

CACTUS CORNER NEWS

Fresno Cactus & Succulent Society

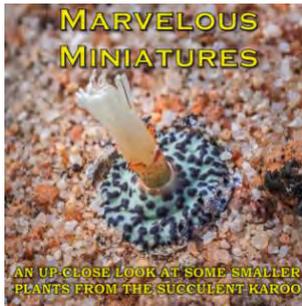
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Affiliated with the Cactus & Succulent Society of America

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IN-PERSON MEETING: THURSDAY, JANUARY 5TH, 7:00 P.M. (Doors open 6:30 p.m.)
REDEEMER LUTHERN CHURCH
1084 West Bullard, Fresno (Near NW Corner of Palm and Bullard)



MARVELOUS MINIATURES BY ROB SKILLIN

An up-close look at some smaller plants from the succulent karoo.

This month's program will feature some of the fascinating miniature succulents from the Succulent Karoo, and adjacent areas. Photos are from 7 trips to South Africa and Namibia that I've taken since 2002.

BIO: I have been growing cacti and succulents for 44 years, and have been involved in various local societies for most of that time. The first office I held was Show and Sale Chairman for the Santa Barbara CSS, during the late 1980's. After moving to California's Central Valley, I became a founding member, and later, President of the Bakersfield CSS. In 2005, after another move, I was a founder of the Central Coast CSS and became its first President. This society now boasts 260+ enthusiastic members, and will hold its fourteenth annual show and sale in September of 2021. I have also been involved with the CSSA as a member of its Board of Directors.

My first interest, which continues today, was cacti of the Chihuahuan desert, especially those unique genera such as Ariocarpus, Aztekium, and Strombocactus, etc. Gradually, I diversified my collection to include Mesembs, Haworthias, and other succulents, particularly caudiciforms. I've spent many years studying the cacti of the US, particularly species of Sclerocactus and Pediocactus. I am an avid grower of plants from seed, and now have a number of seed-grown specimens in my collection dating back to 1982. As an acknowledgment my expertise with these plants, I have been asked to judge numerous shows throughout California, including the CSSA, Intercity, NORCAL, LA, Fresno and San Diego shows.

Along with my interest in cacti and succulents, I enjoy photography and travel. These interests have come together in a wonderful way during my botanical explorations of the western US and Mexico, and portions of South America, Africa, Madagascar and the Middle East. I have several programs based on these trips, and I speak regularly to clubs in northern and southern California, as well as at the Huntington Succulent Symposium and 2019 CSSA Convention. Many of my photographs have been published as illustrations for articles and covers of the CSSA Journal and Haseltonia, as well as the Timber Press Book of Succulents of the World. I have published several articles on a variety of topics in the CSSA Journal.

***** Rob will be bringing a few flats of winter-growing succulents for sale. *****

FROM THE PREZ:

Hi Members,



It was wonderful to see so many of you at our Winter Party earlier in the month. It was great being able to sit down and enjoy a meal together for the holiday season. Oh at least I think it was, let's just say I won't be doing an auction pick up the same night of our party ever again. The rain that evening really changed my plans, ended up making the item pickup even more chaotic and took longer. Oh well, must go with changes and make it work. Can't thank everyone enough for donating items and then bidding in the auction. Over \$1900 was raised, which is an amazing achievement. Every time we have an auction our members really step up to make the auction even better than the last.

This is the time of year that there really isn't much going on. Just the cold and a few rainstorms if we are lucky. Before we know it though, our big spring event The Home & Garden Show will be happening. It takes place the first weekend in March at the Fresno Fairgrounds. Start thinking about helping, whether it be setup, on registers, or at clean up. We can always use extra help. As we get closer to the event, I'll send out more information.

Hope everyone had a wonderful holiday and is ready for the New Year. As always, we are working to make your experience in the club the best we can. We have a few changes coming up for next year that will hopefully do just that.

Wishing you all a Happy New Year, full of good health and new plants!

