

## **Aims of the IOS Reference Collections Initiative**

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From the outset, the aims of IOS as set out in the Statutes included “organization and support of protective collections of living plants”, and a byelaw was appended to the statutes stating the purpose of such collections in more detail (IOS Bull. 2(2): 44-45. 1964), later revised to specify pro-active ways in which support might be provided (l.c. 3(6): 180-181. 1977 (English), 185–186 (French), 190–191 (German)). There has always been close collaboration between IOS and the Sukkulenten-Sammlung Zürich but IOS has not up to now been successful in developing the sort of broader network that was envisaged.

Following a review of the cactus collection at the National Botanic Garden of Belgium, and its conclusions, which are the subject of the next presentation, a plan to revive the IOS initiative was discussed at a meeting between Dr David Aplin, who had asked for the review, Sara Oldfield, sometime chair of the IOS Conservation Section, compiler of the *IUCN Status Survey & Conservation Action Plan for Cacti and Succulents* (1997) and now Secretary-General of Botanic Gardens Conservation International, and myself. We agreed on a number of basic aims for the IOS initiative, as follows:

- Obtaining and maintaining inventories of living specimens of potential conservation and/or research or other resource value in the succulent plant collections of personal and institutional members of IOS;
- Assisting collection holders in assessing and recognizing the resource value of individual plants in their collections;
- Promoting good practice in the documentation and secure labelling of their plants;
- Promoting collaboration between collection holders in selecting groups to be treated as ‘specialities’ or as back-ups for collections elsewhere;
- Assisting collection holders and researchers to locate and obtain or exchange desiderata;
- Assisting collection holders with plant identification or verification via contacts with IOS experts;
- Encouraging collection holders to make a photographic record of plants when flowering etc, and if practicable to prepare herbarium specimens and other reference material.

The popularity of cacti and succulents means that many taxa regarded as ‘Endangered’ *in situ*, like *Echinocactus grusonii*, are relatively secure in cultivation, that is, *ex situ*. This suggests that a parallel system of conservation categories for taxa in cultivation could be helpful in prioritising the maintenance of individual specimens in collections. Numerous criteria would need to be taken into account in devising such a system. Ultimately, using a ‘points system’ perhaps, it might be possible to ‘rate’ whole collections for their value and importance as an *ex situ* conservation resource.