Thorny Issues

Sacramento Cactus & Succulent Society **July 2016** **Volume 57, VII**

July Program

MEXICO, THE HIDDEN TREASURES OF COAHUILA—WENDELL S. WOODY MINNICH

Mexico is thought by many to be the richest region in the world for cacti. For all those individuals who travel in search of rare and unusual cacti, their first choice is often Mexico. The Sierra Madre Oriental is considered the center of diversity for Mexican genera, ranging from *Ariocarpus* to *Aztekiums, Echinocereus, Ferocactus, Geohintonia, Gymnocactus, Mammillaria, Obregonia, Pelecephora, Thelocactus, Turbinicarpus* and many, many more. Because of the plethora of plants found in the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi and Hidalgo, most field workers have just decided to ignore the little explored Coahuila.

Monterrey Huasteca | Photo by Woody Minnich

For most of us, Coahuila and its neighboring state of Chihuahua were often only used as drive-throughs on our way to the succulent-rich south. In recent years, many of the serious plant explorers have started finding new back country roads in these two states. These new roads have graciously opened up some of the rarely explored areas to extremely remote regions, and some of these back country roads (trails) are not even found on the maps! Coahuila, as close as it is to the USA, actually has some of the least explored and most remote regions in all of Mexico.

On our trip through Coahuila, we drove for many hours without ever seeing other vehicles or back country people. There were no urban or agricultural developments as these wild places are still virtually untouched! The valleys and mountains of these expanses will surely offer many new species for the field worker willing to do some serious exploring. Near the roads, if you wish to call them roads, I saw only a few dried-up old ghost towns where apparently some tough old Mexicans, probably from the Poncho Villa era, once resided.

From the unknown territories of Coahuila, there have been numerous new cacti and other succulents discovered and rediscovered. The crown jewel of these new plants is the fantastic *Mammillaria luethyi*. It was lost for over 60 years since its original sighting, growing in a rusted tin can on a dusty ranchito porch. All of us exploring Mexico had searched for this very special *Mammillaria*, until only a few years ago, Luethy found it in northern Coahuila. The Sierra del Carmen, which abuts the Rio Grande and the Big Bend National Park, has also been the origin of other new species. Close to this area, we discovered a new, very beautiful *Echinomastus*, or possibly *Gymnocactus*? Also from this region we found a very handsome red *Sedum*, as well as *Echinocereus longisetus*, and the northern most of the *Echeverias*, *Echeveria strictaflora*. In a remote dry lake bed, Laguna la Leche, we admired the amazingly cryptic *Escobaria abdita*. Wow, just some of the treasures of Coahuila!

Sedum robertsianum | Photo by Woody Minnich

This trip was also to be an adventure in seeing some of the brand new *Agaves*, *Echeverias*, *Astrophytums*, *Echinocereus* and *Mammillarias*. We scored on almost everything we went to see, and never, in the 45 years that I have traveled Mexico, have I seen it so green. This talk will also feature many cacti and other succulents that have never been seen in books or presentations. Come explore Mexico with me!

About our Speaker, Woody Minnich

Woody, as he is commonly called, has been in the cactus hobby for some 45 years and has become well known for his participation in many of the cactus and succulent clubs. He is an honorary life member of nine clubs as well as a life member and Friend of the CSSA (Cactus & Succulent Society of America.) He has served in almost all positions of leadership from president, to newsletter editor, to show chairman and so on. He is also known for his extensive field work studying primarily the cactus family. He has traveled throughout Africa, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Madagascar, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand, Peru, Socotra, the United States and Yemen. From these trips and his nursery experience, he has developed an extensive knowledge of the cactus family as well as many of the other succulent genera.

Woody is also known for his many presentations. His photography is considered to be special and his commentary very entertaining and educational. He is a recognized international speaker and has spoken for plant conventions - organizations all over the USA, as well as in England, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Mexico. Woody has also authored a number of articles for various newsletters, the CSSA journal and his photographs are well published. Woody is the creator-originator of the first color version of the CSSA journal "Cacti and Succulents for the Amateur" that also featured show plants, shows and the growers of the pictured plants.