Thank you,

Robert





Alisha Pena (1st)
Dominic Ortiz (4th)
Elton Roberts, Rosalinda Hernandez (5th)
Mary Godwin (6th)
Dennis Shamlian (13th)
Christeen Abbott-Hearn (16th)
Mark Muradian (20th)
Tony Sharp (25th)

We have to apologize to those new members whose names were misspelled in the December newsletter:

Ed Rodriguez
Tina Rodriguez
Pat Bertram

Welcome



Your dear old editor missed the December party due to being crippled up with something like sciatica. Every movement is a painful ordeal.

A lot of plants that I normally bring in to the patio and lath house are still out in the rain and cold.

There's nothing I can do about it. It'll be interesting to see what survives.

Sue

Euphorbia antisyphilitica



Photo: Wikipedia

"It melts in your mouth, not in your hands."

Euphorbia antisyphilitica was named for its use by cowboys and early settlers in the Chihuahuan Desert and adjacent regions as a supposed preventative of syphilitic infection.

In an unusual twist of history, it later became used by millions of people in the United States, Mexico and elsewhere around the world for quite a different reason. Perhaps most readers of this paragraph have consumed a substance from this desert plant. Where the plant is native in Mexico harvesters make treks out to the hills where it grows and rip it up, roots and all, from the desert. The plants are bundled and lashed high on the backs and sides of burros to be transported to a camp in the desert where they are boiled in water to which sulfuric acid has been added.

A wax from the plant forms a scum on the surface. This is raked off, thrown into buckets and taken to Candelilla wax collection centers to be purified. This edible wax remains hard under conditions of high heat and humidity, as opposed to chocolate and other covers of candies and confections which stick to wrappers and hands. Because the wax is water soluble it has been widely used as a covering for pellet-sized gums and candies which "melt in your mouth, not in your hand," Although chocolate bars are popular in cold regions or in winter, the Candelilla wax covered items have proven more marketable in hot desert regions or in summer.

(From: "Living with Desert Plants" (Boyce Thompson Southwest Arboretum))

Sue

Club Access: President, Robert Scott, (559) 960-3665, rob_scott85@yahoo.com; **Vice-President**, Rosanna Rojas, rfrojas96@gmail.com; **Treasurer**, Michele Roberts, (559) 645-5257, robertshowse@comcast.net; **Secretary**, Karen Willoughby, pkatwillabee@gmail.com; **Editor/Sunshine**, Sue Haffner, (559) 292-5624, sueh@mail.fresnostate.edu; **Publisher**, Mary Ann Villegas, maryann@maracast.com; **Webmaster**, Vickie Veen, vickieveen@gmail.com; **Refreshments**, Nancy Jobin.

Wilcoxia schmollii – Normal and Crested

Elton Roberts

It seems like the first time I saw a *Wilcoxia schmollii* was about 35 some years ago. As I remember it was sitting against a wooden wall and not looking like anything I had seen before. It had the name of *Wilcoxia papillosa* on it that I remember. I asked the guy about it and he said he did not really know what it was. I asked about getting it and he said, "No." But before I left, he changed his mind. I got it home and somehow, I discovered that it may be a *Wilcoxia schmollii*. In the dark haze of the past I do not know how I came to the decision that the plant was a *Wilcoxia schmollii*. It could have been going to a cactus nursery about 100 miles away where I gotten much smaller plant. It, as I remember, had the name of *Wilcoxia schmollii* on it. In comparing the two I decided that my plant was also a *schmollii*. Along the line I also got a plant with the name of *Wilcoxia papillosa* on it. It looked almost like the one of *W. Schmollii* but it had lots more white hair on it. The hair was much denser and a little longer. That first plant was a single stem that hugged the container it was in. As I remember the plant was in a tin can with holes in it for drainage. That single stem was about 20 to 25 cm long and just hung down with the tip curved upward. It was not getting much in the way of light. The spines that should have been quite dense were quite thin and the stem showed through all the way up and down the stem. I think it may have had one or two side shoots that were maybe 1.5 cm long. To tell you the truth it was nothing to look at but, it was a cactus plant!

