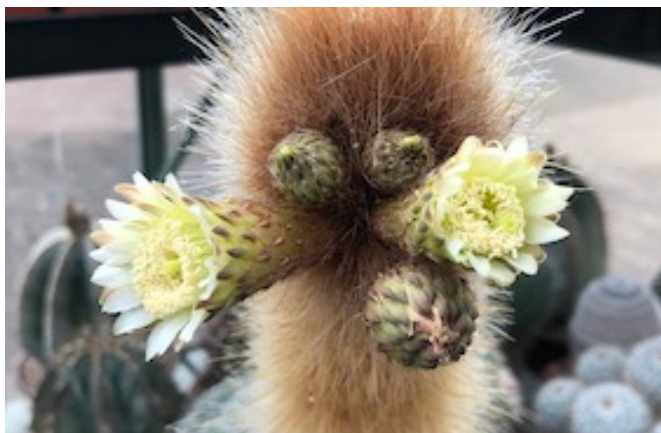


Chairman's View - Robin Arnott

Welcome to our autumn/winter newsletter – bringing you up-to-date with all that is happening in the Fife branch of the BCSS. We had an expectation that we might have been able to resume our monthly meetings but, so far, that has proved to be impossible. We are exploring other ideas as to how we can resume branch meetings and another article in the newsletter explores some options. The committee feel it is important to re-start some form of meeting, otherwise there is the danger that like Ayr branch, we will cease to function and have to close down. For those of us who enjoy meeting up, hearing good speakers and the chance to swap or buy plants re-starting is the better option.



Espostoa senilis in flower

But what about your plant experiences this year? After a coolish May, the summer proved to be very challenging with temperatures soaring and some of my plants suffered in the prolonged heat. With temperatures in the greenhouse reaching the high 40s Celsius, no wonder some plants protested and more than a few of mine succumbed. My policy of taking cuttings and potting up off-shoots has meant that I still have plants, although not as mature as they once were. It will be a few years before they will be challenging on the show bench. One benefit of the heat was the proliferation of flowers, the best



Larryleachia cactiformis with seed head

showing I have had for a few years and my *Espostoa senilis* (bought from Bill Christie in 2019) rewarded me with a fine display. Another 'first' was getting *Larryleachia cactiformis* to flower and set seed, courtesy, I was told, of bluebottles in the greenhouse. We did manage to hold a branch show in May and even though it was on a reduced scale, with limited classes, we attracted a good number of exhibitors with some wonderful plants.



The big show event of the year was, of course, the BCSS National Show. Originally scheduled for 2020 in Milton Keynes, it was delayed because of Covid but finally took place in Newark in September. There was a good representation of Scottish growers, ranging from Fife to Aberdeen and Glasgow where Christine and David Bruno's and Hamish McKelvie's names



Thelocactus rinconensis v. *nidulans* at National Show

featured on some cards. My entry, *Thelocactus rinconensis* v. *nidulans*, despite a good showing in May, and a first prize at a later show in September, failed to impress the National judges. One of the benefits of a National Show, besides seeing some magnificent plants, is the chance to browse and buy from the nursery stalls, sadly (because of Brexit) restricted to UK growers, where tastes from the straightforward succulents to the more difficult-to-

care-for cacti are catered for. If you are not careful, significant damage can be done to the wallet.



BCSS *Haworthia truncata*

Mindful of the injunction “you have no more room”, I was very circumspect and only bought a couple of *Astrophytum* Japanese varieties, a few Conophytums, some Crassulas... as well as some BEF pots. These are now safely installed in the greenhouse, where some of the Conos have already burst into bloom.

One aspect which did raise some eyebrows was the bookstall where a second-hand volume of Steven Hammer’s out-of-print 1993 book ‘The Genus Conophytum’ was selling for £200. When I returned home, I had a look at the various cacti and succulent



BCSS *Lithops* display

books I had bought over the years and had to re-appraise my appreciation of them. The moral is ‘look after your books’.

Another aspect which has been pleasing for me this year was the sowing of some seeds. It has been a few years since I last sowed any but I decided to buy some seeds from the Mammillaria Society and the Mesemb Study Group and also use some of my own seeds. I dusted off my propagator, set the thermostat to 22°C and sowed the seeds in 2” pots. Success was so-so and, in most cases, germination ran at between 10% - 50%, although there were a number of failures when no seeds germinated at all. The ones that survived are now being moved into

the greenhouse for over-wintering and keeping them viable is going to be another challenge.



