

Experience with a privately owned Reserve Collection devoted to *ex situ* Conservation

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Everybody knows the importance of well-referenced collections for study and *ex situ* conservation of threatened species. Important collections can be the opportunity to spread knowledge of rare plants, and sources of propagules and seeds, whose availability reduces the pressure on collection of plants from the wild. I joined the IOS Reserve Collections Initiative when it began in 1988. At that time I was already the owner of a fine collection of endangered cacti, belonging to the slow-growing kinds, like *Ariocarpus* ssp., *Turhinicarpus* ssp. and allied ones, started by seeds early in the '80, when I was only 15. I was able to do this because of the Italian climate and a series of lucky coincidences, which allowed me to use more or less suitable greenhouses and allowed the collection to expand.

In 2002 the Town Council expropriated the piece of land where my rented greenhouse was, and I had to leave suddenly. I tried to save the situation by offering my collection to the town in order to build a living museum dedicated to biodiversity. The Council answered positively and made an agreement with a nursery where I could keep the plants while waiting for the new greenhouse to be built. After that I began a long relationship with politicians. In 2006 they suggested I organize a cactus show called 'La Festa del Cactus' to support the project. Today the show has become the most important cactus-show in Italy.

The official presentation of the working project called 'Green Visions' was approved by the Town Council in 2008, with the patronage of the Bologna Province and the Emilia-Romagna Region. Then, it decided where to realize the project and found some resources to build the greenhouse. Now the Council has invited me to join a meeting at the end of this month [April 2011], in order to take the final decisions on the incipient Green Vision project.

A small museum and a big nursery?

When I originally presented the project for a museum of succulent plants, I asked for a large heated greenhouse area in which to house almost all existing succulent kinds, totalling 4500 sq. metres and subdivided in different greenhouses to be realized stage by stage. The project included a landscaped area with plants grown in beds with explanatory labels, a small library and a laboratory for education and with courses in order to obtain an income to make the project self-supporting.

Year after year the size of the building has been substantially reduced by the Council and, at the moment, funds are just enough to build a greenhouse of 250 sq. metres, and no resources are available to cover general maintenance expenses (heating, water, electricity). With a structure of this small size it would be difficult to realize a noteworthy collection and raise sufficient income from sales to make it self-sustainable. So I must face the need to save just a small portion of the existing collection, say 1–3 specimens per taxon, while the rest of the plants would be sold to start a commercial nursery very close to the museum.

Inventory of the collection

As of 1 April 2011, the collection database included 26,450 accessions, representing 2333 genera, 1,622 species, 122 subspecies, 478 varieties 33 hybrids and 15 cultivars.

Postscript

Soon after the Inter-Congress I met officials at the Municipality in Bologna and they told me that, yes, they will build a Botanic Garden with a greenhouse where part of my collection could in be hosted. A considerable part of my plants will not fit the new accommodation, however, so I have decided to start a nursery to house them and to sell new productions in accordance with CITES regulations. I hope this will let me self-finance the maintainance and enlargement of the reserve collection. I would be grateful if IOS and BGCI could give me some institutional support for this project.