In time I discovered that my plant of *W. papillosa* had the same color of flowers as the plant of *W. schmollii*. I did not like getting rid of a name but as it did not match the description of *W. papillosa* I changed its name. It has now been ascertained that *Wilcoxia papillosa* was changed to *Wilcoxia viperina*, then changed to *Neoevansia viperina* and now it resides in *Peniocereus viperina*. Luckily *W. schmollii* has not had such a wild ride. It was a *Wilcoxia* for most of its known time till someone decided it was an *Echinocereus*. But they have it under *Wilcoxia* in *Echinocereus*. I have to say, why did they not leave it alone along with the rest of the *Wilcoxia* and leave it as a *Wilcoxia*. I guess N. P. Taylor wanted to see his name in print and so made the change. To me *Wilcoxia* will never be an *Echinocereus*. The plant was discovered by someone by the name of F. Schmoll. What the F. stands for I have not been able to find out. In the books it says it comes from only two tiny places in habitat and they are in danger of disappearing. The plant is listed on the endangered species list.

Here is the description of *Wilcoxia schmollii* from Backeberg's Lexicon;

Body with napiform root, root to 7 cm long; branches at first very thin in part, later stouter to clavate, weak (to about 2 cm in diameter if the plant is grafted, which is recommended); ribs 9 - 10 + -, tuberculate; spines hair-like, unequal, to 7 mm long, whitish, blackish or violet-blackish; flower about 3.5 cm long purplish-pink; tube covered with hair-like spines; fruit ? Mexico (Queretaro)

I personally have never grafted one of the plants and see no need to for they grow just fine on their own roots. I have never seen a *W. schmollii* plant grafted. I have to think that the shape of clavate would refer to grafted stems as I have never seen club shaped stems on any of my plants. All my plants are on their own roots. I have never grown a plant from seed as cuttings root and grow very well, for me they do anyway. I have been given some plants that were grown from seed. These, if they had not come to me would have perished in the Car fire. At the present time I have maybe 80 offsets on their own roots that I potted last spring. I have pollinated my plants many times but never remember to check for seed pods. I went out and started looking for seed pods and found 19 that are fat and full of seed. For me it is not too good to go out looking for seed pods as the sun is setting. But I did find 19 and I will, if I remember it, look for more if there are any more on the plants. I guess that the reason I never checked for seed pods is that they are all hidden under dense hair and look very much like the stems they grow on. In looking at the seed pods I have to guess there are about 100 seed in the average seed pod.

(Continued on following page.)

That means that I have between 1500 and 1900 seed, that number could go up if I find more pods. The pods are to 1.5 cm long and about 1 cm in diameter, oblong or football shaped. All the ones I found are ripe and have splits running length wise of the pod. The pulp in the pods is dark color and gummy and so the seed has not spilled out. Some of the pods have only one split in them and others have several. I opened the pods and put them in a tray under a fan so they will hopefully dry out so I can get the seed out somewhat easier. In the dim light the seed that fell out looked to be black and round like a ball.

Photo 1 is of one of my large plants. This photo was taken 3 years ago and the branches are almost twice that long now. The stems are about 1 to 1.5 cm in diameter. 1 cm where the hair like spines have fallen out and 1.5 where they are covered in dense white hair like spines. The stems are so far to 60 cm long and most curve up wards at the ends. The flowers are only to 3.5 cm in diameter and the buds are covered in dense white hairs. These white hairs are referred to as spines.



