

A VISIT TO SIX AREAS IN NAMIBIA, HABITAT TO DIFFERENT LITHOPS SPECIES by Tok Schoeman
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On 29 April 2013, my wife and I, accompanied by Dr Ronald Uijs of Cape Town (co-author of *Lithops coleorum* S.A. Hammer & R. Uijs 1994) left on a trip to visit Lithops localities south and west of Windhoek, Namibia.

AREA 1

The first locality was a farm about 60 km SSW of the small town of Rehoboth, the area of the Coles' type locality for *Lithops pseudotruncatella* subsp. *groendrayensis* C244. We visited two gentle hills, about 2 km apart, where the plants were growing among the white quartzite stones, well camouflaged by their shape and white colour, blending perfectly with the environment. Although only a little rain had fallen some weeks before, it was evident that plants had flowered in spite of harsh conditions (Fig. 1.1). A year before (Feb. 2012), I had found the plants in bud in the morning and the bodies much more turgid (Fig. 1.2). This subspecies is probably the palest and less marked of all known Lithops species, and being mostly single headed with a round facial shape is a typical feature. Some specimens show faint lines and spots (Fig. 1.3), reminiscent of its nearest neighbour *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica*. Tufts of grass and a shrubby *Acacia* species share the locality, as well as the succulent *Tavaresia barklyi* (Fig. 1.4).



Fig. 1.1: *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *groendrayensis* in dry habitat conditions.
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Fig. 1.2: *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *groendrayensis* with flower bud, Feb. 2012.



Fig. 1.3: A habitat specimen of subsp. *groendrayensis* with prominent markings.



Fig. 1.4: *Tavaresia barklyi* growing with subsp. *groendrayensis*.

AREA 2

The next day we travelled to a farm about 40 km west of Maltahöhe where *L. schwantesii* var. *urikosensis* was reported to grow. This was not far from the type locality of the **christinae* form, C210 of this species. Here we found quite a number of plants growing among grey-white calcrete stones scattered over a large, flat terrain (Fig. 2.1). A fairly large number of multi-headed plants was a sign of an undisturbed population with many old specimens (Fig. 2.2). The locality was quite dry with sparse vegetation around and the Lithops were wrinkled. Plants had flowered earlier and a few were still in bud in spite of the drought (Fig. 2.3), evidence of their persistence to survive and even produce seed in very harsh conditions. We believe that this is another population of the **christinae* form but this can only be concluded when plants are in a better condition.



LEFT

Fig. 2.1: Habitat of *L. schwantesii* var. *urikosensis* [**christinae* (?)] with Ronald Uijs (left) and the author.
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Fig. 2.2: An old specimen of *L. schwantesii* var. *urikosensis* [**christinae* (?)] with 17 heads. Note signs of sunburn on some of them.



Fig. 2.3: Suffering but still in flower. *L. schwantesii* var. *urikosensis* [**christinae* (?)] in habitat.

AREA 3

Later the same day, we travelled northwards to an area ranging from about 70 km SW to 90 km WSW of Rehoboth. This is habitat to *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica* and in a matter of two days we visited four populations of this subspecies at their respective localities. This subspecies mostly occurs on white outcrops with quartzite stone varying in colour from white to yellowish, often stained with orange or grey (Fig. 3.1), and sometimes with protruding dark grey-brown schist at the site. One locality, however, had red-brown granite as dominant rock type with a few scattered white quartzite stones in between (Fig. 3.2). This subspecies is characterized by its single heads, almost perfectly round faces and many strong lines branching out from fissure to margin (Fig. 3.3). In most localities the little rain of the season left the plants wrinkled with orange brown colours like dried apricots (Fig. 3.4). Low, thorny shrubs and grass were present at all these localities, and near one locality we observed the thick stemmed *Cyphostemma bainesii* (Fig. 3.5), as well as the very rare green flowered *Aloe viridiflora* (Fig. 3.6). Near another population, we saw an *Aloe hereroensis* in full flower (Fig. 3.7).



