

Gymnocalycium, une révision alphabétique (deuxième partie)

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http://yann.cochard.free.fr/articles/Gymnocalycium_-_an_alphabetical_review_B/

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John Pilbeam continues his review of the genus *Gymnocalydon*, providing updates to his book which was published over ten years ago and which is now out of print.

Photography by Bill Weightman, John Pilbeam and Graham Charles.

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In the first part of this potential saga, I got as far as the letter 'A', a slow start, but this was due in part to the introduction to this review, which took quite a large part of the space. It seems from looking at the 'B's of this genus that I shall not do much better in this part, but there are some worthy plants under this letter, and I would not want to sell them short.

The first, *G. baldianum* was the first gymno I ever saw. I had been buying plants seen in local shops for a year or two, when I noticed that those I had been buying arrived in wooden boxes stamped with the name of the nursery, and that it was in Norwood, south-east London, not far from where I lived with my parents in Herne Hill (local pronunciation was "ern"ill). A phone call brought a good response and I was invited to visit the nursery, which was not strictly open to visitors.

The owner appeared to me (a teenager) quite elderly; he must have been at least 35 years old! It was a sheer delight of a glasshouse, full to the gunwales with hundreds of plants ranging from mature pre-war imports to dozens upon dozens of his propagations. The building was large and more or less square, with the floor several feet below ground level. This probably accounted for the number of plants he had managed to keep throughout the Second World War years, when no heat was allowed for glasshouses housing such frivolous plants. One of them was the aforementioned *G. baldianum*, and I was presented with an offset from an ancient clump he had. One of the many offsets produced subsequently from this plant is pictured (Fig. 1), a survivor in adversity if ever there was one. I subsequently acquired a few more plants of this species over the years, sometimes labelled with the subsumed name *G. venturictum*, but the name *G. baldianum* has never been even shaken under the lumpers' bombardments over the years, and this was an even more daunting threat than that faced in the years of 1939 to 1945.

It goes back a long way, being described in the very early 20th century by Spegazzini, and comes from near Andalgalá in Argentina. It is popular in cultivation since it is easy to grow and gives its flowers freely every year in abundance, the colour varying from red to somewhat pinkish-red, but always a delight to behold. Bill Weightman's photo of it in the wild (Fig. 2) is an eye-opener: who would have thought that the familiar, green-bodied, globular, clustering plant would indicate that it was having such a hard time in habitat, with an almost flat topped, solitary stem sunk beneath the sandy soil? In these circumstances why does it have such feeble spines for protection? Maybe since it does apparently sink beneath the surface in times of drought, the need for spines is reduced. I am given to understand that its more normal situation is among grasses so perhaps this pontification is unwarranted. It is still a favourite with me and among growers of this genus, and few collections are

without it. In time it will make a clump of stems, and a clump in full flower is a sight for the proverbial sore eyes.

Next in Une is another unassuming, but nevertheless attractive species from northern Argentina in the Tucuman and Salta provinces, *G. bayrianum* (Fig. 3). It has maintained its individuality enough to get through as an accepted species since it was described in 1967 by Hans Till in the German Society's journal *Kakteen und andere Sukkulenten* (KuaS). For me the appeal is in the velvet texture of the epidermis, which bears close examination with a powerful magnifying glass to see the texture which gives this tactile effect. The strong spines recurve onto the flat-globular body, and it never seems to make a large plant, now and again getting to about 10cm or so in cultivation, nor to cluster readily. As you can see from the plant illustrated, it will flower at an early age, no more than 5cm or so in diameter. In good light the matt body will colour with blush-orange tints. Its large flowers are about 6cm long and 4cm wide, creamy white with reddish-pink throat.

A species described only recently, and so not included in my 1994 book, is *G. bercktii* (Fig. 4), named after the Gymno enthusiast, Ludwig Bercht, at one time editor of the Dutch and Belgian Society's journal *Succulenta*, and author of a review of this genus in a series of articles in that publication in the 1980s. It comes from San Luis province in Argentina, and was described by Gert Neuhuber in the Austrian Gymno Group's publication *Gymnocalycium* in 1997, pages 219-220.

