

# CACTUS CORNER NEWS

*Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society*

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**Wasn't sure there would be enough material for this issue...  
But hold on, 'cause this one's got some kick!**

Title: "The Folklore, Enchantment, and Evolution of the C&S Hobby from 1894 to the present day"

The allure of cacti and succulents has fascinated people for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. However, unlike some other horticultural endeavors, the collecting and fostering an interest in the C&S is fairly new. This program focuses on the people, the changing American landscape, and a curious set of events that have shaped our hobby as we find it today.

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Gunnar Eisel's interest in cacti and succulents can be traced back to his childhood infatuation with photographing night-blooming cereus flowers and a few unfortunate encounters with opuntia glochids. His interest in cacti became intensified through many annual trips to the Anza-Borrego desert.

Born and raised near Heidelberg, Germany, Eisel has taught music at CSULA, CSUF, Whittier College, and Fullerton College. He recently retired as music professor at Citrus College in Glendora where his students were frequently subjected to his rantings regarding cacti and succulents.

## **This month we are having a virtual meeting on Zoom.**

The meeting will be held on Thursday June 18th. There will be a follow up email giving you the details on Zoom and how to participate in the meeting.

In the mean time here are the details on the 3rd installment of the Webinar presentations....

Join us Saturday, June 13th at 10:00 a.m. PDT for the third in a series of webinars featuring Cactus and Succulent experts from around the world. Wendell S (Woody) Minnich will present a program entitled, "**Socotra, a Secret Island in the Arabian Sea**".

This presentation will include some of the fantastic endemic succulents of the Island of Socotra. These plants will include the famous *Dracaena cinnabari*, the "Rolls-Royce" of Adeniums, *Adenium socotranum* and other wonderful caudiciforms including: *Dorstenia gigs*, *Dendrosicyos socotrana*, various *Boswellias* (Frankincense), *Euphorbias* and *Asclepiads* and numerous reptiles.

This magical place is one of the three most exciting islands in the world. Being under the control of Yemen, it has become almost impossible to visit for numerous years, and it may be many, many years before anyone from the USA will be able to once again tour this incredible region.

**To register for the webinar in advance [Click Here](#)**

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email about joining the webinar.

The program will be 45 minutes followed by a short question and answer period.

Register in advance for this webinar:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_7OB58mINRUyMKx7Ma1hbrg](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_7OB58mINRUyMKx7Ma1hbrg)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email about joining the webinar

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## **Lithops in Captivity, Staying Alive, Staying Alive**

*Fred Gaumer*

I remember either writing this or saying it to someone, maybe many times. My first encounter with Lithops was at the San Jose cactus club show many years ago. I saw these little plants and thought they were very interesting but they would be more so when they grew to maturity. And I recall making a hand gesture to myself imagining they would eventually be 4 to 6 inches round. Surely, that's not all there is. I think that I asked one of the club members lurking around the displays what exactly are these small plants. I would not have been surprised if when I walked in to the mall where the show and sale was being held there would be a banner that read: San Jose Fungus and Lichen Society Show and Sale. Could the objects be the end of a life cycle of a subterranean fungi that was soon to burst and emit spores everywhere? Well, of course not. There were cactus and other unusual plants like I had never thought possible in abundance. At that time there were quite a few club members dedicated to growing the most magnificent potted plants possible. I had seen cactus and other succulents before but nothing like this. And what about the "living stones"? Why did they attract my attention? I had questions about everything that day. I had always been interested in plants and animals and nature. And, I think, that I can be obsessive and have a compulsion to collect. It wasn't long before I had some cacti and other succulents. I don't remember when a lithops followed me home the first time but it probably wasn't very long after my initial immersion. And I don't recall how long the lithops and I remained companions but it couldn't have been around to celebrate a birthday. It was a long time ago and things are forgotten but I didn't give up trying to acquire more plants and the knowledge to keep them alive and healthy. I hope that after reading this, and you have a fascination for them, you will feel confident enough to try again. I have heard so many times that a person has an interest but might as well pay for them at the cashier and deposit them in the trash receptacle on the way out. Or they never water them because when they do it's signing the death certificate. The main problem with keeping Lithops alive is that it is hard to believe that a plant can go so long without water. Anybody who has grown plants before attempting to cultivate Lithops is at a disadvantage. When Lithops are actively growing they enjoy a good solid drenching with water flowing out the drainage hole at the bottom of the pot. When they are actively growing is sometimes confusing. During the cooler months of the year when they are exchanging their old bodies for new they are certainly actively growing but this is not the time to give them any water. They are getting everything they need from last year's set of leaves. Any moisture now could lead to their demise or at least over produce the new bodies and in Lithops big is not better. Or it might cause them to generate an additional set of new leaves over the ones still forming. The good news is that if they survive this with proper care they may remain alive and when next year's new body forms it could be wonderfully perfect. The other difficult time of the year for these plants is summer. **See next page**



