

# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

July will be our fifth meeting of the year. Of course the threat from covid has not gone away – cases are rising but fortunately most people have been vaccinated and the symptoms of the newer strains appear to be milder.

## Announcements

Just a reminder that you should read the notes on the last page of the newsletter, regarding next month's meeting – we are going to be relying on the audience to bring in examples of *Parodia/Notocastus* and *Agave* plants from their collections.

## Last Month's Meeting

It was good to see our chairman, Adrian back for the meeting. Ian Acton – who has a keen interest in South African plants – was also present.

### ***Western Cape of South Africa (with a bit of Northern Cape too)***

Ben started with showing us a map of South Africa, showing the position of Cape Town in relation to the rest of the country - it is positioned towards the South-Western corner of the country. Ben then followed up with some more information to highlight South Africa's unique characteristics, leading to a great deal of plant diversity.

The world is divided into six Floral Kingdoms, also called Floristic Regions by botanist Ronald Good. These six regions are called Holarctic, Neotropical, Paleotropical, Cape, Australian, and Antarctic, and South Africa is home to the smallest and most unique of these Floral Kingdoms. Although the

Cape only covers 0.04% of the earth's surface, it is home to 3%-4% of all the known plant species. The Cape Floral Kingdom contains 8,600 known species, many of which are endemic and have very limited distribution. This is 5.7 times more plant species than the UK although the UK is 3.5 times bigger (so the Cape has ~20 times greater floral diversity).

A Mediterranean climate is a major climate type of the Köppen classification system, and it is characterized by a hot drought period in summer and a cool wet period in winter. These regions are located between about 30° and 45° latitude north and south of the Equator and on the western sides of the continents. There are 5 Mediterranean climate zones around the world, and these occur in California; Central Chile; the Mediterranean Basin; the Cape Region of South Africa; and Southwestern and South Australia. The Cape Floral Kingdom contains 80% of the plant species found in these 5 zones.

The Western Cape of South Africa is a winter rainfall region and this differs from the eastern regions of South Africa which experience rainfall in the summer months. The regions in between the west and the east can vary with their rainfall, so this does lead to some differences in how plants from the different regions like to be watered. For the plants around the Cape, winter is the main growing season for many of the plants.

The habitats which occur in the Cape Floral Kingdom include Fynbos (the largest biome), Strandveld (coastal), Succulent Karoo (xerophytes) and Renosterveld/Dolerite Sol (scarce). Fynbos is derived from "fine bush" and it covers a few areas with an exceptional degree of biodiversity. The soil tends to be nutrient-deficient, acidic and sandy.

Ben showed us some of the typical plants which grow in the fynbos. The tall broad leaved shrubs are mostly members of the Protea family. We saw *Protea cynaroides*, the King Protea, which has a spectacular flower. Closely related to the proteas are *Leucospermums*, and we saw *Leucospermum reflexum*. These plants grow in acidic soil which is well drained. *Mimetes cucullata* is another member

of the protea family and it has vivid red flowers on top of the slender stems and leaves, *Leucadendron salignus* is another member of the protea family and the plant we saw had yellow leaves. They eventually form a cone of flowers on top of the stems. *Erica vestita* forms heath-like shrubs and the stems can grow to 2-3 feet in size. The plant we saw had vivid deep pink flowers, and red, crimson and white varieties also exist. The seeds germinate best following a fire. *Phyllica pubescens* has a feather duster appearance - the horizontal leaves are covered in tiny white hairs. Flowers eventually form on top of the stems. Restios are reed-like plants and we saw *Restio festuciformis* - which forms tufted, grass-like stems that change colour as they mature and flower. *Elegia capensis* has bamboo-like stems and can grow quite fast. It has green stems and forms golden brown flower heads followed by dark brown seed heads.

Fire is an essential element of the Fynbos environment, a natural burn which occurs every 12-15 years controls growth, recycles nutrients, initiates seed germination and enables regeneration of the plants. A recent problem in South Africa is the plantation of foreign trees such as pines and gum trees - these are larger than the native species and interfere with the fires by providing a greater energy content, which causes the fires being more severe. It is necessary for garden designers and landscapers to provide some form of fire break - certain 'fire-retarding' plants can be planted to slow the spread of flames, and a mulch of pebbles, gravel or a similar sized strip of paving may also be effective.

