

Crassula

mesembryanthemopsis

During a visit to South Africa during May 1989 I was fortunate enough to encounter *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis* in habitat. On a cold and windy morning I was on the lookout for interesting succulents some 5km north of the small town of Pofadder in the northern Cape Province. The site being investigated was a rocky ridge composed mostly of layered metamorphic rocks which were deeply folded and highly weathered. Covering the rocks in the flatter spots were quartz pebbles. Many small succulents, especially things like scaly anacampseros, lithops, ophthalmophyllums, some conophytums and other small mesembs favor these sites because the pebbles provide some shelter for the germination of seedlings which can often be found growing on the shady side of small pebbles. It was on such a site that I was slowly walking, stooped low so as to get as low to the ground with my eyes as comfortable. My sight was attracted by a small clump of pure white round buds which from experience suggested that it didn't fit in with the irregular pattern of rocks and pebbles. Upon kneeling down I saw the bare outline of about 12 greyish-white leaves of a single rosette of *C. mesembryanthemopsis*. The leaves were nice and plump, the result of recent rains but they were still sunken below soil level and covered by small fragments of rock. The photograph shows this plant at life size. A color image would be very similar except for showing the background as being a light greyish-brown. I searched the area for more plants and found them to be abundant, occurring about every metre or so. Only one double rosetted plant was found and all were in bud. This made it relatively easy to spot but had they been without flower buds it would have been hard to pick out this species from among the white pebbles. The same day I drove north into Namibia and again located plants on quartz covered areas west of the town of Warmbad, some 110km north of the previous site. Here they were growing on gently rolling country used for sheep farming. Many of the taller growing succulents such as sarcocaulons were nibbled back to the hard stems but specimens of *C. mesembryanthemopsis* were all perfect. As in the previous site they were pulled right into the soil with only the buds raised a few millimetres above the surface. Plants at both sites did not

exceed 35mm in diameter and were almost always single rosettes with about a dozen leaves.

Cultivation of *C. mesembryanthemopsis* presents a challenge for some growers. It dislikes the heat of summer and will go dormant even if watered. If kept cool and shaded during summer it will grow well. I do not treat it as a winter grower here in Victoria because our winters are humid and cool and watering at this time can lead to leaf rusting and other fungal infection resulting in root loss or death. The safest time to water *C. mesembryanthemopsis* is during autumn when it can be watered frequently and heavily. At this time plants should be grown in as much light as possible. If fertilized regularly *Crassula mesembryanthemopsis* will grow much larger in cultivation than in habitat. Some UK growers have this plant filling 200mm pots and the resulting clump is hemispherical in shape. Regular, preferably yearly repotting is required to keep plants growing to achieve such size but collectors may choose not to pump up their plant to such a level.

Propagation is almost exclusively by cuttings which root easily during warm weather. Single leaves will also form plants and it is often easier for a collector to pull off a few leaves than to take a knife to such a favored plant. Leaves should be mature and plump as old and shriveled ones usually fail to root.