Although it has been available for some years it is still not common in collections or on commercial lists. This may be because of its unprepossessing black body colour, but more likely because of its slow growth (it makes far more growth underground, having a thick taproot) and maybe its reluctance to adapt to cultivation. But it is worth looking out for and trying to obtain and grow for its minimal size and growth, producing its flowers at only about 2 or 3cm in diameter in cultivation. It will slowly make a slightly larger plant than this (it was described as only 4 to 6cm wide in the wild), but is never in a hurry, and the old adage about making haste slowly certainly applies to this species if you want to keep it, as well as providing sufficient depth in the choice of pot to allow proper development of the long root. The 3 to 5 spines too are minimal, thin, black, to about 1cm long and spread flat to the body. Flowers are whitish with brownish pink throat, out of proportion to the body, to nearly 8cm long, 6cm wide, no doubt to draw the attention of pollinators and gymno enthusiasts to an otherwise almost invisible plant.

A quick mention here of *G. bicolor* is appropriate, but it has been reduced to synonymy with *G. mostii* (yes, really!), so more of this anon. Which brings us to *G. bodenbenderianum* (Fig. 5), which I first ordered as seed simply because the name had such an appealing ring to it. Many years later I was pleased that I had made this early purchase, as it was one of the slowest growers in the genus, making after some 25 to 30 years a solitary stem only about 12cm in diameter. It is one of those brown beauties of the genus which seem to do so well in shows in the UK, and rightly so, as to keep it growing well and unmarked for the number of years required to get it to showable size is a history of care of several decades.

It was listed in Hosseus and Haage Jr.'s catalogue in 1928 and included by Berger in his "Kakteen" as *Echinocactus bodenbenderianus*. In 1936 Curt Backeberg rescued it from the waters of limbo and pulled it into the gymno boat where it clearly belonged; he knew a good gymno when he saw one in distress. It considerably precedes the now submerged species *G. riojense*, under which Hans and Walter Till in the Austrian Gymno Group publication had a field day in 1991, sinking no less than 5 taxa, and erecting 7 new ones. Some of these I understand are to be acknowledged beneath *G. bodenbenderianum* as subspecies in the New Cactus Lexicon, viz. ssp. *kozelskyanum* (Fig. 6) (syn. *G. kozelskyanum* and *G. riojense* ssp. *kozelskyanum*), subsp. *paucispinum* (syn. *G. asterium* ssp.

paucispinum, *G. stella-tum* var. *paucispinum* and *G. riojense* ssp. *paucispinum*), and ssp. *piltziorum* (Fig. 7) (syn. *G. piltziorum* and *G. riojense* ssp. *piltziorum*] - plus ça change ¹⁾ and the devil take the hindmost!

The other varietal names erected in the aforesaid 1991 publication have disappeared into the deep - if you are of a curious disposition see my book for the list, or better still the Austrian publication for text (in German) and pictures. I attempted to erect one of them, *G. riojense* subsp. *paucispinum* var. *platygonum* (Fig. 8), to species status in 1994, but transgressed International Code of Botanical Nomenclature rules (not difficult!), so it rests fully submerged beneath *G. bodenbenderianum* ssp. *paucispinum* - at least this beautiful plant has a name, albeit not on my plants' small labels: there just isn't room, and I can't be - (what's the word?).

All these variations have their individual appeal, and I recommend anyone keen on this genus to grow as many of them as you can obtain. At least those now to be recognized are often listed commercially, and I have included photographs of them for your delight and maybe seduction into wanting to try them - start as young as you can!

And so to that most popular and widespread of species, *G. bruchii* (Fig. 9), a variable plant to say the least. Also sunk here, mentioned and pictured in the first part of this review, is *G. albispinum*, rarely seen these days, but commonly around some time ago. This was a name erected by Backeberg for a plant with no known origins in the wild, but essentially a larger bodied plant with more outstanding spines.

Also long forgotten are half a dozen forms erected in the early war years (1941 - as a Londoner I remember it well), by Oehme for minor variants; Backeberg had also recognized one of these forms as a variety in 1936, var. *hossei* (Fig. 10), and this was also in circulation in the postwar years, but I have not seen it separately identified for some time now.

