

Damn Sphalmates!

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If there is a word that we see very little in cacti books, and which may scare some amateurs, is that of “sphalmate” (a feminine name). It designates an error made in a species name *, and it is quite common to find this kind of error in the Cactaceae

I remember the mess created by David Hunt when he changed the well-known “*Ariocarpus scapharostrus*” to ***Ariocarpus scaphirostris***: no one understood why this great botanist had changed the species name, and it took a generation of cactophiles to accept this new epithet, most of them having never understood the reason, if ever given.

While working on my book on the Taxonomy of Cactaceae, I found randomly, some “pretty gems” of sphalmates, thus, I decided to include them in my work, according to Art. 60.2 of the International Code of Nomenclature for each taxon that I studied, and proposing, when necessary, a spelling correction which is authorized by Articles 60.1 and 60.3 of the Code.

These sphalmates can be either a spelling error of a name (Latinised or not), or wrongly “Latinised”, according to the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICN), or even misused, sometimes intended for a woman and masculinised (or the opposite): thus, *Cleistocactus brookei*, dedicated to Winifred Mary Adelaide Brooke, and which must be written ***brookeae***, or even *Mammillaria zuberi*, honoring Ruth Zuber, and therefore to be spelled, according to the Code, ***Mammillaria zuberiae***.

As for Commander Benjamin Grady Barthalow, his name was misspelled in Britton & Rose, and became Barthelow, describing *Echinocereus barthelowanus*, when it should have been written ***barthalowianus***! All of this should be normally fixed when previewed and released if possible. Sometimes we reach the point of absurdity: typographical errors followed Commander Barthalow on his grave, where his name was engraved: Barthlow! There was probably hesitation

* **genera** names cannot be corrected (e.g. the genus ***Huernia***, dedicated to the missionary Just **Heurnius**).

between the “E” or the “A”, and the engraver decided not to put anything at all! It becomes surreal.

I was able to discover during my research, other beautiful gems, such as a plant dedicated to a single person and called *Echinocereus pamanesiorum*: if ***Matucana madisoniorum*** pays homage to the Madison couple with the correct terminology ‘iorum’, this ***Echinocereus*** was not dedicated to the family of General Pamanes, but only to his person, which is well indicated in the protologue of Alfred Lau, who described the species. The name must therefore be corrected to ***pamanesii***. Same thing with *Corynopuntia parishii*, named by Orcutt to honor the Parish brothers, and therefore should be written ***Corynopuntia parishiorum***.

It works both ways, since by a small mistake, Jorge Meyrán wrote *Echinocereus lindsayi*, when he had expressly specified that his plant was dedicated to Geraldine and George Lindsay, then ***Echinocereus lindsayorum***!

We also have erroneous corrections, made on ***Austrocactus bertini***, ***Ferocactus wislizeni***, ***Leptocereus leoni***, ***Pilosocereus royeri***, all corrected to “ii”, while the Latinised spelling of Bertinus, Wislizenus, Leonus and Royenus gives the genitive with a single “i”. Other examples can be given, with *Gymnocalycium ragonessii*, *Matucana haynii*, *Mammillaria goodrichii*; because these names are for Ragonese, Hayne and Goodridge, with a final ‘e’, they must be written respectively ***G. ragonesei***, ***Matucana haynei*** and ***Mammillaria goodridgei***, the latter having been additionally decked out with a spelling error since dedicated to John Octavius Goodridge and not “

To confuse our amateurs a little more, some species names seem to have been at least spelled correctly: *Gymnocalycium monvillei*, *Melocactus lemairei*. However, they had been written correctly in the protologue as *Echinocactus monvillii*, *Echinocactus lemarii*. How is this possible? This is simply because, according to Article 60.9 of the Code, the original spelling cannot be corrected, as it is based on an intentional Latinisation.

The now non-compulsory use of Latin in diagnoses will certainly not help future descriptors to write the names of their plants correctly. Currently,



Commandant Benjamin Grady Barthlow :
the bad spelling of his name followed him to his grave.

pinación es menos robusta y de menor tamaño y por otra parte su hábito es cespitoso, con tallos de un grosor de 4-8 cm.

Esta especie ha sido dedicada a los esposos Lindsay, George y Geraldine. El Dr. Lindsay es uno de los científicos que más ha estudiado la flora, la fauna y muchos otros aspectos de la península, como son los históricos; además ha fomentado la creación de reservas animales y vegetales, la organización de exploraciones, etc. En 1967 publicó una revisión sobre *Los Echinocereus* de Baja California, en esta misma revista.

A description of the species is as follows:

Echinocereus lindsayi Meyran sp. nov.

Stem simple, 8 to 13 cm high and 8 to 10 cm in diameter, apex somewhat sunken, with 11 to 13 ribs. 10 to 25 mm high, straight or at times slightly spiralled rather prominent at times somewhat tubercled, sometimes with transverse grooves, wider at the center of the areole.

Areoles 6 to 7 on each rib, 1.5 to 3 cm apart, circular or ovate, 8 to 12 mm long, 8 to 10 mm wide, with wool when young, at first white or yellowish, later gray, disappearing with time. Radial spines 10 to 13, subulate, 10 to 45 mm long, 1 to 1.5 mm diameter, rounded or at

Texte original de la description d'*Echinocereus lindsayorum*, dédié aux époux George et Geraldine Lindsay, mais orthographié *Echinocereus lindsayi*.
*in Cact. Suc. Mex.*20, p.83 (1975).

there could be more than a hundred misspelled names, and therefore sphalmates, among the recognized Cactaceae, i.e. about 4% errors in species names. I may be a "stopper" with all these modifications, but the rules are the rules, and I may even have missed a few, which will allow some to practice hunting sphalmates in my future book of Taxonomy of Cactaceae, Description of the Species, volumes 3-4!

I sincerely thank my friend Brice Chéron for having greatly helped me to disentangle all these damn sphalmates!