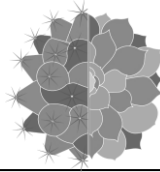


# British Cactus & Succulent Society

## Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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## Editorial

After a lot of rain last month we seem to have had dry weather for a while and I seem to spend a lot of time watering plants which are in pots in my back garden. One or two heavy downpours each week would be ideal although I realise that is not everybody's idea of a good summer.

## Last Month's Meeting

David mentioned we had apologies from Cath who was not feeling well, and also from Jane. And Adrian Bailey was having some medical treatment.

He asked if there were people at the meeting who only grew cacti – on seeing a few raised hands, he said “sorry Andy – this month's talk will be Richard on South Africa and next month will also feature South Africa” - since David had arranged for Derek Tribble to visit us to give us a new talk which he had recently put together. It was increasingly difficult to find visiting speakers these days – so today we were lucky that Richard had been able to revise a talk which he gave to us some years ago.

David said he didn't have anything else to announce. He mentioned he would have to leave the meeting early and have others lock up at the end – he had to get to the airport for an early morning flight the next day.

### **South Africa - Revisited**

Richard mentioned that the title “South Africa Revisited” is a bit of a con - he hadn't been to South Africa again but he had just revisited his pictures to see what should be included this time. He mentioned that he had made two trips to South Africa - one to the Southern Cape province in 2006 where he had attended a conference and he had tacked on a few extra days - he went along the "garden route" and

also visited a number of botanical gardens. For the second trip, he had attended a convention arranged by IBSA (Indigenous Bulb Association of South Africa) in 2017 where there would be one day of lectures followed by two days of visits to various localities, accompanied by South African plant experts. He was able to visit a few more localities after the guided visits.

The Cape Floral Kingdom is in the South Western tip of South Africa and it is a rather special area. It covers around 0.04% of the total land surface of the Earth, but is home to 9,000 species of plants and this is the highest number of species in any of the world's floral kingdoms. To illustrate this, the first picture featured 3 plants growing in close proximity - these were an oxalis, a moraea (iris family) and a romulea (also iris family) - moraea extends all the way from Africa to Europe, including one species in the UK.

Both his trips had started in Cape Town, which is where the capital is situated. The talk for the first trip was originally titled “Botanic Gardens in the Western Cape, South Africa” and he started with a visit to the world renowned Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town, then on to Worcester to visit the Karoo Desert Botanical Garden, and then the Klein Karoo, the Swartzberg mountains to George, where he found another botanic garden, and then a drive back along the South coast - he visited Cape Agulhas which is the southern-most part of South Africa, then to the Harold Porter Botanical Garden at Betty's Bay before returning to Cape Town to prepare for the flight home.

We saw a picture of Table Mountain taken from the plane, and another picture taken from the ground, with white clouds on top representing the "table cloth". We saw the conference centre and Richard mentioned it was possible to see Robben Island - (where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned) through the window. After the conference, Richard showed some of the participants enjoying a drink at a visit to a winery in Stellenbosch.

South Africa is a beautiful country but there are parts which need improvement - we saw a shanty

town where conditions looked dire but they did at least seem to have electricity.

At the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, we saw *Carpobrotus edulis* - the old name of hottentot fig is probably not appropriate any more. It occurs in several flower colours. *Aptenia cordifolia* had red flowers, and we saw a species of *Glottiphyllum* with yellow flowers. A *Delosperma* had pale yellow flowers. *Malephora crocea* was growing in the conservatory and had bicolored flowers, red with a yellow centre. The conservatory is called the Botanical Society conservatory since they funded the costs. We saw large plants of a Baobab and *Aloe dichotoma* planted out. Some of the displays are laid out to represent different regions of South Africa - the picture featured the Knersvlakte section which is home to many Mesembs and we saw the Little Karoo and Drakensberg displays as well. The Drakensberg is much further to the east, near Durban and it's not an area he's ever visited.

