

CENTRAL SPINE

July, 2010

Newsletter of the Central Arizona Cactus & Succulent Society

An Affiliate of the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

On the Web at www.centralarizonacactus.org

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From the editor ... Diana Decker

The development of the newsletter format is still in progress. Special thanks to all who contributed articles and information this month, and to Sue Tyrrel, who mails copies of the newsletter to those members who don't use e-mail. The CACSS board members want the newsletter to go to members 8 to 10 days before the next meeting. The newsletter deadlines reflect that schedule.

August Newsletter Deadline: Saturday, August 7.

July Presentation: "Pilosocereus and other cacti of eastern Brazil"

Speaker: Leo Martin, CACSS member

When: Sunday, July 25, 2 pm

Where: Dorrance Hall, Desert Botanical Garden

Leo visited the Brazilian states of Bahia and Minas Gerais with the CSSA 2008 field trip. He has previously given us a general overview of the trip. He saw a great many species of cacti in genera Coleocephalocereus, Discocactus, Melocactus, Micranthocereus and Pilosocereus, as well as quite a few in smaller genera. In this talk Leo will present a general overview of genus Pilosocereus, 17 of which are found in Brazil. Leo did not see all of them, but he will show you a lot of them and teach you how to tell them apart. If time permits, he will talk about some other Brazilian cacti as well.

Seed Bugs *Lygaeus kalmia* By Sue Hakala

At the June club meeting, there was concern from some members about the "box elder bugs" they had found in their yard that might be eating their cactus and succulent plants. Research has shown that box elder bugs eat the seed pods of the female box elder tree pretty exclusively. These bugs look remarkably similar to seed or milkweed bugs which you might find in your yard eating seeds, not your plants.

A couple of years ago I found them scurrying around the ground under a large datura in my yard. These one-half inch brightly colored red and black bugs have folded black wings making an "X" on the red back with two white spots below. They were having a definite jamboree. After I panicked, assuming, incorrectly as some of our members have, they surely must be attacking my most beloved cactus nearby, I found out that they are seed eaters. They were also enjoying sucking out the latex-like substance found in the datura. *Lygaeus kalmii* injects an enzyme into the plant to allow for digestion of the toxic substances. The toxic datura gives the bugs the protection that they need from predators; hence, the brightly colored bodies announcing, "If you eat me, you'll get sick."

Seed or milkweed bugs get their name from the milkweed plant that they depend upon for their entire life cycle. How they arrived in Mesa, Arizona, to summer in my yard has some authorities scratching their heads. One said that milkweed bugs are found only where milkweed plants grow. I guess nature is making an exception or, perhaps a new variety, and might be in your yard, too. This is probably a good thing, as much of the habitat that supports milkweed plants has been destroyed in North America through development.

Male milkweed bugs attract a mate by creating a sound rubbing their back wings over their abdomens. The female allows the male to climb on her back. They join at the abdomen and move round until they face away from each other. They stay joined from anywhere from one-half hour to nearly an entire day mostly depending upon the temperature. I found many doing just this while they walked around as far as 15 feet from the datura. The female lays about 15 oval bright red eggs on the plant which hatch in about three to six days. The little nymphs are red with black antennas and legs. They feed on the milkweed plant flowers, pods, seeds, and latex, molting about five times. In my case they are eating the datura. After about 40 days they are fully developed, living for about a month. A female will lay two broods during her lifetime.

Members of the Lygacidae family, to which milkweed bugs belong, not only eat seeds, but use them for travel. Hanging onto the thin silk-like strings of the milkweed's seeds, the wind sends the bug and seed far away.

My seed bug infestation was brought under control the next year when a praying mantis set up home, thinning the seed bug population. This beautiful bug gave me a perfect example of how important it is for gardeners to know what kind of bug they have before spraying needless chemicals. To see photos of this brightly colored bug, search for *Lygaeus kalmii* online.

President's Letter from Steve Martinez

Hi, everyone,

OK, so plenty of heat and no monsoon yet. At this point it's just a little bit late but both I and my plants could use a little relief. Right now I water about every three days, but I have a lot of stuff in some pretty heavy sun, so it's necessary to keep them hydrated, especially my adeniums. They actually love the heat, and take plenty of water. I also grow many things that are "difficult," but these I keep in an evap-cooled greenhouse. The problem with our summer, as you all know, is not just that it is hot but that it does not cool down enough once we really kick in to the heat. Plants are stressed quite heavily as a result...and combine that with some frost in the winter...then some more heat next summer (if the plants make it!)...whew! We grow some tough plants.

