

The tale of a little red stone

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A new *Lithops* cultivar is described. Photos by the authors.

During a field excursion with Professor Desmond Cole and Naureen Cole south of Bethanie in Namibia early in 2004, one of the authors (HM) was fascinated by a little red stone next to a *Lithops schwantesii* subsp. *schwantesii* var. *marthae* plant in one of the colonies visited. On closer inspection the 'stone' turned out to be a small reddish-coloured extra head on the side of the normal greyish-coloured plant. As this plant was discovered in a new colony, Professor Cole collected this plant as part of the Cole collection of the C411 colony. This plant stayed in his collection and red head had slightly increased in size to be about a third as big as the other two heads, when the 'red stone' flowered for the first and only time in 2008 (Figs. 1 & 2). The red head persisted on the plant with the other normal-coloured heads, which by 2022 had developed into a six-headed plant, plus one small red head (Fig. 3).

On another *Lithops* trip in May 2008 to an area just a few kilometres from the C411 colony, a few plants there had a visibly redder shade, and the late Tok Schoeman collected a very old seed capsule from one of these plants. Tok sowed the few seeds that he could liberate from the capsule and one reddish plant resulted from this sowing (Fig. 4). After Tok passed away, the plants in his *Lithops* collection, together with his seed collection, were incorporated into the collection at Alte Kalköfen Lodge. Among the seed packets was one marked in Tok's



Fig. 1 The *Lithops schwantesii* subsp. *schwantesii* var. *marthae* plant collected with a smaller reddish side head, flowering after four years in cultivation



Fig. 2 Red tips to the flower petals of the yellow flowers of 'Torra Red'



Fig. 3 The original plant seen in Fig. 1, 14 years after being discovered in habitat



Fig. 4 A double-headed 'Torra Red' plant in the original collection of the late Tok Schoeman



Fig. 5 A second double-headed 'Torra Red' plant discovered in Tok Schoeman's collection



Fig. 6 Two-year-old 'Torra Red' plants

distinctive handwriting as *'//marthae - Red selection'* and a pot with another double-headed plant with the same white plant identification label (Fig. 5). The seeds from the capsule of this double-headed plant were sown both at Alte Kalköfen Lodge and in the UK in 2020 and these sowings resulted in almost pure red-coloured plants (Fig. 6).

We have named this cultivar 'Torra Red'. Torra being the local Namibian phrase for a stone or a rock, and since at first sight the small red head of this var. *marthae* was mistaken for a rock, it seems an appropriate name. The plants are a dark red to maroon colour with some showing distinct red lines on the leaf face surfaces and dusky dots being only a few, or more often, absent. The flowers are a normal var. *marthae* yellow but some flowers have red-coloured tips to the petals (Fig. 2).

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