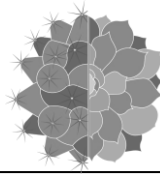


British Cactus & Succulent Society

Southampton & District Branch Newsletter

November 2024



Branch Secretary

David Neville
6 Parkville Road
Swaythling
Southampton
Hampshire
SO16 2JA
davnev@btopenworld.com
(023) 80551173 or
07974 191354

Newsletter Editor

Vinay Shah
29 Heathlands Road
Eastleigh
Hampshire
SO53 1GU
sotonbess@gmail.com
(023) 80261989

Editorial	1
Last Month's Meeting.....	1
Recommended Cactus & Succulent Resources on the Internet	1
Next Month's Meeting	6
Forthcoming Events.....	6

Editorial

Our clocks changed a week and a half ago so the evenings get dark quickly now. The weather is getting cooler and I suppose we will get a frost soon.

Last Month's Meeting

Cathryn's baby bump was developing and she was expecting her baby in November. She mentioned that she wasn't sure how many meetings she would be able to attend next year. David mentioned that although our membership was stable, attendance at our meetings is a concern - it has dropped this year, and we've been at around 20 for the last few months - this is the lowest number for 15 or more years. David felt that he should step down and let someone else take over with some new ideas. So we will need a new secretary and also a new chairman if Cathryn won't be around for a while next year - **please give this some thought ahead of the AGM**. We have a quite a few people on the committee but these two roles are important. We need to determine how the branch would be run and there are some important responsibilities such as looking after the visiting speakers each month.

Mike Hill and Ben Turner had sent their apologies and were unable to attend today. At the start of October, Portsmouth would be holding their Autumn show at Widley, which is between Cosham and Waterlooville, It's well worth attending - there is usually a good selection of mature plants in the show, and also plant sales, and refreshments would be served throughout the day.

On the screen was a picture of a plant that was looking for a new home. David said he had been contacted by a lady in Cadnam, and she had a large cactus which was 40 years old - it seemed to be a

Borzicactus. It was available free of charge to anyone who could provide a new home - and her husband was willing to transport the plant to our area. Judging from the picture it was around 5 or 6 feet tall including the pot.

Next month is our AGM and we normally hold an American Supper as well. Please read the information on the last page regarding arrangements for the meeting. It will also be time to elect the branch committee for next year. If you are interested in helping run the branch, please have a word with David during today's meeting. Also please also have a think about whether you can give a short talk to the members at the January meeting.

Recommended Cactus & Succulent Resources on the Internet

I mentioned that my presentation was around 40 slides and spending just 2 minutes on each would use up the time for the meeting. I intended to cover a mixed range of websites of interest to us and also mention some sources for information on orchids and bromeliads, which some of our members grow. One of the big problems with the Internet is that if a website changes its address (URL) or shuts down, no notification is issued, so if you have links to such a website, the link will stop working - this means you have to check the links every few weeks or months to make sure they are still active. There are some online tools which can help with this process, but it can be quite a big problem. One of the sites I would show later (The Succulent Plant Mall) suffer quite badly from this. During the talk I used my mobile phone as a mobile hotspot, so we would be able to visit the actual sites during the meeting, allowing us to see the online content in real time.

I adjusted the focus on our digital projector but the clarity didn't seem very good and the smallest fonts were not going to be readable. Clicking on a link in the Powerpoint opened a webpage in the web browser. I started by showed our branch website, which included a summary of the October meeting. Lower down was the branch programme of meetings. One of the links provides access to our monthly newsletters, and there are over 200 of these online. Google indexes the content of these

newsletters so if you do a search for words I might have used in a particular month or “BCSS Southampton” and also the talk’s title or speaker’s name, you should find the appropriate newsletter. There were other pages showing details of the branch’s 50th anniversary. There is a link to the Zone 11 page - the concept of zones has been retired, but the page shows all the meetings from the local branches (Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and us) on a single web page.

