Talking about Sulcorebutias (mostly HS numbers again)

John Pilbeam muses over the identity of some Sulcorebutias that have been distributed in cultivation under Heinz Swoboda (HS) field collection numbers. Photography by Bill Weightman.

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Is it really four years since I wrote the first of these chats about Sulcorebutias ? How time flies when you are semi-retired and enjoying yourself, doing all the things that you want to do, rather than the alternatives which are necessitated by earning a living.

Because I have taken occasionally to including some of my older *Sulcorebutia* plants in exhibits which Derek Bowdery and I have been putting on at the Royal Horticultural Society Westminster shows, and at Chelsea, Malvern and Hampton Court Palace flower shows, I find I am treating them better than ever before by way of repotting. The big disadvantage of this I have found is that they immediately take advantage of you by growing to fill the extra space you have given them, and, like Dickens's well-known orphan bringing their bowl to your attention at the end of the year to ask for more.

I drew the line at 25cm (10 inch) bowls for the real oldies among them last year, but this year I will have to break my resolve that they would not get anything bigger, for an insistent, shrill handful of plants, not to mention the swelling numbers ready to step into those vacated pans, like pass-me-downs, all the way down the line. The real problem of course is that at the end of it all more space has to be found if I want to keep them all - and I find it difficult to do otherwise. Something will have to go!

Last year was a great one for flowers on the Sulcorebutias, and that earthy scent greeted me whenever I went into the glasshouse where they are housed for most of the spring and early summer. I do keep insects at bay in this house by using fine net at the ventilators, until the temperature gets to excessive levels, as the net does restrict the air flow and so the heat builds up, but by this time (usually mid-June) the plants I desire to pollinate are all hopefully gravid.

In April and May**,** when they are at their peak of flowering, I have mentioned before the amazement I have in watching the number of honeybees battering their heads in frustration at the side glass panels, clearly desiring to show me that, whatever pollinates these musky smelling flowers in the heights of Bolivia, they are quite prepared to hold their noses and try to do the job at near sea-level here. Fortunately unlike the later visitor, the leaf-cutter bee, they seem particularly stupid in dealing with glass barriers. The leaf-cutter bee however will seek out any little crack in the defences and make its way unerringly in and out. But since they are not usually heavily in action until June, and even then ignore the flowers as they are intent on filling the odd pot with cigar-butt-like bunches of pieces of cut leaf in which to lay their eggs (with no real ill effect on the plants), I have not found them to be a problem.

After a year's unblooming wait for plants bought in spring 1993 with the Heinz Swoboda field collection number HS 48, and labelled Sul*corebutia flavissima* "weiss bluten", I was absolutely knocked out in 1995 with the usual dense circle of flowers (bluten) on this species, in white (weiss). This event followed a rather less showy effort by my white flowered S. *breviflora* (another first-time bloomer, with half a dozen blooms at most), but at least they turned out to be similarly correctly labelled. So, with a white-flowered S. *crispata* (obtained nearly ten years ago from an American fellow round robin member, and consistently flowering well with a clear white flower), the mysterious HS 44a (S. *cylindrica* or S. *vizcarrae*, take your pick) and these last two which have now obliged with flower, I now have four white-flowered forms of normally yellow or magenta-pink flowered species, and am hoping to acquire a white flowered S. *swobodae* as a swap later this year. As far as I know that is all the white flowered versions there are - unless someone knows differently ?

Some of my other HS numbers flowered well this year, and several had a familiar aspect. First, HS 240 from Muyurina in the east of Bolivia, in Department Santa Cruz, from the word go looked to be S. *langeri*, because of its relatively small stems, only 2cm or so across, and its dense white spination, and now that it has flowered that is clearly what it is. Will this provisionally named plant ever get proper recognition I wonder; it really is a beauty, and much sought after by Sulco collectors. But I suspect that it will languish as a provisional name, in view of the lumping mania which has overtaken not only the species in this genus, but is threatening demolition of the genus itself. I need hardly add that my labels are mostly unaltered, and they all still start with *Sulcorebu*tia. Has anyone relabelled them all *Rebutia ?* You have ? You mad fools !

