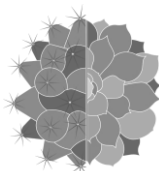


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

The weather has been very pleasant these past couple of days and it feels like Spring is almost here. I have not watered my plants as yet but a couple more days like this and I may be tempted to give them some moisture. Of course the danger of frosts is still a possibility.

Last Month's Meeting

David started the meeting by explaining that the scheduled speaker Cliff Thompson could not attend today due to an inflammatory stomach condition. He learnt of this at the weekend and made some phone calls to try and arrange an alternative speaker, but no one was available at short notice. So he had to prepare a talk himself. Perhaps that why the attendance is lower. The first half would be pictures taken on a day trip in South Africa when he was last there (2012) and the second half would cover some succulents growing in Mexico. He apologised for the late start to the meeting. This was due to the traffic roadworks, making everyone arrive late.

We had apologies from Cath whose baby was up all night. Jane our vice chairman was away on holiday. Richard mentioned that Peter Down is recovering and hopes to be here next month. Adrian can't drive at the present time. Tom had brought in some *Eucomis vandermeijeri* bulbs - help yourself to a couple. Ben Turner had been approached by a garden in Somerset who want *Gasteria* species and subspecies (not hybrids) - and they are willing to pay for them. Contact him if you can assist. Finally, don't forget to renew your BCSS subscriptions.

Trips in South Africa and Mexico

David started his talk. They were staying in Springbok - a famous town where there is a motel and some hotels. He had been given some GPS co-

ordinates to find *Crassula susanna* and they set off from Springbok, and were due to head some 80 miles south west. Before that, they explored another road, and were on the land of a farm/ranch called "Zandkraal". They stopped here because there were some interesting looking plants around. The plants don't grow on the flats - they tend to be up on the slopes where it is rockier and more free draining. There were quartz patches here and some succulents prefer those, so there was lots to explore.

One of the first things they found was a *Stapelia* - it looked like *S. variegata* but the stems are much fatter and more mottled and the flower is also larger (twice the size) and David said it was *Orbea namaquensis*. The plants here were growing similar to how they do in cultivation, with some bits dying off. You get a spreading group of stems. They were lucky to be here with three flowers open at the same time. We saw the general terrain and they were driving on graded gravel and dirt roads. It was very quiet, with no housing or villages around. The area was covered in many plants. Some flowering plants with tall flower spikes and green/white flowers were possibly *Scillas* or perhaps *Albuca*, *Drimia* was also mentioned later. There were huge numbers of these plants.

Next was a *Cotyledon* - although the plant had umbels of orange-yellow flowers, this was unusual since most of them have red-orange flowers. It's not a plant he had seen in cultivation (it might have been *Cotyledon cuneata*). Another stapeliad was developing seed horns. They tend not to grow in large groups unlike the mesembes or bulbs because their seeds are airborne - so the plants tend to be distributed. You never see a plant surrounded by seedlings as you would with other genera. He wasn't sure what the next plant was - it probably wasn't a *Huernia* since the stems were upright - it might be a *Tridentia*. A bit further away, they saw masses of bluish-green clusters of mesembes and this was a species of *Cheiridopsis* - there are about 50 species and it's hard to distinguish between them. We saw some close ups and they had formed clumps 15-18 inches across. They also found some *Tylecodons* - this might be *Tylecodon wallichii* and the inflorescence stems were developing. You cannot easily see the plants when they are dormant because

the leaves are all shed. When they are in full leaf, they look very different.

He had no idea what the next plant, a shrubby mesemb was. In an area where there were a few more pieces of quartz, they found an *Adromischus* and the plants were very well coloured, due to the light intensity – it's very hard to get that much light in cultivation so you will not see these plant colours in your collection. You will get some colour if you grow your plants in the garden in the summer months but it still won't be anything like this. The plants had beautiful vibrant red colours – in this country it would just be a greyish green colouring. There was also a bilobed *Conophytum* - it might be *C. bilobum* itself. The seeds fall in the cracks between the rocks and the plants can establish there. When the rain comes, the seed heads will open up and release the seeds - so in a few years you may get a small population of plants in one area. Once you get your eye in, you will spot more and plants - they were always growing amongst the rocks and not in the open.

