

## ***Mammillaria lasiacantha* and similar looking species at Anthony Gap, New Mexico** by Root Gorelick

*Mammillaria lasiacantha* is commonly known as the golf ball cactus. It is usually as white as a brand-new golf ball, with a dense covering of bright white spines and a spherical unbranched stem the size of a golf ball. It is native to a large swathe of northern Mexico and only found east of the Rio Grande in far west Texas and far southern-central New Mexico (Zimmerman & Parfitt, 2004a; Powell & Weedon, 2004). It is always found on limestone, with the limestone colour closely resembling that of this cactus.

Photos of *Mammillaria lasiacantha* were taken on 11 March 2020 on the hill 500m north of Highway 404 at Anthony Gap (Figs. 1–3). This hill is usually considered a southern portion of North Anthony's Nose ('nose' is an idiosyncratic local term for 'mountain'). Both New Mexico Highway 404 and the main pipeline for El Paso Natural Gas (from the Permian Basin to Arizona) run through Anthony Gap, which separates Anthony's Nose from North Anthony's Nose. North Anthony's Nose is the only part of the Franklin Mountains in New Mexico and is entirely in southern Doña Ana County.

In New Mexico, Lyman Benson (1982) recorded *Mammillaria lasiacantha* from Otero, Eddy, and Lincoln Counties, but not Doña Ana County. Richard Worthington's checklist of all vascular plants of the Franklin Mountains lists *M. lasiacantha* from Texas, but not from New Mexico (Worthington undated, but probably 2014). A search of electronic herbarium records at SEINet



**Figs. 1–3 *Mammillaria lasiacantha* at the southern end of North Anthony's Nose (11 March 2020)**

(<https://swbiodiversity.org/seinet/>) on 17 February 2021 yielded no specimens of *M. lasiacantha* from Doña Ana County. However, on 30 August 2020, an old acquaintance, Paul Hyder, posted an iNaturalist record of *M. lasiacantha* at Anthony Gap, also on the north side of Highway 404 ([www.inaturalist.org/observations/58109330](http://www.inaturalist.org/observations/58109330)). There is also an iNaturalist record from a few miles east of Anthony Gap, in Chapparal (<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/44332259>), and several records from the Robledo Mountains just northwest of Las Cruces, as well as several records from the Texas portion of the Franklin Mountains.

In the El Paso/Las Cruces area, *Mammillaria lasiacantha* is the second cactus to flower each year, flowering throughout much of March. *Mammillaria lasiacantha* is just behind *Echinomastus intertextus*, which in Doña Ana County usually starts flowering during the last few days of February. Flowers of *M. lasiacantha* always have white- or cream-coloured inner petals with a much darker midstripe. The midstripe colour of *M. lasiacantha* is the same for all inner petals in a given plant,

but varies widely between plants, from tan to pink to red to light purple. Apparently in other locales, the midstripe of inner petals can also be green or yellow (Zimmerman & Parfitt, 2004a).

*Mammillaria lasiacantha* superficially resembles three sympatric taxa at Anthony Gap: mature specimens of *Epithelantha micromeris* and immature specimens of *Coryphantha* (*Escobaria*) *sneedii* var. *sneedii* and *Coryphantha* (*Escobaria*) *vivipara* var. *neomexicana* [but note that I recently subsumed *C. sneedii* as a variety of *C. vivipara*, i.e., *Coryphantha vivipara* var. *sneedii* (Gorelick 2020)]. All four species have small spherical stems with many white spines per areole. However, only *M. lasiacantha* and *E. micromeris* are unbranched and quite cryptic in habitat, whereas *C. sneedii* and *C. vivipara* seem conspicuous, at least to me, and are almost always branched when mature. *M. lasiacantha* and *E. micromeris* are readily distinguishable from each other by looking at their growing points, i.e., shoot



Fig. 4 (above) *Epithelantha micromeris* with flower bud at Anthony's Nose (28 February 2020)



Fig. 5 (left) *Epithelantha micromeris* in fruit at Anthony's Nose (16 August 2007)



apical meristems. *Epithelantha micromeris* has the very unusual feature of having its growing point completely covered with wool and long upright spines in a small tuft that completely obscures the epidermis surrounding the growing point (Figs. 4–5). The wool there is deciduous, while the long spines, once they are displaced by new growth, break in half along their length, thereby becoming shorter spines (Powell & Weedon, 2004: 364). Flowers



