



Creeping Devil

Cactus That Wanders in the Desert

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ONE of the most remarkable succulents on the planet is the “creeping devil” cactus, scientifically known as *Stenocereus eruca* – sometimes referred to as the wandering cactus of Baja California Sur. The creeping devil sits flat on the ground with only its tip raised, unlike other members in its family that stand upright.

The crawling devil cactus occupies a special place among the numerous endemic (growing in just one location) and rare plants of Baja California, Mexico. It is the only plant species

in Mexico that may wander between locations practically while staying alive, and it is also the only type of cactus that is non-erect.

The unique ability to crawl enables the creeping devil to lie prostrate on the ground. It accomplishes this by killing off its rear end while expanding horizontally on the leading end. In order to give the plant an anchor, along with water and nutrients, as it slowly crawls across the desert floor, the bottom of the stem develops new roots on



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the growing end. The rear end breaks down and absorbs in the soil, transforming into nutrients that are reabsorbed by the plant through its roots. As a result, the creeping devil not only kills itself in order to move, but it also cannibalises its dead end in order to survive. In favourable locations, hundreds of branching stems can occasionally grow together to form impenetrable patches.

The creeping devil is officially listed as an endangered species in Mexico, and if its small habitats are utilised for urban, touristic, and recreational activities these amazing plants might not be able to travel the sands of Baja California

Sur for much longer. This cactus can live up to a hundred years if not disturbed.

The climate where the creeping devil grows impacts the growth rate and the speed at which it crawls. It moves at a speed of two feet each year in its natural habitat, where the climate is moist and marine.

This cactus can reproduce sexually, but due to its isolation and the lack of pollinators in its natural habitat, it can also do so by cloning individual parts of itself, which separate from their bases, die, and then develop into new plants on their own.

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