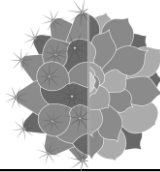


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

April was our second meeting after two years and we had a similar number of people attend again. As before, a few members were absent but we do hope to see them at future events.

Announcements

Don't forget to **renew** your BCSS membership – this can be done using the renewal form included with the December Journals or also using Paypal or a credit card at the BCSS website, at: <http://society.bcsc.org.uk/index.php/subscriptions.html> (if renewing online you'll need to know your BCSS membership number, this is written on the address label of your Journal – David and I also have a list of membership numbers for current members).

Last Month's Meeting

David kicked off the meeting with some brief updates. Glenn Finn had decided to take a holiday at short notice and hence wouldn't be at today's meeting. Paul Whitlock had agreed to stand in for him in the kitchen, but some additional help would be appreciated. Our chairman Adrian Bailey still has some medical issues while he is waiting for a procedure on his eye, but he hopes to be able to attend a meeting soon. Bruce Beckerleg's bad back has not cleared up as yet - and Robin Caddy was missing due to not being well. David also mentioned that for the National Society, a new chairman - Gregory Bulmer has been appointed, following the recent vote.

For the June meeting, David said he will not be present, but he wanted to arrange to hand over the spare keys to the meeting hall to ensure others would take care of opening and closing the hall. Jane Williams agreed to be here around 7pm to open up the hall.

Richard said that normally at this point he would introduce the speaker for the meeting and for today, it would be David Neville who would be doing most of the talking. David did mention that he had hoped for more volunteers to cover various topics but only a few people had brought along plants and other materials for discussion. In most people's collections, there should be fair amount of material starting to come into flower, but it does also depend on the amount of sunshine that enters the greenhouse - shadier locations will tend to flower later. Richard mentioned that if a plant is actually struggling to grow, it might be stressed into flowering (and try to produce seeds)

David said he went up to Spalding to sell plants at the Spalding Cactus Mart a couple of weeks ago, and he paid a visit to Southfield Nurseries while up there. Everything was in full flower at the nursery and there were thousands of Rebutias and Sulcorebutias and Mammillarias in flower. Tom Radford mentioned that the eastern part of the country often has more sunshine than the west or the centre of the country.

A few different composts had been brought in. David said that the commonest mixtures tend to be based on John Innes straight from the bag perhaps mixed with grit or pumice for additional drainage. David pointed to his own mix and said that it might vary based on what he could buy, but it tends to be 1/3 peat based compost (levington) 1/3 loam or top soil and 1/3 aggregate which is mix of cornish grit, perlite and cat litter. He doesn't have a collection of large plants any more and most of his plants are growing in small pots - these are perhaps only 2 inch or 3 inch or 3.5 inch in size and these can dry out in just a single day in the summer. Larger pots can hold more moisture and can go quite a bit longer before they need watering.

The cat litter he used is Tesco's "low dust cat litter" and it costs £4.25 for 10 litres from Tesco at present. It is important to check the different cat litters which are on sale since only a few - those which are based on molar clay - are suitable for our hobby. Cat litter based on paper or similar materials will just turn into a soggy mess and won't be suitable. The Tesco

material has changed consistency and is now a larger grade than it used to be but the actual material seems to be the same. A company called Euro Car Parts also sell "all purpose absorbent granules" which are similar to the Tesco granules and these were at the price of £8.99 for 20L although it currently is out of stock and they might be switching to a new product called Isol8 which seems completely different (and is more than twice the price).

Perlite is cheaper than the cat litter and 100 litres can be bought for just over £20. Of course perlite is very light and Richard mentioned that compost with a high proportion of perlite can make pots easier to topple over. When questioned about the molar clay granule size, David didn't think that the size mattered too much as long as it's not as fine as sand. Richard mentioned that the grit is not there in the compost just for water to drain through - as the water drains out, the air comes in the gaps in the compost. Toby had brought along a bag of drainage material which seemed to be quite good and Toby mentioned it is available in larger bags as well.

