

CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

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Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

Vol. 38 No. 5

May 2020

>>> No Meetings or Workshops this month <<<

Not much activity to report as we continue our COVID-19 quarantine.

Hope everyone is staying safe at home and has what they need to get by.

If you need some assistance getting through please feel free to contact one of the Board Members.

Starting on page 3 is a fascinating story, with pictures, of Peter & Jaan's latest trip to Namibia. I know you will enjoy this report!

55th ANNUAL CSSA SHOW & SALE

The Huntington has made a decision to cancel all June events which means our show & sale scheduled for June, 26-28, has been cancelled for this year. The CSSA held off making that decision for as long as possible but now it has been made for us. I'm hopeful that we can all get through these difficult times safely and see each other soon. I look forward to the 55th Annual Show & Sale next June, 2021, at the Huntington and hope to see all of you there.

Sincerely,
Barbara Hall—Annual Show Chair



Bruce Hargreaves in his Agave Garden



Dear FCSS Membership,

Both the Board and I hope that all of our members are doing well and are staying safe during this time of quarantine. As I am sure you are aware, our May meetings have been canceled. Unfortunately, with the current uncertainty as of late, we have come to the decision to cancel all club meetings and workshop until further notice. When we are notified that gatherings may resume, and feel that it is safe to do so for our members, an announcement will be sent out. We feel this is the best course of action, rather than stringing everyone along on a month-to-month basis. This is a hard time for everyone but we will be doing our best to continue delivering digital cactus and succulent content for you to enjoy.

Please continue to send in your plant pictures and they will be featured in upcoming newsletters, articles and on the club's social media pages.

You may also submit any plant questions you may have. The question, along with the answer will be published in the next newsletter. No question is too small and it's a great way to learn. You may send all pictures and questions to: rob_scott85@yahoo.com

We genuinely hope that all of you and your families are doing well and staying healthy. If anyone is in need of help, please reach out to myself or any board member. We are all part of this group and are here for everyone.

It feels like summer is slowly coming. We are having really warm days, but nights are still on the cool side. This is a great time to move all of your plants to their new summertime spots. Most of us kept plants under the patio for the winter but now it's time to get more sunlight, just be careful not to burn them! When moving plants it's best to slowly acclimate them back to full sun. This is especially important as the temperature begins to hike. Moving plants right to the full hot sun can cause their stems and leaves to burn. Slowly move them to the brighter light, moving them closer each day. Shade cloth can also be used to acclimate the plants. Fold it a few times over the plant to create "denser shade". Slowly reduce the layers so that more light gets through to the plants. Slowly adjusting the plants to more light gives them time to build up the plant cells to take more sunlight. This process can take some time, but it's better than having burned plants!

Remember that the majority of succulents don't like the harsh afternoon sun here in the Valley. Make sure they get shade or bright light in the hot afternoon and evening. This is even more important for plants in pots, as roots get hot and will die.

It's also time to start reducing or stopping all watering to winter growing plants. Now's the time of year that these plants start going dormant for the summer months. You will start seeing the leaves turn yellow, maybe even wrinkle. Some plants may lose their leaves, while others will look perfectly fine. The majority of these plants don't want any more water and if given water could rot. Depending on the plant type a little water once every couple weeks will help the plant not desiccate too badly. A list of these winter growers will be attached to the end of the newsletter.

Well that's all I have for now. I hope everyone is doing well and staying busy caring for your plants. We are still going through the photos that members have sent in. Please continue to send photos of your yard and plants so they can be added to newsletters and posted online. Please join the club's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Take care and stay healthy,
Robert

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Greetings from Namibia!

Peter Beiersdorfer and Jaan Lepson

In early March we flew to Namibia, on our fourth trip to this southern African country, once known as "Southwest Africa." The country sports a very arid coastal region with almost no rainfall, and an arid interior, which in the south near northern South Africa is a winter rainfall area, while the north gets summer rains. The Kalahari Desert makes up the eastern part of Namibia.

During our earlier trips we had explored many of Namibia's natural wonders, such as the superb dune fields of the Sossusvlei area, the Fish River Canyon, which is Namibia's equivalent of our Grand Canyon, and the moon-like landscape which hosts *Welwitschia mirabilis*, a plant that throughout its lifetime, which can well exceed hundreds of years, sprouts only two leaves that lengthen endlessly like pasta coming from a pasta machine.

Our recent trip was dedicated to finding by ourselves some of the 14 *Lithops* species growing in Namibia. We are growing 35 of the 36 species of *Lithops* in our yard in Livermore. Finding *Lithops* in the wild would clearly be a highlight of any trip, especially given their reputation for being almost impossible to locate and see.