A nice *Kalanchoe sexangularis* had red leaves and there was a caption that the name *Kalanchoe* might have two possible origins - either the Chinese "kalan chauhuy" meaning 'that which falls and grows' ... many of the species have the ability to grow into mature plants from pieces that have dropped or alternatively some believe it to be derived from the ancient Indian words "kalanka" meaning 'spot or rust' and "Chaya" meaning 'glossy', referring to the reddish glossy leaves of the Indian species, *Kalanchoe laciniata*.

Another crassula which used to be quite common in our collections used to be called *Crassula falcata* but is now called *Crassula perfoliata* v. *minor*. *Crassula rubricaulis* has red stems. The next slide showed a sunbird feeding from flowers on a tree. It does the same job as a hummingbird in the new world. The distinction is that hummingbirds hover, and sun birds need to land on the plant, although the bird in the picture hadn't read the script and seemed to be hovering. A bulb in the sandy areas of the West Coast of South Africa has actually evolved to produce a stalk for sun birds to land on.

He left Cape Town and headed for Worcester. He showed some of the scenery including a large viaduct, which had a very long tunnel. He mentioned that he had difficulty turning on the lights on the hire car (a Polo) since the controls on the rental car were completely different from the ones on his old UK VW Polo. He did get to his destination, the Karoo Desert Botanical Garden. It's an oxymoron since Karoo means desert. There were nice plants of *Cyphostemma juttae* growing here and *Euphorbia caerulescens* had bluish stems. One of

the advantages of being at a botanic garden is that the plants do tend to be named. We saw *Euphorbia ingens* - the label on this was really badly faded and despite magnifying the picture and changing colour tints, he was unable to make out any of the words on the label. *Euphorbia virosa* had been photographed at Kirstenbosch, as was *Euphorbia pentagona*. *Euphorbia mauritanica* had an attractive ring of bracts surrounding the small flowers. A *Senecio* looked like either *S. anteuphorbium* or *S. longiflorus*.

*Crassula perforata* has leaves closely attached to the stems and it almost looks like the stem grows through the leaf. Another plant with greyish leaves looked like an *Adromischus* or a *Tylecodon*. Richard also photographed a sign saying "before driving off, please check under your car for tortoises."

He drove east on Route 62 and visited the Cango caves which are 20 million years old. These were quite interesting and had formations of stalactites and stalagmites. The guides catered for Afrikaans speakers and "others". The road to Swartberg pass is unpaved and deemed to be impassable for caravans. Near the top of pass he found a rather nice *Crassula atropurpurea*. A view down from near the top showed the road doing lots of zig zags and why it wasn't suitable for large vehicles. The pass itself is quite long, some 15 miles in total.

He arrived in George and took a train which was supposed to run from George to Knysna but which only went to Sedgefield due to repair work. When he got back to George, the person at the place he was lodging at found out he was interested in plants and asked him whether he had been to their botanic garden. He hadn't known about this so set out to find it. It was getting rather late in the day so some of pictures at the garden had to be taken with flash.

Going on from George, he reached Bredasdorp which has a Dutch feel and we saw a nice church there. He went to a nature resort there and also saw a tortoise on the road. He went on to Cape Agulhas - there was a sign there explaining how one side was the Indian Ocean and the other side was the Atlantic Ocean. Cape Agulhas has a lighthouse and we also saw a sign saying "Dune Fynbos". There were various aloes and other plants planted here. The next step was to the Harold Porter Garden at Betty's Bay - he showed a picture of a protea, and Ian Acton suggested it was *Protea neriifolia*. The garden was at the foot of the hills and there were a variety of different habitats here.

