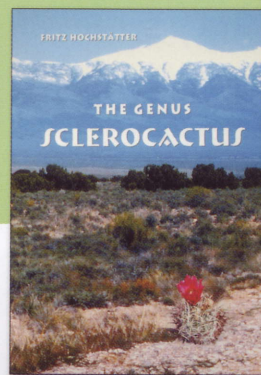


BOOK REVIEW

by Roy Mottram

The genus *Sclerocactus*. Tribe Cacteeae, family Cactaceae by Fritz Hochstätter; English translation by Chris Holland. Privately published, Mannheim; 4 Jul 2005. 504 pp, 476 color photos, 5 colored maps. 29.9 × 22.0 cm, hardbound in publisher's color-photo decorated, laminated boards. ISBN 3 00 016153 8. €125 (approx \$155).



The author is a well known enthusiast for the cacti of the American Southwest plains, and begins here the first of a projected series of three volumes dealing with his great passion. *Sclerocactus* is one of those genera of rare and hard-to-cultivate species that are threatened by the presence of humans, who appear to be bent on repeating the self-extinction of the Easter Islanders, who are believed to have chopped down every single tree in order to satisfy an irrational demand for ever larger and useless stone heads at the instigation of their egotistical leaders and their hapless, ingratiating followers. Not a single taxon in this genus (or subgenus for some of us) escapes the description of being either Appendix I, endangered, or extremely endangered, and the author logically calls for a blanket listing of the entire genus under Appendix I of CITES. Some of us might argue that CITES is just another political tool for our leaders to berate and control the innocent, but you can see his point.

If we cannot halt the extinction process then clearly the next best thing is to document carefully what we now have, and the author does this extremely well. Page after page of clear, on-the-whole good quality photographs forms the main impression of the book. There is a blue-shift to many of the photos which could have been easily corrected in Photoshop, but otherwise they illustrate the plants handsomely.

Taxonomy is always a touchy subject, but on the whole the classification used is quite conservative and agrees well with that of the *CITES Checklist* (1999). The notable exception is the recognition of *S. wetlandicus* as distinct from *S. glaucus*, and even placed here in different sections of the genus. They are geographically close, and comparison of the illustrations in this book do not reveal significant differences. However, the author supplies evidence from slight differences in the seeds, rather more important evidence from isoenzyme analysis, and the seedling forms. Seedlings of *S. glaucus* are said to be always pubescent, while those of *S. wetlandicus* are always glabrous, the latter character being present only in section *Mesae-Verdae*. How significant you rate these characters is a matter of individual judgement.

The pattern of the book is similar to that of the same author's previous works, and includes once again a detailed description and illustration of the seeds by Günther Hentzschel. A new feature here is the isoenzyme analysis provided by Monika Konnert. The significance of this data is not clear, and the diagrams provided are impossible to evaluate without specialist knowledge. We therefore have to take the conclusions at face value. As usual, the author includes full reproduction of all original descriptions, glossary of terms, field numbers lists, botanical keys, and an index to common names as well as to scientific names.

With cultivation an important issue, the author includes a page of advice, mostly of a traditional nature, and favors grafting for best results. The suggestion that it is "imperative that plants grown on their own roots are not kept in the greenhouse" is controversial and offered without explanation, but one wonders if it can possibly be universally true even if it happens to be so in the author's personal experience. In view of the threatened nature of these plants and their difficulty of cultivation, it is a great pity that financial resources have not been channelled by the authorities into this kind of important scientific research instead of wasting it on misguided CITES bureaucracy. ❖

Opuntia quitensis

Opuntia quitensis F. A. C. WEBER (a synonym of *O. johnsonii*?) has the peculiar habitat of possessing vegetative and flower buds that are superficially indistinguishable until soon before flowers open. Vegetative and flower buds in most other *Opuntia* species are readily distinguishable when they are less than 5% the size of mature pads (cladodes). In *O. quitensis*, buds are not readily distinguishable until they are over 90% of their mature size. Here, mature flower buds are essentially the same size as vegetative buds, with identical spination. The illustrations show the first obvious indications that this is a flower bud, as the ephemeral leaves near the apical meristem first become redder and fleshier, and four days later as the flower first opens. —Root Gorelick ❖

