

CactusBase Pro



It is almost 30 years now, that I am struggling around in the world of cactuses. In that period I was pleased to receive quite a lot of visitors in my glasshouse. One of them was regularly my mother. Each time when she was looking around in the glasshouse, she had the same question: "How many cactuses do you have"? And of course she meant cactuses and succulents, because that's all the same for her, namely "prickly plants". When I started my hobby,

I could simply answer that question, because counting till about two hundred and fifty wasn't that difficult. But like other persons, infected by the cactus virus, my collection was growing bit by bit, and answering my mother's question became more and more a problem, so the answer was more a guess than an exact one. The last couple of years my answer was merely the same: "About thousands of plants, ma". With this amount she was pleased, but in contrast, I had a strange feeling in my stomach, which you could describe as a form of agitation. I would know the exact number of my plants, and giving my mum a correct answer.

In December 2002, Peter van der Puyl approached me with the question if I wanted to join creating a Dutch translation of the English-based database program for cactuses and succulents, named Cactusbase Pro. About given the answer, I didn't have to think that long, because having such a nice database program looks fun. I have tried many times in the past to create such a program for myself, but by hook or by crook, it never finished. It just took too much spare time to complete such a thing. Beside this, I have been looking before to this kind of computer programs, but till now, I was never really enthusiastic. The cactus database which came the closest to my wishes was the database of Gerard Meijssen (which, by the way, can be freely downloaded from the Succulenta E-group). But that database works only under Access 98, and is more specialised in the scientific side of the plants. All by all I answered Peter that I would join the project.

And so it happened that in January I received an envelope out of England, with a pair of CD's and a user manual. The sender seems to be Mike Witlock. I was lucky to have two PC's at home. One for business purposes and one for testing. The testing PC works under Windows 95, and this is, regarding the system requirement, the minimum requirement. A good machine for the first install. Entering the CD, and following the instructions and voila the program was installed and I could use it. But first a little bit poking around, to see if everything is working. Fortunately, a lot of example databases were supplied. The first look was a stable program, and despite of the old PC fairly fast. Also all the necessary stuff for the translations was installed successfully and seems to work. Time to think about how to continue.

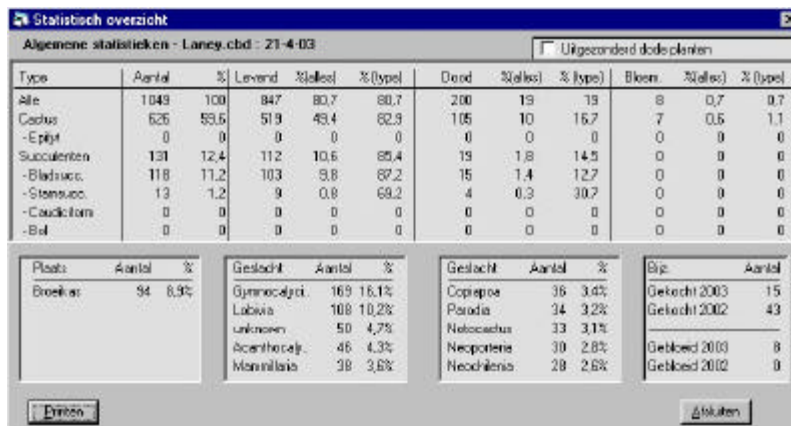


Figure 1: Statistic Overview

As written before, I had developed something for myself, to record information about my plants. This was not up to date anymore, but for a start, this was better than typing in everything again. After a lot of messing around, I succeeded in creating a database that was suitable

for CactusBase Pro. But unfortunately messing around is not possible for everybody. So new users has to type in everything from stretched on, if Mike is unable to convert their databases (convert = rebuild the format so it can be used for another program). After successfully inserting my messing around file, I could complete my collection within reasonable time. The real work could start now. The menu's, help files, etc. were translated, and finally I could work with a complete Dutch language version. The first thing I examined, was the Statistic option (see figure 1), so I could finally answer my mothers question. It seems that I had 847 plants. My abdominal feelings were gone, and the next time she would ask me that famous question, I can finally give an answer.