Next we visited the main BCSS website. This shows information about the individual branches and there was a history page describing how the BCSS was formed. There was a "Plant of the Month" section also a page showing events that are happening around the country. There is a page to renew your subscription. David mentioned that the site is now modern looking. There are links to each of the branches around the country, allowing you to visit their websites. The content level of each branch's site varies. One I would recommend is the Manchester branch. Like us, they publish monthly newsletters and theirs go back to the 1960s and 1970s. The BCSS’s history page shows how the hobby developed in this country. The Succulent House at Kew was established in 1845, “Cactus Culture for Amateurs” was published in 1889 and the National Cactus and Succulent Society was formed in 1895. The first meeting of the Cactus & Succulent Society of Great Britain was held in 1931 but the outbreak of war in 1939 caused activities to be suspended. The Yorkshire Cactus Society was formed in 1945, and the British Cactus and Succulent Society as we know it was formed in 1983, when the Yorkshire Society merged with the NCSS.

Next were some links to the BCSS forum. People chat about a lot of topics - there are 240,000 posts on there. You can vote for plant of the month (different pictures are published each month). David mentioned that one quite useful feature is helpful for beginners - if they post a picture of their plant and ask for it to be identified, there are lots of experts watching the forum and they will provide you with an answer. There are daily discussions going on and knowledgeable people contribute, including people who have given talks at our branch.

Next was Chris Rodger’s site. He is a Conophytum expert and he also has webpages on Adromischus and Crassula, along with some general habitat pictures. If you look at the Conophytums, there are a large number of pictures for each species, with some showing the flowers on the plants and lots of different views of the plants, including pictures from habitat. *Conophytum burgeri* had 11

pictures - this unusual plant is one that Geoff Penrose brought in as a “plant of interest” last year. David mentioned Chris is in his 50s and lives in Yorkshire and he is well connected and very well travelled, and he is a recognised authority on this genus. *C. stephanni* is a hairy plant and there were 17 pictures of this, including plants in habitat. With Adromischus, the pictures featured the flowers and the leaves and the habitat shots showed how difficult they are to spot when growing in other vegetation or when camouflaged to look like the rocks they grow in.

Another website is Terry Smale’s - he sadly passed away in 2021 but his site has been left up. There’s lots of information about the plants and the pictures feature plants in his own collection. There’s other information about bulbs and lithops as well. You can see the index of species down the side. Next was Derek Tribble’s site on Adromischus. He gave us a talk recently and he’s been to South Africa many times. His site covers the 5 sections and provides a distribution map of the species and more information about the plants.

Next was a site for Succulent plants maintained by Richard Hodgkiss - Geoff Penrose said he used to be a member of Harrow branch. There are a tremendous number of links to different families of succulent plants, and it’s a very large index. We looked at some of the example pictures. – it seems a useful resource for many genera.

Next was Desert Tropicals. I like this site because if you visit the cacti pages it has a list of the current cacti species in a particular genus but it also has the synonyms of all the plants that were formerly part of the genus. This is very useful when speakers use the old name. They have listed some of common names for the plants but this seemed to be American in origin, so perhaps not something you would hear people use in this country.

The IUCN Redlist website gives the current status of endangered plants. We visited the page for *Ariocarpus fissuratus* and it says “least concern” - this is because it occurs in many locations in Mexico. David said that most species have a much smaller distribution, and those are the ones that are most likely to be threatened.

ILFFE is a site which is an encyclopaedia for cacti - it has useful information on names and it also lists synonyms as well. It provides a representative picture of the plant and other details including names of subspecies and varieties. Looking at the page for *Borzicactus intertextus* it said the accepted name was *Matucana intertexta* and it showed you 3

subspecies and varieties. They also had the same page featured under Matucana. The site also has sections for Bromeliads, Bulbs, Palms & Cycads, Succulents and Trees. David said he was worried about whether they have used the latest names from the scientists or the commonly accepted names, meaning the site might not be as useful for collectors. Sulcorebutias were merged in with Rebutias, so *Sulcorebutia steinbachii* was listed as *Rebutia steinbachii* - but it did also appear under the link for Sulcorebutias as well.

