

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

We are already in February so spring may only be a few weeks away. I am sure we will have one or two cold spells before then.

Last Month's Meeting

I was late getting to the last meeting so missed any announcements that might have been made. During the meeting David did apologise about the temperature – the church seems to have locked up the thermostat for the heating which means we can't control the hall heating ourselves.

Members' Evening - Short Talks by Branch Members

Malpaís de Güímar - Reserva Natural Especial

Stuart Arnold used to be a member of Wiltshire branch, but he recently moved to this area and has started to attend our Branch meetings. His talk was about the Reserva Natural Especial at Malpaís de Güímar on the island of Tenerife in the Canaries. This area has been set aside as a protected park and it is situated on the eastern coast of Tenerife. Some maps showed the relative position of the Canaries – they lie off the northwest coast of Africa.

The protected area was first set up in 1987 and extended in 1994, with a larger area being protected in 2006 - the area is now around 3 km². The University of the West of England (UWE, i.e. Bristol) has been studying rainfall in the area and

Stuart mentioned that a German website also provided useful information about the plants found in the area.

The Canary islands were created by volcanic eruptions. Fuerteventura and Lanzarote are the oldest islands and they formed around 23 million years ago, while the youngest, El Hierro, is around a million years old. The terrain on Tenerife varies from rocky to sandy, and sunshine levels are good throughout the year. The proximity to the sea means there is a high level of salinity in the environment. The rainfall is estimated at 15cm per year but in recent years it has declined to just 9cm - causing some plants to die out.

People from North Africa first settled on the islands and they were called the Guanche. Spain colonised the islands in the 15th century. The natives were either killed by the Spanish or died of exposure to new pathogens and any remaining survivors were assimilated into the new Spanish population and their associated culture. For hundreds of years, the land was subject to the grazing habits of the Guanche, and they grew crops like cereals and tomatoes. They also collected fish and shellfish. In recent years there was an increase in industry and the villages expanded in size. Now with the action to conserve the Malpaís, nature is gradually regaining its foothold.

Stuart mentioned on his slides he had used a code to denote which of the plants were found on which of the various Canary islands. Cardon is a reference to a large plant and the largest Euphorbia in the habitat is *Euphorbia canariensis*, the Canary Island Spurge. The sap of Euphorbias is an irritant, and this plant is one of the most toxic. These plants can attain a height of 3-4 metres tall and when he first saw them and didn't know any better, he thought they were cacti. They can grow to an age of over 100 years. As it grows, it gets bushier. They are nice and green when young but they do get woodier as they age and the stems can become white. We saw some closeups of the stems and the spines which are dark and grow in pairs on the corners of the stems. These spines can be 5 to 14 mm long. One member of the Wiltshire branch was always interested in what pollinates a plant so he put the next couple of

pictures in for her - they featured a beetle which lays its eggs in the old wood of the plant, and the caterpillar and butterfly called the Canary Sphinx.

Next was the sweet spurge. *Euphorbia balsamifera*, it was less toxic and the leaves were used to feed animals. It wasn't flowering but he found images on the Internet. The leaves even used to be eaten by herders and their families in Oman at the beginning of the monsoon, at this time there would be very little to eat otherwise. Again the old plants get woody, especially on the coast where the air is saltier. It grows as a low shrub or as a small tree from 2–5 meters tall.

Next was an image of Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, chevalier de Lamarck, often known simply as Lamarck, who was a French naturalist. He was a soldier, biologist, and academic, and an early proponent of the idea that biological evolution occurred and proceeded in accordance with natural laws - preceding the ideas of Darwin with this thinking. The bitter spurge, *Euphorbia lamarckii* is named after him. It grows to a height of 0.8-2.5 metres.

Moving on from Euphorbias, there were lots of plants of *Kleinia neriifolia* (also called *Senecio kleinia*) around. It's not the Dragon tree (*Dracaena draco*) but it looks very similar in appearance, and has forking branches with tufts of blue green leaves. A description from the early 1900s said "these plants almost seem to live on air, yet they attain a considerable size".

