



Fig. 1: View of the *Euphorbia* collection with species like *E. viguieri* var. *ankarafantsiensis*, *E. perrieri* var. *elongata*, *E. beharensis*, etc.

## Euphorbias in conservation – when work meets passion

by Thomas Cammaerts

In 2010 I started working at the Meise Botanic Garden. I had just left a busy period of landscape gardening which only allowed a minimum of time to collect succulents. My first introduction to the greenhouses of the Botanic Garden was a general introduction. Already then, I noticed there were a lot of different succulent collections. I saw Agavaceae, Cactaceae, Liliaceae and others. But more important, I saw a modest Euphorbiaceae collection in the center of one greenhouse. After this introduction, I was assigned to the tropical collections (Araceae, Bromeliaceae and Arecaceae). However, the time during lunch break or after work I spent in the succulent greenhouses.

After a first quick look I concluded that the *Euphorbia* collection was a collection like so many in other Botanic Gardens. There were species like *Euphorbia lactea*, *E. milii*, *E. canariensis*, etc. But after a closer look I found species like *E. maromokotrensis*, *E. ambovombensis* var. *ambatomenahensis* (now *Euphorbia ambatomenahensis*), *E. dawei*, *Elaeophorbia drupifera* (now *Euphorbia drupifera*)

and *Monadenium kaessneri* (now *Euphorbia neokaessneri*). This was a solid base to build upon! Consequently I expressed my love for succulents whenever and as much as possible. This resulted in my transfer to the dry collections 6 months later.

During the following period, the Meise Botanic Garden had some contact with Jaap Keijzer and Rikus van Veldhuisen. Both were really helpful by giving their advice and expertise. The *Euphorbia* collection moved to another greenhouse and I started to repot, prune and multiply the plants.

In 2011–2012 I received two important e-mails that changed the course of our collection. The first one came from Wilbert Hettterscheid asking us if we were interested in taking over a part of his collection of euphorbias from Madagascar. This collection was housed in the Botanic Garden of Utrecht at that time. The second e-mail came from Arboretum Trompenburg. The late Dick van Hoey-Smith had a very impressive succulent collection and a

love for euphorbias. At that time the Arboretum was making some changes in their collections and they had to downsize the succulent section. The following weeks I started moving plants into the greenhouse in Meise, first from Utrecht and then the ones from Rotterdam.

Because the timing wasn't perfect we just moved the plants and cleaned them up a bit, but greater work like repotting and pruning had to wait until spring. Meanwhile the contact with the International Euphorbia Society got better and better. Jaap and Rikus made a second trip to the Botanic Garden to offer their expertise. Later on I made my entry into the committee of the I.E.S.

After repotting everything, I could finally enjoy all those new plants. The Madagascar collection had a lot of interesting and sometimes very rare species like *E. umbraculiformis* (nomen nudum), *E. commersonii* (syn. *E. elliotii*), *E. bulbispina*, *E. erythrocuccullata*, *E. rossii* and many others. Most of these plants originally came from the Botanic Garden Heidelberg and Palmengarten Frankfurt and were offsets or seedling from original plants Werner Rauh or Röösl and Hoffmann once collected in Madagascar. Many of them came from the type locations.

The collection from Arboretum Trompenburg was a mixed collection with lots of species from South Africa, but also many from east tropical Africa. The ones that

stood out were species like *E. prona*, *E. turbiniformis*, *E. sepulta*, *E. mitrififormis*, *E. micracantha*, *E. venefica*, etc. In total hundreds of plants were moved from the Netherlands to the Botanic garden. The Botanic Garden decided to focus on the Euphorbiaceae collection and to build up a Reference Collection. From then on we collected numerous new species coming from other gardens or through the I.E.S. The collection grew massively and together with the I.E.S. we made plans to organize an International Euphorbia Convention in 2015, to celebrate 10 years of existence of the society. The Convention was a success and a lot of new contacts were made.

During the following years we received plants through expert sellers like Rainer Martin, Ernst Specks and Petr Pavelka. But also some private collectors like Cok Grootsholten donated plants. I myself went through several databases of other Botanic Gardens in the hope of finding new species and making some exchanges with them. The result now is that we have good collaboration with several Botanic Gardens like BG Bonn, BG Bochum, Palmengarten Frankfurt and have already made exchanges with Sukkulentensammlung Zürich, Jardin Exotique de Monaco and others.

The future for the Euphorbiaceae collection looks good. The Meise Botanic Garden is planning to build a



Fig. 2: *Euphorbia podocarpifolia*: Obtained from an Australian botanist who collected the plant in Cuba, this little known species from the Cubanthes group grows in a warm and humid climate and has proven to be difficult to propagate. The BG has one plant and the second plant is at Jaap Keijzer's place. Cuttings take a long time to root and are prone to slowly start rotting during winter. We now have started to experiment with extra light and warmer conditions.

new complex of greenhouses to keep the different collections. This means we can improve the accommodations of the plants and there will even be room to further expand the collection. For now we are focusing ourselves on the upcoming International Euphorbia Convention in May 2019. We hope to bring the *Euphorbia* community together and to discuss the plants we all love.

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Fig. 3: *Euphorbia erythroccullata*, plant derived from the original type plant collected by Rösli & Hoffmann in 2002 with collection number 09/02. Received from Wilbert Hettterscheid and originally coming from Heidelberg.



Fig. 4: *Monadenium kaessneri* (now *Euphorbia neokaessneri*), this species was one of the best finds in the original Euphorbia collection from the botanic garden. Collected in 1986 in Congo, Katanga, Luapula by a collaborator of the Botanic Garden working in Lubumbashi. Even today it is rare in collections, although the plant has been distributed by the Botanic Garden Meise.



Fig. 5: *Euphorbia eyassiana*, old plant coming from the Trompenburg collection



Fig. 6: *E. bwambensis*, plants grown from seeds collected in Congo, Epulu.