



A new species of *Opuntia* from Colombia

Opuntia altomagdalenensis G. Xhonneux

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Fam: Cactaceae

Sub. Fam: Opuntioideae

Tribe: Opuntia

Scientific name: *Opuntia altomagdalenensis* Xhonneux spec. nov.

• **Latin Diagnosis:** *planta arbusculata (altus 1,5 - 3,5 m) compositae articulatus spinosus ova orbiculatus (longitudo 20-25 cm, largus 16-20 cm). Areolas compositae on 3-10 spinas (0,8-10cm longis) distantibus 4-5 cm. Floris: aureis-roseis, salmo, 4cm latus (diametro). Frutos: = violaceus, ovatus spinosus latus (diametro) 3,5 5,5 cm.*

• **Typus:** Colombia, Cundinamarca, Municipio Jerusalem 0,5 km via Jerusalem-Guataqui 450m alt. Coll. G. Xhonneux # 2867. Fold preserved in the National herbarium of Colombia # 507222 feb. 2005.

• **Etymology:** named for the higher part of Rio Magdalena, which extends from the source down to the rapids of Honda.

• **Description:** plant arbustive branched out 1,5 3,5 m high, consisted of spiny cladodes. The trunk becomes spineless at the base in age.

Cladodes green, ovo-circular 20-25 cm long, 16-20 cm wide, thickness \pm 1-3 cm, according the age of the cladode and the season. Areoles are distant from 4-5 cm between them, each consists of 3-10 white spines 8-10 cm long, central spines are stouter and longer, few glochids, absent on the old cladodes.

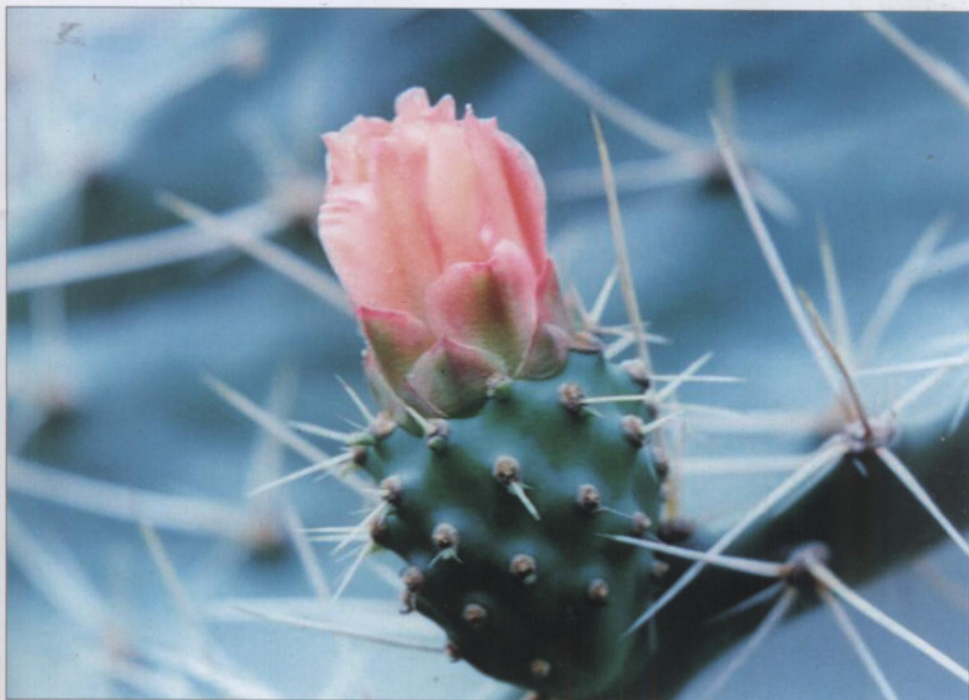
• **The flower:** opens well only in the daytime of full sun and heat, segments of the perianth pink-salmon. The pericarpel is green and high (4-5, 5,5 cm long and 4 cm in diameter) spherical and mamillate. Every mamilla ends in a bent and pointed bract 6 mm long, and is covered with long, yellow glochids of 0,5 mm and 1-3 spines of 0,4 – 1,7 cm long, white to yellowish

The receptacle consists in 10 green, triangular sepals 0,7-1,2 cm at the base and 0,5 – 1,2 cm high, 9 petals 2-3 cm long and 1, 5-2 wide, pink-salmon to bright orange.

The pistil is 2,8 3,5 cm long, white at the base, the stigma has carpels united at the top



Opuntia altomagdalenensis, habitat (Photo : G. Xhonneux.).



