The story behind the story of a discovery: a good lesson of protection to learn for CITES

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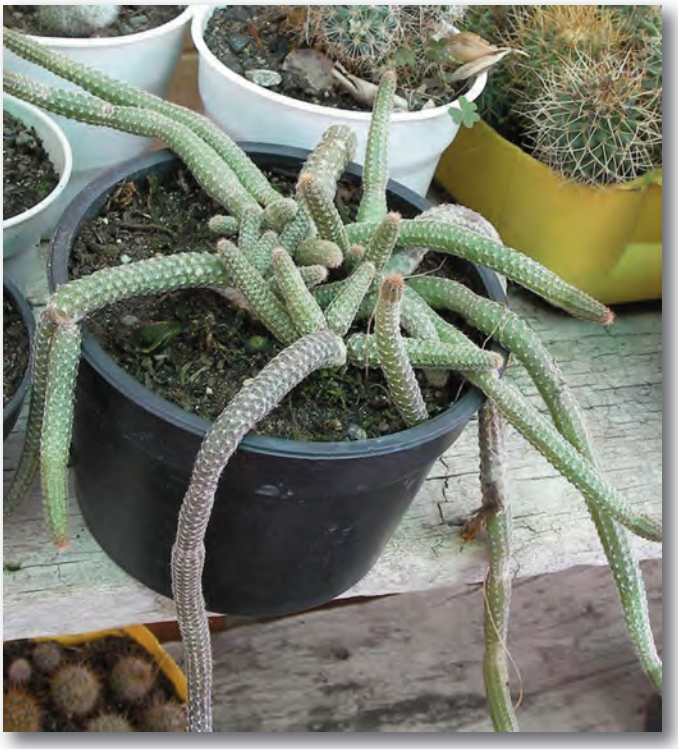
It all began in 2004 when a long-time friend, Luis Ramirez, a Bolivian cacti specialist (Ramirez Brothers Cacti) discovered in the south of his country, in the Tarija department, on the border with Argentina, growing wild, a very curious cactus, elongated, drooping, which he took for a new species of *Aporocactus*. Obviously, there is little possibility that the plant in question belongs to a Mexican genus, but this was the first impression this plant gave to him, and he took a cutting. Searching in the area, he found another location on the Bolivian side, then another on the Argentine side with an Argentinian collegue, Juan Hirschmann, a controversial character, with a bad reputation*. Luis was convinced that this was a new discovery, but no decision was made for a possible description of this taxon and things remained there ...

Meanwhile, and this is an initiative to emphasize, Hirschmann propagated the cactus from cuttings and the plant was rapidly found in many Argentine collections, being simply considered a hybrid. However, this doctor in biology assured that he had discovered with the “cactus”, without expressly naming the species, a cure for cancer ... Many controversies appeared, and one just needs to type the name of this person on the Internet to understand who we are dealing with.

Alas, Luis died tragically in a road accident on July 30, 2011.

In November 2012, Pascal Femenia, a good friend of mine visited Luis’s brother, Juan Ramirez, picked up a cutting of the only plant kept and collected by Luis on the Bolivian side, and took a picture of the discovery which he began to propagate vegetatively in France.

In September 2013, another friend, Frédéric Carlier received from José Fabião, from Portugal, two cuttings of the same plant, but originating from Argentina, without a precise locality. Moreover, the plant has been cultivated for a long time in Argentina and is considered a hybrid called ***Chamaecereus*** ‘Longo’ n.n. Two years later, cultivated as a hanging plant, Frédéric’s cuttings are 30 cm long.



The original plant discovered by Luis Ramirez in Bolivia in 20044. © Pascal Femenia

Original cutting from Argentina. © Frédéric Carlier

The extraordinary proliferation of the plant brought by Hirschmann in Argentina, and multiplied as a hybrid named *Chamaecereus* 'Longo' n.n. On the right, a ***Chamaelobivia*** for comparison. © Roberto Kiesling

Without consulting each other, coincidently, Frédéric and José posted two hours apart, the first on the French cactuspro forum, the second on the BCSS forum (British Cactus & Succulent Society), the same subject on this ***Chamaecereus***, with a splendid flower of red brick colour for the latter. In France, the debate was based on one and the same opinion: in all likelihood, it was considered a hybrid for most of the participants. José added that he found it even invasive plant!

At the C.A.C.T.U.S., a famous cactophile convention that takes place every year in France in May, in Tiercé (Maine et Loire), Pascal and Frédéric generously distributed to the professionals present there and to some amateurs, cuttings of the two Bolivian and Argentinean clones.

The well-known French nurseryman Henri Kuentz gave Frédéric Carlier, the key to verify the hybrid origin or not of the mysterious ***Chamaecereus***: "pollinating the two plants together, get fruits and seeds and then sow them. Observe the sowing: if after a few weeks the sowing is homogeneous, it is certainly that we are in the presence of a botanical variety and on the contrary, if the sowing gives seedlings of different shapes, we are then in the presence of a hybrid.