They will not enjoy full afternoon blazing sun light. Morning sun shine and filtered afternoon sun is what they prefer. Where they live in the wild they are able to pull themselves down to sometimes even below the surface of the soil. This is not so easy for them to do in a pot. Look at the side of their bodies and get a feeling of what normal looks like. Do they have wrinkles? Are the wrinkles more exaggerated than usual? In the hottest part of the year is not when they want a lot of moisture. Observe them early in the day. If they are becoming desiccated give them a little drink late in the day. When in doubt don't water. In the Spring and Fall give them a more generous watering schedule. But don't go crazy with it, they are some of the most water thrifty plants in the world. Observation is what it takes to be successful. If you still have trouble and are determined to succeed try growing *Lapidaria margaretae*. They are a close relative but more tolerant of the easy life and their leaves will crack and occasionally circumcise before they give it up. Watering Lithops is an art form. If you feel you must water get a spray bottle and give them a misting when the sun is low in the sky.

The other piece of the equation is what kind of soil is suitable. I would recommend not using any kind of organic material in the mix but I can't resist adding about 20% of regular potting soil. I screen out the larger pieces of forest products which is something I don't do for my other succulent plants. I add a small amount of regular sand that is used in the building trades to pumice of various sizes and colors. The end result is very dense and heavy. If you skip the organic material you can occasionally give your Lithops a little fertilizer at quarter strength. There are often Lithops for sale at the box stores and they are potted in a mix that works for their style of growing. I can't identify what that stuff is but I repot as soon as possible. One thing to get from this is that if they can grow Lithops, you certainly can. And don't be alarmed when your plants are not as big and juicy as when you purchased them. They make up for it with color and pattern enhancements. Many of the plants for sale there are some of the easier species to handle but sometimes there are offered some out of the ordinary gems. I wonder how many of these plants survive more than a few weeks? If you are a person obsessed with plant identification you might give these a miss. You may never know for sure. Just call them, "Living Stones".

To get a better insight into the living stones you can check out from our club library some of the specialized books on the subject. The first one is titled "Lithops, Flowering Stones" by D. Cole. Desmond Cole and his wife Naureen have spent most of their lives studying Lithops in the southern parts of Africa. When you see a Lithops species name followed by a C and a number or by Cole and a number it denotes a plant from a particular location in South Africa or Namibia. Their work with the plants has made Lithops more understood and accessible to the world. Steven Hammer's "Treasures of the Veld" is truly a masterpiece. It has everything needed for a good read and eye catching photos. You will be "happy as a clam" if you have this in your book collection.

“Wild Lithops” by Harald Jainta is a book about what you could expect to see if you were roaming the out of the way places looking for Lithops in their natural habitats. It is a reminder that big is not always better when trying to cultivate them in a pot. A human finger nail (along with the finger, of course) is often used for a size reference in many of the photographs. It is amazing to me how tiny and how few heads most of them have in nature. And how many of the species look so similar to me.

People, especially children eat Lithops where they grow in nature. Other animals enjoy dining on them as well. Their resemblance to rocks keeps them safe most of the time. In cultivation they are plagued by the usual suspects of insects and other small sucking creatures. Root mealy bugs are a problem that I had one time that left a mark on my memory. A chemical assault might be called for. Always be suspect of a product that kills other living things and use caution and follow instructions carefully. Birds seem to be attracted to Lithops in pots, a lot of the time just pulling them up and scattering them about. If mice and rats discover your stones it won't be long before you have none.

I think that this grouping of words is like the dialogue of the movie, “If you build it they will come”. If you want to grow Lithops you can have good results if you try. And maybe try again. Everyone who grows plants should be aware that all living things have an expiration date. But Lithops should out live a human lifetime. Sometimes things can go bad and take a turn for the worse. I water my mixed collection of succulent plants with a hose. I try to be careful and I do move things like Lithops out of the spray zone when I remember to. But not always does the brain connect to the nozzle. Usually there are no negative consequences. After you think you have gained some skills try growing some from seed to get some real insights to how these plants exist.

I keep thinking that I am finished and then remember to say an additional thing. Lithops salicola is a good beginner's plant. And so is L. lesliei. And even though I have seen some overgrown ones recently so is L. dorothea. And, in my opinion I don't think it is a good, long term idea to have different species growing together in the same pot. Also, I prefer a deep pot to accommodate the long, contractile roots but they seem to do well in others not so deep. OK, is that it? Stay healthy, my friends.

## Article by Elton Roberts

*Escobaria alversonii* is in flower in my hothouse. They are dotted around here and there in southern California but I have found the most in Joshua Tree National Park. I have only one plant and that is a frustration for I would love to have two plants so as to get seed. I could hike around all day parked on one spot and just walk around seeing the different plants and their shape and how large they are. In one semi flat place there has to be many thousands of plants along with other cactus also. Common name for *E. alversonii* is the fox tail cactus.

Escobaria alversonii fl close  
Escobaria alversonii offset in flower  
Escobaria alversonii pl & fls side