And other more recently acquired HS numbers have proved to belong clearly to well-known species already in cultivation : HS 220, from Pojo, in the Department Cochabamba, with soft

brown or yellow strokable spines has to be S. swobodae, although there may be some confusion about the application of this number; HS 253, 255 and 258, all from Department Chuquisaca, the first two from Villa Serrano, the last from Padilla, look to be forms of S. crispata; HS 265 and 272 from Torotoro in the Department Potosi, are clearly what we call S. torotorensis, although doubts have been cast over the standing of this species lately. Others I have still to make up my mind about, and a few (notably HS 264) are interestingly different.

Of older numbers I am glad to report that HS 152, S. augustinii, which I touched upon in the last Sulcorebutia article in The Cactus File, Volume 1, no.10, has now filled its 5 inch pot, and decided that its further progress would clearly be in jeopardy if it continued not flowering, and so it did. John Brickwood had meanwhile sent me a picture of his plant obliging with bloom very well, and I suspect with a tacit recommendation to move to the south coast. It really is an individual, beautifully close-spined species, with quite a different aspect to the finer, darker spined, unnamed HS 151, pictured in the earlier article mentioned above, which is also a beauty, but with larger individual stems and a less heavily clumping habit.

HS 125 from Zudanez in Department Chuquisaca, is turning out to be a lovely shag pile form of S. crispata, with quite small stems (2.5cm or so), and the usual heavily clustering habit for this species, so that it should soon be widespread in collections. It is similar to plants in circulation under the number KK 2005, which has equally long, soft spines. This seems to be referable to S. crispata too, but I have seen both labelled by the appropriate but quite unofficial name S. senilis. With the already wide range of forms of S. crispata it is not too difficult to see this new, attractive form fitting in here. It will be interesting to see how it develops as it forms clumps.

Talking of long-spined forms brings to mind a plant I have under the number HS 30, from Santa Rosa, Department Cochabamba, which

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(Top)
A white-flowered form of Sulcorebutia flavissima, distributed under the Heinz Swoboda collection number HS 48

(Middle)
Sulcorebutia augustinii HS 152 making a densely packed clump of small stems, each half to two-thirds the size of its companion HS 151

(Bottom)
Distributed under the number HS 125, this is a long-spined form of Sulcorebutia crispata from Zudanez in Department Chuquisaca in Bolivia

has turned out to be a lovely, long-spined form of that doyenne of neat spination, S. *arenacea*. The difference in length between some of the extremely short-spined forms of this species that I have had before, no more than 3mm or so, and this long-spined form, with spines over l0mm long, is quite extraordinary, and points up the danger of too narrow a concept of a species.

Another one recently in circulation, that seems to be defying allocation to an existing species, is HS 100 from Rodeo in Department Cochabamba, Province Campero in the south of that Department. This is a heavily populated area for *Sulcorebutia species*, but it does not seem to tie up quite with anything. The form I have of this species (HS 100a) makes smallish stems to about 3cm tall and wide, with spines reminiscent of S. *kruegeri* (from some way north), all radial, not even in plants of some size showing any sign of developing central spines. The flowers are a lovely magenta-pink with white throat.

HS 140, also from Torotoro in the Department Potosi, is another beauty, with closely fitting spines on comparatively small stems, about 3 or 4cm tall and wide, and bright, solid red flowers.

A couple of plants under collector's numbers WF 47 and WF 57 (Willi Fischer, propagator extraordinary at Kakteen Centrum Oberhausen in Germany) are intriguingly different and slow growing, but have not yet flowered for me - perhaps this year.

And lastly, another form of HS 44a I picked up a-few years ago, with pale pink flowers rather than the white flowers commonly seen, put on a good show, with blooms of the most delicate silky, pale pink I have seen in this genus.

There is always something new happening in this wonderfully free-flowering genus to get me excited as flowering time approaches; I cannot wait for the spring.

Reference:
The Cactus *File* 1(10): 14 (1993)

(Top)
***Sulcorebutia arenacea* HS 30 - an unusually long-spined form of a species that is generally known in cultivation as being particularly short-spined**

(Middle)
Distributed under the collection number HS 100a, this *Sulcorebutia is* reminiscent of S. kruegeri, but seems to be something different

(Bottom)
***Sulcorebutia* HS 140 is another as yet unidentified plant, reported from Torotoro in Department Potosi, Bolivia**

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