*Aloe vanbalenii* forms large and dense clusters of rosettes with its recurved leaves. These are initially green in colour but if they receive sufficient sunshine they will change to an intense red colour. *Portulacaria afra* forms dense clusters of upright stems and it is also called "African Jade" due to the vivid green colour of the leaves. *Strelitzia reginae* was introduced into England in 1733 and it was named after Queen Sophia Charlotte, the wife of George III of England. She was a princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz. The plant is well known for the exotic flowers which are called the "Bird of Paradise" flower. It is an Eastern Cape species which can grow in Mediterranean climates, but it does require a winter temperature of around 10°C. *Strelitzia juncea* is more compact than *S. reginae* and it is also called the rush-leaved strelitzia - it can be grown in a smaller greenhouse.

*Euphorbia caput medusae* grows around the Cape peninsula. The plant has a central caudex, from which emerge numerous snake-like stems. The caudex can be a few inches across and the stems can

vary in length, hence a large plant in habitat can measure a metre or more across.

Next it was time to go north on the N7 road, to Van Rhynsdorp, towards Namaqualand. The Kokerboom Nursery is named after the local kokerboom plants (*Aloe dichotoma*). The natives used the branches of the aloe to make their quivers. The nursery was first set up when the N7 road was being constructed and a lot of local plants were due to be dug up and destroyed. We saw a Euphorbia growing in a wooden cage, it was several feet high and Ben wasn't sure why the plant was imprisoned. Of course Euphorbias can be dangerous because of their sap.

We saw some of their stock beds and another picture showed a lovely hoodia in flower. The plants were being grown according to their genus. Ben mentioned that the Hoodia is known for its species properties as an appetite suppressant - Pfizer tried to cash in on this and synthesize the main chemicals from the plant - a diet drug would be very popular in the USA - but a long standing legal dispute arose since the locals claimed it was their intellectual property.

This was the nursery's sales area. you get a little pot and just put a cutting in with a trowel. There were potted-up plants too. We saw Haworthias and various mesembs. Another area featured young quiver trees on the side. When you go outside, there were stock beds with big plants, and some massive euphorbias and aloes. In the background - there was a mountain which appear to look like Table Mountain - Ben explained that there are loads and loads of these "Tafelbergs" in the Western Cape, particularly along this road. It was spring and the aloes were in flower - he thought this plant with a tall spray of flowers was *Aloe rupestris*.

If you go further north, you get to the Knersvlakte. The origin of the name is somewhat ambiguous. Because there is quartz in this area it may related to the sounds wagons wheels used to make when they go over the rocks and the quartz. The land looks very barren but in reality, it is an amazing area with a vast number of species. The quartz retains the heat and is free draining and many mesembs have adapted to this and are endemic to the area. There was a gate to Kwaggaskop Farm which you had to go through to see the best area for the plants. There were various different mesembs growing here. Plants like *Argyoderma delateii* grow here, they are growing all through the quartz and are well blended in. Once you see one and your eyes get accustomed, then you will start to see plenty more of the plants. Unfortunately, they were not in flower here - there

were some seed pods on some of the plants. Plants of *Oophyllum nanum* were just about to come into flower – this forms iridescent purple flowers and the leaves were a red-bronze colour. Another member had crystalline leaves. We saw an *Anacampseros* and a *Portulaca* with pink flowers. We also saw *Crassula columnaris*, and a *Tylecodon* - Derek Tribble grows a lot of these. We also saw an *Albuca* which is a bulb, (possibly *A. suaveolens*) with flowers about to open.

They went further north, and into the Northern cape. Springbok is near the Namibian border. This area is called the Richtersveld and it is also the site of the Transfrontier National Park. Springbok has a lot of colonial heritage, used to be a mining settlement. Afrikaans has Dutch and German elements hence the pronunciations of the words differs from the English spellings – G's are pronounced with an H sounds and W's with a V.