Fig. 3.1: *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica* in habitat. Note how colours blend with that of soil and stone.



Fig. 3.2: *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica* growing among red-brown granite rocks.



Fig. 3.3: A charming specimen of *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica* in habitat.



Fig. 3.4: *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *dendritica* in habitat, withdrawn into their niches below ground level.



Fig. 3.5: *Cyphostemma bainesii* in habitat.



Fig. 3.6: The rare *Aloe viridiflora* in habitat.



Fig. 3.7: *Aloe hereroensis* flowering in habitat

AREA 4

After leaving the area of subsp. *dendritica*, and on our way home for one night, we stopped about 30 km SW of Windhoek at a locality of *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp. *pseudotruncatella* var. *pseudotruncatella* where once before we found a population of about 10 plants. We found the locality overgrown with high grass, shrubs and small trees (Fig. 4.1), and we spotted only one specimen with four heads, healthy and turgid among the grass. Its colours blended perfectly with the orange brown and white quartzite stone around (Fig. 4.2).



Fig. 4.1: Thorny bush and high grass on a locality of *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp./var. *pseudotruncatella* SW of Windhoek, Namibia.



Fig. 4.2: A thriving specimen of *L. pseudotruncatella* subsp./var. *pseudotruncatella* in habitat, SW of Windhoek.

AREA 5

On day four of our trip, we took the road west to Walvis Bay on the cold Atlantic Ocean and from there about 40 km inland into the Namib Desert. This is where *L. gracilidelineata* subsp. *gracilidelineata* var. *waldroniae* C189 (TL) grows in a very small area. On our last visit in 2012 we had found only four plants, realizing that most plants had been removed by collectors. So we searched the area around and found another small population about 5 km away (Fig. 5.1). As some rain had fallen in the desert, the plants had just finished flowering and bodies were beautifully turgid. The pale faces with prominent humps and strong red-brown reticulation looked like little brains among the stones. Plants are well sheltered by big grey-white and grey-brown rocks (Figs. 5.2 & 5.3). Other vegetation was scarce; only stunted grass, low shrubs and a flowering *Hoodii pedicellata* have been observed (Fig. 5.4).

Fig. 5.1: Habitat of *L. gracilidelineata* var. *waldroniae* in the Namib Desert after some rain



Fig. 5.2: Typical examples of *L. gracilidelineata* subsp. *gracilidelineata* var. *waldroniae* in habitat. Note the two young plants above the mother on the right.



Fig. 5.3: Remains of summer flowers on *L. gracilidelineata* subsp. *gracilidelineata* var. *waldroniae*.



Fig. 5.4: A *Hoodii pedicellata* in habitat bearing a crown of flowers.

AREA 6

On our return trip to Windhoek via Swakopmund that afternoon we stopped at a locality about 40 km from the coast, well known to us, but not to Ronald. This was a population of *L. ruschiorum* var. *ruschiorum* with some plants having beautiful, prominent markings. Ronald wanted to see it. What a wonderful surprise! Approaching the spot, we were welcomed by numerous yellow spots of flowering Lithops among the pale rocks and gravel, a result of recent rain in the desert (Fig. 6.1). Of all the var. *ruschiorum* populations known to me, this one has the most reticulated specimens of all (Fig. 6.2), the markings coming close to that of var. *lineata*. The body colour of the latter however is generally more orange-brown, and it grows about 500 km to the north-west on the Skeleton Coast. Our last population was a spectacular and suitable conclusion to a wonderful trip.



Fig. 6.1: Flowers in the desert, habitat of *L. ruschiorum* var. *ruschiorum*.



Fig. 6.2: An old, well marked *L. ruschiorum* var. *ruschiorum*. Note the small insect pollinator on the head right centre.

In conclusion: To see wild life in its natural habitat is a marvelous experience and a privilege. But you also become aware of a delicate balance of natural elements. Human interruption can permanently spoil it all. We do not possess Nature; we merely are her caring custodians!