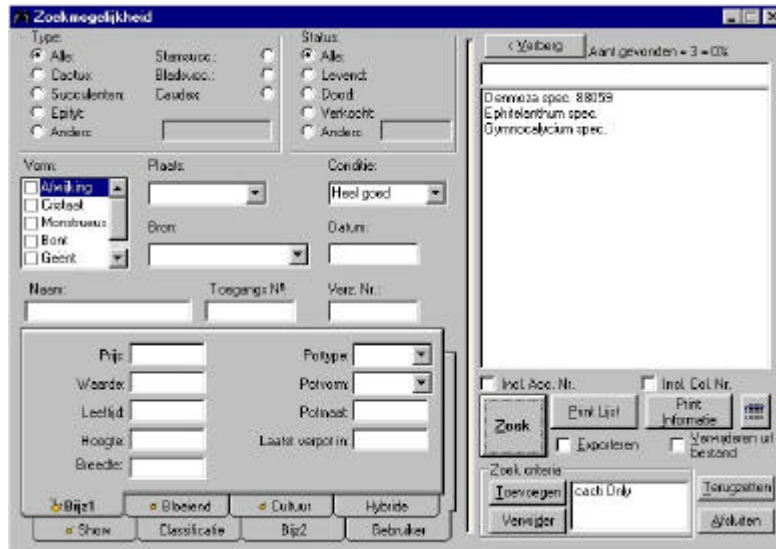


Figure 1 : Searchscreen

Of course I didn't enter all my plant names, just to get an answer on the question "How many plants do I own". CactusBase Pro offers a lot more, such as an increased search facility (see figure 2), a wish list which can be setup completely to your own needs, year notes, a planner, graphs and diagrams, linking pictures to the plants, flowering information, notes, etc.

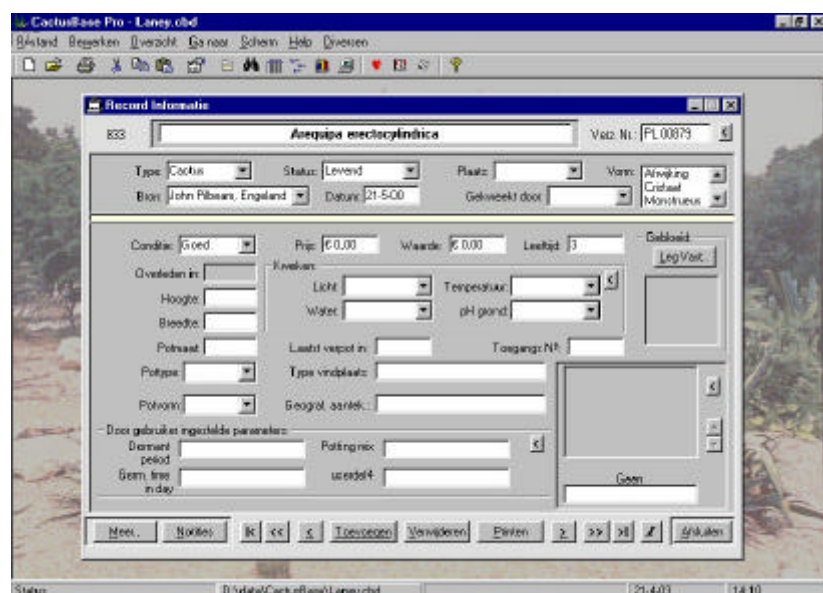
Besides of this, CactusBase has a choice out of four different types of databases, namely the main collection, treatment, an extended literature database, and a database to record pictures. Of each type of database you can keep track of different variants. For example your own collection, separated from your wife's collection, multiple literature databases, etc. Some things, one can setup completely to your own needs, such as the language under which the program is operating, the locations of different databases and programs, the names of the fields, etc. This entire one can setup easily in the Option menu. But the most important of all is the main collection. If this database is opened (For example "laney.cdb", yes...this is my own collection), one get a kind of information card (see figure 3).

In this card, one enters the most important details about his plants, such as the collection number, if the plant is a cactus or a succulent, if the plant is death or alive, where the plant is located, where he comes from, what his condition is, etc. Apart of that, one can also record flowering information, pictures and notes.

Figure 3: The Information Card

One can also record information regarding classification, history, and for those who joins shows and competitions, even this information.

All information one can print in different ways. For lovers of graphs and diagrams amongst you,



there is the possibility to produce splendid graphs, which can be exported in almost every format (see figure 4).

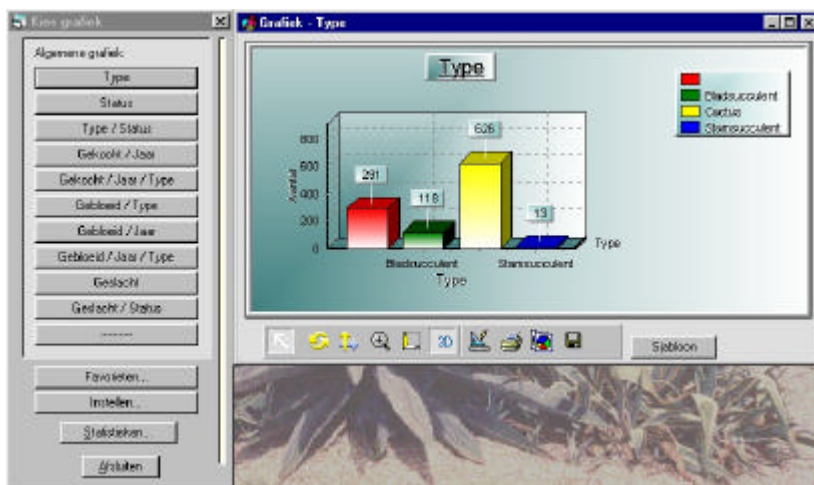


Figure 4: Graphs

Also creating and restoring a Back-up is possible and works fantastic.

For the crossword enthusiasts, even a crossword is integrated.