Photo 1

-- Here I will say that there is a Wilcoxia named *nerispina* that has been upheld, dismissed, thrown out and made a synonym of *W. schmollii*. It has larger in diameter stems, being up to 2.5 cm in diameter and the stems are much shorter, to only about 23 cm long on my 40-year-old plant. The term *neri* = black and *nerispina* = black spines. Here is a note taken off the web; 'The name "*nerispina*", meaning "black spined", refers to the grey or black coloration of central spines. The usually darker colour or the spines helps distinguish this cactus from the otherwise identical *Echinocereus schmollii*.' On my plants of *W. nerispina* the stems are larger in diameter, they do not grow as long as those of *W. schmollii*. The central spines are quite stiff and in the most part make the stems look black or very dark. The flowers are also larger and open out flat where the flowers of *W. schmollii* are smaller and also open more funnel shaped. In 1985 Nigel Taylor published a book called *The Genus Echinocereus*, as far as I am concerned the book was worthless. In it he proved he never grew the plants that he lumped or dismissed altogether. In it he dismisses *W. nerispina* as a doubtful species. Let someone print something in a book and just about every one that follows believes what was printed as the only truth there is.--

Photos 2 - 4 are cristate form of *Wilcoxia schmollii*. This is new to me as I have had them for only a bit more than a year. *Photo 2* is a fairly young plant, the stems that look more like leaves are only 5 to 10 mm thick, 5 mm where the soft hair like spines are matted down or have not fluffed up. I measured quite a few stems to find one where the spines are fluffed up, spines and all it measured 10 mm thick. Most of the stems are 5 to 8 mm thick. The widest stem is so far 11 cm and the tallest of my plants is 9 cm. As can be seen in *photo 3* the stems are not flat but undulating. Take out the undulating and that one stem would be about 14 to 15 cm across. The undulations give the stems strength to stand up where if they were just flat, they would lean over on each other and that would not make the plant look fancy like it does.. The plant would lose some of its charm if it just looked like a pile of leaves lying there..



Photo 2



Photo 3

As seen in the photos the spines are very fine and even softer than hair. In *photo 4*, there are some normal stems growing, if you run your finger up in that hair it is almost impossible to be felt, it is so soft. To save the looks of the crest I take off the normal stems that grow. These I pot up and grow. I have also taken a few small crested stems off and have potted them. They also seem to root down quite easy. So far, I have not allowed the normal stems to grow much longer than 5 to 6 cm long. The first normal stems I removed are now to 8 cm long and growing very nice like.



Photo 4

I do not know if the crested stems flower or not. I have not had these plants long enough to see if they will flower. I have some crested plants that flower on a regular basis and others that have never flowered. *Photo 5* is a close up of a stem showing the very soft spines. I have never measured the spines to see if they are to 7 mm long. It got the better of me and I went out and measured the spines on my plants. The spines on the stems are only 4 to 5 mm long but on the spent flowers the spines are up to 11 mm long. I have to wonder if in their measurements they measured the spines on the flower buds. There in *photo 5* the spines may look long but this is a close up of a stem to show the spines and ribs. I know the ribs do not show up very well but the spines in rows show that there are ribs.



Photo 5

Photo 6 is showing flower buds and the position on the stems. Notice how hairy the buds are and those hair-like spines are to 11 mm long. The buds can form with only one bud or with a whole cluster of buds from what looks to be the same areole. On the right hand stem the bud at the bottom is a single bud. Right above it is a cluster of 5 buds. The left-hand stem has a cluster of about a dozen buds. In *photo 7* there is a cluster of 3 buds just starting to open the outer petals. I have seen that not all buds in a cluster grow to flowering size and do. The buds are only about 1 cm in diameter so not much larger in diameter than the stems. *Photo 8* is a flower open, notice it is hard to tell where the bud starts and what is the stem. The flower is not quite all the way open and is about 2.5 cm across.