We started our trip by searching for *Lithops vallis-mariae*. It was first found near Mariental, a town of about 10,000 about 275 km south of Windhoek, Namibia's capital. Some of you may remember the town's name from a talk Peter gave on Namibian succulents. The town is rather sizable for Namibia and it has several doctors, one of whom stitched up Peter's head after falling 20 feet from a cliff at a location 200 km away in November 2016. *L. vallis-mariae* is thought to be the hardest *Lithops* to find in habitat. Because of its camouflage it blends into the surrounding gravel almost perfectly.

We had picked three possible locations to search for *L. vallis-mariae*. The first was at the edge of the small village of Berseba. It is said that because the plants are readily accessible they would likely be extinct by now. We did not find the exact location where the plants are supposed to be. But to our delight we found several plants scattered over a few hundred yards where we searched. Later that day we visited another location about a 100 km away and by pure luck found four more plants. We called it a day.

At other stops we found two subspecies of *L. schwantesii*, *L. karasmontana* ssp. *bella* and *eberlanzii*, *L. francisci* (these and the *eberlanzii* were incredibly desiccated after years of drought), and the rather elusive *L. optica*, which grows in the arid coastal desert near the port city of Lüderitz. We also went to a farm larger than the country of Liechtenstein where we found *L. gesiniae* nestled in the cracks of polished granite plates at an altitude of about 1500 m (5000 ft).

We were already trying to get flights out of Namibia well before our scheduled departure. When Namibia had its first two cases of Covid-19, a Romanian couple coming from Spain, it immediately closed its borders to foreigners from high risk countries. This included Americans. Various airlines stopped flying into Windhoek. In fact, South African Airlines, which we flew from Johannesburg to Windhoek, ceased operations altogether until May 20, and our flight out was cancelled.

We lined up various other flights, including a flight from Cape Town. But there was no way get to Cape Town by air that day. Even by car did not work, because South Africa had closed its borders to anyone who has been in a high risk country for the past 20 days, which includes America and Europe.

At present (3/28/20), both Namibia and South Africa have instituted a three week lockdown. We are spending our lockdown time at the Alte Kalköfen Lodge, which is about 100 km (65 miles) from the nearest town of Keetmanshoop and about 230 km away from Lüderitz.

The lodge is a wonderful place. For starters, it is home to the "Cole Lithoparium." This is a huge complex, which houses all species and subspecies of lithops and their cultivars. It also has collections of other plants, such as conophytums, haworthias, and stapeliads. Here we spend our days admiring the collections and watching the odd train slowly lumber by twice a day or so. Our hosts, Frikkie and Hilde Mouton, are wonderfully friendly and kind - which, I must add, has been a trademark of all of our Namibian hosts.

We have been booking new flights for the time when the lockdown is over on April 16. The first we found is on April 20. We hope these flights will operate and carry us back to California so that we can start caring about our own lithops at home. But we will probably be sad to leave Namibia when the time comes.

A quick update (4/4/20): The US embassy in Namibia organized a charter flight on April 1 to fly 50 US and Canadian citizens from Windhoek to Lusaka (Zambia). The State Department also provided for a letter from the Namibian Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation that allowed us to drive 700 km from the Alte Kalköfen Lodge to Windhoek despite the lockdown. The day before the scheduled departure we scrambled to get a seat on the charter flight and to book connecting flights on Ethiopian Airlines to Addis Ababa and from Addis Ababa to Washington and on United Airlines from Washington via Chicago to San Francisco. By 6 pm on Tuesday evening we were packed and ready to drive to the airport. Because the charter flight had weight restrictions, we had to leave two suitcases with clothes, bird guides, plant books, tripod etc at the lodge. At 3 am we arrived outside the airport, which opened two hours later. Our flight left at 10 am for Lusaka, and 41 hours later we arrived at home in Livermore.

We'll take advantage of our shelter-in-place period in California to assemble a presentation on "Sleuthing for Wild Lithops and Their Companions". The program is scheduled for the March 2021 meeting of the Fresno Cactus and Succulent Society -- if all goes well.

Figure captions:

(Photos next 2 pages)

Fig. 1: Habitat of *Lithops vallis-mariae*. Can you find the double-headed plants? Peter could not locate the two big plants Jaan found - instead, he found the small one hidden in the lower left that Jaan didn't notice!

Fig. 2: Close-up of *Lithops vallis-mariae* showing the wonderful texture of their skin.

Fig. 3: Four-headed plant of *Lithops karasmontana* ssp. *bella* in the wild.

Fig. 4: Double-headed plant of *Lithops francisci* in the wild. The plant is nearly fully desiccated after many years without rain. At one location only 4 of 17 plants we found were still alive.

Fig. 5: The Namibian port city of Lüderitz showing some of the coastal hills that are home to *Lithops optica*.

Fig. 6: Starting the climb to look for *Lithops gesinae*.

