

British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

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Editorial

Following the end of summer time just a week ago, we've had a lot of rain and perhaps the cold weather is arriving too – there was ice on the car yesterday so perhaps a first frost too. I've seen fuchsias and roses flowering away even into November, which shows how mild we've had it up to know.

In terms of plants in flower, a few Aloes have flowered sporadically through the last, as have a few haworthias. All three of my *H. maughanii* plants are in flower so I have had another go at trying to set seed. Last year I got one seed pod and half a dozen seeds, but none germinated which was a real surprise for “fresh” seed.

Announcements

The branch dinner took place on 11th October, and we had a good turnout, something like 17 people I think. I hope everyone enjoyed their meals.

At the last meeting David mentioned that one of the ideas being considered to celebrate our 60th Anniversary in 2014 was a coach trip to the ELK conference. This will not go ahead, since we did not have sufficient interest.

The Zone 11 Quiz will be hosted by Portsmouth on the evening of Saturday November 23rd. We haven't selected our team yet, but we do hope our members will come along to support the team.

Next month is our **Annual General Meeting**, which will be followed by an American supper. As is usual, there will be no table show, library or plant sales at the AGM. However, please do bring along

some food or nibbles for the American supper. There will also be a lucky dip “bran tub” where members can exchange gifts. Further details of this are given on the back page.

Nomination forms for the 2014 Committee are available on the front table. We would like to see some new faces join the committee, so if you are interested in maintaining the success of the branch, please do have a chat with David or Dot.

Last Month's Meeting

Plants of Interest

Alice Jankovec had brought along a few of the plants she had grown from seed. First was a tray of various mesembs, sown in March and August 2012. These were reasonably established and formed nice plants. A second set of plants were 4-6 months old, and they had been sown in March / April this year.

She uses the bag method – the pots were placed in individual bags on a windowsill in her bedroom. As soon as she can handle them (usually 2-3 months after germination) she puts them out in rows in a tray and then can put them out in the greenhouse.

5 Star US Habitats

Martin Doorbar mentioned he hadn't ever seen such a large audience at a branch meeting! Back at the end of 2007, his employer offered him a chance to work in the States. He accepted, and in February 2008, he went over to the east coast of the USA (Philadelphia). There are no cacti to speak of in that area – but being stationed in the US gave him opportunities to visit the south western states. In July 2011, Graham Charles asked him to put a talk together for one of the “Explorers” events, and what we were to see this evening was an expanded version of that talk.

The title of “5 Star American habitats” might make you think that it was chosen because of the outstanding plants to be found. He admitted the title had actually been chosen because of some of the 5 star hotels he stayed in during his travels! Apart from one trip he did on his own (to Los Angeles), on

all the other trips he was accompanied by his wife and two young children so he had to pick out some decent and civilised hotels - none of this camping out in the wilderness. We saw some pictures of the 5-star hotels they stayed at.

Martin then showed us a list of all the places he got to visit during his stay in the States. Using a map of the USA, he had circled in red the areas he would be covering in the talk. There were 3 stops in California, a couple in Arizona, then Monument Valley and Southern Utah, followed by Wyoming to see Yellowstone. Monument Valley is on the border between Arizona and Utah. He also went to Bar Harbour in Maine – there are no cacti there, but it's a nice place to visit in the summer. The final location was Florida, where they spent their final 2 weeks holidaying, before returning home - after 3½ years.

The Joshua Tree national park was first place he'd ever been to see plants in a natural habitat. It was December 2008 and he was staying in Los Angeles. The park was a 2 hour drive from there, and it sits on the border of the Mojave and Colorado deserts – these two regions split the part in half, and there is quite a transition in geology and conditions between the two deserts. As he headed for the Northern entrance of the park, on the way there he saw a sign saying “Dig your own cactus for 59c” and decided to investigate. This was a small local nursery offering some quite nice plants but nothing particularly unusual. Martin mentioned that from the various nurseries and conventions he visited during his stay in the US, he was actually disappointed by the variety of plants that were for sale - the variety and depth available in Europe is infinitely better. Having said that they were very nice plants on offer here and they were very cheap. In the succulent house there were plants such as Agaves. There was an outdoor area too - a lot of the plants are used for landscaping. He didn't buy anything and carried on. It was a dull overcast day, and there was even a little bit of drizzle. He soon had his first views of the park. It was barren, and he noticed that in the lower plateaus, the temperatures are hotter and you don't see the yuccas, but in the higher, cooler, wetter areas there were some fantastic specimens of the Joshua tree, *Yucca brevifolia*. All the flowers were spent but there were plenty of seeds forming. Every time you went round a corner, you saw more of them. There was evidence of regeneration too, with young plants showing some nice new growth. The Mojave Yucca (*Yucca schidigera*) is also found here, although it not as good looking.

