

# Malagasy journey (Part 1)

by Philippe Fenin



Fig. 1: *Euphorbia quartziticola* produces a huge underground tuber that brings forth numerous stems, each with a leaf rosette at the apex..

Since the days of Werner Rauh there has been little exploration of the *Euphorbia* flora of Madagascar. At the same time there is a growing number of *Euphorbia* enthusiasts travelling to Madagascar to actually be in one of the hotspots of this vast genus. Philippe Fenin shares some of his *Euphorbia* encounters while travelling Madagascar in November 2012:

## Itremo Pass

To access Itremo pass from Ambatofinandrahana, you need a good 4x4 vehicle and a lot of energy. 30 km in four hours to discover *Euphorbia quartziticola* Leandri in its habitat ... a few thousand flowering individuals welcome us.

Some rosettes of leaves appear on the surface, but the pachycaul root can be deeply buried in the sand. One can imagine the size of the “caudex” of the specimen relative to the hand of Theresa, my wife. Each rosette leaf corresponds to the apex of a stem (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2: In contrast to *Euphorbia itremensis* the leaves of *Euphorbia quartziticola* are thick and shiny, the cyathophylls are bright yellow instead of (usually) whitish.



Fig. 4: *Euphorbia itremensis* grows a subterranean napiform tuber producing several branches. How many specimens do we see?

A few kilometres further and after the pass, we find a population of *Euphorbia itremensis* Kimnach & Lavranos. Over a hundred square meters it is a festival of white and pink flowers, as two forms coexist on the same habitat, and pale pink intermediate forms.



Figs 5-7: Although the colour of its cyathophylls of *Euphorbia itremensis* is said to be cream faintly tinged pinkish, you can find anything from pure white to bright pink.



Fig. 8: *Euphorbia rossii* grows shrubs of 1 m height with numerous erect branches, fiercely protected by spines of up to 2 cm length.

## Between Manja and Morombe

A short time after we had crossed the river Mangoky by ferry we returned to the track we had left because the ferry had changed this place of landing. We passed

near the village Bevoay and discovered *Euphorbia rossii* Rauh & Buchloh. It was hidden among the bushes and shrubs growing on red sand. We were surprised that the colour of the flowers varies from one plant to another from red to yellow to orange ...



Figs 9, 10: *Euphorbia rossii* has its cymes at the apices of the branches; they may carry up to 20 cyathia with cyathophylls from olive-green to ruby red. Cyathia bear 4 or 5 glands, which in turn may be cinnabar-red to ruby wine-red.



Fig. 11: Hard to find in habitat but a beauty in cultivation: *Euphorbia tulearensis*

## Between Toliara and Saint Augustin

It was in a small canyon – a one hour's walk from the track – that we had the joy of seeing the famous and unusual *Euphorbia tulearensis* (Rauh) Rauh. Our research had taken us several hours in a dry and thorny vegetation... It had not rained for more than eight months. In fig. 11 the shrivelled leaves of *Aloe descoingsii* subsp. *augustina* show how the vegetation had suffered from the lack of rain.

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Figs 12, 13: *Euphorbia tulearensis* grows a reduced main stem from a thick, tuberous root with many lateral roots; branches are numerous, erect; they are short if the plant grows in full sun-light, long if it grows under bushes.