

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

February 2024



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## Editorial

The weather has continued to be mild although we have had spells of cold weather in between. Given that we are now at the coldest month of the year, we'll have to see if we can get away without encountering any severely cold weather.

## Last Month's Meeting

David commented that there were less than 20 people attending today – this was perhaps due to the bad weather earlier in the day. Our new chairman Cathryn Quick had a bad cold and wouldn't be here today. David mentioned that Ian Acton had brought in some cuttings of *Gasteria bicolor* v. *liliputana*. This remains a small plant and it does flower beautifully.

David asked if anyone tried to renew their BCSS subscriptions. He said he had tried and was given a message that his membership was on auto-renewal despite him not having requested that last year. Previously all subscriptions ran from year to year but now annual subscriptions run from the month you join to the same time next year. This makes it very confusing. You have to renew by the end of February in order to receive the next journal.

David mentioned he had not heard from Alice about the status of the branch accounts.

### **Members' Evening - A selection of short talks by Branch Members**

**Mike Hill** was giving his first presentation to the branch. He was going to talk about *Sinningia*, which is a gesneriad. The first slide showed a picture of a Gloxinia (*Sinningia speciosa*), along with a map of central and south America showing how many species are found in each country. The genus has a

South American distribution, and there are many species in the Mata Atlântica (the Atlantic Forest), so there are many species native to Brazil. He has been to the Atlantic Forest and didn't see them in the wild. He asked David Neville if he had seen any in habitat, and David said no.

Mike said a lot of these places are quite wet, and some of the plants grow as caudex plants. Some of the plants also demonstrate peloric flowers - these are radially symmetrical flowers that occur in species with normally bilateral flowers and have a symmetry down the middle. *Sinningia* is a family that he has been interested in for a long time. There are 5 clades in the family and 3 have some sort of tuber – it's those three that are mainly in cultivation. His next slide showed that there are around 75 species and 1 clade has caudexes which grow above the ground and this was *Dircaea*. *S. leucotricha* is in this tribe. Gloxinias have tubers and that is what you plant and the plant grows from that. Others have a rhizome.

The reason he has an interest in the genus is that it was one of the first plants he grew and it had amazing flowers. His mother had bought him a plant of *Reichsteineria* (*Sinningia*) *cardinalis* and it proved to be an amazing plant with beautiful red flowers. It had a small caudex and has fairly hairy leaves, but not as hairy as *Sinningia leucotricha* which has more felt. The plants have annual stems which will fall off and it will grow new ones the following year. The same applies to the leaves as well. You can grow them as house plants but they prefer to be grown south-facing since they receive a lot of sun and grow in rocky places in Brazil. He had brought along his *S. leucotricha* which was over 30 years old. It has a big caudex and forms basal stems, and it should start to form new growths soon. When they are young, the caudex is shaped like a doughnut and it looks quite cute, but as it ages, the stem bases make it look a little uglier. It is easy to grow from seed, and he was given the plant as a seedling. A friend he used to work at Manchester University, where they were growing in large pots, and it grows larger, up to a height 4 feet and produces more foliage - it probably is best to restrict the pot size and grow it as a smaller plant. He got his seeds from a company called

worldwondersgardens.co.uk and they currently list *Sinningia magnifica*. Their stock changes throughout the year so it's worth checking their website from time to time.

*Sinningia eumorpha* is a much smaller plant and it will do well in a 3½" pot and it is well worth growing, you can get it to flower within a year from sowing. The flower is a real beauty and it has been used for hybridisation. The stems die down to a caudex and it produces a single flower per stem. The tiny seed are surface sown and its quite easy from seed. *Sinningia iarae* is another plant he grew at the same time. It flowers like *S. cardinalis* with a hood on the flower. It grows to quite a large plant. He has been growing it for 2.5 years and it hasn't flowered yet. *Sinningia magnifica* is very much like *S. cardinalis* and he showed us some pictures of plants from habitat in Brazil. He managed to get it to flower in 18 months from seed. It might grow on to become a large plant eventually.

A couple of plants he has grown which are non-caudex plants are from the clade Corytholoma. *Sinningia tubiflora* has white flowers and it's a really fantastic plant which is called a hardy gloxinia by Americans. In this country it would be hardy if it was kept dry in the winter but it really needs greenhouse protection in the winter. It can grow to 3 feet tall. It has scented flowers and the growth will die down. You can take cuttings of it and it is well worth growing. *Sinningia sellovii* is another plant he had grown from seed. It produced two feet tall stems, and tubular red flowers, and there are hybrids of it with tubiflora and it's perhaps a cross he will also attempt himself. This plant isn't scented and also isn't hardy but the cross with tubiflora might combine the best of both species.