We saw a shot of the rocky terrain and the sandy soils. A little further on, he did a proper stop and

wandered around. a little bit further did in a proper stop and a wander round. He didn't go onto the rocks – and in hindsight this was a mistake because *Echinocereus polycephalus* is supposed to be found there. However, he didn't see any on this trip. He headed up the road to Keys View (alt. 1581m), a famous landmark which provides views to the west of the San Bernardino mountains. In the valley is the San Andreas Fault, and this is the southern tip. On another trip he went to Palm Springs and actually went into the fault, which was 3 metres wide and 4 metres deep, with water oozing up at the bottom.

The old pines tree on the mountain ranges must be very old – they can't grow very fast in this climate. As you drive up the road into the park you can see that the Joshua Trees must be quite sensitive since they suddenly stop appearing - there are distinct climate zones where they can and can't grow. Carrying on into some of the lower regions, there are various outcrops and pull off areas. It seemed like a fairly dry area and everything gave the impression of being parched. The teddy bear cholla (*Opuntia bigelovii*) looked great when the sun came out and illuminated the yellow spines. There was evidence of flowering on the plants. The silver cholla (*Opuntia echinocarpa*) has white spines and *Opuntia ramosissima* is the pencil cholla – it had bicolored spines which were white with yellow tips.

He travelled on and got out of the car to have another wander around. The area seemed like a wash, and it was unlikely anything would grow there, so he moved off to the side. Then we saw a picture of the first “proper” cactus (excluding the opuntias) that he ever found on his own. It was a fantastic ferocactus with bright red spines. Looking around, he could see they were not plentiful, but there were a few of them around. They were just as red as they appeared in the pictures, with luminous red spines. They were the size of a large football, with fantastic spination and also clean and in good condition. He also found *Echinocereus engelmannii*. This occurs as different varieties in different parts of the US. They were a bit dry at this time of the year, and would no doubt have been more spectacular in flower, earlier in the year. There were some variations between the different clumps that he found. He also found a few Escobarias or Coryphanthas. These were very nice plants and some were the size of a dinner plate. He had labelled them as *E. vivipara* but they could potentially also be *E. alversonii*. They are difficult to tell apart when not in flower, and of course there are no labels out there. *Opuntia basilaris* is a picturesque plant, and some of the forms take on a bright purple-red colour, but the pictured specimen was mainly green. The Fouquierias were in leaf and also in flower, and

there were some fantastic specimens. He was now down at the lower parts of the Mojave Desert but didn't have time to get to the Southern exit and return in time for the evening, so he hung around this area for a while before turning round. *Cucurbita palmata* is the Coyote Melon – it is a cucurbit with an interesting fruit. There were a few of these around, and the ants were all over it.

We saw a general habitat shot, looking into the valley at the flatter area. An interesting warning sign near a group of cholla plants advised keeping to the path, mentioning that the plants were hazardous. In the late evening sun, they were glowing nicely. He would have liked to have spent some more time there and take a look at the foot hills but time was running out. He stayed for the sunset, got a few evening shots and headed back to LA.

In 2011 there was an ad hoc detour to the Cactus and Succulent Society of America's convention. He took the kids to see the San Diego Zoo and Safari Park – this is one of the premier attractions of this type in the world. It also has a couple of acres of a planted cactus garden, containing plants such as Saguaros and barrel cacti (*Ferocactus*) and agaves. After a week of sight seeing, he went to the CSSA convention, which offered the option of a desert park tour of the Anza-Borrego State Park. This park is named after an 18th century Spanish explorer, de Anza, and "Borrego" means big horn sheep, which are native in the mountain areas of the park, although he didn't see any. The park is the 2nd largest state park in the USA and covers an area of ½ million acres.

There were quite a few other Brits enrolled on the tour and their mode of transport was ex-military 6-wheel drive vehicles. As you turn off the main highway, you see plants of *Ferocactus cylindraceus*, and some are 10 feet tall. The park has a nice variety of plants, since the trip was in the spring (April), a lot of plants were in flower. He saw *Mammillaria*s and *Echinocereus engelmannii* in flower, and *Ferocactus* budding out. *Ferocactus cylindraceus* was found here with a huge diversity of spines in red, yellow and white tones. A cylindropuntia of some sort might have been *C. acanthocarpa*. Then they found the plant they had come to see - *Dudleya saxosa*, growing right by the track on the rocks. They carried on into the central part of the park, and were on dirt track roads now. You would need a 4-wheel drive vehicle here. You could see many agaves in flower. A fence off area was actually a site for beehives. The bees had plenty to feed from, with many Agaves and *Yucca whipplei* in flower. The latter is quite interesting - when the flower spike emerges from the centre of the plant, it is the size of

a football. They took a short break by a stream, and saw another *Dudleya* across the stream. After using a telephoto lens to take pictures of this, they walked round the corner and found 100s of the same right there on a small hillside. The plants were different colours depending on amount of sun they had received. There was also a parasitic plant growing on the natural scrub - dodder of some sort according to Paul Klaassen. It had a luminous orange colour to its stems. It occurs periodically when the conditions are right.

