



August 2020

President's Message

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THE SKY IS THE LIMIT...*Virtually*



With the familiar heat of August upon us, I detect a degree of the "old normal", undeniably wrapped up in new packaging. This month will be our fourth virtual general meeting since the SARS-CoV2 outbreak really hit us in March. We have had three interesting and entertaining presentations each month. This coming meeting will be no different, with Alice Liles as our distinguished speaker. See the meeting information in this newsletter to learn about Alice's presentation.

Also, the general business of the Club continues to be handled by your Board of Directors. In fact, as per the club bylaws, I've appointed a three member nomination committee to select a slate of officers for the 2021 Board of Directors. There is much interest by current Board members to continue for another year. That said, current Club Bylaws allow for nominations "From the Floor" during our September general meetings. So if you have ever been curious about how "the sausage is made" for SACXS, consider being nominated for the 2021 Board of Directors. If you want to know more about Club operations, check the Club website at SACXS.org and look under Bylaws and Rules.

Once the Slate of candidates is set, it will be presented to the Club during the September meeting at which time nominations from the floor can be accepted. Such nominations can continue until the October meeting at which time the slate of candidates will be locked. The membership will then vote on candidates at the November meeting. If there is only a single candidate per office to be filled, the vote will be by acclamation. If we have two or more candidates for any Board position, we will have an actual vote at the November meeting. I look forward to connecting with everyone virtually on the 19th for our August general meeting. Until then, stay well.

-Jimmy Black, SACXS President

### ***SACS Board of Directors***

The SACXS Board of Directors meets monthly on the second Wednesday, one week before the General Meeting. Board members contribute varied experiences and viewpoints as they serve the interests of SACXS. Please don't hesitate to express your opinions and ideas to any of the board members. Your feedback is invaluable.

**President:** Jimmy Black **VP/Programs/Show & Sale Chair:** Mandy Bulmer

**Membership:** Anna Marie Stern **Treasurer:** Don Clark

**Tours/Field Trips:** Alyssa Danna **Recording Secretary:** Vacant

**Publicity Secretary:** Linda Lopez de Roman

**Director:** Linda Draper **Director:** Barbara Schulze **Director:**

**Director/Newsletter Editor:** Ann Black

# August Meeting:

## *Cacti & Succulents of the High Plains*



The Texas High Plains may be foreign to those of us who live in South Texas. The Texas High Plains actually comprise the southern portion of the Great Plains, or, more specifically, the northern portion of the Llano Estacado (“Staked Plain”). In its broader sense, the High Plains may be said to cover the northernmost Panhandle of Texas, northeastern New Mexico, eastern Colorado, and westernmost Kansas. The High Plains are generally flat grassland, drained eastward by the Platte, Arkansas, and Canadian rivers. The economy is based on cattle, irrigated and dry farming, and some natural-gas and petroleum extraction. Our distinguished guest speaker, Alice Liles, will sort all of this geography out for us at our August 18 meeting.



Alice Liles, a former English teacher of 31 years, graduated from Texas A&M University and holds a Master of Education degree from University of Houston, Victoria. Liles writes two blogs, “The Bright Muleshoe Lights of Muleshoe”, and “Cactus are Cool” found on her website [www.aliceliles.com](http://www.aliceliles.com). She recently published a book, *The Bright Lights of Muleshoe*, comprised of stories that appeared in her Bright Lights blog. She is a member of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America, the Austin Cactus and Succulent Society, and the Texas Association of Cactus and Succulent Societies. She lives in Muleshoe, Texas, with her husband Bill, four cats, two dogs, and more cactus than she can say grace over.



Her presentation, *Cacti and Succulents of the Texas High Plains*, will focus on cacti and other succulent plants that she has grown successfully in her garden in Muleshoe.



Mandy Bulmer, our program director, will be emailing us a link. We use GotoMeeting for our online host.

# The Mystery of *Neobuxbaumia polylopha*

by Linda Draper



In this strange pandemic-touched spring and summer, I've spent more time in my garden and on social media since actual face to face encounters with friends nearly disappeared. I've enjoyed comparing plants with virtual friends online, each of us sharing pictures and observations about our plants.

My main subject has been a pair of *Neobuxbaumia polylopha*. The tallest one was installed in our cactus garden in 2014 by SACXS Member and landscaper Marty Ruona. It started blooming during its second year in place. Our gigantic hailstorm in April of 2016 severely damaged the beautiful plant, and I feared it would die. It fooled me by growing a foot or more that year and blooming as if nothing had happened. Since then it has bloomed prolifically each year and has nearly doubled in height but it has never set fruit. It bears battle scars, but appears to be a happy plant.



Tallest *N.polylopha*

Tallest *N.polylopha* with blossoms and buds



Tallest *N.polylopha* facing the house

I was so devastated by the damage to that tall cactus and so many others, that SACXS member Alice Knight gifted me an unscarred *N. polylopha* that she'd grown. It was about 3' tall when I set it out in another cactus garden area in late spring of 2016. After a year, it began to grow fairly rapidly and bloom. In 2018 there were

only a few flowers and only one set fruit. I was very excited. I sent the seed to a Facebook friend who grows many cacti from seed for sale. The following year this plant blossomed all over its top and there were many, many fruits which I harvested for the seed. I gave some to our own SACXS member Don Snyder and he's successfully grown them. Now in 2020 the plant is over 6' tall and again has its top

covered in blooms and fruit. I've been harvesting the fruit for seed again.

I remarked in one of the Facebook cactus and succulent groups that I would have seeds to share. Ten to twelve different individuals asked for some. Most of the seeds from 2019 have gone out all over Texas, and even one batch to Australia. Almost everyone has reported back that the seeds have sprouted and seem to be doing well.

I've compared notes with a friend in the Rio Grande Valley who has several mature specimens even larger than mine that bloom regularly but never set fruit. I speculated that perhaps the plants are **dioecious**. The flowers on her plant and my oldest one both look

different from the flowers on the one I call "baby mama". They're skinny and long while the flowers on "baby mama" are compact and much thicker. The different appearances make me believe that there are two separate sexes for these plants although I wasn't able to find any information in that regard through my limited research. It remains a little mystery



Baby Mama with flowers & Fruit



Baby Mama with flowers & Fruit



Exploded fruit with seeds



Tallest *N. polylopha* showing thin flowers



In the meantime I continue to enjoy these big beauties and share seeds with anyone who wants to grow them. They're beautiful columnar cacti that do well here in San Antonio. I'd love to see them commercially available to folks here.

*Linda Draper*

Editor's Note: I did some reading on this species and found very little about its reproductive biology. There are research studies about the floral characteristics of other species of *Neobuxbaumia*, but none on *polylopha*. I did find out that Neobuxbaumias are closely related to Saguaros, which I found to be very interesting.



Here is a flower dissection from a *Neobuxbaumia polylopha*

The one on the left is from a plant that never produces seeds-it's a plant that is growing in the valley and belongs to one of Linda's friends. You can see that it has a vestigial ovary. I suspect that is a true male flower.



Here are some flower dissections from Linda's *Neobuxbaumia polylophas*

The plant on the left is from Linda's Big Daddy. This flower has well developed stamens and ovaries. It is probably a hermaphrodite. Supposedly these hermaphrodite plants are not self fertile. If there was a male flowering plant nearby, Big Daddy might set seed. The flower on the right is from Linda's Big Mama. It has ovules in its ovary, but poorly developed stamens. Which is why the plant never did much until Big Daddy came along!

So, maybe these plants are Trioecious-having male, female and bisexual flowers on different plants of the same species???

-Ann Black