

**First Description (Rausch)**

Succulentia 64(10): pp 213-214 (1985)

Gymnocalycium albiareolatum Rausch spec. nov.

Simple, flattened-globular, up to 60mm diameter, greenish-grey, often tinted violet, with a turnip-like root. Ribs 9-11, straight, upright, with cross-cuts, that form c. 10mm long, chair-like humps. Areoles, round to oval, 5mm long, strongly white felted in new growth. Radial spines 6-7, awl shaped, curved to the body, brown, rough, up to 10mm long. Central spines absent.



Fig.269 *G. albiareolatum*, GC977.01 near Villa Sanagasta, Prov. La Rioja, Argentina

Flowers appear from close to the centre of the crown, 65mm long and 45mm wide. Ovary long narrow, up to 17mm long pointed at the bottom. Tube dark green, with wide, whitish edged scales; outer petals whitish-pink with a green central stripe; inner petals silvery-white with a greenish-pink toned middle stripe. Throat, stamens and anthers pink; stamens are set in 2 series, the lower being curved in towards the style. Style is short and thick, with 11 stigma lobes, whitish. Fruit oval to club shaped, thin at the bottom, 25-30mm long with a blue bloom, scale wide pink, fruit splitting vertically.

Seed round, hat shaped, 1mm diameter, black, rough, with a wide basal hilum.

Habitat: Argentina, La Rioja, near Villa Bustos, 1000m.

Type: Rausch 716, deposited in the Städtische Sukkulentensammlung, Zurich

Etymology

From the Latin 'albus' meaning white, referring to the white areoles.

Distribution

This taxon has a very limited distribution near to Villa Sanagasta (previously Villa Bustos), Prov. La Rioja, Argentina. It is said to be usually buried in the ground making it very difficult to see when not

Fig.268 Habitat of *G. albiareolatum*, GC977.01 near Villa Sanagasta, Prov. La Rioja, Argentina



Fig.270 *G. albiareolatum*, Pittz 221 from Sanagasta, Prov. La Rioja, Argentina

in flower or fruit. Rausch later described a smaller, caespitose form as var. *ramosum*, although plants with offsets have been reported from near the type locality.

The type locality is said to be about 2km south of Villa Sanagasta on the way to Dique de Los Sauces. Recent housing development and road construction is thought to have damaged the type locality, although during my recent visit I was able to see hundreds of plants in bud and fruit on a gravelly slope near to the town.

Conservation Status

Vulnerable. Although there are still plenty of plants where there is no obvious immediate threat to them, the total distribution area is believed to be small and near the expanding town of Villa Sanagasta. Recent road development and housing expansion have affected the population near the town, but there is no obvious threat to the remaining plants on the nearby slopes of the Sierra Velasco.



Map 37 Location of *G. albiareolatum* in Prov. La Rioja, Argentina



Fig.271 *G. albiareolatum*, Pittz 394 from Cuesta Huaco, Prov. La Rioja, Argentina

History

The spelling of this species name was changed from the original by Hurley et al. (1992) supposedly to comply with the ICEN rules. However, although this correction was questioned by H. Till (2005), the revised spelling is used here.

Although at first it was said to be a member of the subgenus *Gymnocalycium*, it in fact belongs to *Microsemineum*.

Rausch later described var. *ramosum* for plants with smaller heads, but this form occurs in the main population.

Commentary

This is one of the best examples of convergence, where two species of *Gymnocalycium* from different seed groups grow near to each other and look so much alike that they can easily be confused. A form of the more widespread *G. kissibagii* (confusingly called forma *albiareolatum*) occurs in a similar habitat nearby. I can find no reference to them actually growing together, rather that there is an altitude gap with *G. albiareolatum* below 1000m and *G. kissibagii* above 1500m.

This taxon appears to be a top-rooted geophyte relative of the *G. bossii* complex. Like members of this complex, the anthers are red, clearly visible after the pollen has been shed. Merzocchi et al. (2000) confirm further similarity in the microrelief of the seeds.

Cultivation

This species is quite rare in cultivation. Most plants derive from Pittz 221 originally collected near Villa Sanagasta.

It presents no problems in culture and its similarity to *G. kissibagii*, which is so striking in habitat, is soon lost so that the two are readily distinguishable in cultivation.