first specks of green appear. Why not have a try?

Ian Acton

Table Show 2010 – Overall Results

Open Section – Cacti (50th Anniversary Trophy)

B Beckerleg	37
T Grech	16
A Sheader	8
T. Smith	7
J Roskilly	6
T Radford	1

Open Section – Succulents (50th Anniversary Trophy)

B Beckerleg	34
T Grech	13
J Roskilly	9
J Burnay	8
T Radford	8

Intermediate Section –Cacti (Peter Down 50th Golden Jubilee Trophy)

B Beckerleg	31
T Grech	21
T Smith	17
T Radford	10
J Roskilly	6
J Burnay	3
A Sheader	3

Intermediate Section – Succulents (25th Anniversary Paperweight)

B Beckerleg	26
J Roskilly	22
T Radford	19
J Burnay	17
T Grech	12

Ladies Cup (highest points total/Female entrant)

J Burnay	
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Ivor Biddlecombe

Next Month's Meeting

Our first meeting of 2011 will be held on January 4th 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	11 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social/American Supper
Tue	4 th	Jan	Southampton	Members' Medley - a number of short talks by branch members
Sat	8 th	Jan	Isle of Wight	no meeting
Sat	15 th	Jan	Portsmouth	Short talks and discussions by branch members
Mon	17 th	Jan	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Tue	1 st	Feb	Southampton	"Tresco Abbey Gardens" - Ben Turner
Sat	12 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Plant Auction and Members' Slides
Sat	19 th	Feb	Portsmouth	"The National Show 2008" - Cliff Thompson

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