This is a *Crassula* - it has opposite pairs of leaves and there was some texture to the leaves, so it looked like *Crassula tecta* but he thought it was something else. Another *Adromischus* was sending up lots of flower stems, of course the flowers are nothing to write home about. There was a bit of "fertiliser" here - not sure if it was rabbits or goats. If it had been goats or sheep then the leaves would have been nibbled or the tips would have been eaten. This is the typical terrain where you find succulents – it's an area of bed rock with broken rocks and gravel and sand and quite free draining. We saw some more colour on an *Crassula* – there were no flowers, but just the colour of the leaves with orange and red edging was attractive. This must be some type of *Asparagus*. quite an attractive looking plant. The foliage is dying off. Other various mesembs were dotted around. There are many shrubby ground cover mesembs and people don't give them a second glance and they are hard to identify. Of course the highly succulent mesembs such as *Lithops* *Conophytums* etc are most popular ones we like to grow.

There are a few hardier shrubby ones and in Cornwall quite a few are grown outside on walls or rockeries, and many have naturalised, but here in Hampshire he doesn't have much luck with getting them through winter - the pots have to be stored away in the greenhouse otherwise they will succumb. Next was a dinky little multiheaded *Euphorbia* - he did look up the name - it was something like *E. multiclava* or multi-something – it's a highly succulent one with nice fat stems in the

centre, and offsets growing and cyathia with flowers dotted around, but it's not one that he has seen in cultivation. Some plants look nice in habitat but have thinner and taller stems in cultivation due to the lower light levels and that can make them less attractive. Another plant was standing 3-4 inches tall - and the audience spotted that there was a stick insect on there, he had not noticed it before.

Next was a *Tylecodon* in flower. A *Crassula* was growing in an exposed area and had a beautiful rich red colour. This picture taken at a higher altitude after scrambling up a hillside. Not all the terrain is the same - but it's usually good to head for quartz since that is where the choice species are found. They found more bilobed *Conophytums* within a mile or two of the previous plant. These were nice plants looking like they do in our collections. In this picture were 2 cotyledons - one in foreground with the orange yellow flowers we saw before but a nicer form with a red edge to the leaves - and behind it was another cotyledon with tubular leaves. These were probably two different species. Another nicer looking plant could be *Cotyledon orbiculata* – it's an incredibly variable plant with many different forms. Related to *Cotyledon* is *Tylecodon* - the difference is the growing seasons. The *Tylecodons* grow in the winter and the *Cotyledons* grow in the summer in the UK. They tend to occur in different rainfall areas but here they were growing together. He thought this was *T. reticulata* which is one of the nice bonsai type species. It's difficult to find propagations of these plants these days.

At a higher point on this hillside – there were some pencil stemmed euphorbias. and an aloe with a beautiful head of flowers. He did have a potential name but it had escaped him. This is a *Sarcocaulon* – which is now called *Pelargonium* or *Monsonia*. They form long seed pods - and these have annual deciduous foliage, and you will only see the finger thickness stems when they are dormant. We saw a primrose yellow flower on there. There were some little shrubby mesembs going orange in colour - this might be a *Mitrophyllum*.

Then to his delight they found a flat quartz area and came across an amazing population of *Crassula alstonii*. This is one of the rarest and choicest of *Crassulas* in cultivation. You rarely see this plant in collections, although Bruce Beckerleg used to be able to propagate it quite successfully. This was his third trip to South Africa and it was the first time he had seen this genus in habitat. They found it by accident - he hadn't been given a GPS location for it. They did find another population around a 100 miles away. It's a golfball sized plant and the leaves are tightly packed together. They also saw some

multiheaded clusters. He has never seen them in this country with the pinkish hue they had there. We could see some *Conophytums* in the picture as well. Young plants of *C. alstonii* were growing here as well. It is such an unusual plant, and it was a thrill to be able to see it.