A member from the audience said they had built a new rockery and they had gone to their Blue Diamond garden centre, in the landscaping area they were able to buy large bags of grit which was around £5 a bag - it seemed to be available in both washed and unwashed grades. Although the grit does not really need to be washed, if you are going to use it for top dressing, then perhaps you will want the washed version.

Another question from the audience was "is it OK to mix smashed terracotta pots into the compost?" The material would be quite durable and it shouldn't be sharp enough to cause any damage to roots. Mark had brought in a mix which David thought looked like rubble - it consisted of chippings and ericaceous compost and cat litter - David commented there didn't look to be too much organic material there. It is possible to grow plants in 100% inert materials, but you do need to be careful with feeding and providing nourishment for the plants. Ernst Specks in Germany used to grow all of his exotic plants in pumice. And some people who grow Haworthias also grow their plants in 100% inert materials. Mark asked David to check the bottom of pot and all the holes were blocked up. Mark said he hated compost falling out of pots and landing on the floor so he placed a disc of garden weed suppressant material in the bottom of the pot, and this prevented the soil from coming out of the pots. The material can easily be cut with a scissor. Katherine had a very fine mix and said she had been growing seedlings - she also had brought some small pots - these were the

containers from a chocolate desert sold by Sainsburys. Another mix on the table consisted of peat-free compost and sharp sand perlite and grit.

The formula for John Innes specifies peat and this is due to be banned from 2024. David didn't know what would happen when that legislation kicked in. It was already difficult enough to find good quality John Innes and this will complicate matters further. David said he had bought some Westland compost and it was quite sticky and mouldy and he wasn't sure how suitable it would be for our plants. Mark said he got some Westland top soil and it seemed to have less bark in it and it wasn't full of clay either. David said he uses that too. Toby had also brought along a grit mix (which was sold at the place where he works and he found it quite useful) - I think it was called "Earth and Green Horticultural Potting Grit". Amelia had also brought along a gritty mix which she uses for all her Echeverias. David said those plants are quite tolerant and don't really need it but he agreed that for most people it is easier to use the same mix for everything. Jane mentioned she uses a mix of orchid compost (which contains bark) and a cactus soil for her Epiphyllums. Richard had brought some epiphytic cacti and we would discuss them later.

If you grow anything then you do need to feed the plants and this is even more important for plants grown in material like pumice. You can water your plants with feed at any watering in the summer months. Some people say you should use a low nitrogen fertiliser or dilute the feed, but Cliff Thompson is one of the best growers in the locality and he uses Miracle-Gro at full strength and it has no adverse affect on his plants.

David had asked for problem plants and only one had been brought in by Robert - it was an Alluardia - which comes from Madagascar. The top of the plant looked dead and he thought that when he bought the plant, it looked like the top might have been crushed in the post. At the time, the plant was also devoid of any leaves. David said the top was definitely damaged and that could be cut off. The plants will leaf up easily in the presence of moisture - they have deciduous annual leaves which come and go with the presence or absence of moisture. David had wondered whether the plant might have been kept too cold in the winter (they prefer 12 °C). Also, if it's been kept too warm it can dehydrate but that seemed to be unlikely to be the problem here. Removing the top of the damaged stem should encourage it to produce more stems/offshoots and it should result in a bushier and more manageable plant.

Richard provided some information on some epiphytes he had brought in. He grows a few different types and he mentioned they don't like their roots to dry out. They also need good drainage. He uses ericaceous compost mixes and mixes in some perlite. They also don't like to be in the sun continuously, so he tries to hang them in a position where they will get some sun for part of the day. He said he was happy with his Epiphyllums, but he has more trouble with the Aporocacti / Aporophyllums - and he wondered if anyone had any advice about how to grow them. Tom Radford said he had grown some of the species before and found that they didn't like a lot of sun. Shading them improved their flowering but it also caused them to etiolate. In full sun the plants look better but they perhaps dry out much more and flower less well. David said that on one of his trips to Southern Mexico, near Oaxaca he saw a Aporocactus growing on a oak tree and there was also moss growing on the tree. There were orchids and bromeliads and peperomias all growing together. There was some cloud formation there each day which would have provided some moisture for these plants.

