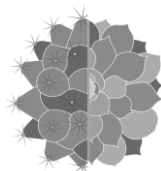


# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

May 2024



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## Editorial

Hopefully all of your plants are showing signs of growth. It will probably be sometime before I find out if the lighter roof in my conservatory allows more plants to flower. It certainly is nice for it still to be light at 8pm in the evening.

## Last Month's Meeting

On the day of the meeting, we had terrible weather with torrential rain and this probably discouraged people from venturing out. As a result the audience was smaller than one would have expected.

David reminded us that it would be the cultivation and propagation evening at next month's meeting. Please remember to bring in your plants of *Crassula 'Silver Spark'* (given out in 2023), *Rebutia perplexa* (2022), *Mammillaria plumosa* (2019). The plant which will be handed out at today's meeting is *Echinocereus reichenbachii* – David had managed to get a supply of 3 year old bare root plants from Southfield Nursery.

David also asked members to consider bringing along anything in their greenhouse showing buds and flowers. Cath would do a session on seed sowing and Ben would talk about composts and pesticides (to view the latest 7 page PDF guide from the RHS, search for "RHS pesticides"), and Richard would discuss heating and lighting. David also asked whether everyone had watered their plants. The answer seemed to be yes.

## American Shows, Nurseries and Collections

Cath introduced Stuart, who has spoken at our branch on a number of occasions. He also owns the Plantlife nursery in Eastbourne. Stuart would show

us some live plants in the first half of the talk and then show us some slides in the second half.

He said this would be a general talk on his American travels - if anyone had questions, please ask as we go along. He mentioned his interest in the hobby started when he went to a cactus show in Brighton in 1975, and got signed up to the society. After 2-3 years he thought it would be nice to have a holiday and go and see the plants in the wild. In the mid 1970s, Freddie Laker's Skytrain service had started up and air fares to the US had become more affordable. Although some people visited other countries with cacti, he felt it would be better to spend time in the States, where they speak the same language and you can get English-type food. He flew over to the States for a month and stayed with Betty Athy who lived in San Diego for a few days. *Lithops aucampiae* "Betty's Beryl" is named after her.

He went to see a cactus show which gave him a taste of how things are organised there. In those days, there was no email so communication was the old fashioned way, with pen and paper. While there he met another person - Woody Minnich - who told him he could come back over and stay with him. Woody is an influential member of the American CSSA and does talks and visits localities to explore habitat plants. He has also designed some of their show trophies and apparently has also produced CDs for Kenny Rogers. At the time he owned a cactus nursery outside Los Angeles. He showed Stuart some nurseries and they visited a few habitats and Stuart has also done trips to California and xico with him. Stuart is also named on Woody's his wedding certificate! He said he has learnt a lot from Woody,, and he was a good photographer too. Woody told him at least 50% of a talk should be entertaining. Stuart managed to get the BCSS to invite Woody to speak at a convention at Reading a few years ago and he got a standing ovation there. Stuart said he used to go over to the US every two years, since 1978 it was in the even numbered years. As their children grew up, they also took them over and this was helpful since he got to use the extra luggage allowance. He was bringing back lots of plants, always with the right paper work, and he

reckoned he could get 500 plants into a single trunk. Once the children grew up, he started to go every year and treated the visits as a semi cactus trip and semi holiday.

The plants he had brought along were some of the plants he had brought back from the US in the last few years. First was a nice variegated Agave - created by tissue culture. they were propagated by a nursery in Minnesota called Shady Oaks and they were created in sterile conditions with no soil, the young plants were lightweight so easy to bring back. Shady Oaks also grew Hostas, and unfortunately the demand for those increased and they stopped growing the Agaves which was a shame. The variegated ones are trickier to grow but this nursery knew how to do it. The plant he had was of Japanese origin with the name translating as "Queen of the white thread".

A nursery he has been to quite a lot is Altmans - they grow plants in wholesale quantities for stores in the US such as Walmarts and Home Depot (the equivalents of our Tesco and B&Q). The plants feature a characteristic plant label providing some basic cultivation information. 2 people work there full time producing new plant varieties. He had brought *Echeveria "Pink Diamond"* with a pink tinge to the leaves. They do get plant breeders rights but because it costs more for a world license, they normally only get them for the US, so people in other countries can propagate these plants. *Aeonium "Mardi Gras"* with three different colours in the leaves was grown by them 10 years ago and it's not that stable but the Koreans have grown quite a few variants of this plant.