Next was the Mammillaria society - Keith and Kathy Flannagan from Reading Branch have been involved in running this for many years. They have a generous seed offer - members can get up to 20 packets of mammillaria seed free of charge as part of their membership. The site includes some private areas where people have to login, and some public areas which anyone can view.

The Haworthia Society maintains pages for Haworthia. At our recent plant focus evening we heard how confusing the new Haworthia names are - they have a link to show the latest accepted names. There's a seed list and members can order these for 50p per packet. The society was due to hold a convention this October, in Leicester. You could go up for just a day or book a hotel room for the weekend if you wanted to attend all the events.

Next was a link to "Cacti Guide", which claims to be an "On-line Guide to the positive identification of Members of the Cactus Family." the site mentions 1439 species and over 11,000 pictures. They also have links to their forums where a wide variety of topics are discussed and people post pictures of their plants asking for ID or advice. I showed a selection of these links, with pictures of *Astrophytum asterias* cultivars, flowers of various plants, pictures of grafts and also pictures of *Mammillaria bertholdii* seedlings with their feathery spines. In the interests of time we did not check all the links I had prepared.

Next was the Francophone website which had been mentioned to me by David. It is a Cactus and Succulent Digital Library with items available for free download. The books were either in the public domain or featured under copyright (with permission). Flags were used to indicate the language of the publication and there are 300 items listed and I counted 134 British flags so presumably these are in English. There were some John Pilbeam books, including his *Gymnocalcium* book and his Cactus File Handbooks on *Rebutia*, *Thelocactus* and *Adromischus*. The files are in PDF format. Graham Charles's *Copiapoa* book and Gordon Rowley's *Caudiciform and Pachycaul Succulents* book is also

available. So this is a very useful resource. There are also links to over 50 periodicals at the bottom of the page.

Next was the International Asclepiad society site, with links to publications and several links to other asclepiad websites and general cactus and succulent resources. Tom Radford mentioned that the society doesn't exist any more - it ceased operation some years ago. The last journal was published in 2020 to Tom's comments appear to be valid. The subscriptions page mentions membership was £24/year and the Chairman was listed as Alan Butler (he now lives in Italy) and the Treasurer was named as Suzanne Mace. There is a morphology page explaining the structure of some of the flowers.

Next was the Cactus and Succulent Plant Mall. This is a resource which has been around for many years. It is run by Tony Mace. It used to be the main cactus and succulent resource back in the day - but Tony has let it get out of date - a huge percentage of the hundreds of links featured on the site do not lead anywhere. Some do work (e.g. the Mesemb Study Group) but the majority do not, so it seems to need quite a big overhaul. It was a very useful resource 20 or more years ago when the idea of the internet was in its early days.

Bihmann's Caudex is a useful site. It claims to feature 2000 species and 10000 pictures, and it has a large alphabetical list of the featured species. These are not grouped, so *Babiana* (a bulb) is followed by *Beaucarnea* (a succulent). It also features Asclepiads and Orchids. We looked at some of the *Euphorbias* and it listed around 160 species and clicking on one showed a picture of the plant in habitat and also in cultivation.

Plants of the World Online is a large online database of plant species. As of September 2024, POWO contained 1,433,000 global plant names, 531,800 detailed descriptions, and 400,900 images. It is also linked to by Kew Gardens. I showed the page they had for *Ariocarpus retusus*. David asked if anyone had used the site and Cathryn said she had used it. Richard said it started off as a collaboration between Kew and Missouri/New York botanical gardens and tapped into other resources such as the Catalogue of Life. He said it is an official Kew activity.

Next was a link to the official Kew Gardens website. It has details of all the activities done at Kew as well as information on the Princess of Wales Conservatory where all the succulents are housed. The temperate house has more exotic species. I also had a link to the Tree of Life which shows you a phylogenetic diagram for a plant species - this is the

diagram which the DNA researchers use to show the linkages and relationships between different plant families.