**Fig. 6** *Coryphantha sneedii* var. *sneedii* at Anthony's Nose (28 February 2020) 20cm diameter

and fruits in *E. micromeris* are only produced in the apical tuft of wool and long spines. By contrast, the other three species lack wool, have normal length spines near their growing point, have flowers produced in a ring below the growing point, and have their growing points visible through their spines. *M. lasiacantha* also differs from *C. sneedii* in that the former has zero or one central spine per areole, whereas the latter has 8–17 central spines per areole. Mature plants of *C. sneedii* also have dozens to hundreds of branches (Figs. 6–7), whereas *M. lasiacantha* always are unbranched. According to Zimmerman & Parfitt (2004b: 254), “*Epithelantha* species and immature plants of *Coryphantha vivipara* var. *neomexicana* often are misidentified as adults of *M. lasiacantha*, especially from El Paso, Texas”, which is just south of Anthony Gap. The few plants of *C. vivipara* var. *neomexicana* at Anthony Gap seem readily distinguishable from the other three species by having fewer spines per areole (Zimmerman & Parfitt, 2004c) and spines that are dull white with brown tips (Fig. 8). See the table for a summary of these differences.

*Mammillaria lasiacantha* has its “latex ducts deep inside the cortex, not in the tubercles” (Zimmerman & Parfitt, 2004a: 248), so you will not see milky sap by simply breaking off an areole. *M. lasiacantha* is a pretty little species, as are its look-alike neighbours at



**Fig. 7** *Coryphantha sneedii* var. *sneedii* in cultivation (27 April 2005)

**Table 1 Comparison of four sympatric species at Anthony Gap**  
**[data from Zimmerman & Parfitt (2004a,b,c) and Powell & Weedin (2004)]**

	Tuft of apical wool and long spines?	Number of branches	Central spines per areole	Spine colour	Location of flowers and fruits
<i>Mammillaria lasiacantha</i>	no	0	0–1	bright white	in a ring below growing point
<i>Epithelantha micromeris</i>	yes	0	indistinguishable from radial spines	white or ashy grey	in the apical tuft
<i>Coryphantha sneedii</i>	no	10–500	8–17	bright white	in a ring below growing point
<i>Coryphantha vivipara</i>	no	0–15	4–10, but 0 in many immature plants	dull white, brown tips	in a ring below growing point

Anthony Gap of *Epithelantha micromeris*, *Coryphantha sneedii* and *C. vivipara*. Anthony Gap is beautiful place to see many species of cacti in one small place – I have seen 20 cactus species plus one named natural hybrid at Anthony Gap and suspect that another six species are there because I have seen them nearby in similar habitats.

#### LITERATURE CITED

Benson, L D (1982) *The cacti of the United States and Canada*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Gorelick, (2020) The *Coryphantha sneedii* complex is indeed complex and continuously intergrades with *Coryphantha vivipara*. *Haseltonia* 27: 40–59.

Powell, A M & Weedin, J F (2004) *Cacti of the Trans-Pecos and adjacent areas*. Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock.

Worthington, R D (undated, but probably written or last updated in 2014) Inventory of the vascular plant flora of the Franklin Mountains, Texas and New Mexico. *El Paso Southwest Botanical Miscellany* No. 5. 46 pages. [<https://floraneomexicana.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/franklinmts.pdf>]

Zimmerman, A D & Parfitt, B D (2004a) *Mammillaria* Haworth (Cactaceae). In: *Flora of North America - Volume 4*. Editors: Flora of North America Editorial Committee. Pages 247–257. Oxford University Press, New York.