Richard mentioned that he used the "Aloes in Wonderland" website (a commercial nursery) to identify some of the plants he had seen. *Aloe rupestris* is a plant he had seen near the start of the journey out from Cape Town, at Klapmuts. The flower is yellow when in bud and they turn reddish orange after they open. *Aloe arborescens* has an impressive red inflorescence and it's a large bushy plant. *Aloe dichotoma* subdivides into multiple branches but it only does this when it gets older. The common name is quiver tree and he had hoped to see the quiver tree forest - he found an old plant and a few young ones - but can this really be considered a forest? The new name for the plant is *Aloidendron dichotomum*. He also found a group of 4 larger trees growing in a line and suspects they were planted in this arrangement rather than being a natural group. On his second trip, he visited the Kokerboom Nursery at Vanrhynsdorp and saw plants of *Aloe ramossima* for sale - this has some similarities to *A. dichotoma*. Ian mentioned that this nursery has since closed down. Richard showed a few other Aloes he had come across. *Aloe ferox* and *Aloe arborescens* were found east of Bredasdorp. *Aloe maculata* (was also known as *A. saponaria*) was also found there. There were some snails nestling in the leaves for protection. He also found the same plant with tall flower spikes near the lighthouse at Cape Agulhas. A large plant of *Aloe plicatilis* was seen at the Harold Porter garden - it was 6 feet tall and 8-9 feet across. *Aloe succotrina* was also found there. Two plants are sometimes described as climbing Aloes - *Aloe (Aloiampelos) ciliaris* and *Aloe (Aloiampelos) commixta*. *Aloe ciliaris* was seen at the garden in George and it had little white projections on the leaves. *Aloe commixta* was found at the same garden and it has yellow oval flowers which hang down.

Richard spent a few minutes talking about his experience with using computers to identify and classify the images he had on his computer. One piece of software is called Photoprism. You install it, and it can be told to look through your images and try and identify them. It said "alpine" for a plant photographed in the Lake District which wasn't too bad. A young deer was identified as an animal. A beetle was correctly identified. A picture of our branch's plant display at a show was described as a bakery(!). A fine building was described as a barn. A bee was correctly identified, but a hover fly was also described as a bee. Two non-native flowers at Wisley were identified as being in Guildford (the images do have gps tags). A type of ray was identified as a shark, as was an image of a fruit bat. A multiheaded cactus (perhaps a *rebutia* or a *mammillaria*) was identified as "dessert". Richard felt things would need to improve quite a bit before the results could be trusted.

We resumed after the mid-meeting break. Richard mentioned that Google has a huge database of images and you can type in the name of a plant and it will display the images tagged with that name. It also has a "reverse" image search feature where you can supply Google with an image and it will show you similar images which hopefully will provide you with more information about the object. Google has over a 100 billion images in its database and amazingly it can search that in just a few seconds, based on your search query.

There are also apps which can look up plants and give you information. The use of smart phones has grown massively and there are several apps which can be used to identify plants. One that Richard named was floraincognita which uses AI to assist with plant identification. You can take a picture of a plant, find out what it's called and learn everything you want to know with the help of a fact sheet. He gave a demo of an identification he had attempted. You start the app, point the camera at the plant you want to identify - and ask it to identify. It can also record the time and location of where you did the identification. He ID'd a plant in his collection and it came back with *Parodia magnifica* which was correct. It can also give you alternate names and a distribution map. Of course you need a way of telling it that the plant is a cultivated plant so that it does not log that the plant is a native plant. Richard gave the example of rare English daffodils in the New Forest and contrasting those with cultivated daffodils which might have escaped from people's gardens.

You can also use the Google lens app to view an image and ask Google to identify the object and you can also adjust the selection box to restrict which part you want to include in the search. Including flowers and leaves will often yield a better result than just the flower. He did this with a *Delosperma*. and it seemed that it might be *Delosperma abbottii*. He tested it using some South African bulbs and it got *Babiana* correct - it's up to you to decide what is the best match.

We moved on to the second trip he went on. This would have been titled "Bulbs & Succulents in the Roggeveld & Knersvlakte" (2017). He did see quite a few flowering bulbs during this trip. He showed us a map as a reminder of areas visited - he went anticlockwise up the Western Cape and then to the Northern Cape and back down the coast. In the middle is the Tankwa Karoo and this is a desert area, there are no passable roads, so you need a 4-wheel drive to explore this region.

When at the conference centre, they had coach trips out to explore to a distance of about 50km - and when convention finished, about half the people set off in private cars and hire cars to stay for a further 3 nights at a remote hotel in Middelpoos. So there were around a dozen cars, and at times it looked like a UN convoy.