A small *Adromischus* plant (a cross of *Adromischus marianiae* 'Herrei') was next and Stuart explained that a few years ago it was like the dutch tulip craze, and the price of some of these plants shot up, there was high Chinese demand for them and they were selling for ridiculous prices, sometimes in 4 figures. This only lasted for a few months, but a few people took advantage of it. He had a plant on Ebay which started at £2.50 and the price went to £7,000 and then £7005. The winner did not pay up, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> placed bidder was quite happy to pay the £7000. The buyer was interested to buy more, so Stuart sent him a picture of had in stock and he received a reply with plants circled - but it was difficult to know how much to charge. Stuart showed another *Adromischus* from Steve Hammer and the leaves of this were selling for several hundred pounds each. The demand for these has died down now.

Someone he goes to see for one day during his trips is Steve Hammer. He said the nursery is a bit of a mess since plants are not priced or labelled - so you just tell him how much you want to spend and what you like, and he will pick out the plants for you. For \$200, you get a cereal box of plants at the end of the day. He showed a Lithops plant he had got from him - it was a lithops with two different coloured heads, one was gray and the other one was pink. When he got it, it was a single head but after the second head formed he saw that the heads were different colours. It has some slug damage but the good things about lithops is that the damage should disappear after a year of growth since the heads renew themselves.

We would see Miles Anderson later - Stuart mentioned he had been paid to write a book on Cacti and it's a good beginner's book. Miles owns a nursery near Tucson in Arizona and he is particularly good at growing *Astrophytums*. He can't grow them very well, but he should repot his plants more often as he revealed that this *A. scapharostrus* hybrid had been underpotted and had managed to burst a BEF pot which are known to be very tough.

Somewhere he visits every year when in the US is the Huntington (The Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens) which is situated at Pasadena, near Los Angeles. The main building is an old house that has been turned into an art gallery, and it houses a fantastic library and collection of pictures. The person who established it is Henry Huntington who made his money on the railroads. The cactus landscapes are obviously good for us, but they also have a Chinese garden and Japanese garden. There are a couple of people working there producing new plants and the Huntington also distributes plants via the ISI (Succulent Plant Introduction) programme. Karen Zimmerman produces some of the new Aloe hybrids and she gave a good talk at the Haworthia Convention last year, where she described the process. This particular plant was called Aloe "Corduroy" and the leaves do indeed look like corduroy. The plants they distribute don't all have to be hybrids - *Aloe castilloniae* is an attractive plant from Madagascar which they issued. For tissue culture. you need a bit of material from the centre of the plant. It would be good if someone did a tissue culture talk - the only person he's seen do one is Robert Wellens from Belgium, but he seems to have disappeared. This plant was tissue cultured and it doesn't need much heat, it can be grown at 2°C-3°C.

He himself started off as a collector then started to propagate the plants. The next group of plants he

showed first turned up in Asia and then made it to the States. These were *Astrophytum*s with strange growths between the ribs. The growing point doesn't show signs of anything strange. These examples were obtained from Miles Anderson and apparently they also come true from seed. They are all works of art but strange looking and not to everyone's taste.

The next plant looked like it could be a branch raffle prize. It was from the Huntington and looked like a boring *Echinopsis*. However, a fellow called Bob Schick gave his collection of *Echinopsis* hybrids to the Huntington and every year they featured 50 plants to distribute and they included a few of Bob's hybrids. This was started some 20 or 30 years ago, and there's more than 120 names hybrids which have been released. There's a collector's set mentality and some people want them all. They have large multicoloured flower and there is a view of them on the Huntington website. They were sold for only a few dollars each. Stuart mentioned there are Facebook groups exchanging cuttings. Southfields sell similar plants they created and they are just as good. Stuart said on Ebay some people were paying £70 or £80 for a single plant, and you don't even know it's the correct plant until it actually flowers. and people who had the set then had had to get a new one if it came out in the future. The latest introduction was "For Norma" and it was described as a gloriously large flower, to 12 cm (5") across, dominated by orangish-pink tones (though these can be delicate, paler pink in warmer conditions) fading to pastel yellow at the base of the petals. Stuart said people were paying silly prices for this.