BCSS *Matucana gold medal*

I mentioned earlier about losing some plants during the summer not all, as it turned out, to heat. I had been bothered by snails and thought I had eradicated them but in the autumn I found a *Stenocactus caespitosus* which I had had for a good number of years with a large hole in it where something had clearly had a good feast. It will not be seeing the show



Stenocactus caespitosus

bench again. Other plant failures were, I suspect, down to old age but some were where I had placed a piece of newspaper at the bottom of the pot to stop grit falling through. I am now wondering whether doing that affected the drainage and contributed to their demise. If anyone has any clues about that, please let me know.

With autumn and winter fast approaching and Covid booster vaccinations and flu jags on the horizon (maybe past by the time you read this) we hope that we are coming to the end of the pandemic. Let us enjoy Christmas and New Year and start looking forward to our branch show next May.

Robin Arnott, Chairman

Tri-lobed *Lithops hallii* v. *hallii* C174 – Update

Bryan J Morris (Fife BCSS)

I previously wrote a small article on having discovered a tri-lobed *Lithops* growing in a batch of seedlings I had successfully managed to propagate (see fig 1). I was hoping that this anomaly would provide me with a rare specimen that I could grow on, propagate and share the seedlings with some of the club members who specialise in growing succulents and especially Mesembryanthemums.

The last picture (Fig 3) shows the plant now having totally reabsorbed the old leaves and growing on in its final two leaved form. It is also starting to develop its mature markings and colouration which distinguishes it as a *Lithops hallii* within the genera.

Hopefully my next batch of *Lithops* seedlings will germinate successfully and may even produce another tri-lobed plant.... even if it does just last for a season!



Fig 1 Tri-lobed *Lithops hallii* v. *hallii* C174



Figure 3

However one year on - and further to my previous observations the photo in (fig 2) shows that the *Lithops* having started to split and reabsorb last year's growth. Unfortunately the plant has reverted back to its usual two leaved form. A little disappointing although not surprising as most of the information I had researched states that this is most often the case.

Lithops from the mesembryanthemum family of succulents are a fascinating species to grow and as shown, do occasionally throw up an oddity in either their shape, form or colouration. They are definitely worth adding to a collection and if the proper watering and care regime is followed, they are relatively easy and rewarding species to look after.



Figure 2



OUCH!! - from the Internet

Cacti and Mesembs

My interest in Cacti started in 2017 and I collected a good number of them over the next 3 years. In 2020 after carrying out a few exchanges and some sales, I made sufficient room to seriously start collecting Mesembs including *Lithops*, *Dinteranthus* and other Mesembs.



I now have a fair collection of *Lithops* amounting to 23 species with C (Cole) numbers and some seedlings. In addition I am now growing and collecting a limited number of Mesembs with the following titles:



Photos and Text by Colin Hay

Aloinopsis, *Antimima*, *Argyroderma*, *Cheiridopsis*, *Conophytum*, *Delianthe*, *Didymaotus*, *Dinteranthus*, *Faucaria*, *Gibbaeum*, *Lapidaria*, *Lithops*, *Nananthus*, *Oophytum*, *Pleiospilos*, *Schwantesia*, *Titanopsis* and *Vanheerdea*.



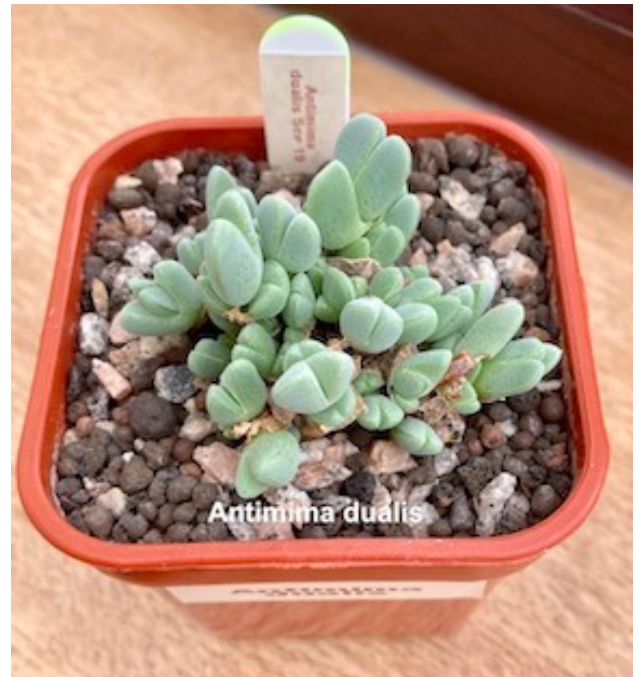
I find it a fascinating hobby and now have a good mixture of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter growers - a number of them have different watering and display needs that will keep my interest throughout the year.