More recently in the 1980s two varieties were put up. The first described by Jorg Piltz, a nurseryman and Gymno enthusiast in Diiren, Germany, in *Succulenta* in 1987, for a plant discovered by his wife near Tanninga, in Cordoba province, Argentina, and named accordingly, var. *brigittae* (Fig. 11), differing most apparently in its darker body colour and more open aspect from smaller radial spines. This variety was wrongly pictured in my 1994 book, the plant in the colour photo owing more to *G. calochlorum*, although the photo was sent to me labelled as var. *brigittae* by someone who should have known better, as indeed I should have done too! It is correctly identified in the accompanying photo here.

The second variety was described by Walter Rausch, also in *Succulenta*, in 1989, as var. *niveum* (Fig. 12), for a small stemmed, remarkably densely white-spined variation from the same province, near Capilla del Monte.

Some decades ago there were stout defenders of the name *G. lafaldense*, for what was clearly this species, either as the "proper" name for it or even as an additional name for a slightly differing plant. It seemed that the old guard had given up the battle on this point, but there have been some recent dabblings of Austrian toes in the "bruchii" waters, which pulled this name once again out of the depths. Gert Neuhuber in the Austrian Gymno publication (2003) resurrected *G. bruchii* ssp. *lafaldense*, picturing a plant exactly like that I grew many years ago as *G. bruchii* var. *hossei*, and put into synonymy beneath it the aforesaid *hossei* as well as all Oehme's old forms of 1941 (*albispinum* included) as well as a later addition by F. Haage & Simon in *KuaS* (1973), fa. *spinosissimum*. He then went on, having demolished all the old forms, to describe two "new" subspecies: (1) ssp. *pawlovskyi*, distinguished by a more columnar habit and pectinate spines; and (2) ssp. *susannae*, a big girl apparently, larger bodied, depressed at the crown and with a pale green epidermis; and a new

variety, var. *glaucum*, larger bodied and larger flowered, with dark glaucous epidermis. Confusing certainly, and on the face of it no more valid than the old *Oehme* forms in this very variable species, and this is probably the level at which all these chips off the "bruchii" block should be considered.

Whatever, in any of its variations *G. bruchii* is a handsome species quite unlike any other, with the bonus of an absolute smothering of blooms every year, uncommon in this genus for its delightful flower colouring. As well as the differing body and spination, the flower colour varies from plant to plant, from almost white to quite deep pink.

Finally almost as a footnote, *G. buenekeri*, which Buining originally described as *G. horstii* var. *buenekeri*, in *KuS* in 1970, and which was subsequently firmly pulled out as a good species in the *GB Society journal* in 1978 by Geoff Swales. It seems it is about to be reimmersed in the *New Cactus Lexicon* under *G. horstii* as a subspecies ☐ I wonder what Geoff thinks about this.

So again: more anon, under the letter H. If the editor had permitted, I intended here to exhort you not to miss the next episode by quoting a few bars from the postwar period radio thriller *Dick Barton - Spécial Agent*. This was only a quarter of an hour episode early each evening, but the cause of more workers knocking off early from their jobs so that they could tune in ☐ tape recorders were not common then. If you are now humming the galloping theme tune, your age is showing too; if not, ask your parents (or maybe your grandparents) about it.

RÉFÉRENCES :

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PILBEAM, J. (1995) *Gymnocalycium* - A Collector's Guide. Balkema, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

HUNT, D. (1999) *CITES Cactaceae Checklist*.

Figure 1 *Gymnocalycium baldianum*

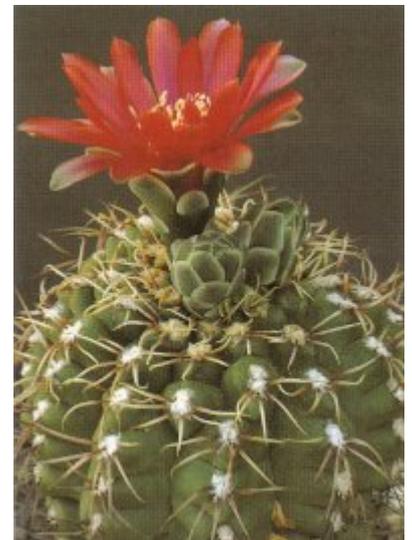


Figure 2 *Gymnocalycium baldianum* in an unusually exposed situation in habitat north-west of Cordoba, Argentina