The clade *Sinningia* contains non-caudex plants including the original Gloxinia (*S. speciosa*) and it does have some similarities to *Streptocarpus*. David said he has grown this from seed and although the flowers are spectacular, you have to be careful, the plants are prone to mildew and problems with botrytis.

**Tom Radford** was next and his slides were titled "General activities in 2023". The first picture was of *Conophytum obcordellum* which flowered for him in January last year. He gives these plants extra light and treats them as winter growers. This species is night flowering and the flowers are scented, presumably to attract the insects which will pollinate it. *Aloinopsis schooneesii* is also grown as a winter grower, he mentioned they need strong sunlight or extra lighting to make the flowers open in our

winters. Once they open, they will remain in flower for a couple of weeks.

*Copiapoa montana* was a plant he bought at one of our meetings and it was a tatty plant which had been rescued from a collection. He cut off the top and tried to root that without success but eventually it formed some pups and these eventually produced some yellow flowers. *Obregonia denegrii* in his collection is one of his oldest plants and it was probably around 35 years old and still in a 3½" inch pot. It flowers well every summer and we saw it with a white flower. Next was *Ipomoea bolusiana* - he got this from someone's collection and had it for a long time and it grew leaves without ever flowering - but last year it flowered for the first time, in October.

Next we saw a shot of his camera on a tripod and the set up he uses to photograph his plants. He said he uses a black background and it is worth looking at the plant from different angles because you will sometimes see more detail or something unusual. The plant he was photographing was *Mammillaria carmenae*. This is a plant which was re-discovered in 1985. It was considered to be a miniature but there are different clones - some produce round globular plants and other grow a bit larger, and this particular plant had filled a 9 inch long pan. In habitat it may hang down over cliff edges.

*Tanquana archeri* is a mesemb which used to in *Pleiospilos* - but there are slight differences in the seed pods and leaf shapes and it was moved to a new genus, however the genera are similar. The plant featured a yellow flower. *Argyroderma crateriforme* is a plant with leaves which split very easily if you overwater it even slightly. This had caused permanent scars to the leaves and he showed how Photoshop can be used to clean up and remove the scars.

*Fockea augustifolia* is a plant which he had grown for many years, he thinks he obtained it from a American nursery which supplied ISI plants. It was probably obtained 40 years ago. It is a caudiciform plant with climbing stems growing from a large tuber. This was growing on some supports and he again used Photoshop to remove some of the rubbish and distractions from the image. Next, we saw a close up of the flower and Tom explained that the flower was in focus but rest of the plant was not, and he used special techniques to merge images from multiple exposures to create a better image where everything was in focus.

*Stapelia hirsuta* was grown from seed and it flowered within 2 years. He used LED lighting to

produce a better image. The large flowers start to reflex after opening. The flies love the smell of the flower and they usually lay their eggs on them.

Next was *Ceropegia simoneae* - he was given this plant, but the stem had broken off. He repotted this piece and it rooted within just two weeks. We could see the exotic flowers. He was also given some seeds and he planted these in August - one came up within 2 weeks, but the other seeds took a lot longer to germinate, some took as long as 10 weeks.

Next was a picture he took in Costa Rica - this was of the Resplendent quetzal, a exotic bird with red, green and blue hues to its colourful plumage. You have to get up early to see them and they fly up high in the trees so you need a telephoto lens as well, It is the national bird of Guatemala.

With *Eucomis*, he has been growing them in his garden. They survived the winter, despite the -6C temperatures. The smallest *Eucomis* is *Eucomis vandermerwei*, with stems up to about 9 inches tall. The most common species is *Eucomis bicolor*, and he has been growing this in the garden for 10 years. The stems on this are 12 - 15 inches tall. *Eucomis pole-evansii* is a giant and grows to around 6 feet tall - he has been growing this in the garden as well, and we saw 3 bulbs there, which he said were 8 or 9 inches in diameter - they seem to tolerate the frost. *Eucomis regia* is winter growing and is more tender - he wouldn't risk putting this species out in the garden.

*Eriospermum* is a genus of tuberous flowering plants from Africa. The rhizome throws up a stem and flowers, and it also produces a single leaf, with some strange protuberances on it. *Eriospermum erinum* produces a tall flower spike with several small flowers and we saw a close up of the flower. The leaf had lots of little protuberances which had small clusters of spines on them. *Eriospermum dregei* has multiple leaves which were covered in small hairs. *Eriospermum appendiculatum* is a much smaller plant which he got recently. It was in a 2 3/4" pot. The leaves had 2 little mounds and they had the protuberances and sharp spines around the edge of the leaf.