Next was a link to the "Catalogue of Life" - this is another cataloguing website - if you type in a name - for example Echinocereus - it will show you all the plants which are considered part of that genus. It shows when the species was established (and by whom) and also lists synonyms for the species. It seems pretty comprehensive.

The "World Plants List" is another site which claims to have a complete, synonymic checklist of the Higher Plants of the World Covering 355304 accepted species, 8703 hybrids, 47765 accepted infraspecific taxa and 999696 synonyms, in total 1,411,468 names. When I typed Echinocereus, I got a count of 602 items and against each one it said whether the name was considered valid or not, and if it was a synonym, the actual name was listed. It provides other information such as who published the name and when the name was established.

The "Global Species Database" is a site where you can download a CSV (comma separated variable) file with species names of plants and animals. I downloaded the file and it was 58MB in size and contained 530000 lines, and 290000 of these were plant-related.

We resumed the second half of the meeting with a slide on ISI (International Succulent Introductions) plants from the Huntington Botanical Gardens website. People like Ben Turner have given us talks about the Gardens. One thing they did was to propagate plants and allow people to order these by mail. The earliest ISI page on the site refers to 2002 but Tom Radford thought they started the scheme even earlier, perhaps in the 1970s or 1980s. David said they did send plants to the UK but stopped doing so even before Brexit, due to concerns about CITES. Of the plants on the 2002 page, a few were still available, including *Aloe striata*. The second page I showed at the Huntington was about the Schick hybrids. Rebecca mentioned there was an article on this topic in the latest eNews sent out by the BCSS. Bob Schick in the USA created a series of colourful Echinopsis hybrids over many years. and with wonderful. The Huntington showed 4 pages of these plants, I think the total number of Schick hybrids exceeds 150. There is a wide variety of flower colours and shapes and many of the flowers are multicoloured, adding to their appeal. On example was 'Sierra Skyline' with apricot to salmon petals. Echinopsis 'Spring Symphony' had ruffled pink petals. Some people try and collect every Schick hybrid in existence so when new ones

are issued they will try hard to get hold of them. The plants are easy to propagate and grow. The flowers only last 1 or two days but they are spectacular. David said the list on the Huntington is considered the reference and all the varieties in circulation were introduced by the Huntington. He mentioned that the eNews article by Elizabeth Pendeleton was worth a read if you are interested in these plants.

The "Cactus and Succulent Review" is a publication which used to be called the "Essex Succulent Review". The early copies were around 16 pages but the latest editions are 64 pages long. They sponsor the "Cactus at the Castle" event at Lullingstone, and if you are a member (just subscribe for free) you will get a discount on the entry price. The booklets are available in 2 resolutions and the September 2024 edition features Paul Spracklin who talked to us recently. Other authors in this issue who have also talked to us include Vicky Davies, Tony Roberts and Colin Walker, so they are all well known established people in our hobby. Apart from the articles, at the back there are adverts featuring C&V Seeds (Vicky Davis), Woodside Cacti and Ian and Sarda Woolnough, and Tony Irons Cacti. The journal started in 2014 so there are 10 years of quarterly journals available.

Next was the "Cactus Explorers" journal. This is a publication by Graham Charles, and the other editors were listed as Paul Hoxey, Zlatko Janeba and Martin Lowry. David said this is a more serious journal, written by people who like to travel and visit habitats. By contrast the Succulent Review is more general chit chat. This one is also used to publish new species names. The latest edition was 89 pages so it's quite a lengthy document.