With the *Mitrophyllum* - these plants were coming to the end of the growing season and they were orange in colour. They almost feel like jelly sweets with soft flaccid stems. A new head will emerge from the swollen base. They found a different *Conophytum* and these ones seemed to prefer growing in a reddish brown substrate, in between the quartz patches. They were growing flat to the ground. Something had been nibbling them. You could see the similarity in the colour of the plant's body and the surrounding terrain. This was *Monilaria* - it is an unusual mesemb with stems with a pair of soft jelly like leaves at the tip - then in the dormant season they have brown stems around 1cm diameter. We could see their vehicle in the distance on the road - it was a Nissan.

There were 4 people in the group - him, Cliff Thompson, Eunice Thompson from California (she passed away last year) and Paul Klassen - a member of our branch but he is no longer able to drive or attend meetings. You could see the group hunting for plants in different directions which allowed them to find more things than all looking in the same area. These were *Tylecodons* and they might be like the ones Tom asked about earlier. They often have more going on underground than above the ground - many have big swollen roots underground. This is *Tylecodon reticulata* which would be grass green in this country - but it had red tips here. You could see the remains of the inflorescence, which forms a barbed wire-like protective network over the plant when the structures harden and dry. Another *Adromischus* had flatter wider leaves.

See these flower stems - does anyone recognise what it is? It was a haworthia and this was *Haworthia arachnoidea*. There were a few dotted around here, in the same area where they had found the *C. alstonii*. There were some flowers at the top of the spike and seed pods were developing at the bottom so they had been pollinated. The plants were seeking protection from the heat of the sun so were growing under or besides rocks or shrubs. A tortoise had been having a munch on the *Tylecodon* leaves - it's surprising how they can clamber amongst the boulders.

Next was *Anacampseros baeseckei* or something similar - they were growing in little pockets in between the rocks and the plants were just an inch

or two across. A plant with spiral leaves looked like *Albuca spiralis* David mentioned *Cyrtanthus spiralis* but that usually has longer leaves. It was October and they carried on looking for plants.

They were now at the GPS location for the *Crassula suzannae* and David mentioned he had found *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis* at other places by accident - but *Crassula susannae* is very rare. The GPS said they were there and they looked for half an hour and found nothing, and some of the party wanted to look around at further distances, but David remained at the location and eventually saw some brown flower stems which he thought looked like *Crassula* flower stems. He got on his hands and knees and eventually found them. Only the tips of the leaves were barely visible, Cliff had a soft brush - and by brushing the fine grit away, they saw that the plants looked just like they do in cultivation. They moved the grit back after they finished photographing the plants. We saw his index finger in one picture for scale - the plants are tiny and buried in the grit - they were beautiful little plants. They didn't find any others in other area near this location and Chris Rodgers had reported the same.

For the second half of the talk, David said he was going to focus on some succulents in Mexico but he did have a few cacti to show us first. They were in Puebla, on the northern Oaxaca border, in an area where a lot of columnar plants grow. We saw some large *Cereus* plants with blue stems and David said these were *Pachycereus weberi* - we often see *Pachycereus pringlei* and *Pachycereus pectenboriginum* but you never see this in cultivation. It forms massive plants, it's a giant of a cactus and there was a picture later to show it was 7 or 8 times the height of John Pilbeam. David said the trunks are like rock hard wood. There is another *Cereus* growing here with massive stems and this is a plant you will not have heard of - it's called *Escontria chiotilla*. A third species was a *Neobuxbaumia* but he didn't have time to look up the name. It's an amazing area for *Cerei* and the views of the plants are breathtaking - there are millions of giant cacti in this area.

David said they passed through area while heading for somewhere else and it's odd how you'll see lots of these plants and then as the terrain changes you see a different species. Next was *Neobuxbaumia tetezo* - they generally grow as single stems until they get quite big and then they make a few side branches, but they are single stemmed until they get to a considerable height. It's a plant he had not heard of or seen in cultivation - it's not anything

special and being from Oaxaca or Puebla, it is also sensitive to low temperatures.

