

Central Arizona Cactus and Succulent Society
November, 1992

November Meeting

This month's meeting will be November 22, at 2 pm in the Webster Auditorium. Remember that this is a week earlier than our regular schedule, to work around the Thanksgiving holiday. The board meeting will be at 1 pm in the Archer House. All are welcome to attend the board meeting.

"Conophytums Galore" will be presented by Steve Hammer of Mesa Gardens, Belen, NM. Steve is an internationally recognized expert on Conophytums, and he will be sharing his adventures in South Africa with us. Steve has also kindly volunteered to help identify plants, so please bring your conophytums and conophytum-like plants to the meeting. Also, be sure to read "On the Dry Side" in this newsletter, by Tim, for some thoughts on these little jewels.

Last Month

The sale of Frank Hennessey's plant collection was a great success. We all admired Frank's garden and had fun during the sale. \$2620 was raised for the Society; of that total, \$1258 was brought in by the silent auction. Those hidden egg timers just drive us cactophiles into a frenzy, don't they. Many thanks to Linda Miller for her hard work and planning. Good job, Linda!

Thank you, Frank, for sharing your collection with us. Our gardens are all enriched by your generosity, and we all promise to take good care of your plants. We will miss you at the meetings.

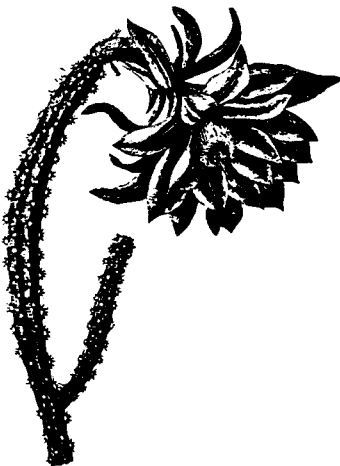
The annual camp-out was held on November 7 and 8 at the Don's Base Camp in the Superstitions. Reports from the participants say the weather was perfect and that the coyotes provided evening entertainment.

Coming up

The annual Holiday Potluck Lunch is on December 13 in the Webster Auditorium. Last year's lunch was fun and very filling, so mark this date on your calendar.

Sign up to bring a dish during the November meeting. Also, when you attend the lunch you will need to bring your own place settings (plates, flatware, napkin, cup). Those of you who would like to help with set-up, please contact Joan Skirvin at 948-2515.

Party favors will be plants chosen from Frank Hennessey's garden before the plant sale. We will also hold the Society's elections at the Lunch.



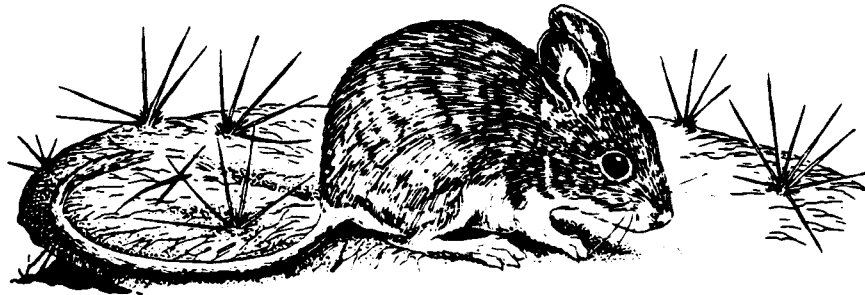
Our annual Judged Cactus and Succulent Show will be March 26, 27 and 28, 1993. Let us know what topics you'd like discussed before the show, such as soil preparation, plant selection and presentation, plant identification.

The presentation for January's meeting is still in the works.

Everyone enjoys the open gardens held from time to time. It gives us a chance to see how others treat their collections and to get ideas for our own gardens. If you would like to host an open garden, give me a call at 831-2477 to schedule it.

So here I am as the new Secretary of the Society with all this white space on the page. Um, I think short and sweet is a good rule of thumb for now.

Happy Thanksgiving to everyone!



CACTUS MOUSE

Peromyscus spp.

ON THE DRY SIDE
by Timothy Chapman

Ed Storms, in his book (The New) Growing the Mesembs, says that "to the perceptive grower, even the occasional loss of a plant can contribute information which will lead to successful cultivation." Oh, good. I suppose I can confess to a lost specimen or two. Some of my succulent acquisitions have seemed so bent on self-destruction that I may as well have gently snuggled them up against the back tires of my Monza before backing out of the nursery from which I bought them and saved everyone a little trouble. In fact, I'm thinking about marketing a new compost product made exclusively from the decomposed corpses of the poor little saplets that have stumbled under the perceptive eye of yours truly.

Conophytums? Sure, I've killed 'em. But in the hopes of sparing you, dear grower, from the wailing and gnashing of teeth that I have experienced, I would like to share with you some of the information I have gleaned from CACSS's vast library complex. West wing, level two.

The genus Conophytum contains nearly 300 species and is one member of the vast Old World plant family called the Mesembryanthemaceae. (Go ahead, say it. Fast. Mesemberanflmumblgiflik. Phmphf. Ow.) Lithops and Trichodiadema also belong to this group, which is centered in the arid regions of southern Africa.

Conophytums are miniature plants, forming small mounds at maturity. Each little shoot or body is composed of a single pair of highly succulent leaves. Sometimes the leaves are so intimately united that only a tiny split differentiates them. They are spherical, or nearly so, to reduce the plant's surface area and minimize water loss. Many species utilize "leaf windows", a clever morphological trick shared by some Haworthias in which translucent tissues in the leaf are able to transmit sunlight to chlorophyllous

tissues beneath. This allows much of the plant's mass to be buried beneath the substrate, very handy in, say, hot climates.

In their natural habitat, Conophytums are (1) generally lithophytes, which means they grow in rock crevices with a minimum of anything even remotely resembling soil. They also (2) tend to grow in areas that, although receiving little rainfall, are subject to periodic moist fog conditions. Ah, two potential clues to their successful pot culture. Well, the first clue means little: Conophytums apparently adapt quite well to life rooted in a standard succulent mix. But that fog thing: yes, they do appreciate occasional misting during part of their yearly cycle.

The fact is that Conophytums are obligates, which is to say that they like to stay in the same summer-winter growth/dormancy patterns that their kind enjoys in their native hemisphere. Pretty snooty. The upshot of this stubbornness is that these plants are winter growers here in the northern hemisphere. The emergence of the flowers in autumn announces their growing period, during which time the plants should receive frequent light waterings (more generous flooding can split the bodies) and bright (not scorching) light. Many Conophytums like some light shading. As our summer approaches, the plants begin to go dormant, and the previous year's leaf pairs turn thin and papery, giving up their moisture and nutrients to the next generation of leaves protected beneath. It is during this summer dormancy the plants appreciate light mistings which keep the roots alive without encouraging growth.

That's really about all I know about the genus Conophytum, and it's mostly from books. Just remember: they're summer dormant, they love the fog, and it takes a heck of a lot of them to get a decent-sized compost heap.