Next, I showed some pages from Ebay. You can find a wide variety of plants on sale there, but since Brexit, getting plants from Europe - since now all imported plants need a phytosanitary certificate. This can be quite costly, although one certificate can cover multiple plants. Most small sellers are not set up to obtain the paperwork which means that they may attempt to send the plants without a certificate and you as the importer would then be responsible if the plants did get confiscated at customs. This issue does not arise if you are buying plants from sellers in this country. I showed a seller selling cuttings of sedums at a price of £8 plus postage. Another seller had a collection of 5 sedums. The colours of the plants were spectacular but it's likely that what you will receive will not be as attractive - some sellers will enhance the pictures to make them look more vivid and you have to use your common sense. A listing by someone called plantlife was a *Haworthia truncata* and this is actually Stuart Riley's ID. David

said Stuart tries to make sure all his auctions end on Sunday evenings because that is when the highest number of bidders are likely to be active. This plant sold for £16 with 8 bids having been placed. A variegated *Haworthia limifolia* was being sent from China and these are usually sent in a inconspicuous and the package is marked with something like "ornament" - there's no guarantee it will get to you. A listing for seeds of *Agave victoriae-reginae* showed a spectacular plant with a large rosette – there really is no guarantee the seeds will form a plant like that – the seller has probably chosen the best picture they could find - again the common sense rule applies. Another seller from China was selling a variegated *Agave victoriae-reginae* and the seller made a claim that if there were any customs issues he would resend the plant or provide a full refund. That's better than nothing but again you'd have to judge if the risk is worth taking.

Uhlig is a German seller and some of their pages are in German (but Google can translate) but they do have a few pages in English as well. I showed their selection of hardy cacti plants - you can choose the height of the plant and specify other parameters when searching on their site. When I checked the shipping section I saw that they were prepared to generate phyto certificates for sales of plants to the US - but there was no mention if they would do the same for plants sent to the UK, and also no mention of shipping costs to the UK. They also have a good selection of seed, or various genera although the majority were cacti. David mentioned that pre-Brexit, Uhlig they did attend as sellers at the BCSS National Show but the extra admin and costs of getting phyto certificates for everything means they haven't done this any more.

Next I showed Japanese site which showed some pictures of *Astrophytum* hybrids. Plants called "Super Kabuto", "Master Kabuto" and "Miracle Kabuto" were featured. There was also a picture of "Onzuka", which is a well-known form of *Astrophytum myriostigma*. "Giomagi" is an Italian seller of plants and they will ship to the UK and provide a phyto certificate. The pictures suggested it was an impressive nursery. Mark Roberts said he had been to Italy for a wedding and happened to come across their nursery by chance. David said he has seen Giomagi plants on sale in the UK and they are quite good quality.

Next, I showed some videos from Youtube. There are of course millions to choose from. These showed someone in Thailand who was growing a lot of different choice *Astrophytum* hybrids. Some of the videos had subtitles in English. Another video was

from Australia and it showed various *Astrophytum* hybrids. A video titled "Jumping cholla attack" showed the aftermath of a person tangling with an *Opuntia* plant. The cholla plants certainly do their best to stick to your shoes or any part of your clothing or body which brushes past them.

"Alsworthia International" was mentioned last month at our plant focus evening. These booklets were published by Harry Mays who has passed away but the site has been left up. There were 56 journals available for download - the old ones were black and white, the new ones have a colour cover. The discussions cover plants from the *Haworthia*, *Gasteria* and *Aloe* families. David said he considered the material to be quite dry and boring. Another site I had found was described as the "International Stapeliad Group" and it was run by the German Cactus Society. It claimed to feature 4181 species but the links and information content wasn't that good.

With Orchids, I had found a site which claimed to feature 865 genera and 25658 species. There were a large number of pictures so as long as you had an idea of the name of the plant, you might find something useful on here. The quality of the pictures was quite good. The site was free to access but the owner did invite donations. With bromeliads I had found a site for "Bromeliad Society International" - they publish journals and the older editions are available for the general public - you can only access the newest editions if you are a member.

