
Cristate sulcorebutias

Les Hewitt asks why there was no mention of cristate sulcorebutias in John Pilbeam's article on this popular genus in the last issue of the Journal, and discusses one of his own favourites, *S. rauschii*.

Photography by the author and Bill Weightman.

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For some years now I have had a passion for sulcorebutias, to the extent that they now take up twenty square feet of my glasshouse bench space. Each year I try to re-pot as many as I can and most species will take full advantage of the extra pot room by filling it up with extra offsets. Needless to say I have struggled with a lack of space for the last couple of years and by the time you read this I will have ordered a new glasshouse.

I find the many aspects of this genus fascinating, from the beauty of the plants and the wonderful flowers produced so freely, to the taxonomy, over which there has been endless discussion for several years now, and sometimes strongly expressed contrary opinions. There is a particular interest from German enthusiasts, and this has resulted in a recent book (in German) by three such devotees to the genus, Karl Augustin, Willi Gertel and Gunter Hentschel.

This along with John Pilbeam's earlier book on the genus and also Johan Pot's CD-Rom "Sulcomania" have been my main sources of information.

As you might gather I have acquired many plants from many sources over the years, some more reliably identified than others, as seed raised plants are not the most reliable,

and seed bought from commercial sources can give doubtful results - in the past I have raised plants from seeds that proved not even to belong to this genus ! This year I have ordered from a different seed merchant: Mats Winberg of Succseed has a good reputation with rebutias and he also has a mouth watering list of sulcos, so I could not resist ordering a few. Germination has been good, the best I have had from *Sulcorebutia* seed which can often give

poor results. If they all reach maturity I will have to find room for another one hundred and twenty five more plants (maybe I should order two new glasshouses!)

A good proportion of my collection has come from the conveniently nearby nursery of John Pilbeam (Connoisseurs' Cacti) who offers many propagations from originally field collected material by collectors such as Walter Rausch, Alfred Lau and Heinz Swoboda which he has ac-

quired over the last thirty years or more. Heinz Swoboda has been responsible for introducing some of my favourite clones and occasionally the odd new species has arisen from his collections.

Of all species though *S. rauschii* is the one which stands out above the rest in my opinion, so much so that I have



Sulcorebutia rauschii cristate with abnormal flowers

acquired about twenty different clones and still I find some clones which are slightly different to my own. Their low clustering habit, almost flat with the surface of the soil, tells us how harsh the conditions must be in their native lands near Zudanez high in the Bolivian Andes.

In the CITES *Cactaceae* Checklist (2nd ed., 1999) all the sulcorebutias are referred under *Rebutia* and *S. rauschii* is listed as synonymous with *R. canigueralii* (formerly a *Sulcorebutia*). These proposals have not been accepted by any sulco enthusiasts I know of, including the authors of the books mentioned above, which all regard *S. rauschii* as a separate, good species and they all regard *Sulcorebutia* as a separate genus from *Rebutia*.

The reason I started to write this piece is because I was surprised to find no mention of cristate sulcorebutias in John Pilbeam's article *Cristates and spine oddities* in the June issue of the Journal, particularly as I know that John is very nearly as mad about the genus as I am. I read the article a second time to make sure my eyes had not deceived me. Having assured myself that he had not done so I thought I should follow up this article with something about my cristate *S. rauschii*.

With only four cristates in my entire collection I cannot be described as keen on these oddities, but I am so keen on sulcos that I tend to want to grow anything in connection with the genus and this includes cristates. When I saw Stuart Riley (of Plant Life nursery) at the Southern Area show in 1995 offering *S. rauschii* cristate plants for sale I had to have one—in fact they were so attractive I had to have two of them. Stuart informed me that the plant originated in a batch of seedlings that Ken Burke had raised and he had passed a piece of it on to Stuart, who has since propagated the plant extensively by grafting. This means of growing this plant is not only convenient for propagation by nurserymen but is probably the best way to grow it, as on their own roots cristates tend to push their roots out of the compost by

way of their stems growing into the compost, and the result is often the collapse of the plant. This plant, now two years since the picture was taken, has indeed grown down the sides of the stock and hit the compost below. This together with many offsets, all of which have reverted back to normal growth has convinced me that I should start the plant again, by grafting cuttings and creating plants for my friends and fellow enthusiasts.

As can be seen from the photograph it has brown spines



Sulcorebutia rauschii (Photo: W. Weightman)

and is a dark green bodied form. John Pilbeam has lent me a slide of a normal plant that seems to match fairly well the spine and stem colour of my cristate plant, and that is reproduced here too. The flowers on my crested plant are as strange as the plant itself and I find it difficult to describe them. They remind me of the patterns made by a child flicking paint from a paintbrush on to paper. I wonder if anyone has other cristates that produce similar abnormal flowers. The plant tends to go a little corky with age at the base as does the normal form. I find re-potting each year helps with this problem, as they grow fast, produce lots of offsets and conceal the older unsightly corky brow, base of the stem. As explained earlier the offsets on the cristate have reverted back to normal, slightly spoiling the appearance of the plant.

I asked Stuart Riley about other crested sulcorebutias and he told me he knows of *S. crispata* and *S. langeri* which I had already seen, as well as *S. tiraquensis* var. *bicolorispina*, *S. canigueralii*, *S. arenacea* and *S. Cochabambina*. Since they need propagation by skilful grafting when they appear, it may be that there are others out there that collectors have not made available. It would be interesting to hear if this is the case and I wonder particularly if there are other forms of cristate *S. rauschii*? I would be glad to hear from anyone who has any at all, to extend my collection of this genus and take an even greater area of bench space.

*Originally published in the British Cactus & Succulent Journal
September 2001 Vol. 19 N°3, (p.160-161)
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