As well as being a member of BCSS and MSG I look forward to their quarterly magazines, newsletters and Zoom meetings. I have also carried out a number of plant exchanges with members of Facebook Lithops UK and Facebook Mesembs UK.



I have a few Mesemb seedlings available for future exchanges.



To broaden my interest and education of Mesembs I joined the following Facebook groups - South African Mesembs, Love Lapidaria, Conophytum Lithops and Mesembs, Aloinopsis & Cold Hardy Mesembs, Mesembs Habitat- to see them in their natural surroundings in South Africa and Namibia, Mesembs Israel, Love Titanopsis, Aizoaceae (Mesembs) and Mesembryanthemum UK. Since joining these groups, I have learned a lot from the Group experts.



Colin S Hay

A Tale of Two Lithops

Jim Gibbs

Actually a tale of two pots of *Lithops* seedlings. I was walking past a small florists in Dundee and noticed two pots of *Lithops* seedlings in their window and couldn't pass them up.



Pots 1 (above) & 2

At home left them for a couple of days then watered them. A couple of days later one of the pots had a head that had rotted (gone squishy is the scientific term I believe) so I split both pots and left them to dry off.



Pot 1 separated



Pot 2 separated

One of the pots had obviously had a problem which was resolved when a bundle of soil started to move on its own and this was discovered.

In fact you can see the start of the damage on the head at



the bottom left of the second pot and had involved quite a few of the heads in that pot as seen in the separated plants. Just for interest I photographed a couple of heads with backlight and you can see the internals of the plant, not to mention the amount of damage the blank blank slug had





done, at least I think it was a slug although I haven't see one quite this small before. It was about the length of a fingernail.

All this was at least understandable but the next part I am a bit confused about as the plants from the pot with the larger heads seemed fine for three or four days then overnight this happened to all but three heads. Not squishy, they all seemed to have dried off to hard remnants.



However, to end on a happier note, Sheila potted up the plants this morning, all of the first pot and the three survivors of the second.



Pot 1 separated

I wasn't sure what the species were but by following the scientifically proven method of comparing with photographs in a book I thought that the more numerous and variable MAY be *Lithops leslei* while I was very unsure about the second which bore some resemblance to *L. bromfieldii* (the *mennellii* variety in particular) or perhaps *L. hookeri*. After



Pot 2 separated

circulating the problem to Colin, Robin & Brian (and an expert friend of Colin's) the second pot, the damaged plants, are *L. bromfieldii* while the first pot is likely to be *L. leslei* or *L. salicola* but variability makes it difficult to be certain.

I really just blame myself for the damage. When chatting to the public I usually mention the need to repot into your own soil as soon as possible to avoid things like this but, although I will often not repot if the plant comes from an experienced grower, this was clearly a case of do as I say not as I do.

Hospital Corner

I really enjoy looking after my Cacti and succulent collection and like to think that I am getting better at growing my plants, especially with all the help and advice from the BCSS club members and all of the information contained within the various books and publications that are available on this



subject. Unfortunately, there are still times where a plant shows signs of distress or illness and a few casualties emerge.

I don't like having to throw out plants or plant material and if a cactus or succulent looks sick or if it's on its last legs then I always like to give it a chance, and see if I can get it to recover. In these cases it's off to what I call 'hospital corner' in my small greenhouse.

The greenhouse is mainly used for growing bedding plants, tomatoes, chillies and cucumbers etc. and is not in the best of positions in the garden to house a cacti and succulent collection. However it does have its uses as a plant hospital and it's now become a transit stop between the conservatory where the majority of my collection is housed and the compost bin!

The problem I have is that hospital corner has now grown into a rather large space due to the fact that I seem to have more and more plants that have succumbed to some sort of disease or infestation. In some cases it is too late and the plant will end

Photos and Text by Bryan Morris

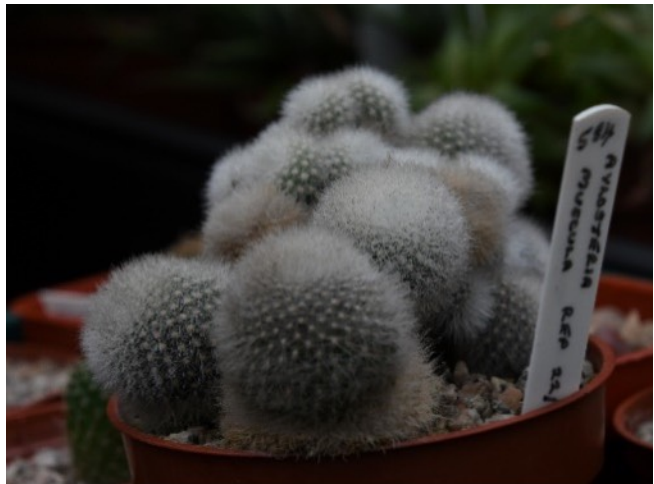
up going straight into the compost bin, however I have noticed that a few of the casualties moved to hospital corner have actually started to grow again. Whether it's the change of light, temperature, humidity or all of the above, several of the cacti have now started to look much improved.