Next was a picture of a collared aracari - this bird was also from Costa Rica, and it resembles a toucan. They are quite common there. The final plant to flower in 2023 was a Christmas cactus - *Schlumbergera truncata*. It is difficult to photograph the large flowers, and he used LED lighting to produce a better effect. He mentioned that the plant wasn't tidy and there was some material in the pictures which is best removed. He used Adobe

Photoshop to remove marks on the leaves and the clone/stamp tool to remove some buds which were a distraction. He also used the spot healing brush and clone stamp tools. There actually was another plant that flowered after the Christmas cactus and this was *Massonia pustulata* which flowered for about three weeks. It is a South African plant. His final picture featured what he considered the "bird of the year" for him - it was a Wilsons Bird of Paradise *Diphylodes respublica* which he saw in West Papua - it has some spirals for its tail feathers.

After the mid-meeting break, we had **Ben Turner** and his talk was titled the "Plantentuin Meise". Back in May, he had gone on a weekend booze trip to Brussels to sample the beers made by Delirium and he also went to the Plantentuin Meise, a botanic garden just outside Brussels - it's a very large botanic garden and famous throughout Europe. The plant palace is a large glass house complex, and it contains various different climate controlled areas, including collections of cacti and succulents. As he walked in, he saw *Pereskia grandiflora* (also known as *Rhodocactus grandifolius*) - this is considered to be a plant which links between normal plants and the cacti and it was almost like a tree, growing up against a wall and with masses of flowers.

In the collection, the plants were loosely arranged by where they came from - there was a South American side and there were also areas set aside for Madagascar (with baobabs) and a South African region, with aloes and the Quiver tree and *Aloe pillansii* and the butter bush *Tylecodon panniculatus*, and also *Crassula ovata* and *Aloe ramosissima*.

There were a few cacti, including a blue stemmed Myrtillocactus, and a big *Agave ovatifolia* with powdery blue leaves in the foreground. There were some big specimens of *Echinocactus grusonii* and nearby was also *Agave macroacantha*. It is a choice plant and more tender to the cold than other agaves, but this was a nice multiheaded plant. Another plant was growing in a trough. There was a big *Echinocactus* with many pups, and this one was accompanied by a sign saying "mother in law's cushion" with Flemish and French translations too. One of his favourite cacti is *Parodia magnifica* and there was a monster sized specimen here, which was very cylindrical. The plant labels also had the conservation status on many of them, with EN for endangered and CR for critically endangered.

There was an interesting plant cross x *Hagespostoa climaxantha* v. *armata* which is a natural hybrid between a *Haageocereus* and an *Espostoa*. Nearby was *Mammillaria geminispina* with colourful seed

Pods and these were decent sized plants. Just at the back of these plants was a 10 foot drop, and while he was there, he heard a loud sound and a commotion, and it seems that a *Neobuxbaumia* columnar cacti had snapped its stem and it had fallen down the back!

There were some monstrous plants and we saw the fasciated stem of *Pedilanthus macrocarpus*, a member of the Euphorbia family which is native to Mexico. David said that Dave Philips used to grow it. Another member of the Euphorbia family is *Euphorbia antisiphilitica* - this was supposedly used to treat sexually transmitted diseases. In the same trough were a few nice specimens of cacti - including *Turbinicarpus* and *Mammillaria magnimamma*. We also saw a ceroid with a nice red cephalium - this was a *Vatricania* - which is now in *Espositoa* - it is monotypic and so the plant was probably *Vatricania guentheri*.

*Agave parrasana* has spikes on every leaf, but unusually, every single terminal spine was pointing downwards and Ben illustrated this with a close up shot. It has nice blue-grey leaves. *Aloe buhrii* is a speckled or spotted Aloe, with distinct bright orange flowers. We also saw *Gasteria disticha* and Ben mentioned he had one for sale which came from Geoff Card.

Next was a South African bulb - *Boophone disticha*. This has unusual fan shaped leaves. When he was in South Africa, a member of the local tribe in the Western Cape said the scales on the outer surface of the bulb were used as a wound dressing in circumcision rituals. The scales build up from year to year.

In another section, there was a Mediterranean climate area, and there were also Western Cape and Fynbos areas. With *Kumara plicatilis* - the leaves were quite long, and it might have been starved of light. Next was a protea - this was a lovely little plant which grows east of Capetown, and it was called *Serruria florida* - it is critically endangered in habitat. It has beautiful flowers and foliage.

There was also a Californian "Chapparal" area - they had *Dudleya greenii* growing here. David said some plants have farina on the leaves and some don't and the name Green is because the plant is named after a person, rather than the colour green. The flowers were like those of an aeonium. *Aeonium percarneum* was a species from Gran Canaria, and the plant forms tall flowering spikes, meaning the height was close to 4 feet overall.

*Sonchus hierrensis* v. *benehoavensis* is also a plant from the Canaries. It's like a giant dandelion and these can become tree sized plants. Ben said he had been growing *Sonchus fruticosus* at his home. *Deuterocohnia brevifolia* is a bromeliad which forms mounds of its small rosettes and this was 4-5 feet across in size. This plant was previously classified as *Abromeitiella*.