He is also known for his cactus and succulent nursery, Cactus Data Plants. CDP was started in 1975 and is still in operation today. Cactus Data Plants specializes in show specimens and rare cacti and other succulents with particular emphasis in *Ariocarpus, Astrophytum, Mammillaria, Gymnocalycium, Turbinicarpus, Melocactus*, *Copiapoa, Fouquieria, Pachypodium*, *Euphorbia, Cyphostemma, Adenium and Adenia.*

Woody and his wife Kathy live in the beautiful mountains south of Santa Fe New Mexico, in a region called Cedar Grove. He has a small 1,200 sq, ft. greenhouse and a few cold frames where he grows his unique plants. He is always on the move and travels frequently to do presentations and shows throughout the western United States. Woody is the proud parent of three children, Leah, Denver and Sarah, all of whom are now grown and out in the big world. Woody is also the proud grandparent of three grandsons, Indiana, Ashton and Logan. He is a retired high school teacher of 32 years where he taught Graphic Arts, Architecture, Art and Health.

Echinocereus pectinatus | Photo by Woody Minnich

June Mini-Show Winners

CACTUS

1st: *Mammillaria parkinsonii*, Michelle Egan
2nd: *M. nejapensis,* Steve Goodman
3rd: *M. camptotricha cv marnier-lapostollei*
"Bird's Nest Cactus," Rudy Aguilar
H.M.: *M. elongate,* Brandy Saige
M. sp., Robyn Andrews
M. centralifera, Mary Schuett
M. krameri, Alex Inglett

SUCCULENT

1st: *Euphorbia flanaganii,* Troy Fajerson
2nd: *E. lactea* "White Ghost" and Keith Taylor, *E. polygona,* Michelle Egan
3rd: *E. suzannae,* Rudy Aguilar
H.M.: *E. decaryi,* Steve Goodman
E. aeruginosa, Brandy Saige
E. neohumbertii, Alex Inglett
E. decaryi, Mary Schuett

July Mini-Show

CACTUS: OPUNTIA

Opuntia albara

Over 50 different types of Opuntia grow throughout the Americas and up into Canada with over 200 in the genus. They are the largest genus in the cactus family. Many are cold hardy, tolerating temperatures down to -30° Fahrenheit. They are also found in the Mediterranean region of North Africa, Tunisia, the Island of Malta, and in parts of South Africa. They were introduced into Australia in the late 1800s and have become a highly invasive plant.

They derive their name from the Greek town of Opus. Common names are "prickly pear," "nopal," "tuna" (Spanish for the fruit), or "paddle cactus" due to the shape of the flattened segments of the plant.

Opuntia have two growth features, which separate it into two distinct groups. The first group is Platyopuntia, which are the "Prickly Pears," with their rounded, flat, paddle-shaped segments called pads. The second group, Cylindropuntia, have cylindrical joint segments. These are "chollas" and are now categorized separately as the genus Cylindropuntia. The flat, paddle-shaped segments of Opuntia are called cladodes, which grow on top of each other in jointed segments. The cladodes are covered with areoles that sometimes have easily detached spines called glochids. Glochids are a distinctive feature shared by both Platyopuntia and Cylindropuntia. Some Opuntia are covered only with glochids that appear fuzzy but are actually clusters of tiny, fuzzy-looking spines that can cause great irritation when touched.

Certain types of Opuntia serve as a good food source. The "Prickly Pear" fruit (tuna) is used to make candy, jelly, and juice. The pads from some species are edible and treated like a vegetable, such as the Indian Fig Opuntia (*Opuntia ficus-indica*), known by the Mexican name "nopales." It can be pickled or fried and very good when served in salad or tacos or with eggs. Research is being done on Opuntia for use in the treatment of diabetes.