At this point, they learnt that one of their trucks had broken down, so they ended up staying here for a couple of hours, and a change in the schedule was necessary. They found more chollas and some nice *Mammillaria dioica*, which were plentiful on the hillside. *Mammillaria tetrancistra* is supposed to be here, but they didn't find any. There were Agaves and *Ferocactus* everywhere, and he found one *Ferocactus* which was 10-12 feet tall. *Dudleya*s were nestled amongst the other vegetation. On the hillside is a hybrid opuntia, Hoffman's Cholla which is found just here in 2-3 populations. It is different from the other chollas and is thought to be a natural and stable cross between *Opuntia bigelovii* and *Opuntia echinocarpa*.

Going back in time to 2009, he also attended a CSSA convention in Tucson. This is a good place to be if you want to see cacti in habitat, since you only have to drive a few miles out of Tucson and you are straight into the plants. It was springtime, and he visited the Redington Pass area, northeast of Tucson. There were opuntias and chollas all around. *Mammillaria macdougalii* were plentiful and had yellow flowers. They were fantastically flat and up to 12 inches across. Many things were in flower. *Mammillaria grahamii* had heads up to 6 inches tall. Plants of *Ferocactus wislizeni* were 6-7 feet tall. A hillside shot showed a mixture of cacti, scrub and Agaves. *Agave schottii* has long thin leaves and is atrocious to walk through. *Agave palmeri* and *Agave chrysantha* are glorious plants. There is also a population of a natural stabilised hybrid between these species, which goes under the name *Agave treleaseii*.

During the convention trips, he tends to run off from the bulk of the crowd to do his own exploring. On this occasion there were around a 100 people in 15 minibuses, so you haven't exactly got the desert to yourself. There were examples of *Ferocactus wislizeni* everywhere. Plants of *Echinomastus erectocentrus* were superb with fantastic magenta flowers. Some plants were up to 10 inches tall and others were 2-3 inch single-headed plants. This was the first time he saw the Saguaros. Just like the

Yuccas in the Joshua Tree Park - they have distinct zones where they grow. He hadn't seen a single until they crossed a ridge and then you see lots of them. The biggest one was an absolute monster of a size. Most were in flower. *Dasyilirion wheeleri* is well known at the higher elevations of the Redington pass area as is *Yucca elata*. It had been a wet winter, so all the plants were doing well.

Wandering up the hillside, he found *Echinocereus rigidissimus*. The plants ranged from small ones 2-3 inches tall, to 10-12 inch tall examples. These plants covered the rock hillside. We saw another Echinocereus. There was also some sort of bulb in flower. Further on into Arizona, we saw the Wigwam Motel in Holbrook on the iconic route 66. Martin mentioned that the Pixar film Cars modelled their Cozy Cone hotel in the movie on the Wigwam motel because the film crew had stayed there. Having seen the pictures of the motel, his wife and kids had wanted to stay there. The wigwams are made out of concrete - but he didn't recommend staying there more than one night.

He went on to Monument Valley. This is a spectacular place and he showed us a view taken from the veranda of the new 5 star hotel, the Goulding Lodge. You can do the 17 mile drive around the stone monuments on a dirt track drive - but this is on Indian land so you do have to pay a fee to them. At that time, he didn't know that are other cacti - including Sclerocacti - that could be found in this region.

In 2010, he had a cactus-free vacation to Yellowstone National Park - this is in the North West corner of Wyoming. Salt Lake City is the nearest large town and it's still a 10 hour drive from there. The family did a 10 day trip and visited Grand Teton Park first. Yellowstone was then a 5 hour drive from there. Yellowstone is famous for hot springs and geysers. "Old Faithful" is one of the well known attractions. There are also colourful geothermal circles caused by algae - but in June - which is when the Park opens - these didn't anything like the brochure pictures. All the steam rising from the lakes was affecting the view and it was not as impressive as it should have been. He did find a little sedum of some sort, but rather than plants, Yellowstone is famous for wildlife and geothermal features. June is a great time to visit as everything is waking up. You can see moose and elk. On one drive they came across two brown bears walking across the road only a few feet away from them - a fantastic sight to see.

