

OBITUARY

LESLIE CHARLES LEACH (1909–1996)

Leslie Charles Leach (Figure 1), known to friends as Larry, was born at Southend-on-Sea in Essex, England on 18 November 1909. After leaving school he passed the entrance examination of the British Army Technical School where he completed a course in electrical technology. Serving as an Army technician, he gained wide experience in electrical engineering. He applied successfully for a post in Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] and arrived in Salisbury [now Harare] in January 1938. Here he met and married Ann (often called Nan) in 1939. In 1944 he established his own business, following the acquisition of premises on Sinoia Street in Harare. Concerning himself mainly with the supply of electrical equipment for vehicles and aircraft, he traded productively under the name of L.C. Leach.

Larry's interest in succulents started in 1950 after he had purchased a 10 acre plot near Harare, which he named 'Farview'. Initially he cultivated a variety of plants, but gradually his attention centred on succulents. Larry endeavoured to learn more about succulents than could be gleaned from available literature or expertise. Soon he began to concentrate on the systematic collection of Stapelieae, Euphorbieae and species of *Aloe*.

In 1956, after selling his business, he visited the eastern Transvaal [now Mpumalanga] and southern Mozambique to compare *Euphorbia confinalis* R.A.Dyer with closely related plants that he had studied in Zimbabwe. At that time he purchased a 25 morgen plot south of Nelspruit. Satisfied that the Zimbabwean plants were distinct from *E. confinalis*, he soon embarked on several, mainly self-financed expeditions to investigate and collect the species of the *Flora zambesiaca* area, and to see as many succulent euphorbias as possible at their type localities. After the death of his wife in 1958, following a long illness, he intensified his research efforts. The journeys encompassed most of southern Africa, including Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia, as well as Tanzania and Kenya. He was at times accompanied by R.D.A. Bayliss, I.C. Cannell, H. Hall, A.R.A. Noel, A. Percy-Lancaster, R.O.B. Rutherford-Smith, E.A.C.L.E. Schelpe, J.A. Whellan, G. Williamson, and H. Wild. His extensive expeditions are summarized in Codd (1966), Schelpe (1969) and Gomes e Sousa (1971).

The Angola trip in 1967 was partly financed by grants from the CSIR. On this occasion he collected several new records of ferns, written up by Schelpe (1968). These collecting trips were often fraught with difficulties and dangers. Two attempts to reach Goa Island, northern Mozambique, to see *E. angularis*, failed because of an allergy to mosquito bites, which he had developed on a previous excursion. However, at the third attempt, with the assistance of the Portuguese Naval Authorities, he landed on Goa Island only to find that *E. angularis* was neither flowering nor fruiting. Three years later, he was back on Goa Island, collecting flowers and fruits. In 1962

Larry was accompanied by Schelpe to collect ferns and *Euphorbia* spp. in northern Mozambique. However, a near-fatal viral dysentery grounded the expedition for a week in Blantyre.

From 1972 to 1981, Larry worked as Honorary Botanist on the staff of Zimbabwe's National Herbarium. Here he described himself as 'probably Rhodesia's only unpaid civil servant'. Larry persuaded the Aloe, Cactus and Succulent Society of Zimbabwe to publish a taxonomic series supplementary to *Excelsa*. Four volumes, containing, among others, monographs of the Stapelieae taxa *Orbea*, *Stapelia*, *Huernia* and *Tridentea*, appeared between 1978 and 1988 with Larry as the sole author. In December 1981 he emigrated to South Africa and settled first at the Botanical Research Institute in Pretoria (Figure 2) and was then employed at the National Botanic Garden at Worcester from 1982 to 1989. Until the time of his death he was employed as Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Botany of the University of the North. Larry passed away on 18 July 1996 at the age of 86. Sadly he could not complete the treatment of the succulent Euphorbiaceae for *Flora zambesiaca* which would have culmi-



FIGURE 1.—Leslie (Larry) Charles Leach (1909–1996).



FIGURE 2.—Larry Leach at his desk at the Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria, December 1981. Photo.: courtesy of *The Pretoria News*.

nated forty years of immensely dedicated research on Euphorbieae and Stapelieae.

In later years Larry spent 'far too much' time on nomenclatural disputes. The identity of the controversial name, *Euphorbia candelabrum* is such an example (Carter 1982, 1985, 1988; editor's notes in *The Euphorbia Journal* 4: 4 (1987); Leach 1974c, 1981a, 1985b, 1986f, 1992a). Larry presented convincing arguments that *E. candelabrum* is the correct name for an arborescent species in Angola (letters to the editor of *The Euphorbia Journal* 1987). He also fought against the apparently misapplied lectotypification of *Stapelia variegata* (Leach 1981d). Convinced that the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* could be improved, a number of proposals for amendment of parts of the Code were unsuccessfully submitted.

Larry was a prolific collector, often in inaccessible localities in the *Flora zambesiaca* and *Flora of southern Africa* regions with \pm 10 000 personal accessions being taken up in various southern African and European herbaria, although current collecting numbers are in the region of 18 000 through the inclusion of specimens sent to him for study.