SUCCULENT: ANY CRESTED SUCCULENT

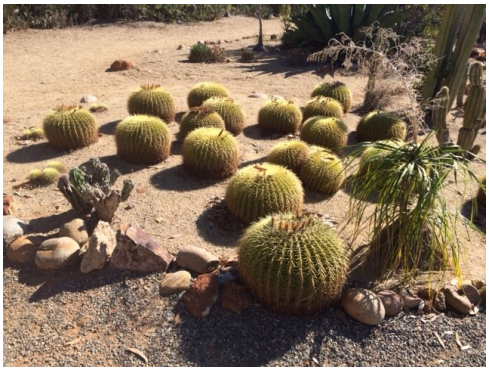
Cresting is a distortion in plants. The reason cresting occurs in nature cannot really be explained. It does, however, create beautiful and desirable plant forms much sought after by collectors. Attempts to artificially create conditions to produce such outcomes have not been successful. We do know that there are primarily two forms of plant growth that give us crested and monstrose plants. Fasciation is the first form: this means banded or bundled. It is a deformity possibly caused by a hormonal imbalance as a result of a random mutation. Other causes may be insects, disease, or physical injury to the plant. It is an occurrence that turns normally cylindrical stems into a wedge, fan or crest. When cresting happens, the plant becomes convoluted, resembling a brain mass form, and changes the symmetry from radial to bilateral. The stem stops growing in length and starts to grow sideways.

2016 SCSS Best in Show and Best Crest *Obregonia denergii*
by Bill Munkacsy | Photo by Gerhard Bock

The second type of distortion in plants is variegation. This is the local absence of green chlorophyll in the plant which causes striping, banding, blotching, or spotting in shades of white or yellow.

A very good and enjoyable book that deals entirely with this topic is *Teratopia: The World of Cristate and Variegated Succulents* by Gordon Rowley. It is available for purchase online, or you can check it out from our club's library collection. It is definitely worth reading for those interested in more in-depth information .

Notes & Announcements



Balboa Park Old Cactus Garden, San Diego, CA
Photo by Stephanie Reali

NOTES

Thank you! A very heartfelt thank you to the club members for honoring me with the 2016 Punctured Thumb Award. I am truly humbled. It is my pleasure to be a member of this club and volunteering in any capacity is just the icing on the cake. I hope to live up to this honor in the years to come. — Marilynn Vilas

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tickle for your calendar! Keith Taylor announced he would be bringing a very special Raffle Table for the November meeting. Seems he overbought at the San Diego Show, and we will be the recipients of his enthusiasm. Bring money!

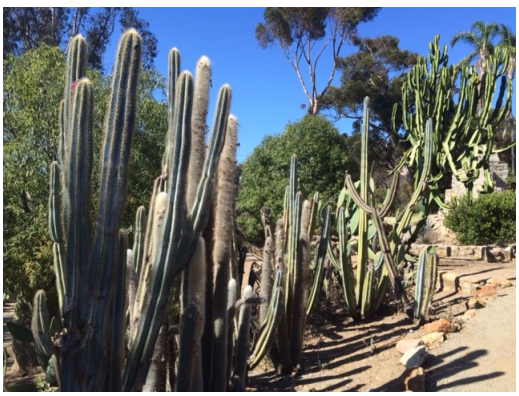
Country Store Reminder! What, you say? Country Store is not until September! Now is the time to start preparing, especially all those garden goodies: jams, zucchini bread (freeze till then), canned fruits and veggies, extra pups from your plants and cleaning closets for the Silent Auction. This is a fundraiser for the club, so all donations are money in the bank. More information in the next months.

New May Show Ribbon! Due to the tremendous response to the new class, "Bulbs," the May Show Committee agreed to purchase another "Best" ribbon, Best Bulb. Start collecting for next May! — May Show Committee

Meeting Details

The Sacramento Cactus and Succulent Society meets the 4th Monday of each month at 7 PM.
Next meeting: July 25

Shepard Garden & Arts Center | 3330 McKinley Blvd | Sacramento, CA 95816
center phone: (916) 808-8800 | www.sacramentocss.org



Balboa Park Old Cactus Garden, San Diego, CA
Photo by Stephanie Reali

Agave pentilla | Photo by Woody Minnich