There were lots of shrubs from the dock family - similar to our plants, but these ones are native to the Canaries. They were *Rumex lunaria* - the Canary Island Sorrel, also called vinagrera due to its vinegar flavour. There were also lavenders here - with 7 different types, of which 4 were endemic. This one, *Lavandula canariensis*, is found on all the islands. It had the right colour to the flower and could be considered a common weed, and it even has its own dedicated bee. The area close to the sea also had a large variety of plants but he had to be careful since he was bruised and injured by having wandered through the terrain and the plants. *Launaea arborescens* is the chicken wire plant - it had yellow flowers and is a type of type of gorse. *Lotus sessilifolius* is the bird's foot trefoil. It also has yellow flower, but it was difficult to photograph properly because it was intertwined with other plants like the chicken wire plant. *Frankenia capitata* is a sea heath. It is adapted to saline environments and grows within a few yards of the sea. Next was *Euphorbia aphylla* and if you describe it, it breaks all the rules. It has virtually no

leaves and the flowers have no stem. Cacti and succulents use transpiration which is different from other plants, but this doesn't follow those rules and it's more like a normal plant - so it's a real one-off. It's a halophyte so it's salt tolerant. He found pictures of the flower and fruits online. He found another plant and had been told the plants were distressed and dying - so it would be a good example of a plant that's dead. This was *Ceropegia fusca* - but the plants weren't dead - they just have a grayish appearance even when they are fine. He found only two of them in a whole day's walk. He ended with an overall view of this area, showing the diversity of the plants he encountered in a relatively small area.

Stuart Arnold

Pictures I found on my Computer

Richard White had looked at some old pictures on his PC and decided he could do a talk about them. There were various plants he had encountered on his holidays also and other trips, when he was working at Southampton and Cardiff universities - these were trips funded by the EU to various parts of Europe. He was working on taxonomic databases to keep track of plant name changes etc. A second category of work involved observations of where plants were found. A third category was related to the database design and giving the names unique identifiers and then tracking changes in nomenclature.

We started looking at the pictures. We saw some of the conference delegates having nice lunches and also in a meeting room. He had a small amount of free time during these conferences and would go out and look for plants. His original idea was to go through plants in the wild found in Malta, and also Portugal and also in Botanic Gardens - but he found he had enough pictures just from Malta to cover the whole of today's talk.

Valletta is the capital and it's an interesting place. They speak English and drive on the left - but it is a Mediterranean country with Mediterranean culture. Victoria Gate is named after Queen Victoria. We saw a branch of Marks and Spencer too. He walked around Valletta to see some of the naturalised plants - these were not natives. *Aloe arborescens* was a shrubby plant and there was also an agave. *Aloe maculata* would be seen again later. There was a large *Opuntia* and a 3 metre high bush of an *Euphorbia tirucalli*. *Aloe maculata* is from South Africa and has spectacular orange-red flowers.

Valletta is the smallest capital of any European Union country, by both population and area. The

official languages are English and Maltese and it is the only official language in the EU with a semitic origin. As a result, some of the names are unpronounceable. The place where the conference was held was Bugibba and we saw some maps of the area. After seeing some plants around the town, he took the bus to the coast. The geology - mostly sedimentary rock which is limestone and there is some blue clay and sandstone as well. It's pretty barren. We saw *Oxalis pes-caprae* which has the common name bermuda buttercup - it has bright yellow flowers. There was also a more succulent low growing red-leaved plant with intense red colour to the leaves and we would see that again later. There were other bulbous plants - the branched asphodel is *Asphodelus ramosus* - in other mediterranean countries there is the unbranched white asphodel is *Asphodelus albus* - they have similar flowers Richard mentioned the web-based "Flora of Malta" is extremely informative, and it mentioned this plant is in the Xanthorrhoeaceae, which happens to contain Aloe as well. South African bulb group members will be interested in the Maltese sand crocus *Romulea variicolor* - the genus *Romulea* has its centre of diversity in South Africa but the genus extends northward into Africa and the Mediterranean and there's even one growing in Devon. A lot of South African bulbs have curvy leaves and some have twisted leaves as well - these are adaptations from South Africa which several genera adopt.

Now on the bus, he was going to the northern end of the island, and to a town called Mellieħa. There are tourist hotels in Mellieħa and also a tourist development nearby called Popeye village where the Popeye movie was filmed. We saw some naturalised non-native plants near the beach - these were Agaves and Opuntias. Next was a Freesia which had been introduced from other places. Next was a snapdragon which is native to Malta - *Antirrhinum majus* ssp. *siculum*. There was another variety with a pink flower. Another plant is a cross between a giant clover and a lupin - *Hedysarum coronarium* it's the Italian Sanfoin. ulla. *Teucrium fruticans* is the shrubby Germander - it grows low to the ground because the terrain here is very exposed and windy, and there were very few trees around.