The past two years with the dry hot summers has caused a bit of a red spider mite epidemic amongst my cacti. Over time I have tried and tested many different products to kill or control the spider mite with little success. The main issue being that once you notice evidence of this pest it is generally too late and they will have grown into epidemic proportions and are very difficult to then eradicate. One product I tried is called SMC (Spider mite control), it's supposed to act



on contact and suffocate the spider mites. I would not advocate its use however as it leaves a horrible greasy, sticky residue on everything it comes into contact with, and trying to remove the resultant residue from pots, shelves and glass is nigh on impossible. Best give this product a miss and leave it for use on other types of plant species and certainly not ones in the house.

A small tray of Rebutias as shown in the pictures below, had a degree of scarring due to red spider mite and may also have suffered a bit of scorching. The chlorophyll in a couple of them had depleted to the extent that they had turned a bleached white. Having moved them, they have now started to regenerate and new heads and offsets have grown without any markings or etiolation.



The next step will be to take cuttings from the new growth and try to get them to root, which will hopefully provide me with some plants to grow on and move back into the main collection.

I do sometimes have a degree of difficulty getting cuttings and offsets to root so any help or tips on this matter would be gratefully appreciated. The Sulcorebutias and Gymnocalyciums seem to be particularly stubborn.

Moving forward – I would hope that I can keep improving my growing techniques and slowly reduce any plant casualties to the extent that the hospital corner will no longer be required!



NEWS

Summary of Committee Meeting October 2022

The Branch Committee Meeting held a meeting Leven Parish Church with the main purpose of discussing resuming Branch meetings and whether any changes would be beneficial. The discussion resulted in a decision to seek members' thoughts on keeping things as they were, or using daytime meetings at the weekend and whether a change in venue, or even moving the meetings around the area, would be acceptable.

Based on the members' opinion we should be aiming on holding a first meeting during January. It would be prudent to use our own members for a presentation for this meeting until we can assess the attendance available for external speakers and give time for catching up and discussion. It was agreed to hold a Branch Show next May 13 in our usual venue of Leven Parish Church.

The treasurer reported that there had been no changes in the finances as there were no meetings or events other than the Branch Show this year and he is waiting for a report on the show.

Communication with members between meetings is increasingly important with email and occasional newsletters, perhaps being aided by some social media interaction. The National Society also offers to create and maintain Branch websites and the committee agreed that there may be advantages in presenting our information in the same format. The benefits of some social media interaction versus privacy issues were briefly discussed and the committee decided to investigate an App called Signal, similar to WhatsApp, as a possibility.

Our lack of a Safeguarding Policy has the potential for problems and Robin offered to produce one. Almost immediately the Society sent a link to the Society's new safeguarding policy and the committee agreed to adopt this policy for the branch.

If anyone has any comments or questions about the minutes please contact the Branch secretary.

Results of the Questionnaire

As agreed at the Committee Meeting a questionnaire asking for opinions on time and venue of future meetings was sent to all current Branch members, with an initial limited set of options.

The results were as follows

Summary	
Venue/Time	Totals
Cupar Y/Monday 7:15pm	4
Cupar Y/Saturday 10am	8
Leven Church/Saturday 10am	4

As you can see there was a large majority for a Saturday daytime meeting with a preference for Cupar over Leven with first choices. Unfortunately since then Cupar YMCA has told us they cannot accommodate us on a Saturday so the proposal is to arrange an initial meeting in the Leven Church Hall on a Saturday in January to see how things go and then use part of the meeting to decide how we move forward.

We shall email details of the meeting as soon as they are finalised.

Trichocereus pasacana in Argentina



Yet another photograph taken by our late President of the branch, Mary Sellars, during one of her trips to Argentina. The species this time is back to a *Trichocereus* we have seen before, *T. pasacana* which grows at altitudes above 2000m. It is a tree-like cactus that gets up to 10 meters tall though the average height is usually a lot less. It has between 18-22 ribs. The mature form looks a lot different to its early appearance. The spines are yellow in color and their length is decreasing during the life cycle of the plant. Old plants tend to have lesser spines than young ones and the early spine form is a lot stronger than the adult form. It produces white blooms which are four to six inches with long hairs on most parts and covered with a dark brown wool.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Good New Year