Fig. 7: Double-headed plant of *Lithops gesinae* in the wild.

Fig. 8: Close-up of *Lithops gesinae*. The plant is plump from recent rains.

Fig. 9: Lithoparium at the Alte Kalköfen Lodge.

Fig. 10: Our abode at the Alte Kalköfen Lodge until the lockdown order in Namibia has been lifted.

Fig. 11: Embarking our charter plane to Lusaka, Zambia.





HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Fred Gaumer, Bill Gale (2nd); Vickie Veen (5th); Valerie Kissler (7th); Mary C. Arellanez (10th); Susan Nagles (13th); Kathleen Sebetka (15th); Charlie Nelson (23rd); Brian Nagles (21st); Madeleine Mitchell (28th).

A get well card was sent to Eddie Etheridge. If you know of any member who needs a sunshine note, let me know. Sue

Roz Tampone alerts us to this plant i.d. site:

<https://plantsam.com/cacti-succulents/>

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This may be too good to be true, but a few years ago a lot of growers were raving about this Fast Acting Fertilizer:

- 12 oz. beer, any kind
- 1 cup Epsom salts
- ½ cup non-sudsing household ammonia
- 2 cups HOT water
- 1 cup Vitamin B1 Plant Starter
- 4 Tbs bloom booster fertilizer
- ½ cup molasses, preferably blackstrap

Combine Epsom salts and hot water in a blender and mix until salts are dissolved. Mix the rest of the ingredients in a container large enough to hold the whole works, and add the dissolved Epsom salts mixture. The concentrate keeps well at room temperature, in a capped plastic or glass container. Shake well before using. To use, add 1 teaspoon of concentrate per gallon of lukewarm water, and use every time you water your plants. Any excess diluted fertilizer should be refrigerated (for some reason, keeping the diluted stuff at room temp too long makes it go bad.) This is supposed to be good for a wide range of plants.

Well, I happened to find this and thought I'd add it for your amusement. You can read online about beer as fertilizer. You might as well just go ahead and drink the beer, then buy a fertilizer that contains all the trace elements.

You read about homemade elixirs all the time. Our former member Rudy Rapisura created his own heavy duty insecticide by steeping tobacco butts (collected from a smokers' receptacle at a nearby mini-mart) into a smelly, dark brew in a bucket he kept in a closet. He added some other stuff to the concentrate; I can't recall now what else he used. It was his very own lethal neonicotinoid. He swore it would kill anything with six legs. (Not to mention anything with two or four legs.)

Here's an Aloe bloom from Karen's garden —>

THE CACTUS THAT WEARS A HAT

One of our older members always used the name "Turk's Cap" for a melocactus. The cephalium atop the mature plant (usually *Melocactus matanzanus*) is red and can resemble the fez that is worn in some North African and other areas (though it was actually banned in Turkey at one time.)



Once the plant begins to form the cephalium, its growth form changes in a dramatic way. Charles Glass, former editor of *Cactus and succulent journal (US)*, contributed these comments to an online list a few years ago:

"Melocactus cephalia are the result of drastically changed growth rate where the spines are produced in abundance, but become more bristly, along with an abundance of wool, but the interareolar space virtually disappears. In other words, the areoles are produced adjacent to each other so there is no longer any green epidermis showing. There is plant body underneath all those spines, bristles and wool, but now very slender in comparison to the basal stem that is typically cactus-like: ribs, green skin and spaced spines. For the rest of the plant's life (which may be considerable) the basal portion is the only part of the plant that produces chlorophyll and it is never replenished with new growth so if it is scarred, those scars are permanent—there for life. The cephalium, which is really just the upper portion of the stem, with its new growth/ratio, keeps growing, getting taller, producing more spines and flowers until the plant succumbs to old age or whatever."



Summer Dormant Succulents

Grow mostly in fall, winter, and spring

Most of these plants will take some water during the summer months, but not frequent heavy waterings. Water lightly every couple weeks to keep from extreme desiccation. Remember if not sure, just don't water. We are always here to help.

Adromischus

Aeonium (can take some summer water if in the ground)

Aloe (brevifolia, buhrii, comosa, dichotoma, distans, erinacea, framesii, gariepensis, glauca, karasbergensis, krapohliana, melanacantha, mitriformis, pachygaster, pearsonii, pillansii, plicatilis, ramosissima, & variegata)

Anacampseros Bulbs (South African- boophone, Lachenalia, Oxalis, *Haemanthus*, *Veltheimia*- Do not water at all when dormant)

- Cotyledon
- Crassula
- Dudleya (no summer water at all)
- Graptopetalum
- Graptoveria
- Haworthia
- Kalanchoe
- Pachyphytum
- Pachyveria
- Peperomia
- Portulacaria
- Sedum (non-cold hardy varieties)
- Senecio