*Aloe dichotoma* is now classified as *Aloidendron dichotomum*. We saw lovely flowers on top of the trees. There were wonderful koppe (rocky outcrops) here - nice aloe garden here. *Aloe melancantha* - not easy - it likes to be on the dry side just coming into flower. At the Goegap Nature Reserve, Ben wanted to see the Hester Malan Wild Flower Garden. In the mesemb "vygies" sections, there were some lovely little gems here. *Dactyloopsis*, *Gibbaeum*, *Ruschia* - quite compact and similar to a *Lampranthus*. There are also geraniums and pelargoniums all of which come from here and which of course form the basis of the many plants we grow in our gardens here. There were *Euphorbias* too. this one appeared to be *E. antisiphilitica*. There was also *E. horrida*, which does get big. Another succulent plant was *Zygophyllum morgsana* / *Roeperea morgsana* – the tortoise bush. It forms large shrubs and has thousands of tiny flowers which he didn't have a close up of.

After the half time break Ben continued on to the Kokerboom Forest, which is about 20 miles north of Nieuwoudtville. It's not a conventional forest as we'll see. Next to the Kokerboom Forest is an incredible waterfall (the Nieuwoudtville Waterfall) which drops a few hundred feet and it is a very impressive sight, although the water only flows in some months of the year. Nearby is also a large natural gorge / kloof. The ancient settlers had to navigate all these natural features. The size of the gorge suggests it would have been quite a deep river in days gone past.

This is also the natural habitat of *Aloe comptonii* - which is one of the parents of *Aloe nobilis* and very

similar to *A. mitriformis*. we saw the plant training down a rock face. Then we saw the *Aloe dichotoma* forest. Ben mentioned that at a bulb group meeting earlier this year, it was reported that this forest has deteriorated quite seriously - even at the time he was there, he hadn't seen that many younger trees. but it appears that a number of factors including climate change and plant poaching may have affected things to make things worse now. We could see more of Aloes scattered around the habitat. There were some stunning landscapes here. This Aloe must have been 100s of years old - it was three times taller than a person. We saw bands of colours due to different colours of the vegetation and the natural terrain. He was climbing here and heard a scurrying sound - turned to see a mole rat - one of the ugliest mammals around!

Now it was time to visit a different part of the country - the region to the east of Cape Town - and the succulent karoo. He visited the Desert National Botanical Garden at Worcester. We saw a "give way to tortoise" sign. Ben mentioned that a friend he met at the Kirstenbosch stand at the Chelsea flower show called Sean worked here and he provided him with a tour around the botanic garden. At the back they have a reference collection. Ben mentioned that Bruce Bayer - well known to *Haworthia* enthusiasts - was once the curator here, but he had since moved on. Over time, some of the facilities have gone downhill, although it was good when he visited.

They try and grow plants in soil that is as close as possible to the natural habitat of the plant. They had a wonderful collection of *Haworthias* and *Gasterias*. Sean was a good guide and here in the UK when he was working at Chelsea, Ben took him round Chelsea and Kew and Wisley. The structures are just corrugated plastic to keep the worst of the elements off the plants. The sides are open, to allow for free airflow. In the *Asclepiad* house, there were some nice hoodias, including *H. gordonii*. We then saw the *Euphorbias*, and other plants from the milkweed family.

There was a really good crested *Euphorbia* here - but it was hard to tell which species it was. Some of the plants were quite small and some weren't show stoppers - but this one was - it was *Pachypodium namaquanum*. There was some propagation going on. We saw a plant of *Haworthia truncata* - it also has the nickname "horses teeth" due to it's appearance. The pots the plants were in were marked with an accession number, and the plant labels were also marked with additional colours using the following code - red for endangered plants, yellow for non-indigenous plants, green for

all year rainfall plants, black for winter rainfall plants and blue for summer rainfall plants.

Next we saw *Gasteria excelsior* which can grow to a large size - and then *Gasteria rawlinsonii* which is one of the most primitive and endangered plants. It is a cliff dweller (cremnohyte). We also saw *Gasteria pulchra* just coming into flower. We saw a few varieties of *Haworthia mucronata* which were also flowering. Ben mentioned that Ernst did his doctorate on cliff dwelling plants, even though he had a terrible fear of heights. We saw *Aloe kouebokkeveldensis* - which was a newly discovered species at the time. There were some large rounded pebbles on the soil of this pot. We then saw a grass Aloe, although Ben couldn't remember the species. Some of them are deciduous. Aloes are also related to the red hot pokers. Ben also showed a picture of a plant of *Aloe vera* in the collection - this is not a native plant - it is believed to originate from the middle east, but it is not found in habitat at all now.

