

Literature review

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News and views on recent publications from the world of succulents

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***Lithops* In Habitat and Cultivation**

Published by the authors, 2021.

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Available directly from the authors. Email for enquiries and sales: sa.lithopsbook2021@gmail.com. 406 pages, 41 distribution maps, 40 botanical watercolour paintings and over 1,400 colour photo's. 30.6x21.6. Hardbound with illustrated dustjacket.

The authors' hobby of visiting and photographing *Lithops* in habitat became an obsession, and apart from just looking at the plants and taking pictures, they soon became interested in the biology and ecology of the genus. They found that information was available in articles but, more often than not, it was not written down. This book was conceived to make all this information available in one place. After gathering the biological and ecological information on the plants for close on 10 years the first author wrote the initial words for the book on a flight to Perth, Australia in September 2018. The majority of the writing was done by March 2020 when he went to South Africa to wrap up a few last visits to colonies of which he did not have complete population information. During lockdown in South Africa over nine weeks in isolation, he started looking at laying out the book and had to redo it several times over a six-month period until the end of 2020. The 40 fantastic paintings and line drawings by Janet Snyman took just less than two years (April 2019–Feb 2021).

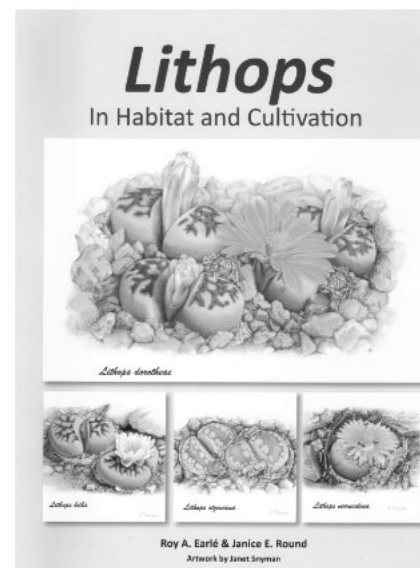
So just what is this mammoth book weighing in at over 2kg all about. The

contents can be summarised as follows: the most recent biological and ecological data is covered; other succulents growing alongside *Lithops*; habitat information and photos; includes information on all 40 species, with over 1,400 colour photos from various contributors and 40 botanical watercolour paintings. There are tips for growing plants in cultivation, tips for showing *Lithops*, information on cultivars (up to the year 2020), and detailed photos of *Lithops* seeds and implications for taxonomy.

Looking closer at the individual taxa we find that each species starts with a beautiful watercolour painting. A brief introduction under the painting is followed by information on history, description and taxonomy, distribution and habitat, populations and biology, flowers and seeds, conservation status, cultivation and ending with any cultivars that are recognised. The photographs are of plants in habitat, and the first image is always a landscape shot showing the typical habitat. Other photos show the diversity of leaf surface patterns as well as flowers. For example, for *L. bella* we have eight photos of the plant. A distribution map ends each section.

Once all the species, subspecies and varieties have been covered, there are still a hundred pages to go. Seven well illustrated pages cover the cultivation of *Lithops*, followed by four pages on diseases, pests and predators. An extensive and very well illustrated section comes next which looks at *Lithops* cultivars, hybrids and oddities. A comprehensive chapter on seed capsules and seeds follows, which also contains a table of seed sizes.

The final two chapters mention *Lithops* on the show bench (with particular reference to UK), and some words about conservation research and the work of the Lithops Research & Conservation Foundation. But we are not done yet! Six appendices bring up the rear! The first of these is



a summary of the classification of the taxa and most helpfully it is illustrated with numerous photos, 15 per page, of *Lithops* (mainly) in cultivation. This is termed the 'identification zone'. Another very well illustrated appendix looks at the most common other succulents that grow together with *Lithops*. Other appendices cover distribution, rocks and stones found at *Lithops* colonies, a glossary of terms used, and short illustrated biographies of all the main contributors. A list of acknowledgements, a general index and finally a *Lithops* index bring the book to a close.

This book is an extremely high quality publication. It contains all the information that you would ever want to know about the genus *Lithops*. It is beautifully illustrated, not only with excellent photos but also the botanical paintings. What struck me the most was that it is accessible to all – the beginner who wants easy identification, the long-time grower of these plants who wishes to learn more about their biology and ecology, and the scientifically minded who are interested in classification and taxonomy. This surely is destined to become the *Lithops* 'bible' and will remain an essential reference for many years to come.