

On preserving biodiversity in the desert. An interview with Dr. Letharia Felina

Letharia Felina gained notoriety for engineering a strain of catnip called ICE-9, which has the adaptation to survive at a temperature of Zero Kelvin. She's here today to share information about her work at the Lichen-Conservatory.

GeoNews – What's the Worst part of your job?

Dr. Letharia – Waking up early in the mornings.

GN – Haha, I feel you. What's keeping you up at night these days?

DL – I'll get right to the point. Some cats go crazy for houseplants. They sometimes go overboard and even take endangered plants away from nature, which causes a huge risk to the habitats of the GeoRing.

GN – Ah, I see the issue. Is there anything you do to solve these issues?

DL – My team and I are *pointing our flowers to the sun*, so to speak, and finding optimistic solutions.

GN – ...Sorry, what?

DL – Well, more people than ever would like to grow rare plants for themselves at home. We thought the best way to preserve these endangered species is to flood the markets with the cultivated variety.

This way, nobody has to go out into the wilderness and cut down their own rare plant to bring home. They can get their own plant from us to study and appreciate while leaving our ecosystems from being disturbed.

GN – Nice. What sort of plants do you cultivate at Lichen-Conservatory?

DL – We cultivate Lichens at the Lichen-Conservatory.

GN – Oh, ok – Makes sense...

DL – *Lichens* are a symbiotic relationship between a fungus and an algae.

My team grows special types of Lichen which have the unique adaptation to survive in the harsh Deserts of the Georing.

These ones are especially interesting to us because of their striking similarity to cactuses. This is a phenomena called convergent evolution, in case you'd like to learn more.

GN – Life... uh, Finds a way?

DL – Hm. Selective pressure has created this remarkable type of adaptive expression.

GN – Totally fascinating. Is the conservatory open to the public? **DL** – Yes! I guess you could say we are a bit like a library that way. We're always happy to have visitors at the Conservatory, and offer daily tours of our collection.

GN – Excellent! **DL** – We must warn you to be prepared for the difficult journey if you intend to visit us by foot through the desert...

Please bear with us, we're still working on a better transportation system.

GN – Looking forward to it. Thank you for joining us. Any desert wisdom you would like to leave our readers with today?

DL – Plants are members of an ecosystem, and are even better enjoyed when met in the context of their own natural habitats. If these habitats cease to exist, we'll simply have no context to appreciate these natural beauties.