They went to a butterfly farm - and Richard showed *Acraea horta* seen at Kirstenbosch, *Dryas Julia* which is an American species at the farm and *Tarsocera* sp. which is a native species. A caterpillar ("woolly bear") of the tiger moth was seen at Tulbagh. We also saw *Brithys crini* which is the Lily borer - the caterpillar of the Amaryllis moth which will destroy Amaryllis plants but luckily isn't found in this country. *Aloides* sp. was one of the Copper butterflies seen at Clanwilliam and he was also pleased to see *Papilio demodocus* - the Citrus Swallowtail, at Clanwilliam.

We saw a view of the conference centre, with various buildings and a swimming pool and mountains in the distance. Because it was a convention, they had put on a display of various potted plants. Down the steps and outside was a wild *Gladiolus carinatus*. In the evening they went up a hill behind the conference centre, guided by a local botanist, and they found a few nice things, including a sundew and *Aloe plicatilis*. They spent a couple of days travelling by coach, and a map showed the localities visited, which were between Wellington and Worcester. There were various nature reserves in the area and they also went up to Tulbaugh. We saw a picture of the coach and there was no number plate - Richard said they had run into an antelope the previous day. The people also had warm clothing on - Richard said they were quite high up and there were heavy mists - don't assume it's warm everywhere!

The bulbs were growing in an area which had been burnt, they take advantage of the lack of competing vegetation after a fire. We saw *Gladiolus watsonius*, *Babiana* sp, *Babiana purpurea* and *Pauridia (Spiloxene) capensis* which has unusual colour combination of white, green and purple colours in the flower. There were also daisies, and a *Nemesia* had a blue and white flower. We also saw *Lachenalia orchioides* and *L. unifolia*, followed by *Pelargonium triste* in flower, *Crassula ciliata*, and an *Oxalis* and a fern. *Satyrrium erectum* is a small plant which is a member of the orchid family. Richard mentioned that due to the burnt plants, your clothes get covered in soot very quickly, as you walk through the area.

We saw a *Babiana* - the genus is named after baboons, who dig up the plants to eat the roots. A red flowered *Moraea* had a monkey beetle in the centre - they sometimes feast on the flowers to get to the nectar and will chew it up completely. *Moraea ciliata* is a member of the Iris family and had yellow flowers. *Ferraria variabilis* was seen at Worcester and it had quite distinct crinkly crenulations on the flowers. An elongated *Gladiolus* was perhaps *G. ceresianus* - it produces a few flowers on the stem. A mesembryanthemum had sacs on the leaves which give a crystalline appearance to the leaves - hence the name ice plants - Afrikaans call them vygies. A *Monsonia* had nice flowers with a picotee effect - it's a member of the Geraniaceae and the flowers were over an inch across.

We saw more mesembs. There was a beetle on the flower and Richard said the orange spots on it made it easier to identify than the mesembs. A shrubby mesemb might have been a *Ruschia*. A *Mesembryanthemum* plant had more cylindrical leaves. Richard showed a map of the route as they headed north. The mesembs were so dense that you ended up stepping on them. A *Cheiridopsis* had seed pods on it and this can be used for identification - this was at Sutherland. Another unknown mesemb with seed pods was also seen at Sutherland. A plant with long cylindrical leaves might have been *Senecio leptophyllus*.

We saw pictures of a beetle and a stone grasshopper, which was an immature nymph. *Romulea tortuosa* had some spiral leaves and Richard mentioned that many of the plants in this region have twisted or spiral leaves - perhaps it's an evolutionary mechanism to reduce water loss.

We saw *Aloinopsis spathulata* in flower, with numerous pink flowers. The next plant was *Daubenya aurea* - but this plant had red flowers - Richard said it had been named after a yellow variant but the majority of the plants in habitat have red flowers. He mentioned IBSA had set up a protected area for the one population which has yellow flowered plants, and we would see this later.

We saw the hotel they stayed in while at Middelpoos - it is 50 miles north of Sutherland and 50 miles south of Calvinia and there are no other settlements in between. *Romulea komsbergensis* had formed lots of pink/purple flowers. He found a purple flowered plant growing next to a white flowered variant - it is distantly related to crocus. We saw an *Oxalis*, *Moraea* and *Romulea komsbergensis* growing within inches of each other.