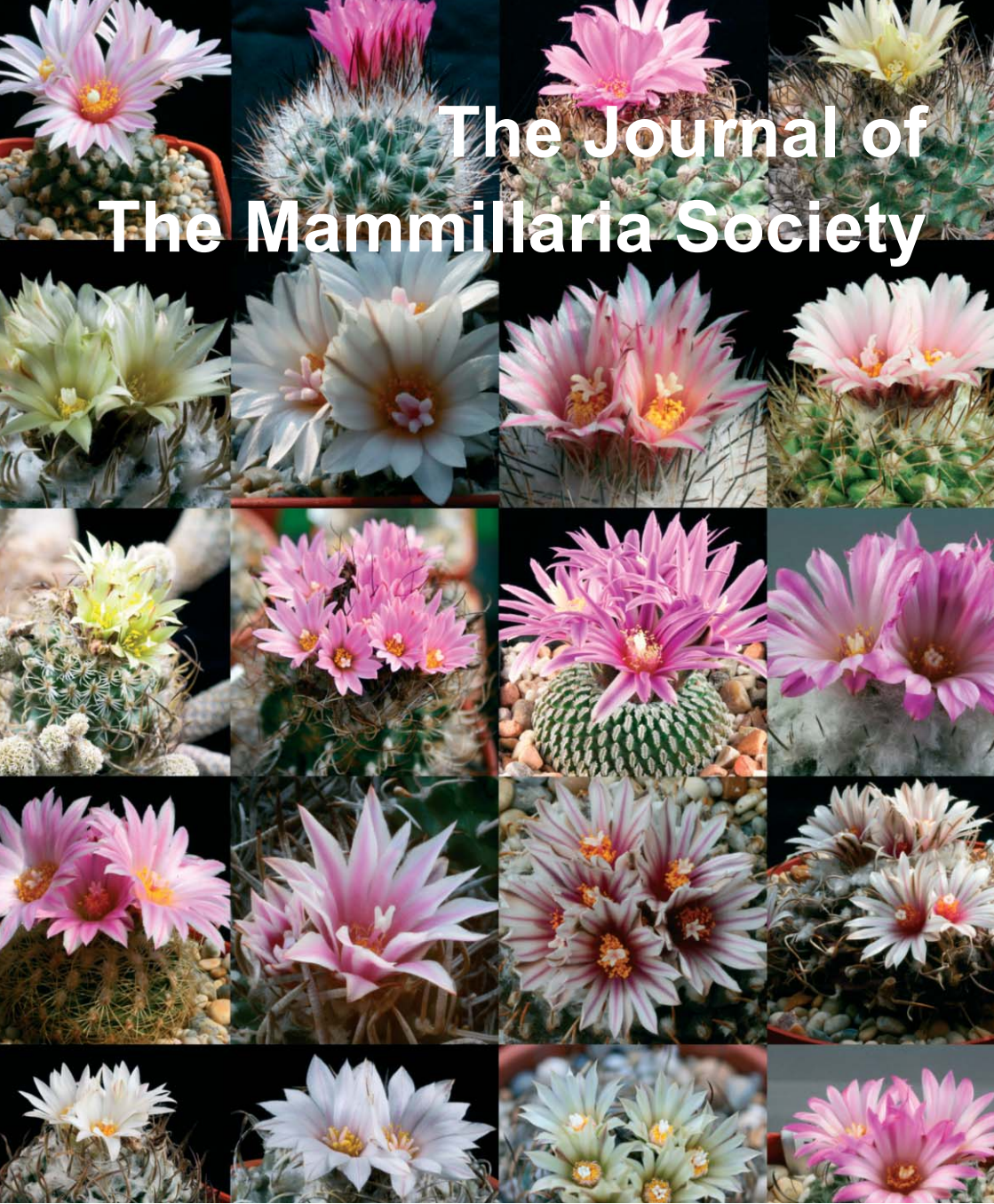
Zimmerman, A D & Parfitt, B D (2004b) *Epithelantha* F.A.C. Weber ex Britton & Rose (Cactaceae). In: *Flora of North America - Volume 4*. Editors: Flora of North America Editorial Committee. Pages 239–240. Oxford University Press, New York.

Zimmerman, A D & Parfitt, B D (2004c) *Coryphantha* (Engelmann) Lemaire (Cactaceae). In: *Flora of North America - Volume 4*. Editors: Flora of North America Editorial Committee. Pages 220–236. Oxford University Press, New York.



**Fig. 8 *Coryphantha vivipara* var. *neomexicana* at Anthony Gap (11 March 2020). Large stems 5cm diameter, small stems 2.5cm diameter**





# The Journal of The Mammillaria Society

**Volume 61  
Number 4  
November 2021**

# Contents

Editorial by Al Laius . . . . .	123
Some mammillarias from Durango by Ian Woolnough . . . . .	124
<i>Mammillaria lasiacantha</i> and similar looking species at Anthony Gap, New Mexico by Root Gorelick . . . . .	129
The genus <i>Turbinicarpus</i> by Philip Andrews. . . . .	133
<i>Mammillaria pennispinosa</i> by Gillian Evison . . . . .	143
<i>Cochemiea</i> versus <i>Mammillaria</i> by Martin Lowry . . . . .	146
In my collection (2) by Robin Arnott. . . . .	148
Seed Distribution 2021 by Chris Davies, Kathy Flanagan . . . . . and Ian Woolnough . . . . .	151
<i>Mammillaria lanata</i> – from seed to flower by David Ilett . . . . .	159
In search of an unknown <i>Coryphantha</i> – twenty years later . . . . . by Massimo Afferni. . . . .	161
<i>Mammillaria bombycina</i> by John Pilbeam. . . . .	163
<i>Thelocactus</i> by John Watmough . . . . .	166
Mammillaria and friends in the Sierra Gorda – part 2 . . . . . by Frank Sengpiel . . . . .	169
Mammillaria Society Zoom meetings . . . . .	171
Our next Zoom talk . . . . .	171

## Front cover:

A collage of *Turbinicarpus* in flower in the collection of Philip Andrews. See the article on the genus *Turbinicarpus* on page 133, which covers some of the author's favourite taxa, and gives detailed cultivation information.

Photo collage by Philip Andrews

ISSN 0464-8072

Website: <http://mammillaria.net>

Printed by: Minuteman Press, Macclesfield