They were heading out from Tehuacán to go to Cuicatlán where there is a reserve to go and see one of two habitats of *Echeveria laui*. And the sign at the entrance to the reserve mentioned that *Mammillaria huitzilopochtli* also grows here. This was an exciting thing to go and see. He was travelling with John Pilbeam and Derek Bowdery, both of whom are sadly no longer with us. They were also with a Canadian couple who had retired and lived in Oaxaca City – they stayed with them and also travelled with them. The location is in the middle of nowhere in the valley of Tehuacán and you have to stay in chalets which are very sparse and full of mosquitos. They are not airtight since you need air movement due to the heat and they were sharing a room with 3 bunk beds in a dirt floored cabin and all you could hear all night long was the mosquitos.

To get to the habitat, you go to the reserve and follow a dirt path with a Mexican guide and it slopes down to a valley and at the bottom of the valley is a river and the Echeverias grow two thirds of the way down to the river - there must be moisture from the river helping the plants to establish and grow there.. As they made their way down, they did see a few other plants. This is a *Jatropha* (Euphorbiaceae) and many of the jatrophas are covered in hairs - and this was no exception – it is covered in bristles like a nettle but the rash and irritation is a 100 times worse – it causes terrible weeping blisters and sores and excruciating pain. They are best avoided - these plants are everywhere and you really need to be very careful to avoid touching them.

Also growing here was an Agave which is quite popular - *Agave macroacantha*. It is a variable plant and can be found with grey or blue or green leaves and also with short or long leaves. The compact forms which are blue are the most sought after ones – there ones were fairly large in comparison. You had to be careful as you walked by them since the leaf tips can tear into your shins. There were other agaves dotted around – he wasn't sure what this one was but it had a nice imprint of the leaves as they unfurl - on the older leaves, the imprint tends to fade away. As they got part way down, they started to see the *Mammillaria huitzilopochtli* plants - it is a relative of *Mammillaria crucigera*. And they also found *Agave titanota* - it is popular in cultivation because some cultivars have amazing bone like trim on the leaf edges. This was only a young plant. They found more *M. huitzilopochtli* - they were in the shade of shrubs and trees as they made their way down. He thought this was an Echeveria but they

decided it was a *Thompsonella* which is a member of the Crassulaceae - the young leaves are grey but the older leaves are tatty.

They found more examples of *M. huitzilopochtli* - the old one at the back was getting corky and brown at the base but the ones beneath it are younger seedlings, probably from the old plant. They saw more *Agave titanota* and also *Agave potatorum*, which also goes by the name *Agave verschaffeltii* - On the right a small *Mammillaria mystax* was growing here and David was surprised to see it here since it normally prefers to grow on flat terrain. In foreground looking dead is the resurrection plant, *Selaginella lepidophylla*. When watered these will unfurl and respond rapidly to moisture. They followed the path, and after 20 minutes (John was walking with a stick) they found the dense population of *Echeveria laui* - this is exactly where Lau and his explorers found this plant, some 20 or 30 years earlier.

The site had been kept secret - it was such a small area where they grow that one person could probably strip all the plants in less than a day. The plants here looked just like they do in cultivation - in good condition and with fat plump leaves covered in dense white farina - it is the finest of all the Echeverias. They were dotted around on the rock – this is a clue to cultivation since this species is more sensitive to overwatering than most of the other Echeverias – if it grows on rock it prefers free draining conditions. You get a build-up of the old dead leaves at the base of the stem, just like in cultivation. And there were signs of regeneration with small seedlings growing near the older plants. There was no sign of flowers - but Jim and Mary revisited the site and took some marvellous pictures of the same plants in flower in the following season. It was such a thrill to see these plants and in such good condition. They are growing alongside the *M. huitzilopochtli* and also there was a bromeliad here. Hechtias grow in Mexico (Dyckia are similar but are from South America) and they have sharp teeth on the leaf edges which are as effective as a saw blade and will rip you to shreds if you are not careful. The pictures make it look like the *Echeveria laui* are easily accessible but they are not - the plants are growing on a ledge and you have to use a long throw lens and it is quite difficult to take a steady photograph when you are trying to find a good angle.

