



Texas Cacti by Brian Loflin and Shirley Loflin.
Texas A & M University Press, 2009. \$24

I know several field biologists who project a truly macho façade. Yet these guys carry what are typically thought of as women's purses—to carry field guides. The claims are invariably that the straps are the right length and the bags the right size, but I never really cared whether such claims were candid or disingenuous. I just thought it was odd. But lately I've come to realize that if I *were* to carry a purse around Texas, especially in the Trans-Pecos, it would have to hold the Loflins' new book *Texas Cacti*.

This book's photos make a great complement to Powell, Weedon, and Powell's *Cacti of Texas*, a more technical predecessor put out recently by the same publisher. Regardless of taxonomic opinion, both books have properly identified plants. But of the two, *Texas Cacti* has superior photos and is designed with amateurs in mind. Take it along as your guide in the field and check your IDs at home against the keys found in *Cacti of Texas*.

The Loflins only discuss plants they have personally seen and photographed (thus skipping over *Pereskia aculeata* and *Selenicereus spinulosus*), and their field-only photographs nicely capture typical specimens in typical habitats. But because these are habitat shots, many plants are pictured without fruit or flower. So, while anyone who grows *Acanthocereus tetragonus* outdoors would have a photo of it in flower, I appreciate the authors' honesty in including only real habitat shots. My one complaint about the uniformly superb photos is that too many are unlabeled.

It is unfortunate that the text does not live up to the caliber of the photos and plant identifications. The anatomy section, for instance, should have been redacted entirely, with too many false or unsupported assertions: What does it mean that cactus flowers

are inside-out? What evidence suggests that cacti (or almost anything other than a few orchids) are pollinated by ants? Who ever documented that apical meristems of cacti suffer a disproportionate number of mutations due to their seldom branching?

Assembling good distribution maps is difficult, yet for the most part the maps here are accurate and useful. Notably missing, however, is *Opuntia arenaria*.

In Texas, the Sand Prickly Pear (aka the El Paso Prickly Pear) is native to the Rio Grande between El Paso and Anthony. While not the most elegant or stately plant, it is one of only three cacti native to the Las Cruces, New Mexico area (my old home) that I can grow outdoors year-round in my new digs, Ottawa. (The other two are *Cylindropuntia imbricata* and *Coryphantha vivipara*.) Further, the map for *Opuntia tunicata* is mysteriously blank, *Echinocereus viridiflorus* var *cylindricus* is inadvertently left out of El Paso and Hudspeth Counties, and I'm fairly certain *Cylindropuntia imbricata* is not native to the Gulf Coast as the authors claim.

Species are arranged by stem shape, an interesting innovation that usually works, though not always. The two Texas varieties of *Escobaria vivipara* (varieties *vivipara* and *neomexicana*) have different stem shapes according to these authors and are hence placed sixty pages apart. Still, superb and properly identified photos make this book easily worth the price. Now I just need to find a matching purse. 🍷