Now to look at some Aloe hybrids. These were first created by Kelly Griffin, who does work with Altmans. He first created something call "Pink Blush" which was small and nicely coloured, and he has created dozens of nice varieties, including "Christmas Carol" followed by "Christmas Sleigh" – the latter has darker leaves and bright red teeth on the edges of the leaves. Stuart said he grows these in pumice and he also grows *Haworthia* and *Gasteria* in pumice. He used to used to buy the pumice from Bob Potter and bought 20 bags from him, which should last a while. These aloes didn't root very well in normal compost but they seem much happier in the pumice. *Haworthias* don't seem to lose their roots when grown in the pumice - they root better and grow better. Pumice has no nutrient in it, so if you use it, you will need to feed occasionally, he said he feeds only 2-3 times a year.

Next was one of Steve Hammer's plants – it was a variegated form of *Haworthia truncata* – when he

got it, there was a small streak of variegation present, but when it started forming offsets they had different amounts of variegation on them. One of the offsets was yellow and had no strength to it and it rotted off in the winter. If you have a bag of "flowers of sulphur", you can paint this on, it stops the rot spreading. However he hasn't been able to buy it recently and Ben thought it might have been banned. Tom said that garden centres used to sell it for overwintering dahlias. The old metaldehyde slug pellets were banned in 2022, and the replacement don't seem to work as well.

Stuart said he now tends to photograph things using his phone and the pictures are as good as a proper camera. Next was a plant of *Agave isthmensis* – this was bought in the States. It stays nice and small and offsets quite well but the offsets grow above the base so need to take care when removing them. They occasionally throw up an offset with yellow stripes in the leaves and everyone seems to want that one. It's an attractive plant and he has never seen it flower. Whilst in Home Depot he found a plant of *Haworthia magnifica splendens* with an Altmans label on it. It was probably tissue cultured and not the sort of thing you'd expect to find in a DIY garden centre. He also showed a *Crassula argentea* cultivar, with nice yellow variegation – this is also known as the money plant.

Now for some other bits and pieces he came across. He went to Miles Anderson a few years ago and he had large *Ariocarpus retusus* cristates on his large stock plants. Stuart wanted one and Mile said they always revert to the normal form so he gave him a piece. Stuart cut it into 8 or so pieces and although most did revert, one stayed in a 2 inch pot and it hasn't reverted yet – it is grafted and sitting on a piece of *Echinopsis* underneath.

A tiny *Gasteria* from Steve Hammer had a foreign name - *Gasteria cv. Sakura Fuji* – it's a fairly slow grower. A Dutch nursery also seems to supply the plant. He was growing it in pumice and he did mention he doesn't know where to get this these days. One of Tesco's cat litters was made from pumice and Euro Car Parts also used to sell a material for dealing with oil spills which was made from a suitable pumice. Pumice is more widely used on the Continent and Specks used to grow all his plants in it.

*Echeveria "Irish Mist"* was also an Altmans plant. Stuart said customs had made it more difficult to bring plants back because of how they can make you wait for up to 4 hours to check the plants and parking for a taxi is not cheap. So sometimes he

now posts smaller things back to himself and this was one of them. A plant he did bring back through customs was a dinner plate sized burgundy *Sempervivum*. Unfortunately it died after flowering, but he has a couple of offsets left.

We resumed the second half of the talk, and this was now a slide show. Stuart said that 2008 was the first year he took digital pictures. When you fly, no one seems to look out of the window, but he showed some interesting shots of Greenland and some glaciers. Approaching their landing you could see the Hoover Dam and how the road had been changed after 9/11, Looking into the distance you see Las Vegas from 20 miles away. Next, a rock bridge in Utah was used to frame a *Sclerocactus* plant. He visited an Arizona slot canyon – there's a small gap between the rocks but the views and colours inside are amazing. Just make sure it isn't going to rain was his advice.

Woody used to live in Little Rock just outside Los Angeles and he then moved to New Mexico – it was a 800 mile drive and something he could do in a day. He owned a nice house with a few acres of land now. The Brexit vote was something that Stuart remembers while watching TV at his house. Everything in the house is connected to his trips and he likes to bring different mementos back. It's like an art gallery. We saw some stylised Baobab trees from Madagascar and fossilised dinosaur eggs – this must have been very heavy and it was a topic featured in the National Geographic a few years ago. there. everything in his house is connected to his trips. brings different things back. like a little art gallery. He had bonsai blocks of the rocks he has brought back on different trips to different countries and this is known as "Suiseki" by the Japanese.