There was evidence of present and past cultivation and Richard continued to try and to find succulents. This plant looked promising but it was a daisy - *Evax pygmaea*. The common name is Pygmy Cudweed and it has hairy silvery leaves. Next was a type of calomile with succulent leaves, it was *Anthemis urvilleana* - the plant seemed to be prone to losing its ray florets, since many were missing

and one of the flowers looked like it was being eaten by some insects.

Carpobrotus edulis is also found growing in Devon and Cornwall. It has spectacular flowers. Some of them were plain white rather than the more common red and pink. *Muscari comosum* is the grape hyacinth and it was in flower like many of the other bulbs. The flower structure is unusual and Richard mentioned the flowers at the top are designed to attract insects and the ones lower down are the ones that produce the seeds. There were a few insects present and he photographed one of them - it was *Spilostethus pandurus* which is a red and black seed bug.

Petrosedum sediforme is rare in England but is common in the Mediterranean - it's a sedum shaped rock sedum - it produces flowers in large clusters on tall narrow stems. It was growing in dried soil where the rain had eroded some holes in the soil. In the middle of a prickly bush, he spotted some brownish purple colours and these were the seed pods of an asclepiad - the two horns were pointing in two directions. The plant was *Periploca laevigata* ssp. *angustifolia* which is an asclepiad but probably not one that you would show in a show class. At the northwest point of the island there is another island called Gozo across the channel.

A local form of fennel is *Ferula melitensis* - the Maltese Giant Fennel - it is bigger than the fennel we might grow here. Some were in flower - it is an umbelifer with large bunches of flowers and can be 6 foot high. He found the succulent with red leaves again - it had pink-blue flowers. It was *Sedum caeruleum*. Why did a red plant have a blue name - well it's due to the flowers. Google lens helped him to identify some of the plants - and he said it seems better than it was in the past. A webpage online Wild Plants of Malta by Stephen Mifsud - <https://www.maltawildplants.com>

At the end we saw a photo featuring several plants of the red sedums and this was followed by a boat painted with a kit kat pattern - it was time for a break - time for tea.

Richard White

Bulbs and Flowers

After the mid-meeting break, Tom said he would present a mixture of slides featuring a few bulbs he had been growing along with some of the flowers in his greenhouse recently. First was a bulb he acquired recently - it's one of the smaller *Eucomis*, - *Eucomis regia*. Normally the genus has upright

leaves but this one was supposed to grow leaves along the ground, but he hadn't really noticed that. The flower was starting to grow in the middle. It was unusual because it was a winter growing one. all the other ones grow in the spring and summer, but this flowers in November. Next was another smaller growing *Eucomis*. It was difficult to take a good picture, but a sheet of black cardboard helped to isolate the plant from other distractions. This was *Eucomis vandermerwei*.

He grows them in troughs. It is small growing and doesn't get large. He puts them outside in the summer and overwinters them inside, but he planted some of them outside a couple of years ago and so far they have survived the winter temperatures in recent years. He'll put a few more out in the garden. They produce quite nice flowers which will go on to produce seeds. The seeds can be planted, but it will take 3-4 years to get them to flowering size. Next was an arrangement in someone else's greenhouse where they were being grown in a round pot. He said he will try something similar.

Eucomis bicolor is probably the one that is the commonest species. It's a medium sized plant that can grow to 2 feet tall. He showed some out in the garden, which had been growing for 12 years. They had been in a different place originally, but a couple of years ago his wife asked him to move them and they are just beginning to re-establish themselves. the interesting thing about this one is that it is very slow in starting to grow – it doesn't start until June - other bulbs start much earlier, in the spring. Then it grows quite quickly. see the flower stem. use card to show the flowers more clearly, including some closeups. you wonder how the insects get in to pollinate them but they do manage it somehow. Next was *Eucomis pole-evansii* growing in his garden. This is the largest growing one – they can grow up to 6 feet high. This has been growing outside for 6 years.

A question from the audience - what soil do you use? in the greenhouse it's a gritty soil. in the garden just regular soil but some extra sand added for drainage. it does stay quite wet at the bottom of the garden. these bulbs are larger and anything up to 5 or 6 inches in diameter. Next were some pictures of plants he saw in Kirstenbosch in South Africa. This is *Eucomis comosa*. It is a strong growing one. cv 'Ruben' is a hybrid. Another *E. comosa* called cv 'Can Can' was a quite a strong growing plant, some 3 feet high. The leaves are quite rigid and stand up to the weather quite well. A display of *Eucomis autumnalis* featured over 30 flowers and was spectacular.

