

Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum Backeberg

First Description (Backeberg)

Blätter für Kakteenforschung, Liefg 5, Bl. 74-1 (1934)

Solitary, spherical, up to c. 15cm diameter, stumpy, pale green, c. 10 broad ribs divided into sharp-edged, low tubercles. Areoles c. 6mm across, with thick white wool at first, later becoming quite black, c. 7 radial spines, light flesh-coloured, somewhat curved and one central spine up to 3cm long bent upward. Flowers porcelain white, half open, green throat. Fruit round, seed dull black. Occurrence: N. Argentina near Mazon.

Etymology

From the Latin 'niger' meaning black and referring to the areoles that become infected with a black mould in habitat when the plants grow in damp places under trees.

Distribution

Backeberg, in *Dis Cactaceas* III (1959), revised the locality to Catamarca on the advice of Stümer. It is now known to be found on both sides of the Sierra de Graciana which lies to the east of Catamarca City.

Conservation Status

Least Concern. The plants are plentiful in habitat and there is no particular threat to their survival.



Fig.379 *Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum*, GC29.02 near the road climbing up to the Cuesta El Portezuelo

History

Backeberg first described this species from plants he received from Ernst Stümer. It remained little known in cultivation until re-introduced with plants imported from Fechner. Much later it was collected again by Borth, Knoll, Rausch and Piltz.

Fric offered seeds of his *G. curvispinum* n.n. Portezuelo in his catalogue of 1929. It is thought that this was the longer spined form of *G. nigriareolatum* that can be seen growing there today.

Till (1998) created a variety *densispinum* for a form which offsets freely and can be found between Pomencillo and Catamarca City. It was said to be a



Fig.380 View northwards from the habitat of *Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum*, GC29.02 near the Cuesta El Portezuelo, Prov. Catamarca, Argentina



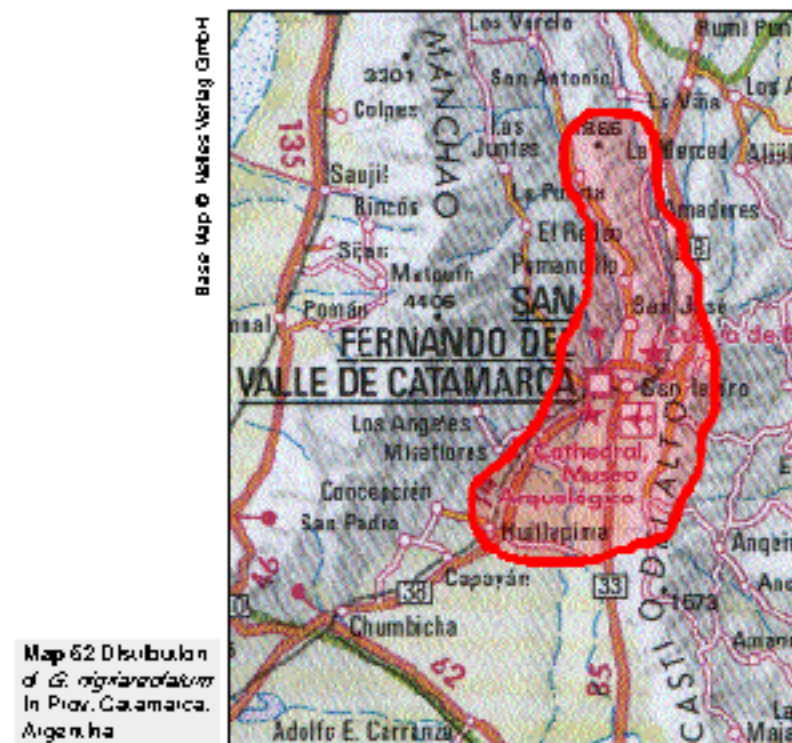
Fig.381 The black areoles of *G. nigriareolatum*, GC29.02 growing under trees with *Parodia microspema* near the road climbing up to the Cuesta El Portezuelo.

validation of the name which was invalidly published by Backeberg in a catalogue of 1937.

He also described a variety *simoi* for a form originally found at Pab Labrado by Borth and more recently discovered between Portezuelo and La Merced, where it sometimes shares its habitat with the red-flowered fa. *carminisum*.

Commentary

The closest relation of this species is perhaps *G. pugionacanthum* which grows further north. There is a red-flowered plant reported from the populations of *G. nigriareolatum* in the north of the range (fa. *carminisum*) that Till (1998) claims is not related to the nearby occurring *G. oenanthemum*, but looks very similar to me. If *G. nigriareolatum* fa. *carminisum* is actually *G. oenanthemum*, then, since fa. *carminisum* is recorded as growing with *G. nigriareolatum* (var. *simoi*), that would support the two beings separate species.



Map 62 Distribution of *G. nigriareolatum* in Prov. Catamarca, Argentina



Fig.382 *Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum*, GC29.02 from near the road climbing up to the Cuesta El Portezuelo, Prov. Catamarca, Argentina. Cultivated plants do not have black areoles.

Cultivation

This species is not common in collections today, most of the plants being derived from the seeds sold by Piltz. It poses no particular difficulty in cultivation and thrives in the usual regime for the genus. The pink-flowered plant distributed as fa. *carminisum* is very pretty but is probably identical to *G. oenanthemum*.



Fig.383 *Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum*, GC00.02 from east of Catamarca City, Prov. Catamarca, Argentina



Fig.384 *Gymnocalycium nigriareolatum* (carminisum), STC255 from La Puente, Prov. Catamarca, Argentina