In his garden there was an *Opuntia* in flower and we could also see the skeleton that would be left by the plant in due course. He has several acres of back garden and it's nothing like a neat English garden. There was a plant of *Echinocereus triglochidatus* there but the buds were not ready to open. When Woody moved from California to New Mexico, he got a nursery to buy all his plants and take them off his hands but he did keep a few of them. We saw a *Uebelmannia pectinifera* which was a lovely 9 headed plant – it must have been damaged when young, normally it grows into a columnar plant. There was some unusually coloured top dressing on the plant and Stuart mentioned how Woody had once collected grit from an ants net and collected it in a jam jar.

The South Coast Botanic Garden was a 3-4 mile drive from his place and we saw *Agave ovatifolia*. Here there were also unusual sculptures of a shark, penguins, and an eagle dotted around. These were made from plastics washed up from the ocean and in different colour combinations - some were large and 10 feet tall. A *Trichocereus* hybrid had a fantastic flower. They are very dull when not in flower but the amazing blooms on them can be 10 inches across. *Furcraea foetida mediopicta* is a member of the Agave family and this plant had nice variegation. They are however cold sensitive so not good in our collections. He showed a picture of his blue rental car and mentioned how glad he was to have it, since it was easy to spot in a car park easily.

The Las Vegas High Roller is the equivalent of the London Eye. They normally visit this on Jane's birthday. It has 28 pods but one is different, it has a bar in it, and drinks are free during one revolution of the wheel. A cactus nursery just outside Las Vegas selling plants for people gardens. If plants had been collected from habitat, they have a special tag that certifies it is legally for sale. He saw some nice agaves. There was a variegated one in a huge pot, and it weighed a ton. but he bought it and found it had 10 variegated offsets on it. *Yucca brevifolia* is the Joshua Tree and the forms just outside Las Vegas are a more compact form but seeds are normally all eaten by parasites.

Beatty is a small settlement around 100 miles north of Las Vegas. The population of a few hundred people and it has more donkeys than people. They stayed at place called the Atomic Inn and there was a nice plant of *Echinocactus polycephalus* growing there. The nearest shopping centre is in Las Vegas and the local convenience store was incredibly expensive. A nearby place was labelled the "Angel's Ladies" brothel. The person who owned the place put a mattress out there and said if anyone landed and survived, they could have preferential rates. Someone did survive the fall but the plane crashed and it's been left there ever since. Beatty is just outside Death Valley - so it's a site people stay at if they want to visit. Zabriskie Point has some good views of the landscape in Death Valley – the lowest point is 282 feet below sea level and there was a sign up in the hills saying "sea level".

We saw more examples of *Echinocactus polycephalus*. you never see it for sale or on the show bench and it doesn't grow easily from seed. It looks like a multi-headed Ferocactus and has fantastic spine colour on new growth. It is difficult to keep alive and only seen it for sale as grafted

plants. He found some seedlings there. He also saw *Echinocactus grusonii*.

At Rhyolite, which was a ghost town, this had been abandoned around 100 years ago. A house which does survive there was built from over 50,000 beer bottles. A "beware of the ----" sign had been broken so one wondered was the danger was but I think it was bears. He did visit Bearizona which is a Drive-thru Wildlife Park in Arizona. You can buy bear deterrent in Costco stores in the States but one wonders how you find out whether it will work or not. Another quirky thing about the USA is that diesel is dispensed from a green pump and petrol from a black pump – this is the opposite to us and Europe and very confusing.

The American Show is always held at the Huntington. Money is usually no object, you pay \$30 to wander the gardens and also view the other parts of the collection. It is planted out with *Echinocactus grusonii*, *Agave parryi truncata* and there was a ridiculously large *Echinocactus grusonii* – it might have been a damaged seedling because it does not normally cluster like that. The Art collection houses Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" and they have an extensive collection of British original including one of Shakespear's original works.

The creeping devil plant *Stenocereus eruca* was planted out in the Baja section of the garden. At the cactus show, the sellers don't have to do any work – all the plants are barcoded and they are just scanned at the exit and the nurserymen get their money (less 50% commission!). Stuart showed us some of the prize-winning plants. They gather all the first prize winners and put them in a different area. A pot is very important in the American show and Stuart showed a plant of *Echinocactus polycephalus* which had won best of show but he said he would not have placed it – there were no signs of new growth on it at all – it should have nice red spines. He mentioned he has judged at their show once, but hasn't been asked again. *Dorstenia gypsophila* was in flower. *Buiningia brevicylindrica* had won a trophy that looked like a toilet bowl!