Therefore Frederic placed his two plants each in a mosquito net cabinet (cheese cabinet found in a flea market!) in order to be sure not to have an unwanted pollination and he used two new brushes. He pollinated the plant n ° 1 on itself in order to verify its type of pollination and then with its pollen he pollinated the plant n ° 2. After a few days, fruit formed on both plants. It only remained to wait for the formation of the seeds, then harvested them and sowed them. The fruits did not resemble the fruits of ***Chamaecereus sylvestrii,*** they were rather elongated; green at first, they turned dark red when ripe. Another peculiarity of the fruit was that it opened longitudinally.

The first flower on the Bolivian clone, May 15, 2015 at Villemeux/Eure, France. © Pascal Femenia

Frederic harvested a large number of seeds that he soon put into cultivation.

Dehiscence occurs even before fruit ripening. © Henri Kuentz

The ripe fruit keeps the remains of the dried perianth.© Philippe Richaud

For comparison, left: grown in the sun, ***Chamaecereus silvestrii*** remains compact. If grown in the shade, although it is growing longer, ***Chamaecereus silvestrii*** remains erect. © JL

Meanwhile, he sent me seeds to observe under a digital microscope and the results surprised: the seeds did not look like anything known and had nothing in common with ***Chamaecereus silvestrii***. This is another clue. The sowing done, the growing of seeds did not take long. After 3 months of cultivation, the result of the sowing was very homogeneous, and demonstrated, if necessary, that we were dealing with a botanical species.

Frédéric Carlier gave me some interesting details: the flowers are open for about 2 days; the fruits ripen within 2 months and contain about 25 to 45 seeds. The seeds germinate in about 8 days.

As a specialist in hardiness of cacti and other succulents, Pascal Femenia told us that with a sunny exposure and with a dry soil from mid October to mid March under the climate of Paris-Brussels-London, this species is able to withstand -6 / -8 ° C without any frost damage. At his home in Villemeux sur Eure (west of Paris, France), the plant has undergone -9 / -10 ° C, still undamaged.

Since then, although we have not found the taxon in the habitat yet, we have enough details and information to make the official description in this issue. It will be named in honor of his late discoverer: ***Chamaecereus luisramirezii***.

Nevertheless, to get the bottom of this, I looked at the excellent website of Christophe Ludwig (http://www.cl-cactus.com) to see if there was a reference "***Aporocactus***" on "field numbers" by Ramirez Brothers Cacti, without success, but it is with surprise that I found two "***Aporocactus***"collection references in Argentina, from two different collectors:

- *Aporocactus* sp KP668, Petr Kupcak, Catamarca (Icaňo - Ancasti III (green side Sierra de Ancasti), Ruta Frías - San Antonio (petrol pump) turning right side to Icaňo, and right side camino directo Ancasti, 556 m alt.). 2-12-2005.
- *Aporocactus* sp STO 93-570, Helmut Amerhauser, Franz Strigl, Hans Till, East of Antilla Brown, Salta, Argentina 790m. 16-06-2009.

I contacted Petr Cupcak, as well as Helmut Amerhauser for more details, but only the latter kindly replied... that he did not take pictures of the plant, because he is more interested in Gymnocalyciums! It is not at all certain that it is the same plant. It even seems that there was confusion with ***Pfeiffera*** ... These data cannot be compared with ***Chamaecereus luisramirezii***, therefore they must be definitively rejected.

Cultivated as a hanging plant, ***Chamaecereus luisramirezii*** blooms profusely.
© Frédéric Carlier.

Finally, there remains an important element that Luis has confided to his brother: the Bolivian site is not accessible in the rainy season, and in the absence of a bridge in this area, it is only accessible during the dry season. As for ***Chamaecereus silvestrii***, which still seems to be untraceable, several expeditions are under way to try and discover the new taxon in its habitat. This would relieve those who still believe in a Hirschmann trickery about the fallacious existence of this plant in the wild.

CONCLUSION

Here is an extraordinary example of the action taken by several people allowing the greatest number of collectors to enjoy this new discovery: their cuttings were made freely available to professionals and amateurs without any danger whatsoever for habitat plants. Artificial propagation has been carried out swiftly, and seeds have been produced without the need for official papers or standards. From now on, trade can be carried out without spiralling prices, and all in an ethical manner.

This is the lot of most commercially produced Cactus species, including those in

Anna and her grandfather, Pascal, show us their cuttings with pride, thus contributing to the propagation of the species. © Pascal Femenia

Part of Frédéric's seedlings; with Pascal, both united in the same fight for the free distribution of the species. © Frédéric Carlier

Frédéric's first cuttings. © Frédéric Carlier.

Appendix A, and as one of our great growers said "This shows that we do not need a inquisitorial administration that self-exempts to protect the plants "in situ" by protecting their habitat only on paper, because the threats are very diverse, and which deals only to seek and criminalize those who produce plants of purely horticultural production, seedlings or cuttings that have no connection with their fantasies of plants torn from nature and directly resold, which is a tiny part of a problem totally apart from our networks ".

***** The misadventures of this person being in the public domain on Google search or other search engine, just enter his name ...

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