One can hardly make names mistakes, because a lexicon of names is delivered for free. This

lexicon is far from complete, but is really usable. Against a supplement of 10 EURO, an extra CD is delivered, on which is an expanded cyclopaedia with cactus and succulent information / photo's, is available. Today, after 2 month of extremely use, I am very, very satisfied with this database.

Peter van der Puyl, who has a succulent collection for more than 20 years now, has a longer experience with Cactusbase. He started with version 2.75 and has converted anything to the newer version without any problems. Here is his full account.

I started with a small greenhouse against the wall, which was 5 square meters and today I have a free standing greenhouse of almost 12 square meters. I started with everything I could get, but by sawing of different species, I started step by step specialising myself to Aloes, Agaves, Aeoniums, Euphorbias and small staying caudexes plants. Of course I lost quit a lot of plants, from both the purchased as the sawed plant, but that's the way one learns. For example, I stopped completely with the Stapeliaceae. I couldn't survive them well, because in wintertime here in Texel (Netherlands) there is always a humidity of 100%. And the Stapeliaceae definitely don't like this. Also the minimum temperature determines which plants one can grow or not. I keep my greenhouse to a minimum of 8-10 degrees Celsius. And that costs me quit a lot of money for heathing. So heathing is also a limitation. To keep track of which plants I own in my greenhouse, and which of them were in a good or bad position, I started a long time ago, to write down everything on system cards. I did that for every plant. Those system cards one could buy, in different sizes, in every office shop. They are placed in plastic boxes, so they keep dry and staid readable. Those cards were, and still are the principle in registrating everything in my collection, and keeping track of every change. It true that today everything goes by computers and those cards will become antique. But Mike promised me, that soon the program is able to print those cards. When I am in the greenhouse, sewing, repotting, watching the plants growing and flowering, removing vermin, etc., I always take the card that belongs to the plant, and I write on it everything I see or do. For example on day "x" "plant "y" is flowering with color "z", and regarding to Euphorbia, if the plant is male or female. Also the size of the plant is noticed. The cards are stored alphabetically in the plastic box, with a numbering within the same species.

When CactusBase came on the market, I bought it almost directly. In that period everything was on floppy disk, and the results were not so overwhelming. For example, I couldn't store pictures of my plants. On the other hand, the information was ordered tolerable and I could view the info on the computer. Through the years the program improved itself in such a way, that I can do almost everything with it, the way I wanted to. There was a Dutch translation very soon, and although I understand the English language quit well, it is nice to see everything on the screen into Dutch. Now I can create a new card, filling it with all the information of the seed supplier. After that I sow everything, and make a note on the card about how many seeds germinate and when they were plant out. After this, I bring over all the information on the card into the computer, into the main-collection database. This way I get a perfect idea of how is the sowing and flowering of my plants. Of course it is important to note everything consequently, and to enter it in the computer. But the winter months, when the plants are in rest, are perfect for this purpose. I can also view quietly if the plants were grown or not.

Furthermore I can take a look with this program about what is known about the specific plant, and which data there is on the internet. In this way I find out what I am doing well or wrong, where the plant belongs and what consequences that has for the treatment. Photo's I made with my digital camera are linked directly to the information of the plant, so I can follow the growing in time. Now that the program is available on CD, and a lot of translations will be available, I think it is a good and practical resource, but no more than that. We still have to sow and to treat the plants by our self, and the program is very helpful with it, for example to tell us when a plant needs to be repotted, how vermin must be suppressed, how many plants there are available for selling or exchange, printing a list to take away to a meeting or exchange mart is a handy thing. Also the program has an extended statistical part, which lets you see for example how many en which plants flowers when. Very nice to track all these things. I am enough satisfied with this electronic card box, and I hope that many people will use it.

Conclusion:

Cactusbase Pro is pleasant working software package for recording a lot of things regarding the cactus and succulent hobby. It is not restricted to data of the plants in your greenhouse or garden alone. It's working under every Windows operating system, starting with 95. It is available in the Dutch language, and members of Succulenta can buy it for EURO 40 You can order it the following way: Via internet at Mike Whitlock, see his webpage <http://www.cactusbase.net> for 60 Euro, and 70 Euro with the 'Encyclopedia of Cacti & Succulents (v.4.0)'.

For members of Succulenta: : Peter van der Puyl, Ada van Hollandstraat 3, 1791 DG, Den Burg, emailadres: ppvdpuy@quicknet.nl The price is 40 EURO for the complete program, and 50 EURO with the 'Encyclopedia of Cacti & Succulents (v.4.0)'.

For the Dutch part, Peter van der Puyl will give his support by phone or computer.

I have asked questions in different discusiongroups on the internet about CactusBase Pro, and all the reactions were positive. Not only praise for the program, but also for Mike Witlock himself, who is not only selling the product, but given it a great support.

Ourselves, we see CactusBase Pro as a good fill up for all the daily things that happens in the greenhouse and/or garden. But it is difficult to take your PC with you to the greenhouse and/or garden. So pencil and paper is still necessary (although a notebook or pocket PC is coming closer to us step by step).

Peter van der Puyl
Paul C. Laney