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Our cover pictures this time are two rather special miniatures. The **front cover** is the brand new turbinicarpus introduced in this issue by Zlatko Janeba, *Turbinicarpus graminispinus* (Photo: Zlatko Janeba)

The **rear cover** features *Crassula barklyi* from Harry Hall's Liebendal Farm, in the Vredendal District, gathered by him in 1981 under the field reference H5049. It grew in full sun in habitat, but is very tolerant of a wide range of conditions, and has even flourished at temperatures down to -5°C with me, producing its pretty flowers in February and March each year. The tiny stems are barely up to 2.7cm long and 1.1cm diameter and the flowers expand to 6.5mm. This particular sample contains the unusual red-flowered form, with pale pink to white being more usually found (Photo: Roy Mottram)



# A new jewel in the genus *Turbinicarpus*: *Turbinicarpus graminispinus* G.F.Matuszewski, V.Myšák & Z.Jiruše

Zlatko Janeba

An introduction to a new turbinicarpus with a personality far larger than its diminutive size.  
Photography by the author.

**T**he Mexican genus *Turbinicarpus* consists of some 35–45 taxa, depending on one's personal view or whether the related cactus genera, such as *Rapicactus*, are included or not. Thus, 36 taxa in 16 species are

recognised in *The new Cactus Lexicon* (Hunt 2006), while Zachar (2004) features 43 taxa (species, subspecies, and varieties), plus many garden hybrids and also the natural hybrid *T. ×mombergeri*. Although



Fig. 1 My cactophile companions admiring the tiny *Turbinicarpus graminispinus* in its natural habitat on 16 Feb 2010





**Fig. 2** Mexico has revealed another of its cactus treasures! This dwarf cactus grows hardly any bigger than a US quarter dollar

taxonomy of this genus is complex and still far from being resolved, these miniature plants are highly prized by enthusiasts. *Turbinicarpus* have an attractive appearance, flower readily, and a reasonable collection of the whole genus can be housed easily within one square metre of precious glasshouse space.

A new and attractive *Turbinicarpus* species was discovered only very recently and described earlier this year in the Italian journal *Cactus & Co* (2011). As this might not be read widely in the UK, the new gem from Mexico is introduced briefly here.

It was discovered by two Czech cactophiles, Vojta Myšák and Zdeněk Jiruše, in the spring of 2008. A group of Polish cactus enthusiasts, Grzegorz Matuszewski, Darek Raczko, and Kazik Dobroczyński also independently made the same amazing discovery some 18 months

later in November 2009. Actually, Grzegorz Matuszewski, with the aid of Google maps, had identified the locality as a promising location for a cactus search much earlier for a trip in 2007. However, he found himself short of time, and did not make the journey until 2009. As the discovery could have



**Fig. 3** From a distance, the long central spines of *T. graminispinus* give the appearance of a tuft of dried grass



caused a race for priority, the Czech and Polish explorers agreed amicably to publish jointly.

I was lucky enough to be in Mexico in the spring of 2010 with my two companions Jaroslav Šnicher and Richard Kalas. We met up twice with Vojta Myšák and Jaroslav Záhora, who were themselves undertaking another cactus hunting expedition, and during the first encounter we succeeded finally in finding another gem among Mexican cacti, *Mammillaria luethyi*, in the state of Coahuila. On the second time we met, Vojta Myšák took us to the place where *T. graminispinus* grows.

It really was a wonderful and exciting moment to be roaming in the habitat of this hard-to-find miniature *Turbiniacarpus* with our cameras almost permanently switched on. The relatively numerous but very well-camouflaged tiny bodies are enveloped with long spines of the appearance of dried grass (hence the specific epithet *graminispinus*), and at this moment loaded with flower buds. Unfortunately for us, not a single flower had opened to show off their delicate beauty. This was the middle of February and several more days of warm and sunny conditions would be necessary to start the show. It seemed on that day as though all the plants were going to flower synchronously within the next 7–10 days, subject to suitable weather and temperature. However, *turbiniacarpus* can flower randomly throughout the growing period, so this may be just a prelude to a much longer flowering period.

Unfortunately, our busy schedule and complex itinerary did not allow us to return to the home of this species, but two of our friends did so and were rewarded with the splendid sight of *T. graminispinus* in full flower.

*T. graminispinus*, like most ungrafted *turbiniacarpus*, is a solitary miniature, reaching only 15–20mm in diameter. There are seven white radial spines per areole and usually one thin flexible central, up to 3cm long and yellowish-brown in colour. Older plants can



**Fig. 4** Most of the tiny bodies of this *turbiniacarpus* were loaded with buds, suggesting that in the next few days there would be a wonderful display of flowers



**Fig. 5** Only this single *T. graminispinus* was about to open its flower in mid-February, yet it was clear from this that when fully expanded it would be larger than the tiny cactus body itself





**Fig. 6** *T. graminispinus* prefers limestone crevices without competition from any other vegetation, other than the widespread clubmosses

Plants of the genus *Turbinicarpus* in the strict sense are often adapted to extreme ecological niches, and this is true of *T. graminispinus* as well. So far it is known from several limestone hills in an area of about one square kilometre. The habitat is located in the southern part of the state of Nuevo León, where it grows together with other cacti,

have two more additional central spines. The funnelform flowers are huge compared with the tiny bodies, up to 5cm in diameter. Its petals are pure white or slightly pinkish, with a more or less distinct pinkish midstripe. The accompanying pictures tell more than any description and for those interested in more details, please refer to the original article in the journal *Cactus & Co* (2011). It is very well written, with a detailed and tabulated comparison of the new plant with the related and/or similar species: *T. gracilis*, *T. swobodae*, *T. hoferi*, *T. saueri*, *T. laui*.

including *Mammillaria candida*, *M. formosa*, *M. pilispina*, *Neolloydia conoidea*, and *Thelocactus conothelos*.

The cultivation demands of this beautiful novelty of the cactus world can be expected to be similar to those of other species of the genus *Turbinicarpus*. Hopefully, this species will soon spread among enthusiasts worldwide, as this is the surest way of avoiding the unwelcome attention of eager collectors willing to gather plants illegally from the as yet untouched population. Conservation of natural habitats of rare plants in general should be our ultimate goal, best achieved by making available a propagated source for all those admirers wishing to possess their beauty in private collections.

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**Fig. 7** *T. graminispinus* often grows in tiny crevices where the soil is almost absent. The epidermis of this cactus can become red when exposed to the sun like this specimen

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