Richard said some of the older books discuss the acidity of the compost. Some of the epiphytes prefer acidic compost but some of the plants from Mexico prefer extra lime in the form of gypsum to mimic the habitats they grow in.

It was nearing the end of the first half of the meeting and David started to assign names to some of the plants which had been brought in to be named. *Mammillaria plumosa* is easy to identify and this was one of the free plants handed out by the branch in previous years. Peter Down had brought in a Thelocactus - David said this plant was previously called *T. lloydii* but might now be considered a form of *Thelocactus hexaedrophorus*. Next was *Notocactus apricus* or *coccineus*. Peter had brought in a Mesemb which had mysteriously appeared in his collection - it might be a *Bergeranthus*. Next was a *Acanthocalycium* - perhaps *violaceum*. These plants come from Argentina. Next was a *Sulcorebutia* and this plant should have vivid flowers. It might be *S. mentosa* - David suggested taking pictures of the flowers and that will aid in the identification. Next was an *Echinopsis*, perhaps *E. aurea* - but it could also be a hybrid. The next plant was a *Lobivia* - they have hairy / furry buds, although perhaps this one wasn't ready to flower this year. Richard had also brought in a plant for identification and also repotting - - but due to Glenn's absence that would have to wait for a future meeting. Richard mentioned some of his labels had faded. Possible species that were mentioned were *M. chionacepahala* and *M. haageana*. The plant was

probably 15-20 years old. As the first half ended, David reminded members to collect the free plant of *Rebutia perplexa* that was being handed out at this meeting.

The second half commenced with Amelia describing her propagation of succulent plants from leaves. Not all plants will propagate from leaves - *Aeoniums* won't - and *Cotyledons* are difficult. *Agaves*, *Sempervivum*, *Haworthia* and *Senecios* also don't seem to propagate readily from leaves. She had the most success with *Pachyveria*, *Graptoveria* and *Echeveria*. With *Echeverias* it does depend on the particular species.

Amelia said there is a tendency to sell variegated leaves but you should avoid these - it's quite rare get a variegated leaf to lead to a variegated plant - and if you want a variegated plant, you are much better off starting with a variegated cutting or an offset. some Kalanchoes form pups on the ends of their leaves and these are very easy to pot up.

Her general tips were to pick a pick a leaf that is nice and plump - not dehydrated. The best way is to pick something from the bottom of the plant, twist it from side to side to pull the leaf away from the stem. They have a growth bud on the leaf and it's this that will grow into the new plant. The leaf can be left on a flat tray - you only need to think about introducing some compost when roots start to appear. She tends to leave the leaves flat on a tray until the mother leaf has withered away. She's had *Adromischus* which did nothing for 18 months before eventually forming a new leaf. In this type of case it may be best to buy a young plant. *Adromischus clavifolius* had formed a new plant - this can be taken off and the original leaf can be used for another attempt.

Other techniques she has used include head chopping. or coring. and this can be used for forming new plants too, although you may want to practice before you try some of the more extreme methods. One of her leaf props had decided to form two plants - one pointing up and one pointing down.

A question from the audience - do you water them when they are small? Amelia said she put them into cell trays and starts watering - she rarely pots them up if the mother leaf is still plump. She uses a long nose squirt bottle to introduce water around the base of the plant.

Another question - do you use hormone rooting powder? The answer was no - there's no real need to do so. Some people do use cinnamon as a anti-fungal compound. "Flowers of sulphur" is also

another anti-fungal compound that has anti-fungal properties - it is available in both yellow or green colours.

Next David Neville talked about some cuttings he had taken a year ago. The tray was full of leaves of *Adromischus* - *A. festivus* and *A. cooperi* are generally easy and will easily propagate. There was hardly a failure in his first tray. However this other tray contained *Pachyphyum oviferum* - and you could see that the success rate was quite a bit lower. *Adromischus trigynus* has a flat leaf and also has a low success rate. David said different people have different success with *Echeverias*. Even the choice *Echeveria laui* can be propagated from leaves. John Pilbeam developed a technique whereby individual *echeveria* leaves would not root - but if you use a sharp knife to get a small sliver of stem at the end of the leaf cutting then the chances improve.