In December 2009, he also visited the Huntington Botanical Gardens. His father had visited this in the

1980s and shown him some old photos, so he was keen to look for himself. He started off from Pasadena where he had tacked on an extra day to a field visit with some sales reps. The day he had chosen to go was a Monday and he learnt that the Gardens are closed to the public on that day! Fortunately he knew Elizabeth Pendelton - and she knows John Trager who is the Curator of the Desert Collections. As a result, he was able to get a VIP entry pass to the gardens, giving him free access to the entire place, with no-one else there other than the gardeners. During the course of the day, he visited the desert garden and also had a private visit with John Trager to the propagation greenhouses which house the ISI nursery. To see everything at the gardens, you really need to allocate 2 full days.

The gardens were founded by a property developer in the mid 1800s, who purchased a San Marino ranch and turned it into his own private gardens. There are many collections there and the Desert Gardens were founded in 1907. Martin said this was the largest outdoor planted collection of cacti and succulents in the world. The Huntington also has a fairly extensive art collection and library. We saw a picture of the main building, where the art collection is kept. He spent all morning in the Desert Collection and then had lunch with Trager and "friends of the gardens" who had come in to do volunteer work at the gardens.

Going along the main walk of the Desert Collection, the Aloes are some 30 feet high. It was December and the South African plants were growing well and in flower, thinking it was late spring. *Aloe dichotoma* was 12-15 feet high. There is a big palm collection in one of the other gardens, and you could see some of them too. Many Aloes were in flower. The plants were in superb condition and growing well. New World species from Madagascar were happily growing alongside Cacti and succulents from South Africa. The mesembs were looking happy. And of course, most of the plants were labelled (not always correctly, said Paul Klaassen!). There were fantastic examples of Tylecodons, Mesembs and Euphorbias. The bees were active, even in December. A plant of *Dioscorea elephantipes* was 5 feet across.

Notocactus magnificus was growing in the rocks. The Mammillaria section was not as spectacular as it was in the 1980s - a couple of bad winters in the late 1980s had killed many of the plants. Every plant was just fantastic and it wasn't just one - there 20 or 30 of them. *Clesitocactus strausii* was impressive and there was a rockery of Echinocactus. There were lovely agaves with glaucous leaves. His camera was still fairly new to him, and some of the

shots were overexposed. Astrophytums were 3 feet high. There were nice plants of *Trichocereus terscheckii* and *Echinocactus platycanthus* which he prefers to *E. grusonii*. A large clump of *Ferocactus robustus* consisted of 30 heads. Despite the good weather conditions some plants do die, and there was the carcass of some cereoid, clearly of a large size. *Machaerocereus eruca* is the creeping devil. It was fantastic to see the stems lying on the ground. *Agave parryi* v *huachucensis* looked good as did *A. americana mediopicta*. There were some tall boojum trees – these were imported when the gardens were first established. There were one or two large Mammillarias left and we saw a mound of *M. compressa*. We saw more Ferocacti and Agaves, and *Ferocactus latispinus* in flower. They have the space to grow some of the ceroids to their full potential. There was also a forest of flowering aloes, with a mixture of red flowered and yellow flowered plants. A South American Ceiba tree had a large bulge in its stem. Several more aloes were growing to a great height. He saw a squirrel and the little chap was going up and down the palm tree collecting the nuts. Again, these palms were at the edge of the Desert Collection.

In the afternoon, he met with John Trager and went to the ISI nursery area – we saw a picture of John Trager and Karen Zimmerman. There were 4-5 greenhouses and he was allowed to wander around them. We saw a Welwitschia seeding (he has a soft spot for this species), the Echinopsis hybrid pen and also poly tunnels where more plants were housed. We also saw the general garden area, equivalent perhaps to the Kew Gardens conservatory.

A view of John Trager's office showed he was a rather busy chap, with bits of paper strewn everywhere. The seed pod of something very large was resting on a shelf. He got to see the main greenhouse – which is a public display of plants of the tender species and choicer varieties – but is only open to the public at restricted times. There were many mesmbs, Lithops, Conphytums here. There were also a few Ariocarpus and a Lophophora (you need a licence to grow this in California!). There was also a 7-headed *Uebelmannia pectinata* and an *Astrophytum ornatum* plant some 6½ feet tall!

He saw one of his favourite ceroids, *Stenocereus beneckii*. Welwitschias in the public display area were significantly larger than the one had seen earlier, and male and female plants were sat next to each other. These grow quite quickly in the right conditions and the plants were in pots about a foot across and perhaps 15 years old. He's tried growing them and finds them difficult, and has not got any past two years yet.