One problem they have over there is something called aloe cancer - this is caused by a mite which eats into the plant, causing a horrible disfiguration of the leaf - the damage can seriously weaken the plant. What they use over there is a miticide called Karbadust which can control the mites - it's described as "an insecticide dusting powder for home garden and animal use. Can be used on Dogs & Cats to control Ticks and Fleas." There is probably some similar product available in this country should the problem ever arise here. Eventually the plants will recover once the mites have been dealt with, although the disfigured leaves are probably best removed.

We saw quite a good-sized example of *Fockea edulis* - quite a large plant there. This was followed by a *Tylecodon* which was starting to come into leaf and then a sizeable *Avonia* with papery scales. Sean got quite excited about the next plant but it was a tiny thing barely showing a leaf and smaller than a fingertip - it was some sort of *Anacampteros*. Next were some stapeliads - plants of *Tavaresia barklyi* and *Huernia pillansii*. Next we saw a fairly new greenhouse and Ben said this was being used to house plants confiscated from various sources at checkpoints and airport and ferry ports. The aim was to catalogue these plants and possibly re-establish them in habitat. There was quite a mixture of plants, and we saw *Aloe pearsonii* and *Aloe pillansii*.

The sun was just beginning to go down outside and the visual effect on the plants growing in habitat was amazing - there was an amazing warm orange glow of the evening sun over everything. Ben said you really had to get in close to see all the variety of

plants which were growing in the various crevices in the rocks. There were various different plants in the hillsides and you had to get close to the crevices to see the variety and number of different things growing even in a relatively small area. There were several conophytums - these were not in flower unfortunately. There was *Adromischus* and a few other mesembs holding on in the evening sunshine. He found *Aloe humilis*, which is one of the dwarf aloes native to the western Cape. It was a bit too early for the flowers on this. there were *Crassulas* and more *Conophytums* with markings, and we saw *Crassula perforata*. There was lots of lichen too - a sign that the air was relatively clean. As they were walking back to the car, he spotted the butterboom - *Tylecodon paniculata* - the stem is very succulent. Just below it was a *Haworthia maxima* with nice raised tubercles.

Now it was time to head back to Cape Town. If you do visit Cape Town, and have any interest in plants, then you must visit the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden - which is located on one side of Table Mountain. This was originally Cecil Rhode's estate - having purchased it in 1895, it was bequeathed to the nation on his death in 1902. It was in 1911 that Harold Pearson and Neville Pillans decided to create a botanic garden here and it took a couple of years to get the government to set aside the land and provide some funds. Table Mountain and Castle Rock provide a beautiful backdrop to the site. We saw a picture of mesembs in flower and the dazzling colour of *Lampranthus* in flower - we saw the red flowers of *L. aureus* and the pink flowers of *L. spectabilis*. There is an area in the garden called Matthew's Rockery and we saw some massive *Euphorbias* there. There were large specimen of *Euphorbia ingens* which is slow growing. Legend has it that one of the early trekkers had terrible toothache and yet they were 2 weeks away from any civilisation. The local guide led him to a tree of *E. ingens* and the sap was poured onto his gum - it burnt through the gum and the nerve and cured his toothache. Not sure how true this story was, but *Euphorbia* sap is an irritant, and the sap of tree *Euphorbias* is stronger than normal *Euphorbias*. We saw a *Kalanchoe* - (now *Brophyllum*) with reddish purple leaves. It was growing next to a *Bulbine*. *Bulbines* also have the same properties as *Aloes* - their leaves are supposed to have good healing properties and excellent for burns and cuts and grazes.

Cycads were planted in a amphitheatre established by Pearson. Cycads are not succulent plants but they are xerophytic and tend to live hand in hand with cacti and succulents. Various cycads and species of *Encephalartos* were growing here. These exotic

plants are in much demand from collectors and poachers and so they represent another group of plants which are threatened. The plants were stunning with big stems, long leaves and separate male and female plants with different cones on different plants. We saw *Encephalartos horridus* which has a blue hue to its leaves.

