

Saguaro: 'Crest quest' that started in 2005 now totals nearly 1,400 saguaros



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Perhaps you have seen a few of those rare saguaro cacti that grow bizarre and sometimes beautiful fan-shaped crests.

Bob Cardell and Pat Hammes have seen more than a few. The two Tucson residents have found, cataloged and photographed an astounding 1,371 crested, or cristate, saguaros.

"We feel that each and every one is beautiful and different," says Cardell, who became so fascinated by crested saguaros that he and Hammes began an intense "crest quest" in 2005.

An Arizona Daily Star story the following year noted that they had located 415 of the prickly standouts.

Numerous excursions by vehicle and on foot since then have turned up well over 900 more crested specimens.

Scientists haven't yet found a definitive cause for the formation of crests on saguaros and some other plants. Possible causes include frost damage, genetic quirks or growth changes brought on by insects, bacterial infections or lightning strikes.

Cardell and Hammes, who record global positioning system coordinates for each cactus, believe there are many more to be found.

"Our new goal is 2,000 cristates," says Cardell, who recently turned 74. "Pat, as always, gives me the inspiration to move on. She is a great motivator and the perfect partner."

Go online to www.crestedsaguarosociety.org for a look at some of the crested saguaros photographed by Cardell and Hammes.