*Eriospermum capense* produces a single leaf. Some members of this genus have quite strange structures on the leaves, although this one was relatively restrained. We saw monkey beetles attacking a red *Romulea* flower, and another well camouflaged stone grasshopper. *Aloinopsis acuta* has yellow flowers. The species was thought to be lost but was it was recently rediscovered after publication of Steven Hammer's *Titanopsis* book in 2013.

We saw a "Welcome to Tankwa National Park" sign. A picture showed a view into the distance and Richard said the mountains in the picture were some 100km away, to the west. We also saw a view of Gannaga Pass in the Tankwa Karoo National Park

We saw *Cheiridopsis namaquensis* in this area, with yellow flowers. Since Namaqualand is quite a distance to the north, this suggests that this plant has a wide distribution. *Tylecodon wallichii* had knobbly dead stems but he found one plant which was more alive, with green leaves and also flower stems on it.

The farm where the *Dubanea aurea* plants with the yellow flowers grow had quite an imposing sign saying "Trespassers will be prosecuted" with a image of a gun. They did find the plant with the rare yellow flowers and it also had monkey beetles on it. He could see some figures in the distance - and these were baboons who were watching them. He was glad he was in a large group, it's quite worrying to have 15-20 baboons watching you. *Androcymbium burchellii* ssp. *pulchrum* has a couple of flat leaves and a red flower - it is also known as *Colchicum coloratum*, following DNA analysis.

The group disbanded at Middelpoos and he travelled on with one other person to Calvinia. *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* was found at Akkerendam Nature Reserve. The Hantamsberg mountain range was in the background. He went through Nieuwoudtville, which is considered the bulb capital of the world, and then on to the Knersvlakte nature reserve. This area has a unique quartz pebble geology and mesembs grow in this area.

*Argyroderma* grows in abundance, and some of the plants had seed pods. A plant of Bushman's candle (*Sarcocaulon mossamedense*) looked a bit burnt and there were no signs of growth on it. *Argyroderma fissum* had magenta flowers. The next picture featured clumps of *Conophytum* - Richard said there were 9 clumps there. *Dactyloopsis digitata* has a unique appearance and was also found here. *Oophytum nanum* is a small plant - it had 10 or so heads but the plant was only an inch across.

*Crassula columnaris* had yellow red flowers - it is a compact plant which forms a terminal flowering spike.

*Trachypetrella anderssonii* was a Stone grasshopper - but this was a Knersvlakte limited edition, with a white appearance to match the terrain, rather than the brown ones we had seen before.

Richard drove back to Cape Town along the west coast. He went to a private wild flower Nature Reserve at Darling, but there were no succulent plants there. He did come across *Chersina angulata* - the Angulate or Red-bellied tortoise at ClanWilliam. It was time to go home and the final picture showed an aircraft on the tarmac.

Richard said he was keen to go again and hoped to have a better list of places to visit. Droughts are getting more and more common and they are also more severe, so many plants are at high risk. Ian said the Worcester Botanic Garden had been badly damaged by a recent fire. Ben called the meeting to a close by giving Richard a vote of thanks for his talk.

Vinay Shah

## Next Month's Meeting

The speaker at our next meeting on August 6<sup>th</sup> will be **Hazel Taylor**, who has spoken to us on a couple of previous occasions.

The title of the talk is "Cacti of the Big Bend, Texas". This is a well known area which is home to a diverse group of cacti and a few succulents, so we should get to see many plants in their habitat, I think I read that 60 species of cacti grow there. I also read that the park boasts more types of birds, bats, butterflies, ants, scorpions, and cacti than any other national park in the United States.

## Forthcoming Events

Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Isle of Wight	Ethanobotany. Interrelations between man and plants.
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Jul	Portsmouth	Baja 2023 – Ian Woolnough
Tue 6 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Southampton	Cacti of the Big Bend, Texas – Hazel Taylor
Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Isle of Wight	Open House Meeting – members only
Sat 17 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Portsmouth	no meeting
Tue 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sep	Southampton	Plant Focus Evening – Thelocactus and Haworthia

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