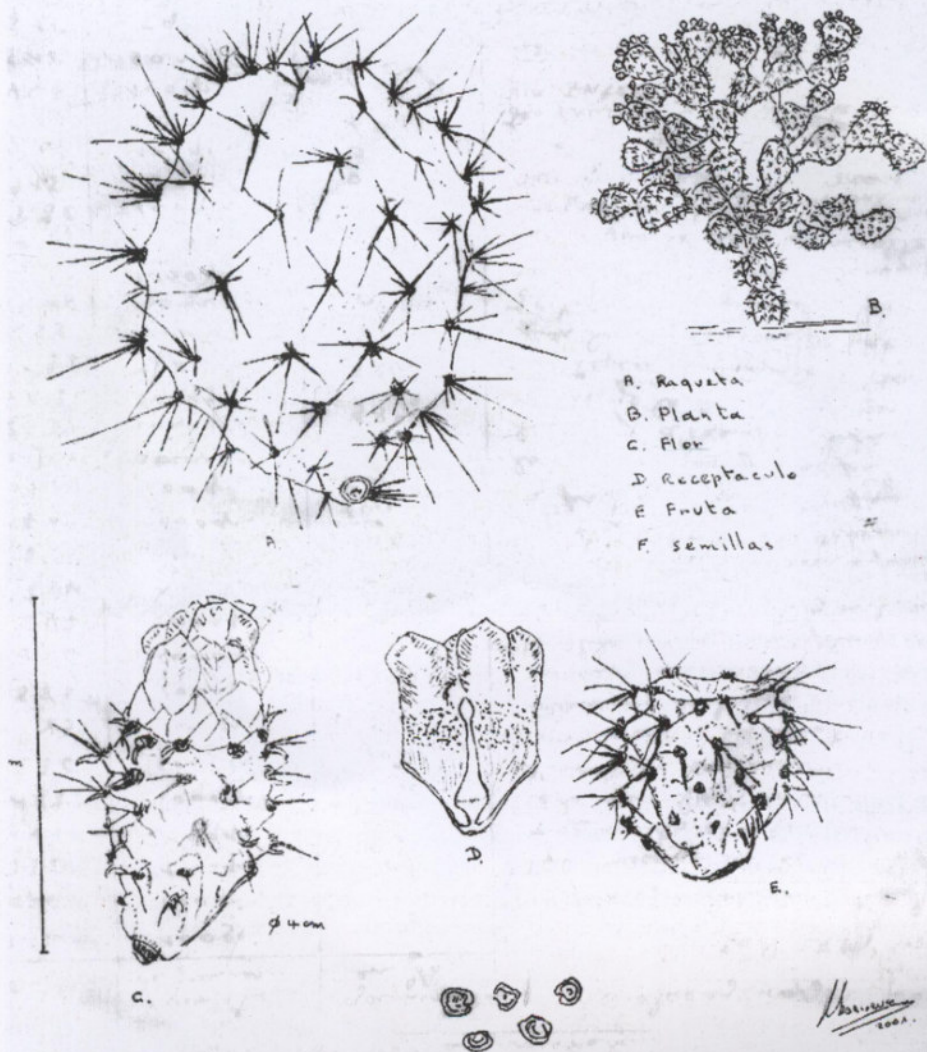
Opuntia altomagdalenensis, habitat (Photo : G. Xhonneux.).

whitish-cream to light yellow (7 mm), the style swelled at the base is white. Stamens are 1,6 cm long, the pollen is yellowish cream, filaments are white, pink to the top.

• **The fruit:** becomes mauve to red wine when mature, 3,5 5,5 cm long and 3,5 4,5 cm wide, covered with areoles, 1-5 spines 1-1,5cm, glochids brown, very short. The scar of the zone of abscission in 2,3 cm in diameter. The fruit contains few seeds (5-8). The fruit is poor in pulp, little perfumed, the taste is insipid. The round or flattened seeds are 3-5mm in diameter and 1,5 mm thick.

• **Origin and distribution:** this species is distributed in 3 departments: Huila, Tolima and Cundinamarca, mainly regions with dry forests and soils affected by erosion, in most of the cases at 300 up to 800m in alt. It is used as a living fence near the walls which separate fields and prairies.

In the wild, we meet the species at Garzon, Altamira, Hobo, Betania, desert of Tatacoa, Villa Vieja, Aipes, department of Huila. Natagaima, Espinal, Puerto Chaguani, Melgar, Armero, Lerida, Honda for the Dpt of Tolima. Girardot to Tocaima, Agua de Dios, Nariño, Guataqui, Quipile, Anapoima, Jerusalem, Arbelaez, Pandi, Dorada, Guaduas. It grows in a vegetation rich in Mimosaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Caesalpinaceae and other Cactacée as *Melocactus*, *Cereus*, *Acanthocereus*, *Stenocereus* and *Monvillea*.



A. Raqueta
 B. Planta
 C. Flor
 D. Receptaculo
 E. Fruta
 F. semillas

Note: in the book "*Plantas Útiles de Colombia*" edition 1956 of Enrique Pérez Arbelaez, chapter Cactaceae p.230, he speaks about *Opuntia bonplandii*, erroneously because this species is only native of Ecuador. In the vol. I of *Britton and Rose*, page 224, there is also a photo plate 40 and page 591, taken near Girardot.

In the *Britton and Rose's* first volume, on 1937, pages 153-157 they indicate the presence of *Opuntia elatior* in Colombia which can give to confusion, *Opuntia elatior* is only on the Atlantic coast.

Opuntia altomagdalenensis has a close affinity with *Opuntia dobbienna* *Britton and Rose*



Opuntia altomagdalenensis, habitat (Photo : G. Xhonneux.).

from Huigra and Sibambe in Chimborazo, Ecuador, See Vol. I Britton & Rose pages 225-207a. One of the differences is the height.

In *Flora's volume of Ecuador* #35 ed. 1989, pages 57-60, they include *Opuntia dobbienna* into *O. soederstromiana* and consider this species as a simple hybrid or subspecies.

We also notice that the altitude (1050-3000m) is very different from that of *O. altomagdalenensis*.

Text, drawing and photos: G. Xhonneux

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