

July 1992

CENTRAL ARIZONA
CACTUS AND SUCCULENT SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

"NEXT MEETING"

Sunday, July 26th at 2:00 P.M. in the Webster Auditorium

A slide show developed by the Cactus and Succulent Society of America will be presented entitled "Madagascar: The Beguiling Isle".

There will be a board meeting at 1:00 P.M. in the Archer House. All members are welcome.

"LOOKING FORWARD"

August Meeting

A guest speaker from the Boyce Thompson Arboretum will be featured.

State Fair - October 15 through November 1

Anyone wishing to enter cacti or succulents in the Fair's garden show should contact Fran Tolleson (943-6729) or Debra Korobkin (493-7003) for more information.

November Fall Camp-Out

Mark your calendars on November 6-8 for the fall camp-out in the Superstitions.

Open Garden

Anyone wishing to host an open garden in October, December, or January should contact Debra Korobkin at 493-7003.

"LAST MONTH"

Joey Betzler from San Diego was our guest speaker. The presentation of his botanical travels in South Africa was fascinating and informative. The slides were impressive. Thanks Joey.

With mixed emotions we learned that Frank Hennessey will be moving to Florida by the end of the year. Frank has graciously offered his collection to the Society. Details on the method and date of sale will be forthcoming. In fairness to Frank and all interested members, please do not directly contact Frank in advance.

ON THE DRY SIDE

by Timothy Chapman

I must have missed Madagascar day in geography class. I guess I was sick. Or some distant relative died, maybe. Yes, I was sick, Aunt Hattie died, and the dog ate my homework. And the sun was in my eyes. At any rate, I decided to learn a little bit about the Great Island recently and thought I'd share some of what I found out with you.

Madagascar is an island, a subcontinent actually, situated in the Indian Ocean just off the coast of Mozambique in Africa. It's pretty big, too. A few football fields shy of a thousand miles long and a little over three hundred miles at its greatest width, it's the fourth largest island in the world, if you count Australia as an island. And why the heck not? Madagascar was formed around 270 million years ago in the late Cretaceous as it separated from Africa as part of the general breaking up of the ancient continent of Gondwanaland.

270 million years. We're talking dinosaurs waving goodbye to Madagascar as it sails away into geographical isolation. That's a lot of time for some pretty interesting biological evolution, and that's the big reason Madagascar is a much more fascinating place than, say, Gilligan's Island, Mary Ann and Ginger notwithstanding. Ninety percent of the island's organisms are endemic, occurring nowhere else in the world. (No, your greenhouse doesn't count.) Add to this the kind of geographical "asymmetry" that creates climatic diversity over the island, and you've got a beautifully unique population of plants and animals, quite

different from that of Africa only three hundred miles to the west. For example, while Africa has several hundred species of orchids, Madagascar can boast several thousand. The aloes of the subcontinent have a flower structure that is different from those on the mainland. There are no "grass aloes" on Madagascar (like A. myriacantha). Nor are any of the Saponariae ("maculate" group of aloes) represented, suggesting that they developed on the African continent after the separation of the island occurred.

And then there are the Euphorbias. While Africa is rich in succulent tree and globular forms, Madagascar has neither. The island Euphorbias tend to be more woody than truly succulent, so you get plants like E. decaryi, E. perrieri, and the whole E. milli complex. Over 150 species are endemic. (There's a good survey of Madagascar Euphorbias by Werner Rauh in volumes III and IV of the Euphorbia Journals).

While I like to stay generally upbeat, I do feel compelled to mention that, like other third world areas and the planet in general, Madagascar is on the ropes and looking bad. Deforestation has replaced native flora and fauna with rice, bananas, and over 10 million zebu cattle. In 1976, 70% of the natural vegetation had been cleared. In 1980, it was 80%. This is very depressing mathematics. There are, thankfully, organizations like the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) that are able to help slow the destruction, but whether or not it is reversible remains to be seen, I suppose. Deforestation not only mangles specific and localized areas: huge bare patches actually alter the climate of the entire island, causing potential loss everywhere.

There is a large river in the northwestern region of Madagascar. It's called the Betsiboka. It is said that during the flood season, the eroded soil from its denuded banks causes the river to run blood red....

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☀ ON THE DRY SIDE ✨
by Timothy Chapman

You have the kind of face I think I can trust. So I hope you will understand when I say that I have a dark and terrible secret that I want to share with you. I collect succulents. I spend money, hard-earned cash, on twisted little xerophytes when I really ought to buy a new pane of glass to fix that window I put a shovel handle through while planting a new barrel cactus. I cruise the Home Depot garden department in the hopes that some little pups may have been knocked off their parents so that I can discreetly pocket them and give them a new lease on life. (I'm only thinking of their well-being. Honest.)

While there are a few genera of succulents that I tend to specialize in, most of my acquisitions have been entirely emotional, based on such non-scientific criteria as cuteness, bizarreness, and name pronunciation difficulty. "The tougher the name, the neater the plant," I always say. Sometimes.

Anyway, it was definitely a higher than normal cuteness quotient that moved me to add a little Echinocereus nivosus to my collection about a year ago. Its specific name comes from the Latin word for snow, quite appropriate in describing the dense coat of thin glassy spines that nearly obscure the pale green stems.

Echinocerei in general tend to be low-growing, forming mounds or clumps, and the flowers are often large and showy, making them popular with collectors. Often called "hedgehogs", about six species inhabit our state. An exact count is tougher than you might think; there is apparently so much variation among individuals and populations that the splitters (those who would create a species classification based on very small differences and nuances) and the lumpers (equally bent on unifying diverse forms under a single species banner) have gotten into terrible brawls in small bars along the border. Really. Nigel Taylor in his work The Genus Echinocereus numbers the species at forty-four.

Anyway, back to E. nivosus. My little specimen, consisting of a four-inch main stem with five smaller "arms", has a ways to go. An adult takes the form of a compact hemispherical mound around 12 centimeters high and 30 centimeters in diameter and produces small, beautiful magenta flowers. In its mountainous native habitat in S.E. Coahuila it can be found among grass and limestone rocks exposed to sun and wind. So kids, if you're going to try this one at home, give it a sunny spot in your greenhouse, and maybe add a little extra lime to its soil.

Synonyms for this little jewel that appear in the literature from time to time are Echinocereus albatus and Echinocereus longisetus var. albatus.