Haemanthus albiflos was in a 9 inch pot. flowered in late autumn for him. when it flowers he brings the plant into the house. quite a nice decorative plant in the autumn and in flower for 2-3 weeks. *Haemanthus paucifolius* is a more difficult plant - just has one or two leaves coming out of each bulb. that picture not happy with it – the flower was obstructed by the leaf - so he turned it round to get a better and clearer view. It been in that 4½ inch pot for 10 years. without being repotted. There were 3 bulbs in there originally, but now it's a few more.

One of the plants he was trying to take a picture of was tall and thin so it was difficult to get a good view. He used a tripod and he can operate the camera remotely, through his phone. You can also put them on the ground. He had a curved dark sheet behind the plant and managed to get quite a nice picture. It sometimes goes under the name *Ipomea* but he said the correct name is *Turbina holubii*.

Parodia magnifica used to be called *Notocactus*. He had that for a long time and it does flower nicely now. Strangely, when he first had it the flowers on it were a lot smaller. Next was *Leuchtenbergia principis*, a plant which he grew from seed many years ago. It always flowers well. He is never sure how to picture it - from the top or the side. It does produce nice pictures and the spines are attractive. *Mammillaria boolii* is a small plant which was in a 2¾" pot – it's only a small plant but it has nice big flowers. It is bit sensitive to watering so can be tricky to grow. *Chamaecereus silverstri* has orange flowers and used to be common - his mother had 50 of them in the conservatory, all the way around. A lot of people have been producing cultivars. and this is one of them – it was a yellow flowered *Echinopsis x chamaecereus* hybrid. *Turbincarpus schmiedickeanus* was a little plant he had acquired recently. You can see the white flowers trying to burst through the spines – it was in a 3 inch pot. Next was a bird – a Brazilian Tanager (*Ramphocelus bresilius*) which was a striking red colour with some black feathers.

Lithops bromfieldii var. *sulphurea* has yellow flowers. He said he was getting the hang of growing *Lithops* now. The *Lithops* with the largest leaves is *Lithops aucampiae* and it also had yellow flowers. Next was *Stapelia asterias* – which used to be called *Stapelia grandiflora*. It was a relatively young plant but it flowers quite easily when only a couple of years old and it had produced a flower which was 7 inches across. It has a "slight smell" and flies had laid eggs on it within a couple of days of the flower opening.

Conophytum cordatum was photographed twice – the difference between the two pictures was the use of an LED lamp to get more natural colour. Next was a relative of one of the plants we saw earlier. *Ceropegia dichotoma* on Tenerife was a strong growing plant with a lot of flowers. He had tried growing it in his greenhouse but it was nothing like the success it was out there. He showed the best he had managed so far. We also saw *Ceropegia dichotoma* ssp. *fusca* – this has really nice flowers which are reddish in colour.

We saw another bird – this was the crescent-chested Puffbird - *Malacoptila striata*, which he saw in Brazil in October. You could see the crescent on its throat. He showed some pictures of Christmas cacti – for some reason it had not done well this year. His wife normally grows them, and one of them died. His daughter in law also grows them and hers didn't do well either – not sure why. The BCSS had been looking for some pictures but he couldn't send that in – he had to do some editing because the pot was in the way. He cropped a different view and produced an acceptable result. Tom ended with a picture of 3 tropical screech owls – these were young birds just leaving the nest. It was again taken in Brazil. These birds are common through all of South America but it was unusual to get three in a single picture.

Tom Radford

Copenhagen Botanic Garden

Ben started his talk with a view of the Copenhagen Gardens in February 2010 covered in snow – something we might end up seeing here tomorrow, given the weather forecasts. This was a talk he originally gave to us in 2011, but our membership has changed quite a bit since then. One February he was wandering round Copenhagen and found himself at the botanic garden by accident – he thought he'd go in and take a look. There was a big glasshouse but when he got to the door, he saw that it was closed on Mondays this was unfortunate since he was due to leave later that day. He saw someone coming out and spoke to them, and told them he was involved with the BCSS and that seemed to do the trick – “come on in”. He had a look outside before he went in, to gasps from the audience – an *Opuntia phaeacantha* v. *camanchica* was almost totally covered in snow. It grows in the Southern USA, in places like Utah and can withstand snow. It also had fruits on it, under the blanket of snow.

He had looked thru the glass and had seen they had a good collection and this was confirmed when he got inside. He mentioned Aloes and the curator at

the time - Martin Aarseth-Hansen was very friendly. He comes over to some of our BCSS conventions sometimes and was a really keen and enthusiastic plantsman, and he loves cacti and succulents, particularly the aloes – hence they had quite an extensive collection there. The Botanic Garden is attached to the university and they have a lean to as a wing to the main glass house and he was able to see the incredible tunnels underneath which provide the heating for the plants – it was fascinating to see the inner workings.