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8

Photo 9 shows a flower from a bit a side view to show the filaments and catch the pink midstripe up the petals. It is kind of strange for some filaments are pink all the way up and others are pink at the base and greenish pink higher up. The stigma is emerald green, the pollen is kind of a faded yellow. *Photo 10* is a flower face on, this flower is by its self and so open to 4.5 cm across. When there is more than one flower to a stem open at the same time the flowers are usually about 3.5 cm in diameter. *Photo 11* shows a plant in a 20 cm diameter pot, the stems are about 60 cm long. I do not know how many flowers there are on that plant, remember you are only seeing one side of the plant. There are just as many flowers on the other side of the plant also. I have the pots hanging above my head and so when I walk down the walkway, I come face to face with what is seen in *photos 11 and 12*. *Photo 12* is when you get quite close to the plant. With all those flowers open at one time, the flowers were only 3.5 cm in diameter. The flowers have a delicate perfume to them.

The plants have a good-sized, turnip shaped root, so a pot a bit deeper than the root is called for. Sometimes the roots are in clusters so a larger diameter pot is needed to accommodate the cluster of roots. The plant may have only one stem but in time if taken good care of it will produce quite a few stems as seen in *photo 1*. I give the plants my regular soil mix and they hang from the cooler side of my large hothouse. The plants are in a stream of air from a blower fan. They seem to be happy with that amount of light. I think direct sunlight would burn the stems. With good light the plants grow lots of white very fine hair like spines. Poor light and the stem shows through the wooly hair like spines. I have not had any problems with the plants enduring temperatures down to 17 F. Just make sure the plants are dry for the cold weather. I water my plants when all the rest of the plants get watered.



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo from Mark Muradian's garden

SAGUARO AND ITS FRUIT. (Botanical name: *Carnegieia gigantea*). The magnificent giant saguaro abounds only in the Sonoran Desert. Slow-growing, it is often seen with branches upraised to the sky. It has long supplied a sweet, red fruit that indigenous people harvest in summer. Dried saguaro ribs and other wood are fastened together into long poles and used to knock the fruit to the ground.

About the size of a hen's egg, the fruit is traditionally made into jam or syrup, or into wine for an annual thanksgiving ceremony, socializing and partying that preceded the planting of beans, squash and corn. Saguaro seeds were ground into flour or fed to chickens.



Photo: Wikipedia

Saguaro has shallow, wide-ranging roots that drink up the desert rains, and its accordion-pleated body expands to hold the moisture until needed. Large, white flowers, designated the state flower of Arizona, appear on top of saguaro limbs in spring. The fruit ripens around mid-June.

Though "cactus camps" are still set up each year to harvest and process the fruit, nowadays the desert people are more likely to purchase their jam and syrup at the store. **Sue**

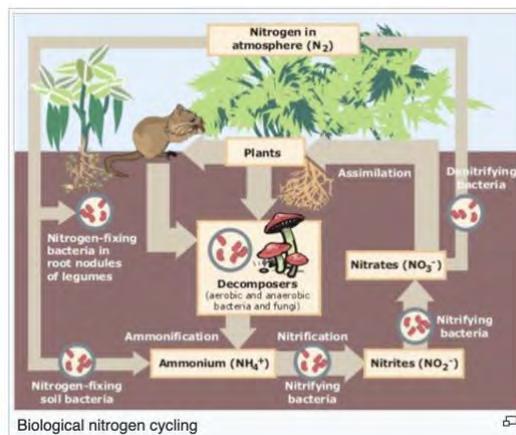


Like all ecosystems, a desert environment contains a variety of plant communities (trees, shrubs, cacti, grasses, etc.) One little-known community is a thin, black crust of non-flowering plants called cryptogams, which grow on sandy soil. The crust is actually a mantle of very slow growing (50 to 100 years) lichens, fungi, mosses, and algae.



The cryptogams retard evaporation of soil moisture, add nitrogen to the soil, break the impact of raindrops, and resist the erosive forces of the wind. The bumpy surface catches blowing sand and organic matter and provides pockets of soil where other plants can take root. Although a layer of cryptogams looks rugged, it is quite fragile and crumbles easily. Please, walk carefully!

Photo: Wikipedia



All photos: Wikipedia