

## Meritorious micranthocerei

(All photos: Root Gorelick)

In a recent issue (*CactusWorld* (2009) 27: 81–87), Colin Norton discussed and photographed two wonderful cultivated specimens of eastern Brazilian columnar cacti with blue stems in the genus *Micranthocereus*: *M. purpureus* and *M. dolichospermaticus*. These two species, if anything, are even more spectacular in habitat.

*M. purpureus* (Figs. 1–2) is the branched and shorter of these two species. It is a truly charming plant, branching exclusively from the base, with each powdery-blue stem 1–2m tall. The blue epidermis is easily visible through the straw-coloured spines. Cephalia always grow on the same side of each stem and are extremely woolly. For me, the best part is the vibrant rose-coloured flower with its whitish centre. Cephalia and flowers start forming on stems around one metre tall. The plants pictured here on the outskirts of Morro do Chapéu, Bahia, were growing with their diminutive congener *M. polyanthus* ssp. *alvinii*, the quixotic bottle cactus *Stephanocereus luetzelburgii*, and the slender blue *Pilosocereus glaucochrous*.



Fig. 1 *Micranthocereus purpureus* in bud



Fig. 2 *Micranthocereus purpureus* in flower

*M. dolichospermaticus* (Fig. 3) is a much taller, albeit unbranched plant. It is known from several localities, all composed of steep, sharp bambui limestone. The stem epidermis is a slightly darker blue than in *M. purpureus*, and also easily visible. The cuticular waxes that give the glaucous stems their blue colour tend to erode away with age, leaving older stems green. As with *M. purpureus*, *M. dolichospermaticus* cephalia start growing when stems are about one metre high. I have included a photo of one very unusual specimen that is branching dichotomously (Fig. 4), which is the only uninjured specimen that I have seen branching, either in the wild or in cultivation. This specimen was growing with several other choice cacti: *Pilosocereus gounellei* ssp. *zehntneri*, and the giants *P. densiareolatus* and



Fig. 3 *Micranthocereus dolichospermaticus*



**Fig. 4** *Micranthocereus dolichospermaticus* with an unusual mode of branching near the top

*Melocactus levitestatus*, close to the small river town of Pôrto Novo, near Barreiras, Bahia.

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Root Gorelick