Figure 3 *Gymnocalycium bayrianum*

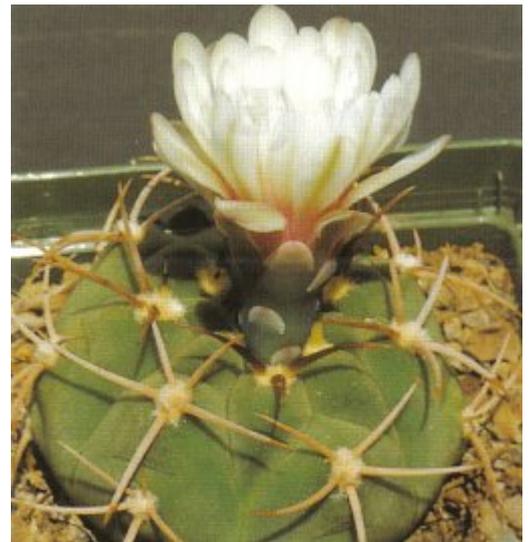


Figure 4 *Gymnocalycium berchitii*

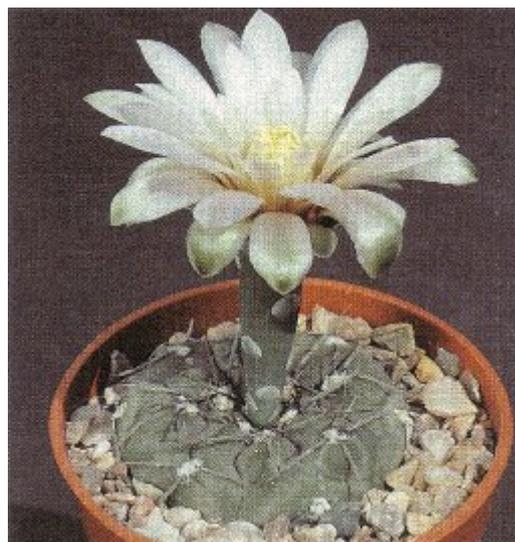


Figure 5 *Gymnocalycium bodenbenderionum*



Figure 6 *Gymnocalycium bodenfaenderianum* ssp. *kozefsfcyanum*



Figure 7 *Gymnocalycium bodenbenderianum* ssp. *piltziorum*

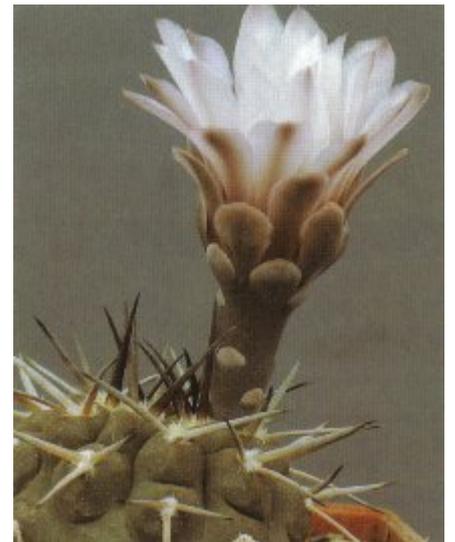


Figure 8 *Gymnocalycium bodenbenderianum* ssp. *paucispinum* var. *pfotygonum*