Larry discovered and described four genera and 150 species and infraspecific taxa in the Euphorbieae, Stapelieae and the genus *Aloe*. Yet his most valuable contri-



FIGURE 3.—Prof. J.N. Eloff presenting the Golden Cactus Award of the International Organization for Succulent Plant Study to Larry Leach in 1990. Photo.: courtesy of *The Pretoria News*.

bution probably was the tracking down of imperfectly known species to their type localities and establishing their correct identity. His wide interest in plants resulted in his being commemorated in the following taxa: *Aloe leachii* Reynolds, *Cheilanthes leachii* (Schelpe) Schelpe, *Crassula leachii* R.Fern., *Dombeya leachii* Wild, *Echidnopsis leachii* Lavranos, *Eulophia leachii* Greatrex ex A.V.Hall, *Huernia leachii* Lavranos, × *Orbeostemon leachii* P.V.Heath, *Leachia* Plowes, *Leachiella* Plowes and *Larryleachea* Plowes.

In 1990 Leach was the first recipient in Africa of the Golden Cactus Award of the International Organization for Succulent Plant Study based in Zürich (Figure 3). He was also honoured with the Harry Bolus Medal by the Botanical Society of South Africa in 1968 (Schelpe 1969), the Gold Medal of the Rhodesian Scientific Association in 1977 (Kimberley 1977), the Certificate of Merit of the South African Association of Botanists in 1981 and the Allen Dyer medal of the Succulent Society of Southern Africa (Anon. 1994).

Larry was elected a Fellow of the Aloe and Succulent Society of Zimbabwe in 1975 and the Cactus and Succulent Society of America in 1983 (Mitich 1983). He was a vice president of the Rhodesian Aloe & Succulent Society and the African Succulent Plant Society of England.

Various tributes to Larry Leach appeared in Gomes e Sousa (1971), Schelpe (1969), Kimberley (1988), Mitich (1983) and Downs (1996).

South African botany has profited immensely from the work of highly motivated, well-versed amateurs. Larry Leach was one of the greatest among them.

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LIST OF TAXA DESCRIBED BY L.C. LEACH

Sections and subsections of genera not included. Subsequent combinations are not indicated.

EUPHORBIACEAE

*Endadenium**Euphorbia*

albipollinifera
ambroseae
ambroseae var. *spinosa*
atrocarmesina
atrocarmesina subsp. *arborea*
bayeri
baylissii
bougheyi
bruynsii
cannellii
carunculifera
carunculifera subsp. *subfastigiata*
congestiflora
contorta
confinalis subsp. *rhodesiaca*
cooperi N.E.Br. var. *calidicola*
cuneniana
cuneniana subsp. *rhizomatosa*
curocana
damarana
debilispina
decidua Bally & Leach
decliviticola
dedzana
demissa
dispersa
distinctissima
dissitispina
eduardoi
ephedroides E.Mey. ex Boiss.
 var. *debilis*
 var. *imminuta* Leach & Williamson
exilis
fanshawei
faucicola
fortissima
fragiliramulosa
francescae
gentilis N.E.Br. subsp. *tanquana*
giessii
glandularis Leach & Williamson
gracilicaulis
grandicornis Goeb. ex N.E.Br. subsp. *ejuncta*
graniticola
griseola subsp. *mashonica*
griseola subsp. *zambiensis*
halipedicola
indurescens
ingenticapsa
inundaticola
jubata
lavrani
linearibracteata
lividiflora
louwii
luapulana
lumbricalis
malevola
malevola subsp. *bechuanica*

*mira**miscella**mnanjeana**monteiri* Hook.f. subsp. *ramosa**mwinilungensis**namuskluftensis**nubigena**nubigena* var. *rutilans**oligoclada**otjipembana**papillosicapsa**parviceps**pedemontana**perplexa**perplexa* var. *kasamana**persistentifolia**platyrrhiza**proballyana**pterochlada**quadrilatera**radiifera**ramulosa**richardsiae**richardsiae* subsp. *robusta**rugosiflora**schmitzii**scitula**semperflorens**sereti* De Wild. subsp. *variantissima**speciosa**subsalsa* Hiern subsp. *fluvialis**strangulata* N.E.Br. subsp. *deminuens**teixeirae**tholicola**vaalputsiana**vallaris**viduiflora**virosa* Willd. subsp. *arenicola**whellanii**wildii**williamsonii**Monadenium**cannellii**torrei**Synadenium halipedicola*

ALOEACEAE

*Aloe**andongensis* Baker. var. *repens**bicomitum**cannellii**enotata**esculenta**excelsa* Berger var. *breviflora**inamara**lepida**luapulana**procera**scorpioides**tauri**trigonantha**vallaris*

ASCLEPIADACEAE

Caralluma caudata N.E.Br. subsp. *rhodesiaca**Huernia**archeri**bayeri**brevirostris* N.E.Br. subsp. *baviaana**erectiloba* Leach & Lavranos*formosa**guttata* (Masson) Haw. subsp. *calitzdorpensis**hislopii* Turrill subsp. *robusta* Leach & Plowes*hystrix* (Hook.f.) N.E.Br. var. *parvula**lavrani**longituba* N.E.Br. subsp. *cashelensis* Leach & Plowes*occulta* Leach & Plowes*pillansii* N.E.Br. subsp. *echidnopsioides**plowesii**quinta* (Phillips) White & Sloane var. *blyderiverensis**thudichumii**urceolata**verekeri* Stent var. *angolensis**verekeri* Stent var. *pauciflora**Orbea**halipedicola**halipedicola* subsp. *septentrionalis**speciosa**Orbeopsis**Orbeanthus**Pachycymbium**Stapelia**baylissii**erectiflora* N.E.Br. var. *prostratiflora**kougabergensis**montana**montana* var. *grossa**obducta**praetermissa**praetermissa* var. *luteola**scitula**Stapelianthus baylissii**Trichocaulon mossamedense**Tridentea baylissii* (Leach) Leach var. *ciliata*

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