*Aechmea distichantha* var. *distichantha* was in flower. Some species of this bromeliad are hardy. There were also some Cycads here and we saw *Encephalartos horridus*. These are being poached in habitat and are unfortunately becoming endangered. We also saw a plant of *Encephalartos ferox* bearing some cones. These plants grow as separate male and female plants. In another section there were plants from the *Sansevieria* family. We saw *Sansevieria trifasciata* "Negro" with dark green leaves and *Sansevieria* "Siam Silver" with variegated leaves. There was also a larger leaved plant which he was unable to identify. While preparing the talk, he learnt that *Sansevieria* has now been reclassified as *Dracaena*!

The final talk was given **Paul Maddison**. He mentioned that this was a talk he first gave in 2012, but he felt it was worth repeating since the branch has many new members since then. He said "we are going on a scientific journey, bear with me". His first image showed the cover of the August 2007 edition of *Scientific American* - it contained an article called "Floral Derangement" which referred to a whole new plant family - "Artificae Plantae: The Taxonomy, Ecology, and Ethnobotany of the Simulacraceae" - Bletter and his co-authors describe 17 different genera of flora that include 86 species, samples of which are currently stored at the New York City's **Foundation for Artificial Knowledge and Ethnobotany**.

He also showed us an encoded message which needed some special decoding to view the hidden message "A brand new plant family composed of objects made by humans to look like a species in the kingdom plantae or fanciful species having components of a living plant species or a combination of components from several living plant species but not looking exactly like a extant plant."

Simulacraceae included the genera:

**Plasticus**, fake plants "typically composed primarily of complex polymers of long-chain hydrocarbons, indicative of their origins in the petrochemical industries"

**Calciumcarbonatia**, faux vegetation designed out of seashells

**Paraffinius**, familiar examples of which are the dust-covered wax bananas, grapes and apples in the big bowl on Grandma's kitchen table

**Silicus**, which includes the truly world-renowned collection of some 3,000 individual specimens of glass flowers, representing more than 830 real flower species, housed at Harvard's Museum of Natural History.

He showed some examples of such plants. His wife was sitting at a cafe with a fake orchid in a bottle on the table. We also saw a green candle resembling a ribbed cactus. A shot from Alan Carr's Chatty Man show showed some cactus sculptures in the background of an interview he was conducting with a member of the Pussy Cat Dolls. He also showed a picture which appeared in the BCSS journal of a sculpture.

He mentioned care has to be taken around the 12 days of Christmas in December to avoid getting tinselitis, although climate change seems to have brought this forward to Halloween onwards. A picture showed him doing field study, with animals whose outer coat can be made into strands like DNA. Our own Southampton Branch produced a yearbook in 1993 with an article called "Crochet yourself a cactus" and he had brought some of these examples in, and passed them around the audience. A sculpture of a toadstool shaped table looked like a "fun guy". We also saw an example of *Echinocactus fiber optica* - and the same plant when it had been plugged in, with the spines lit up.

He created his own genus Simulacraceae with Sub-family Imaginaceae Genus Pencilartus - imaginary things made using pencils and crayons. Top right of the image was a cultivation tool which can be used to sharpen the pencils (a pencil sharpener). You can get the pencils to a sharp point but you have to be careful not to sharpen them too often or they would disappear. Shakespear would say "2B or not 2B, that's the question".

Finally we ended with some examples of pencil art. He had seen this published on the internet. saw this on the internet many years ago. There were various sculptures. One appeared to have a large stomata at top. Another one was twisting to follow the sunlight? One looked like a starfish or a Stapelia flower - perhaps an example of convergent evolution? These were the creations of an artist called Jennifer Maestre. Visit <https://shorturl.at/bGOY2>, <https://shorturl.at/ehivK>, <https://shorturl.at/ayRX3> for examples or her work.

Vinay Shah

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **March 5<sup>th</sup>** and the title of the talk is "The Great Outdoors - Gardening with Cacti and Succulents" and the speaker is **Paul Spracklin**, who gave a talk to us a few years ago. At that time, he had told us that his location in Essex was in a unique microclimate, which allowed him to grow many plants outside which you might not normally expect to survive our winters.

I expect he will tell us a bit more about this topic and tell us what sort of plants he has been able to grow.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 10 <sup>th</sup>	Feb	Isle of Wight	Conservation
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup>	Feb	Portsmouth	Bring your unnamed plants
Tue 5 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Southampton	The Great Outdoors - Gardening with Cacti and Succulents (Paul Spracklin)
Sat 9 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Isle of Wight	TBC (Cliff Thompson)
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup>	Mar	Portsmouth	Los Angeles County Arboretum and The Huntington (Ben Turner)
Tue 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Apr	Southampton	American Shows, Nurseries & Collections (Stuart Riley)

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

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