*Adromischus herrei* is one of the nice ones to grow and as long as it doesn't get damp in the winter it should be fine. On the trophy tabl was a clump of *Leuchtenbergia* – this is normally solitary but this had multiple heads. *Pseudolithos cubiformis* was only a few inches across and had won a trophy in the form of a Viking helmet which was 5 times the size of the plant. We saw Woody's drawing for "Best Ariocarpus". A *Yucca endlichiana* plant had a rough feel to it and it was in a plastic pot and it had

been awarded a prize for best plant in a plastic pot. We saw a picture of Louise Guerin and Karen Zimmerman who work at the Huntington.

Everywhere you stay in Arizona has to have a Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) outside and we saw this at a Best Western motel. Something else we grow in our collections but never see it very large is *Pachypodium lameri* - it flowers and branches and eventually grows into a tree.

He doesn't collect plants from habitat but one exception is *Opuntia pads*. *Opuntia santarita* has purple joints but in this country the sun is not strong enough to form the purple colour. We also saw *Ferocactus wislizeni* with yellow buds and red flowers – this is pictured on the back of his van. We saw a hummingbird and after 10 attempts managed to get a picture of it.

We saw his visit to Miles Anderson – in the US you can buy personalised number plates for a just a few dollars and he had registered zero-phyte. A picture of Mile's son was out of date, he must be 10 or 11 years old now. Miles is very good at growing *Ariocarpus* – these specimens looked like habitat plants but they had been grown from seed and were mainly *A. fissuratus*. He saw a white edged *Agave victoria reginae* there and learnt that the plants stop producing offsets after a few years, so large plants are unlikely to offset. *Agave potatorum* "Cubic" has two rows of spines on the back of leaves but he didn't notice this until he was back home. He asked if he could have an offset and was told it had been sold to someone from Korea.

He showed what happens at a motel when he unputs the plants for packing – there is a load of excess soil so he puts it on any plants he finds. The Tucson Society has 760 members and half turn up for talks, so it was a huge audience of 350 people and there was also a huge amount of food. At Altmans they have a number of locations in different places. He showed us the retail section at one in Southern Arizona and Kelly Griffin who works for Altmans.

He got *Kalanchoe daigremontiana* (variegated) with no chlorophyll so the offsets which drop from the leaves will not survive. We also saw *Echeveria* "Angel Kissed" and *Tacisedum* "Solar Flare". For \$7 you can get a pot full of Sedums and Echeverias and the like. We saw the giant dinner plate sized *Sempervivum*.

At another cactus show at the San Diego branch, there were a lot of tourists. There was hardly a plastic pot in sight. He saw a strange *Agave*

*potatorum* “Toothless” with no teeth to the leaves apart from spine tip. There were almost as many places selling pots as plants. We saw a \$100 round pot so they were not cheap. There were top cuts of *Trichocereus pachanoi* with some fancy names and these were \$200 or more, and \$50 for the smallest one. We saw a picture of Woody and Miles Anderson looking at sales plants, and also *Agave victoria reginae* “White rhino”

He sees Steve Hamer for just a day. Hje has learnt a lot from him. Glottiphyllums which are boring in this country were fantastic there with nice colours to them. Some haworthias were more or less haworthias that are more or less unpropagatable but they had nice variegation on them. *Crassula fragarioides* was in a 3 inch pot. *Aloe* “Pink Blush”, and *Aloe* “Green Sand” grown in the Californian sun had fantastic texture and colour.

Ocotillo Wells is a day trip from San Diego. There are large collections of rustic dinosaurs which were donated and placed in the village. A cristate agave was part of a municipal planting – he saw it every year for 10 years but it has now dried up.

At Encinitas in California, at an empty building plot, plants had been planted out and small stones laid out and painted in different colours with succulents being grown between them. We saw Los Angeles airport which has an expensive circular restaurant on a tower.

Flying back, why was there duct tape on the wings? We saw a view of London on the approach, and a view of the Thames and Big Ben and the London Eye and also Battersea power station, followed by a view over Kew where the glass houses were visible.

*Vinay Shah*

## Next Month's Meeting

Our next branch meeting will be held on 4<sup>th</sup> June. David will send out an email (and we will update the branch website) as soon as we know.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 11 <sup>th</sup> May	Isle of Wight	Cultivation – Vicky Davis
Sat 18 <sup>th</sup> May	Portsmouth	Social Evening
Tue 4 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Southampton	Title/Speaker – TBC
Sat 8 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Isle of Wight	Fraileas and all that Jazz – Stephen Woods
Sat 15 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Portsmouth	Mini-Show and Judging – Bill Darbon
Tue 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jul	Southampton	Title/Speaker – TBC

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