Succulents come in all different forms and from all over the world. They can be found in Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and of course the Americas. Some store water in their leaves, others in their stems, and some in their roots. In the middle of the rockscape’s center bed, you’ll find examples of one perennial succulent called Lithops, which an English naturalist discovered by chance on a collecting expedition to South Africa in the early 1800’s.

You may need to look twice, because as Conservatory Manager Rob Nicholson notes these plants are masters of camouflage. Rob: Lithops are called “living stones” because they actually look like a cluster of little rocks. And a lot of times these plants have adapted to a very specific part of South Africa, such that the color of the lithops matches the colors of the rocks around it. So it’s a way for them to confuse predators who might eat them otherwise. They look like a rock; they look like the rock that’s right around them, so they’re very hard, for any animal that wants to eat a nice succulent juicy plant, to find. You can see that there are some that are gray, some that are green, some that are brick-colored; some that have a clear window on the top. People collect these worldwide because they’re so fascinating and beautiful.

In order to survive the heat and drought of the South African deserts, ‘living stones’ have evolved into an efficient water storage system that at any given time consists of just two small, waxy rounded leaves. These remarkable plants will hold water collected through the year in order to endure the months of drought. With the onset of new rains in the fall, Lithops emerge from their state of dormancy. Mature plants produce white or yellow daisy-like flowers as they start the process of growing two new leaves that will help them to once again, survive the coming year’s drought.