

**Sociedad Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Cactáceas y otras Suculentas (SLCCS):
Towards a consolidated network to promote the study and conservation of succulents in
Latin America**

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The SLCCS is celebrating this year its 20th anniversary. Even though it is already recognized in Latin America as a leading organization bringing together people interested in the conservation and study of succulent species, it is necessary to increase our efforts to spread awareness of the goals, activities and reach of the society, especially outside the Americas, where there are many consolidated organizations that share similar goals with the SLCCS and a genuine interest in succulent plants.

The SLCCS was founded in 1990 in Havana, Cuba, during the 5th Latin American Botany Congress. The founders of the society were Helia Bravo-Hollis (Mexico), Honorary President; Jorge E. Gutierrez Amaro (Cuba), President; Léia Scheinvar (Mexico), Vice-president; Alicia Rodríguez Fuentes (Cuba), 1st Secretary; Baltazar Trujillo (Venezuela), 2nd Secretary (Venezuela); Maricela Ponce (Venezuela), Treasurer; and Charles Glass (US), Honorary Member. Originally, 18 Latin American countries had regional representatives to publicize the existence of the organization.

The statutes of the SLCCS were created and approved in July 1992 during the 5th National Congress and 3rd International Congress on the uses of Nopal. They can be modified during General Assembly meetings, in the presence of members of the Board of Directors and Regional Representatives. Five central objectives were proposed for the organization: (1) to support and stimulate studies on cacti and other succulent plants in Latin America; (2) to contribute to the unification of taxonomic criteria in the Cactaceae; (3) to encourage conservation initiatives in succulent plants; (4) to organize scientific events of broad interest to the large community of people interested in succulent species in Latin America; and (5) to facilitate collaboration and joint studies among scientists and students in the region.

The SLCCS is composed of researchers, students, plant collectors, plant growers and public in general. The current Board of Directors (elective period 2006–2010) includes the following members: Jafet M. Nassar (President), Léia Scheinvar (Honorary President), Roberto Kiesling and Salvador Arias (Vice-Presidents), and Adriana Sofía Albesiano (Secretary and Treasurer). Following a tradition since the beginnings of the Society, we will elect a new Board of Directors during the coming 10th Latin American Botanical Congress this year, in La Serena, Chile. Besides the five members of the Board, we have 13 Regional Representatives for the Society in the Americas: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. We have between 40 and 50 active members, and our electronic bulletin reaches more than 500 people directly and over 1000 indirectly.

We conduct three very important activities that keep our organization alive: student training, publication of an electronic bulletin, and the design and maintenance of a web page. They allow us to have a real impact on the people and assist the development of the Society. Regarding student training, whenever members of our organization have the opportunity to participate in a

scientific congress in the area of botany, we offer a pre-congress course (theory and practice) of two days to people attending the event. To date, these courses have always been dedicated to the taxonomy, systematics and ecology of cacti. At the end of the activity, we give students a certificate of attendance and encourage the most outstanding participants to engage in research projects with succulent species. Overall, we have offered more than 20 courses until now.

The electronic bulletin began in September 2004. It is our link with people all over the world, but especially with Latin American colleagues and students interested in succulent plants. Since the first number, it has been published every four months with the help of the Editorial Committee composed by regional representatives of the Society. Anybody producing information on succulent plants in Latin America can contribute articles to the Bulletin. All the manuscripts are submitted to the Editorial Committee and classified as articles of general interest or scientific articles.

More than 500 people in Latin America receive the bulletin periodically. They help re-transmit this publication to more readers all over the world. Up to now we have produced 15 issues, some with more than 30 pages of varied information. The bulletin starts with an editorial article, followed by a section dedicated to initiatives for the study, conservation and cultivation of succulent plants. The next section is dedicated to description of ongoing research projects in Latin America. Many of these studies are part of undergraduate and graduate theses. Thanks to the Bulletin, many people around the world are aware that those studies are being conducted. After this section, we include divulgation and scientific articles on a wide variety of topics. In the case of scientific papers, we send them to referees to decide the quality of their content. In addition to this, we include a series of sections of general interest: informative tips, special announcements, review of recent publications and a list of recent published papers. The last page of the bulletin is dedicated to provide basic information on endangered species and to list the names and addresses of all regional representatives. Overall, we have produced 15 editorial articles, 13 contents on initiatives, six general comments, 39 projects, 34 articles for the general public, 21 scientific articles, six special announcements, 11 book reviews, 127 informative tips and we have listed 390 published references. Everybody interested in receiving our bulletin can send a message to jafet.nassar@gmail.com and ask to be included in the list of subscribers.

In May 2008, we launched the official web page of the SLCCS. The electronic address is <http://www.ibiologia.unam.mx/slccs/www/index.htm>. The page is updated every four months and it has free access. The first service provided is a list of updated events related to succulent plants, including congresses, courses and announcements, among others. The page also contains all the issues of the *Bulletin of the SLCCS*. There is also a virtual library, where the visitor can see and download articles in PDF format and pictures of succulent plants donated by the public. Our latest idea is to include in the page a "Post a Sign" section, where people can announce their requests for papers, assistants, research material, collaborators, equipment, seeds, books, etc. The more people use the page, the more updated and useful it will become.

We have received the support of the international community of researchers and general public, which encourages us to continue offering all these activities. But we have needs that, once satisfied, would allow us to offer a better service to our members and readers. For instance, we need more referees to evaluate the quality of the manuscripts submitted for publication. We also need to receive a greater and steadier volume of contributions to the bulletin. This will allow us to programme in advance the structure and content of future issues. And of course, we would like to reach more people and stimulate them to contribute with publishable information in the bulletin. In the case of short-courses, we would like to expand the content of the programme and include

more instructors. The production of a didactic manual to distribute among the students would facilitate the instruction of the courses.

These are just some of the avenues for development of the SLCCS in the coming years, but there are other possible ways to grow and make greater impact; especially by establishing collaboration agreements with other organizations with similar goals. To make contact with them and discuss strategies to achieve common goals is a challenge our society has to face in the coming years.