Amelia mentioned that Barbara Hawkins had managed to get *Aeonium nobile* to root from a leaf. A further discussion ensued, and another technique was to remove the centre out of a plant stem and cut the leaves off with a piece of stem.

Next, Ted Smith discussed growing lithops from seed. He used a polythene bag to seal up a pot with soil in the bag. He sterilises the soil first by heating it in a pan - alternatives are pour boiling water onto the soil or to microwave the soil. We saw some seeds which has been planted in February. He had also planted the free seeds given away at the last meeting and these were starting to come up.

Once they germinate you do need to admit some air. The next pot was society seed - planted in August 2020. These plants will take 3-4 years to form adult plants. Ted showed Ivor's seed spreader - this was used to sow the seeds and spread them over the compost. With lithops seed pods they are tightly shut but you can get them to open by placing water on the capsule. It will open within a few minutes and you can shake the seed out. Lithops seed last many years - they can easily survive 10 years.

We saw new leaves coming through on *Lithops psuedotruncatella*, and *L. bromfieldii*. You can remove the old leaves eventually once they have dried.

We looked at one of the free plants handed out in previous years - it was *Mammillaria plumosa* - and Mark and Sharon had brought in their plants from 2019. Mark's was in a 5 inch pot and Sharon's needed to be potted up - both look healthy.

Mark has also brought in a collection of different mesembs all grown from seed. We saw *Faucaria*, and a *Pleiospilos* was flowering early. David said these have a coconut and germolene scent. Their leaves don't dry out like *Lithops*. *Argyroderma* always looks beautiful with pale greeny blue coloured skin. *Cheiridopsis pillansii* forms spectacular plants in habitat. We also saw *Lapidaria margaretae*. Most mesembs are very sensitive to overwatering but *Faucaria* are not, they are easier to grow. *Trichodiadema densum* has purple pink flowers which close up at night. We also saw a *Glottiphyllum*.

Toby had brought in a *Haworthia* in flower - the flowers are not that exciting and the height of the flower stems depends on the species. It was perhaps a form of *Haworthia retusa* - 6 rosettes and each had produced flower spike.

Mark Roberts asked if anyone had propagated *Sansevierias* using the technique of water. He mentioned he learnt about it accidentally when his wife had got him a plant and he had put a damaged leaf in some water - it formed lots of roots within days. He had also bought a collection off Ebay and the seller had done some work with propagation in water. Every *Sansevieria* species he has tried has worked.

We ended with some more flowering plants. *Parodia chrysacanthion* is one of the earliest to flower and it comes from Argentina. It usually remains solitary. makes a head up to 8 inches across. forms white fluff in the centre of the body and forms clumps of yellow flowers. *Mammillaria carmenae* was rediscovered and this form grows a taller head almost like it is a cliff dweller. It's a plant that can be stroked without any problems. *Mammillaria glassii f. ascensionis* - was a plant we handed out in 2014. These are more attractive than the original form. It is easy to grow and is never going to get very large. *Mammillaria zeilmanniana* was a plant that Tom had brought in - he mentioned it was a stray seedling that he found growing in the pot of another plant he had bought a couple of years ago. Finally were some *Echeverias* from Katherine - David said it was difficult to name them since they might be hybrids or cultivars.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on July 5th and it will feature a talk from Portsmouth member Cliff Thompson who will talk about "Cactus Hunting in northern Peru".

Forthcoming Events

Sat 11 th Jun	Isle of Wight	Trees (Gill Salter)
Sat 18 th Jun	Portsmouth	Mammillarias of north-west Mexico (Chris Davies)
Tue 5 th Jul	Southampton	Cactus Hunting in northern Peru (Cliff Thompson)
Sat 9 th Jul	Isle of Wight	Baja California (Cliff Thompson)
Sat 16 th Jul	Portsmouth	Mexico 2020 (Ian Woolnough)

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