We saw the Jade money plant (*Crassula ovata*), lots of Aloes, a *Pachypodium* in the centre and a cabbage tree - *Cussonia paniculata* - in the middle – it makes a stunning container plant. They also have raised beds with plants in. There was a large collection of plants, too many to name, but he spotted *Aloe ciliaris*. There were also plants being grown in crevices in a wall, similar to Kirstenbosch. There were *Graptopelaums* and *Sedums* and *Echeverias* and some had purple leaves. There were cereoids, *Opuntia basillaris*, and *Agave multifilifera*. This forms a compact and neat rosette. An aloe had flowered and was setting seed. Next to it was *Agave Americana mediopicta aurea* which is a lighter green colour than the usual *mediopicta alba*. *Agave titanota* had ivory spines – these are a copper colour when they first form and then they turn white as the plant matures.

This was *Pelargonium cotyledonis* which comes from the island of St. Helena and nowhere else. (this is where Napoleon was exiled). They were growing lots of them with a view to re-introducing them into habitat, but when Kew heard of this, they stopped the process since they did not want other countries interfering with British territories – as a result they had a large number of surplus plants and Ben was asked how many of these do you want? He only had a little satchel with him so had to restrain himself. He was due to go back that evening and said that Danish customs were very nice, only asking if he had any cannabis.

They have another house where they have habitat beds – the *P. cotyledonis* was there growing in volcanic rock to emulate the natural habitat. The Hawaiian palm (*Brighamia insignis*) was in the back corner – he had not seen any that big. It is a nightmare for mealy bug, as many of the geophytic pelargoniums are. He was unable to identify a tree aloe – it might be a hybrid – there are a number out there and one called “Hercules” grows at a tremendous rate. It had very long leaves. *Aloe ferox* was easier to identify. There were creative plantings of *Haworthia*.

There was a smooth-leaved form of *Aloe broomii* - it usually has the most spines on the leaves. It's very cold tolerant as well and one of the few that survived at Hollygate Nursery when their heating failed. Another big Aloe was *Aloe angelica*. There was an *Alluaudia* on the left.

A plant was labelled *Aloe deltoideodonta* var. *candicans* - he wasn't confident it was correct. *Aloe polyphylla* is easier to recognise. There was also *Aloe castanea* which is the Cats tail aloe due to the inflorescence. They were growing some things under lights. *Aloe aculeata* had leaf spines with white tubercles. There were lots of different Agaves. There were some variegated plants and we saw *Gasteria gracilis variegata* - he put that picture in for Peter Down. *Gasteria rawlinsonii* is a cliff dwelling species which hangs down. It has the lowest number of chromosomes - i.e. it is one of the most primitive. There were typical gasteria flower on the *rawlinsonii*.

The dragon tree grows on Socotra which is part of Yemen. They are slow growing. There were Hoodias as well. We saw the Hawaiian palm *Brighamia insignis*. He had to stop growing it because it was a magnet for red spider. It has a lovely primrose type flower and is the campanula family and has a large swollen stem.

There were some geophytes - *Sinningia leucotricha* with silvery hairy leaves. *Scadoxus punniceus* is in the Amaryllis family and it flowers before the leaves form with orange heads of flowers. *Rauhia peruviana* is also in Amaryllis family - the genus is named after Werner Rauh. - it is now called *Rauhia multiflora*. *Albuca bracteata* used to be an Ornithogallum - the common name is "pregnant onions" as new bulbs emerge from the body of the plant. We ended with a spectacular shot of some air plants being grown on cork - these were Tillandsias with red leaf tips and purple flowers producing a very vivid display.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday March 4th** and it will feature a talk by our own member, Tom Radford.

He will be giving us a talk called "on Closer Inspection". I expect we will see some close ups and Tom of course is keep on photographing plants using advanced techniques. I'll post more details on our website in a few days

Forthcoming Events

Sat	8 th	Feb	Isle of Wight	Preparing for the Spring Show
Sat	15 th	Feb	Portsmouth	A Personal Choice - cacti and succulents over the last 50 years (Tom Radford)
Tue	4 th	Mar	Southampton	On Closer Inspection (Tom Radford)
Sat	8 th	Mar	Isle of Wight	Rio Grande do Sol, Brazil (Cliff Thompson)
Sat	15 th	Mar	Portsmouth	Raising Cacti from Seed (Vicky Davies)

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

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