"Orchid Dynasty" was the website of an orchid seller which had some nice pictures. I showed the images of a slipper orchid, and also *Sophronitis coccinea* – it's a small plant with a red flower which has been bred with *Laelias* and *Cattleya* plants to introduce the red colour into the hundreds of intergeneric hybrids which exist these days. Another picture showed an attractive hybrid - it was another intergeneric cross between *Odontoglossum* and *Oncidium* and other related genera. Finally I showed a *Phalaenopsis* (moth orchid) which had a large yellow band of variegation in its leaves - this is something I had not seen before. Another website I had found showed pictures of the smaller *Phalaenopsis* hybrids.

Moving on to Mesa Gardens - this is a US nursery which used to be owned by Stephen Bract. He retired in 2016 and sold the business to a couple of youngsters. It offers a tremendous number of seeds - the site said they had had 3000 cacti varieties, 600 succulents and 2000 mesembs. I showed some examples – the prices were \$2 for 20 seeds of *Titanopsis hugo-schlechteri* or *Lithops verruculosa*

and \$9 for 10 seeds of an exotic *Astrophytum myriostigma*. David said you always used to have to pay fees to customs when you imported stuff from them in the past. Cathryn said the new owners have a Youtube channels and she has watched quite a lot of their material. Steve Hammer used to work there for a while, and this explains the focus on mesembs.

C and V Cacti is owned by Vicky Davis and she has formed a partnership with one of Europe's prime suppliers of seed - Cactus Moravia - who are based in the Czech Republic. Her listings feature 4600 seeds and she also has other listings for North American and South American cacti seeds. The orders are grouped to reduce shipping costs - and once the seeds arrive in the UK, they would be mailed out to you. So there is likely to be delay of a few weeks in getting the seeds, but it offers an easy option without import hassles if you do want to get a wide variety of seeds.

I ended the session by showing how to use "google image search" to upload a picture from your computer to try and find a match and to identify it using Google's huge database of images. (they basically store every image on the internet and when you do the search for a matching image they have some algorithms which can look throughs 10s of billions of images and still return results to you within a second or two). You do have to take some care because Google will show you the names assigned to the matching pictures but on occasion the sourcing webpage may not have labelled it correctly. I demonstrated the search using an image from Ben Turner's talk earlier in the year and also from Richard White's talk which featured an unnamed Protea. Ian Acton has mentioned a name and I was able to confirm it using the results from Google.

At the end of the talk Cath mentioned that the CSSA talks are available on a Youtube channel. David mentioned a channel called "Crime Pays but Botany doesn't" - this apparently is "a Low-brow, crass

approach to plant ecology & evolution as muttered by a misanthropic Chicago Italian.". He is very knowledgeable and it's a watch as long as you are not offended by swearing and profanities. Richard mentioned that a site called archive.org is worth knowing about - it stores all the webpages from the internet in a database and if the site disappears you might find it has a copy of the information. He used it to restore a webpage that he has inadvertently lost. Someone asked "does anyone have any temperature information? ILLFE and Desert Tropicals have some information on this.

I will upload a list of all the websites I featured to our website in the next few days.

Vinay Shah

Next Month's Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **Tuesday December 3rd** and this will be our Annual General Meeting, followed by the Christmas Social. After receiving reports from the main branch officers, and electing next year's committee, we would normally hand out the Table Show trophies - but since we did not have a table show this year, that last part will not be necessary this year.

After this, it will be time to dig into some food and refreshments! **A selection of drinks will be provided by the branch, but please do bring along some items of food suitable for sharing for the buffet table.** Please note that we do not have an oven or cooking facilities at the meeting hall, so any food items which need cooking will need to be prepared in advance at home.

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

Forthcoming Events

Sat	9 th	Nov	Isle of Wight	Another Year another Slideshow. A year in plants and flowers
Sat	16 th	Nov	Portsmouth	AGM & Social Evening
Tue	3 rd	Dec	Southampton	Annual General Meeting, followed by Christmas Social
Sat	21 st	Dec	Portsmouth	no meeting
Sat	14 th	Dec	Isle of Wight	AGM and American Supper
Tue	7 th	Jan	Southampton	Members' Evening - Short Talks by Branch Members

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

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