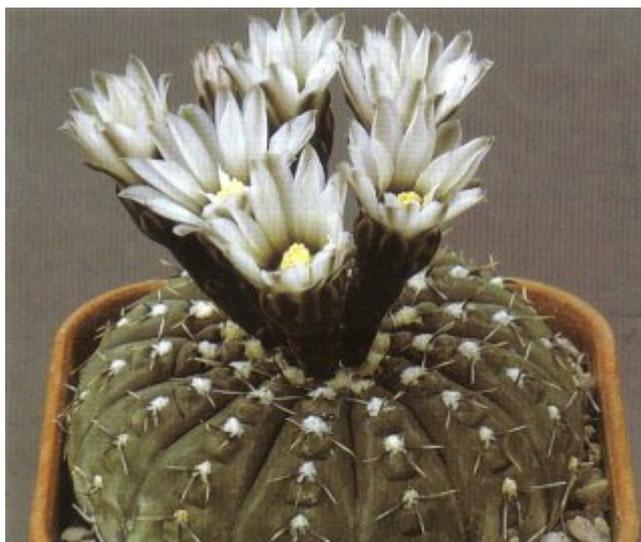


Figure 9 *Gymnocalycium bruchii*

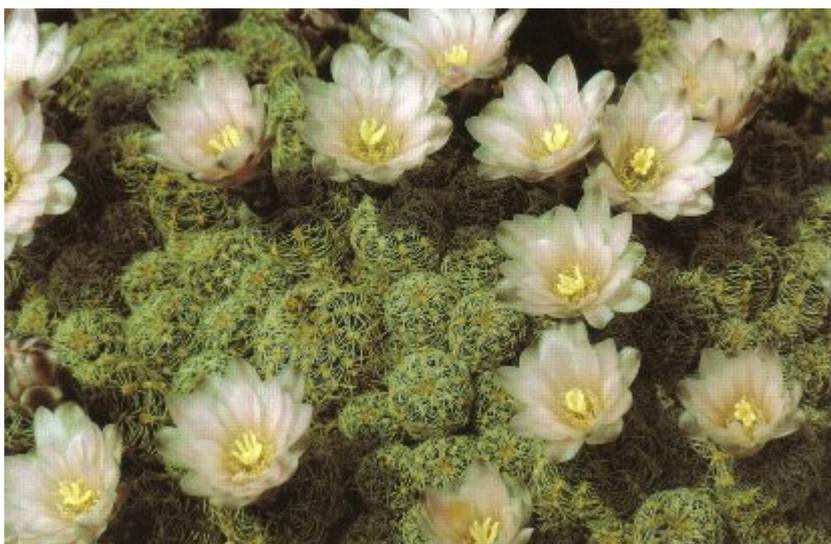


Figure 10 *Gymnocalycium bruchii* 'var. hossei'

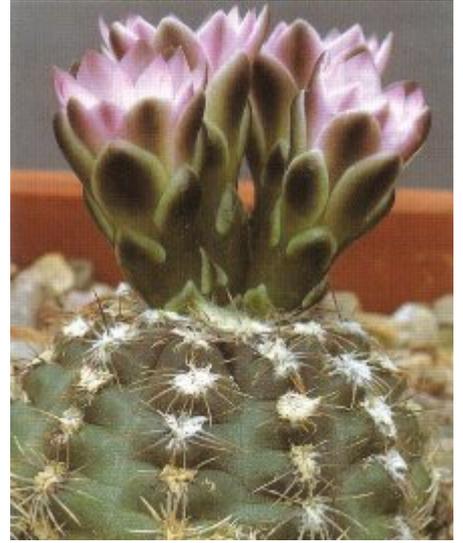


Figure 11 *Gymnocalycium bruchii* ssp. *brigittae*

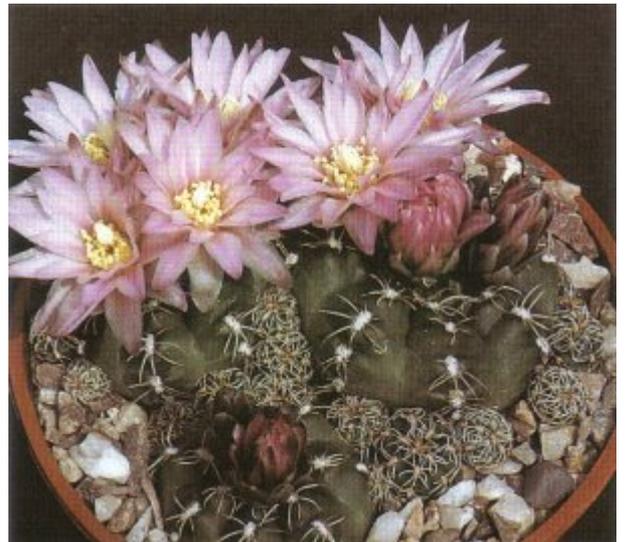


Figure 12 *Gymnocalycium bruchii* var. *Niveum*



1)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste_Alphonse_Karr

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