They headed back and paused for a break in some shade - we saw pictures of them and of their Mexican guide and also Mary and Jim, the Canadian couple. The guide didn't speak any English but Jim

spoke some Mexican Spanish - Mary has lived there for 20 years but she hasn't learnt the language.

Now some of the other things they saw in Mexico. This is *Echeveria gibbiflora* - which is one of bigger growing Echeverias - it sends up this strong stem and it's the parent for many of the fancy frilly leaved cultivars - the plants with carbuncles and warts and strange carunculations on the leaves. It does grow to 2 feet tall and the stem is thicker than your thumb. Here they were growing on a steep rocky face rock in a valley in Puebla. Some were growing in the scrub and you only see the flower spikes and not the plant rosettes. There were some younger plants. The seeds are tiny and dust-like - they get lodged in the lichen and moss and which provide perfect conditions for the seeds to develop. Also growing on the rock was a sedum. The tall flower spike was at odds with the compact rosette. We saw *Echeveria gibbiflora* and you can see the patterning on the stems caused by the leaf scars of the old leaves detaching themselves.

In a different locality - in Sierra Juárez, there is a range of hills on the outskirts of Oaxaca City, Derek was seen photographing *Echeveria rosea* which has a semi-epiphytic habit. It has a distinctive tightly packed flower stem. It is hardy in our country and people in Cornwall can grow it successfully - it is widespread in Mexico and can be found in several states. These are the flower spikes - it has a tight flower spike with pointed flowers, unlike the bell shaped flowers of the regular Echeverias. David said his plant was in bud now. We saw Derek looking at some Echeveria's growing on a tiled roof - the plants were doing OK, unlike the roof which was crumbling and in need of repairs. Another echeveria was growing in different terrain - *Echeveria pinatorum* was growing on the roadside in the pine belt. As you make your way up the mountains, you go through deciduous trees like oaks and then find pines at higher altitudes. It's not one you will see in cultivation - because it is very difficult to grow in cultivation - it is a tuberous rooted Echeveria (there are just three of them.) David mentioned that John Pilbeam was sent two plants, and the first he kept on the dry side and it dried up - and the second he gave more water and it rotted - so he lost both plants in the first year. It is quite common in these habitats in Mexico.

Now they were in Sierra Mixteca, where there's some rocks and areas of moss and debris and detritus. Some unusual plants can grow there - we saw *Echeveria montana* - it always develops stems quickly and branches as well and gets to quite a size - we saw it with Mary's hand for scale. It was a fair sized rosette and was offsetting from the base. You

won't see it in collections except perhaps in specialist collections. A yellow flowered sedum was growing on the same rock, in dappled shade.

In a different locality with dry hillsides, there were some Agaves here. *Agave triangularis* had nice imprints on the leaves and also thorns on the leaves - it grows quite large so is not suitable for pot culture. The next plant was growing in someone's front garden - *Echeveria gibbiflora* - it was getting a bit more moisture and nutrition in a raised bed, the leaves were the size of a hand it had strong flower stems. We saw John Pilbeam on the left and Derek Bowdery on the right with a plant in the middle to provide an indication of how large and impressive it was. *Echeveria setosa* only grows in one large canyon in Oaxaca - there are multiple varieties - *E. setosa*, *E. setosa cilliata*, *E. setosa deminuta* (= *E. rundelli*) and *E. setosa oteroi*, and these all grow in various parts of the canyon but they only one found one variety, which seemed to be the type. All of them have the fine hairs on them.

Echeveria nodulosa has attractive markings and there is a selection called cv "Painted Beauty" which is popular in collections. This was similar with the purple trims and some marking on the leaf surface. David asked Roger and Linda if they remembered growing this - but they had forgotten - David said it was 20 years and they used to sell lots of it at Netley Show. When you are on the sunny side of a mountain, if you go to the other side there's often different plants growing there. He found *Pinguicula* - with the sticky leaves - these had the mature flat leaves and at end of the growing season they form a rosette of smaller leaves. And in middle of a pair of *Pinguiculas* was *Selaginella* - this one was green and unfurled and growing. You used to see it for sale but you don't see them now. The *Pinguiculas* are quite common in the southern parts of Mexico.