Next we saw the tallest of all the tree aloes - *Aloe barberae* - it can make a really big tree and based on the height of the person standing next to it, this specimen must have been close to 40 feet tall. *Aloe arborescens* was in flower - it is considered a weed all over Europe these days. South Africa has also had a lot of issues with non-native invasive plants.

Who better to give you a tour round the succulent Reference collection than Ernst van Jaarsveld? He's a bit of a legend in the succulent world and Ben was able to spend a bit of time with him. There are a real plethora of plants in the collection and we saw some of the smaller growing Crassulas. we saw *C. rupestris* and *C. hemisphaerica*. They are also trying to replicate growing the plants in their habitat soil. We saw several shots showing the collection of Cotyledons, Euphorbias, and mesembs which were growing exceptionally well in rectangular earthenware pans. We saw various Conphytums. The bulbs were growing as weeds in the mesemb collection, and in the bulb collection, Lithops were growing as weeds there, and were actually doing quite well due to the extra moisture they were being given!

We moved to the conservatory - which is where the main collection is housed at Kirstenbosch. Cape Town gets 100 days of gales per year and it is also quite wet so they do need to provide some protection for the plants. This baobab was rescued from the diamond mine at Kimberley and replanted here. Ernst has introduced lizards to control pests. We saw Sansevierias, Euphorbias and larger Aloes, and numerous climbing plants. Even trying to emulate the habitat, a Haworthia was planted just like you'd see it in habitat, surrounded by pebbles and with just the leaf tips showing.

Ben ended the talk with *Pelargonium incrassatum* which is one of the geophytic species. The biggest collection of these in the UK was just up the road at Stourhead. The section of geophytic Pelargoniums is named Hoarea and this is named after Sir Richard Colt Hoare who was an important pelargonium collector and breeder, By 1821, he owned over 600 varieties, many of which he had cultivated himself.

Vinay Shah

Below are some events that Amelia Herbert wanted to publicise. Those marked with an asterisk will be known to have at least one succulent plant seller.

## External Events

9 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	West Moors "Westival"	12noon - 4pm	Bond Ave, West Moors, Ferdown BH22 0LJ, United Kingdom
24 <sup>th</sup> July 2022	Purbest Local Arts and Crafts	11am – 3pm	Jurassic Coast Campsite Bindon Lane, East Stoke BH20 6AS
5th & 6th August 2022	Taunton Flower Show*	Friday 10:30am - 6pm, Saturday 9:30am - 6pm	Vivary Park No parking at show, use park and ride: the west side of town P&R is called Silk Mills and the east side of town, (by J25 M5) is called Gateway.  Park entrances via: Town Gate entrance (Mary Street), Wilton Gate (via Fons George), and Mount Gate (Mount Street)
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2022	Weymouth Farmers and Makers Market	10am - 3pm	just outside The Range, New Bond Street, Weymouth, DT4 8LY
17th August 2022	Gillingham & Shaftesbury Show *	8.30am to 6pm	Turnpike Showground Motcombe Shaftesbury Dorset SP7 9PL  Free Shuttle Bus to/from Gillingham & Shaftesbury

## Next Month's Meeting

At our next meeting on **Tuesday 2 August** we will hold another of our Plant Focus evenings, where we select a genus of cacti and a genus of other succulents which we will examine in detail, using plants that everybody brings along to show the selection and diversity available. The chosen genera this time are **Parodia (including Notocactus)** and **Agave**.

The success of these meetings depends entirely upon members bringing along examples of these two genera from their collections, so that we have plenty of material to talk about. So please make a special effort to bring along as many plants as you can - they don't have to be large show quality specimen plants, just bring along any examples of these species that you may happen to have in your greenhouse.

We will talk about the various species, about which are the easiest, or slowest, or most difficult, highlighting the most cherished and highly sought species. We will discuss cultivation requirements, best sources of plants and seeds, the best books available etc.

This type of meeting has proven very popular in the past, and we hope that everyone will bring along plants from their collection to help make the August meeting as successful as our previous meetings in this format.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 9 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Isle of Wight	Baja California (Cliff Thompson)
Sat 16 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Portsmouth	Mexico 2020 (Ian Woolnough)
Tue 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug	Southampton	Plant Focus Evening - Parodia/Notocactus and Agave
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Isle of Wight	Open House Meeting - members only
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting

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