

CYLINDROPUNTIA LEPTOCAULIS X VERSICOLOR

Root Gorelick visited a park in Arizona to enjoy the cacti but didn't realize exactly what he had seen until he looked at his pictures. Photographs taken on 24 February 2020 by the author.

When out in the field, especially far from home, it pays to take many more photos than you intended, label those photos later, and look for surprises. I had a very short visit to an urban park on the west side of Tucson, namely Greasewood Park, where I followed my own advice. While there, I had only noticed fairly pedestrian cacti, at least until a week or two later when trying to label Figures 1 and 2. To my surprise, this plant was clearly a hybrid, probably an F1, of two common chollas at that site: *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* (Figure 3) and *C. versicolor* (Figures 4 & 5), with the offspring inheriting many of the best traits from both its putative parents. The hybrid had the gorgeous red fruits of *C. leptocaulis* plus the lovely red stem pigments of *C. versicolor*. The hybrid was a spherical shrub that stood a meter tall and about a meter in diameter, so not as statuesque as *C. versicolor*, but you cannot ask for everything. And now I feel bad to have not taken more photos of



Figure 1. *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* x *C. versicolor* - Greasewood Park.

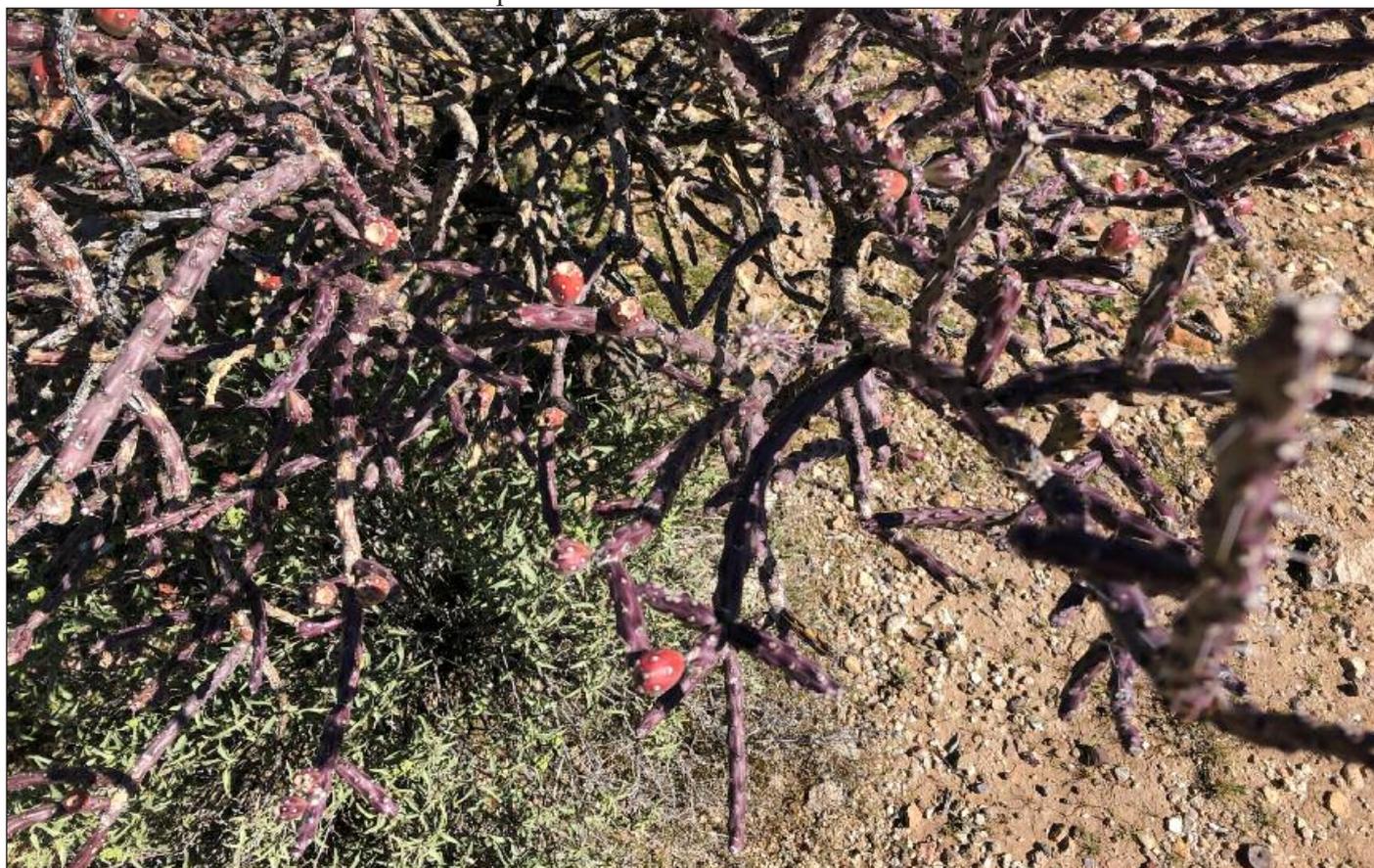


Figure 2. *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* x *C. versicolor* - Greasewood Park.



Figure 3. *Cylindropuntia leptocaulis* - Greasewood Park.



Figure 4. *Cylindropuntia versicolor* (foreground), *Cylindropuntia fulgida*, *Carnegiea gigantea* - Gates Pass.



Figure 5. *Cylindropuntia versicolor* - Greasewood Park.

this elegant hybrid that was even vibrantly colourful in February.

Cylindropuntia leptocaulis has a reputation for being promiscuous, which I have always found odd insofar as it has light green flowers that are primarily open at night, whereas most other chollas, including *O. versicolor*, have flowers that are open during the day. However, the flowers of *C. leptocaulis* often stay open until a few hours after sunrise and this species has hundreds of flowers

per plant and seeds that seem to volunteer in lots of nearby places. Its seeds probably get disseminated by birds because of the small bright red fruits. Years ago, when living in a second-story apartment in Las Cruces, New Mexico, *C. leptocaulis* would germinate in hanging pots on my balcony wherever house finches nested, but I never saw a hybrid there.

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