Echeveria gigantea stood out like a beacon in the sun - it has lovely pale grey blue leaves in this country but it doesn't have the red colouration achieved in habitat. Next was a member of the Agavaceae - but not an agave - it's a *Furcraea* which grows in the very south of Mexico and central America - they are cold sensitive plants and many can grow very large. *F. bedinghausii* (which this was) can grow to 30 or 40 feet tall - and *F. foetida* can form rosettes 20 feet across. Like agaves, they have sharp leaf tips. The unusual thing about them is that they always produce 100s or 1000s of bulbils (plantlets) when they flower, and these grow and spread easily, which some consider to be a nuisance.

Superficially similar is *Beaucarnea*, which is now called *Nolina*. The common one is the pony tail palm, *Nolina recurvata* but this was a finer leaved plant called *Nolina gracilis* – it's much slower growing. This was found in the same area as the forest of the columnar cacti.

A scenic view showed the hills in the distance – the roads are often only a single vehicle wide and hence tricky to navigate. This was found on a plateau they had reached – it was a *Senecio* – similar to *S. praecox* but he wasn't sure what it was. There were flat padded *opuntias* growing nearby. Near the *Senecio* was a oak tree with beautiful orchids in flower (probably *Laelia* species). Under the canopy of the tree were more orchids and *Tillandsias* and also Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*). They also saw some *Peperomias* and ferns as well. David said someone had travelled further south to the state of Vera Cruz and they said they saw trees covered in breathtaking displays of bromeliads, orchids, *peperomias* and ferns.

This was in the Sierra Mixteca - Derek was photographing *Echeverias* growing en masse. There is in the village with a wall covered in plants of *Echeveria secunda*. There's a picture in Pilbeam's *Echeveria* book of the wall with 1000s of plants all in flower. This was within a 100 yards of that wall. The plants were doing well and there was lots of regeneration with the young plants growing in the moss. There was another *Echeveria* alongside the *E. secunda* - and this is the flower but he didn't know what it was, and the rosettes were different from the *secunda*. Derek was trying to balance to take his picture and John had stuck his walking stick in Derek's back to support him - David said "Don't move" and took a picture – it's appeared in one of the books with the caption "The End". We saw *Echeveria rosea* again and this one was growing on the ground and growing well – quite often they grow on the trees.

In Hidalgo, they visited a famous locality called Mextitlán and this is where *Cephalocereus senilis*,

the old man cactus grows. It is only found at this one location. There were also some *sedums* growing here. There was a sprawling white flowered one – he didn't know the name, but Ray Stevenson the *sedum* expert would probably have known. Another *sedum* had a compact rosette and then produced a large spike – the leaves on the spike can also root and form plantlets.

They were looking along this road for *Echeveria sanchez-mejoradae* which had been found here - and they eventually found a nice population, growing in amongst other plants. There was moss and moisture around. There was an unwelcome critter too – a photographed a black snake with yellow bands – the only match in Mexico that I found suggested it might be the Mexican short-tailed snake. There were ferns growing here and a stream with a pool which is why everything was so lush. There were *pinguiculas* here and some with apparently blue flowers. We ended with a *Sedum* with white flowers and a *Hechtia* which had a tinge of reddish coloration.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday April 1st** and it will feature a talk on agaves which will be given by Keith Flanagan from Reading Branch.

He will be giving us a talk titled "Manageable Agaves" and this describe some of the smaller growing and miniature plants which we can hopefully easily grow in our greenhouses. Keith has been growing agaves for over 40 years and he has substantial experience of growing these plants.

Forthcoming Events

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)
Tue	1 st	Apr	Southampton	Manageable Agaves (Keith Flanagan)
Sat	12 th	Apr	Isle of Wight	Propagation of Cacti and Succulents
Sat	19 th	Apr	Portsmouth	Annual Branch Plant Auction

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