The final place he went to was Florida and we saw the Kennedy Space Centre and the NASA building where the massive Saturn 5 rockets used to get man to the moon during the 1960s were constructed. When he visited, the very last shuttle mission was due to take off the following week and he managed to get a picture of the launch pad from some 2 miles away. His young girls were able to enjoy a Princess dinner as part of the Disney land experience. We saw some pictures of the beautifully restored Apollo moon rocket in a purpose built exhibit centre where it is protected from the Florida climate. His family standing at the base gave an indication of the sheer size! The space centre is well worth a visit if you are in Florida. Martin ended his talk with a picture of a sunset, with a saguaro off to the side.

Vinay Shah

Table Show Results

There were 13 entries in the October table show.

	Cacti – 3 Cacti	Succulents – 3 Succulents
Open	(1) I Biddlecombe	(1) I Biddlecombe
	(2) B Beckerleg	(2) B Beckerleg
	(3)	(3)
Intermediate	(1) B Beckerleg	(1) B Beckerleg
	(2) I Biddlecombe	(2) I Biddlecombe
	(3) T Radford	(3) T Radford

Ivor Biddlecombe

Bookworm Corner

Well it is a miracle that this article appears this month due to our computer deciding to go on strike and do all sorts of strange things, the man in the computer shop has diagnosed a case of 'sticky keys' and it is currently awaiting surgery! I personally hate computers and I think the best place for them is out of the window, in fact as this month's meeting is on Guy Fawkes Day, maybe it would be better to chuck it on the bonfire instead. I am attempting to write this month's contribution on Mark's mother's laptop!

November is here in all its glory (chilly/windy/wet) but lovely when the sun shines. Do make an effort to get down into the New Forest soon to see the changing colours of the trees and golden bracken. The fungi are amazing in the variation of size, shape and colour, appearing under trees, on fallen rotting wood and growing directly out of tree trunks and branches. Just don't ask me what the names are because apart from a few common ones I haven't a clue!

It's all go in the greenhouse with that annual nightmare of trying to put up bubble wrap and even worse get all those wretched cacti and succulents back in that have been spending the summer happily outdoors and now require some protection and warmth for the winter! However the *Faucarias* (tigers jaws) are all doing a cheery yellow mass flowering after a complete no-show last year and defiantly cheer up the cacti house.

'ENJOYED THE LECTURE? THEN ENJOY THE BOOK!'

October

Martin Doorbar gave a tour of America in his presentation entitled '5 Star American Habitats' which it turned out was a reference to the luxury accommodation and not necessarily the best habitats as I am sure most of us presumed! Books with particular reference to North America in the library include 'Cacti and Succulents in Habitat' (Preston-Mafham K.), 'The Genus Echinocereus' (Taylor N.) and 'Mammillaria - Cactus File Handbook 6' (Pilbeam J.).

November

This month we welcome Terry Smale who will be able to answer all those questions you have on 'Where do Cape Succulents Grow?' Books worth consulting include 'Flora of Southern Africa' (Court D.) and 'Lithops-Treasures of the Veld' (Hammer S.A.) and 'Mesembs of the World'

(Smith G.F. et al.). All these books can be found in the 'Featured Book Corner'.

Sue Wilson

Next Month's Meeting

Our final meeting of the year will be held on December 3rd. This will be our **Annual General Meeting** followed by the **Christmas Social**.

After receiving reports from branch officers, it will be time for some food and refreshments! Drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food for the buffet table.

There will also be a "bran tub" lucky-dip. Simply bring along a wrapped present (suggested value is £2 or thereabouts) and place it in the tub at the start of the meeting. Later in the evening you'll get a chance to take a present out of the tub.

In order to give the Committee members a chance to participate in the festivities, there will be no plant sales, sundries sales, table show or library at the December meeting.

Finally, for Committee members, a reminder that a committee meeting is due to be held on 19th November. **Please bring along your annual reports** so that these can be included in the December newsletter (or email to me).

Forthcoming Events

Sat	9 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	Asclepiadaceae (Tom Radford)
Tue	19 th	Nov	Southampton	Branch Committee Meeting
Sat	23 rd	Nov	Portsmouth	Zone 11 Quiz (hosted by Portsmouth Branch)
Tue	3 rd	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat	7 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	Annual General Meeting & Christmas Social
Sat	14 th	Dec	Portsmouth	Annual General Meeting & American Supper

Branch website: <http://www.southampton.bcsc.org.uk>

Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/southamptonbcsc>