What keeps us humans going is a little trip to California, and we may still have a couple of seats on the bus, so check it out. Our biennial nursery trip is coming up August 13-15. I am looking forward to another fun trip, one that includes a night at the beach. We'll be coming back with a bus full of goodies...some new finds, some replacements for our learning experiences (haha). Well, that is how you learn. You would not believe how much I've killed in 35 years! Actually, many members understand this because they too have gone through this the hard way. I think a better way might be to ask a member. There is someone that has grown that odd plant that you are having trouble with. Maybe we could come

up with a way to facilitate finding that person, say, by an e-mail forum, or during the silent auction part of the meeting. If you have an idea, let me know. We also have a workshop scheduled for late September, so look into that if you are interested in growing bulbs. See you at the next meeting. Steve M.

Fall Seminar: Winter-Rainfall Bulb Sprouting

Bulbs from southwestern Africa's winter-rainfall region grow and bloom beautifully in metro Phoenix all winter, when our succulents are sleeping in the cold. Some sport bright flowers, others beautiful fragrances, and a few have intricate miniature blooms best seen with a magnifying glass. Some of the easiest genera for us are *Albuca*, *Babiana*, *Ferraria*, *Freesia*, *Daubinya*, *Gladiolus*, *Lachenalia*, *Massonia* and *Oxalis*. These bulbs are dormant in the summer so they can be packed into boxes and stored until late fall. At our meetings, members Cliff Fielding, Celeste Gornick and Leo Martin have displayed a number of these plants in bloom, and now you, too, can learn how to grow and bloom these wonderful plants.

Leo is offering a seminar showing you how to sprout these plants from seed or bulbs and grow them to bloom. The seminar is limited to 20 people and will be held at a location to be determined on a Saturday or Sunday in late September, the best time to plant the seeds. There will be a \$20 materials fee which pays for containers, growing medium, seed and bulbs, and printing a syllabus. If the cost is less than \$20, the extra will be refunded to you. Each participant will take home at least 10 containers, a different species in each.

We will have seed from Silverhill Seed in Cape Town, South Africa. The website is www.silverhillseeds.co.za (yes, this is spelled correctly). We will also have *Oxalis* bulbs from Telos Rare Bulbs in Oregon, www.telosrarebulbs.com. If you want to order some of your own seed or bulbs to plant at the seminar, you are welcome to do so. Be advised that importing seed from other countries requires a US Department of Agriculture permit.

Contact Steve Martinez to reserve a spot.

Plant-of-the-Month Selection - a.k.a. Mini Show

Cacti: *Astrophytum*, *Ariocarpus*
Succulents: *Adeniums*, *Stapeliads* (*Orbea*, *Carraluma*, *Huernia*, etc.)
OR...any plant that you think looks outstanding right now!

Warning from Doug Dawson: Watch out for the Palo Verde Beetle

If you have palo verde trees in your yard, watch out for the palo verde beetle (*Derobrachus geminatus*). This beetle is probably the largest beetle you'll ever see in the Valley. It's black and has large antennas that extend perpendicular from its body. The beetle digs deep holes in the ground, $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, to deposit eggs, crawls back up out of the hole and leaves. The eggs hatch and become grubs, which chew on the palo verde tree roots, killing the tree. The beetle doesn't cover the hole, so you can look for the holes and fill them with grub-killing granules to save your trees. Fortunately, the beetles will only be

digging holes for a few more days or weeks.

Garden's Director of Horticulture Recommends CACSS

Cathy Babcock, the DBG Director of Horticulture, now writes an Arizona Republic Saturday column, "Know Your Desert Garden," answering readers' questions. In her July 10 column, she answered a question about the cochineal scale, the insect that attacks Opuntia, and offers tips on growing succulents. She also encourages readers to take classes at the Garden and to consider joining CACSS and attend our meetings.

APS Changing Policy, Saving Saguaros

Arizona Public Service Co. has hired a north Phoenix firm, Native Resources International, to transplant small saguaros growing beneath about 700 miles of high-voltage power lines across the state. More than 15,000 or more small saguaros will be moved about 20 feet from the power lines so they don't eventually grow into them and create a safety hazard. The contract could bring nearly \$1 million in revenue for Native Resources International. Transplanting saguaros is a shift in policy for APS, which formerly shredded all the vegetation underneath its high-voltage lines, including saguaros, which came out of its giant mower in a puree.

("APS Alters saguaro-shredding policy," Ryan Randazzo, Arizona Republic, June 2, 2010)

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PLANT QUESTIONS??? WHOM TO CONTACT!!!

Many CACSS members have experience with different kinds of succulent plants. I hope they will add their names to the following list. (Just call or e-mail Bob Torrest—480-994-3868; robertst9114@msn.com).

For now the list is simply alphabetical with principal interests. When more members add their information, the list will be cross-referenced by topic.

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Specializations include Flora of Namibia, Growing from Seed, Lithops, other Mesembs, and Melocactus.

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Specializations include Desert Landscaping, Unusual (including Rare Fruit) Trees and Shrubs, Aloes,

Agaves,
Columnar Cacti, Trichocereus, and Opuntia.