# The Largest and Rarest White-Flowering Manzanote Cactus Tree of Zacapa, Guatemala Is blown over in a Wind Storm, May 2025

Only two of these white–flower *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora cactus* trees have been found so far in all of Mesoamerica

Aerial Photos by Drone Pilot Javier Archila
Text and iPhone 15 ProMax Photos
by Nicholas Hellmuth

FLAAR Reports, FLAAR (USA) and
FLAAR Mesoamerica (Guatemala)

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This is what we found when we reached the top of the cliff overlooking the Rio Tambor below. This tree was not chopped down—it was rotten on its inside core and was blown over in a wind storm about a week before we arrived.

We were shocked that one of the only white-flowering manzanote cactus trees in the entire world was now smashed.

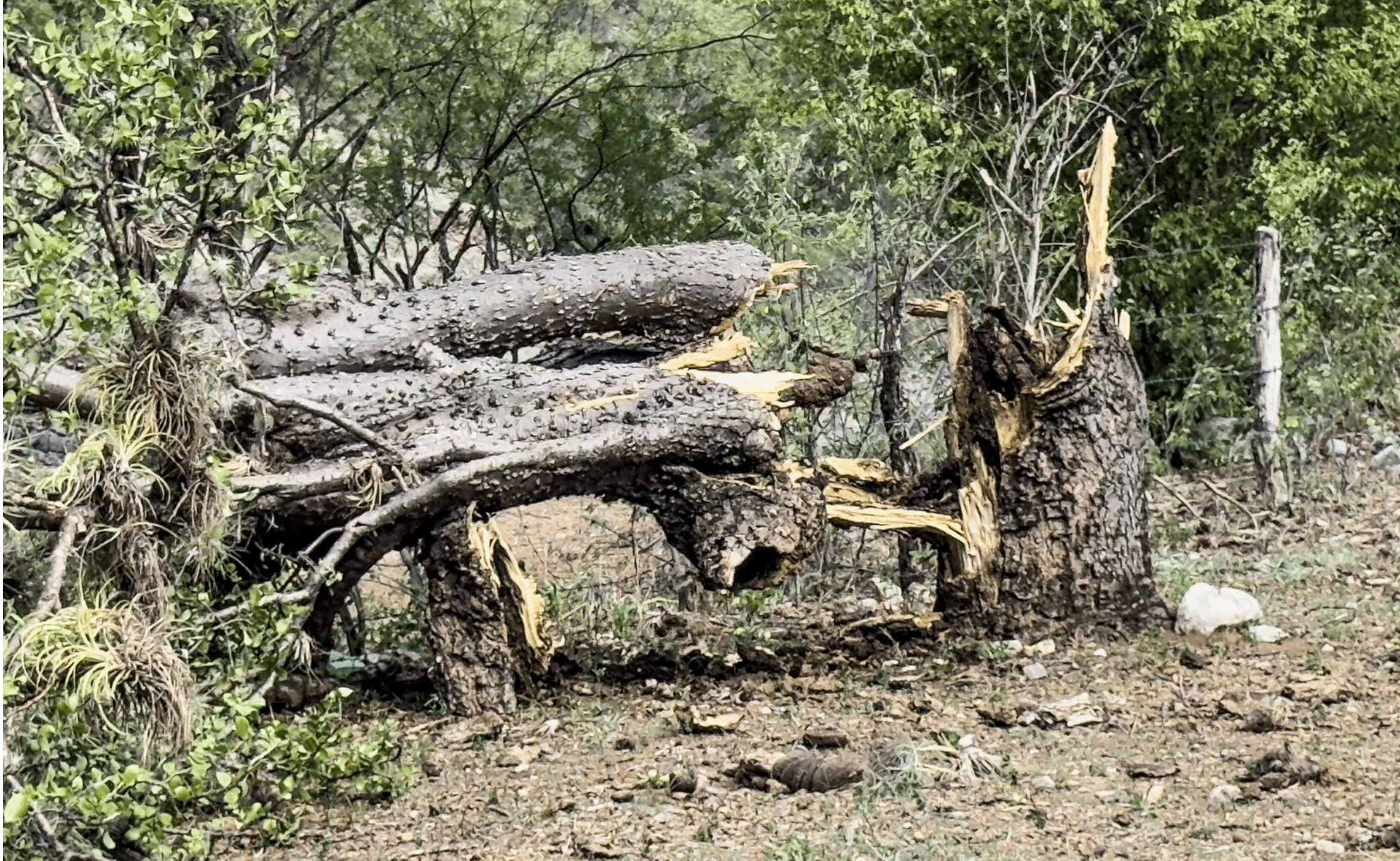
All the photos from the ground are by Nicholas Hellmuth, iPhone 15 Pro Max, FLAAR Digital Photo Archive of Flora, Fauna and Biodiverse Ecosystems of Guatemala. We don’t repeat this in every caption.

Totally fallen over.

The tree to the right is now the only white-flowering manzanote tree still standing.

Bosque seco area of Zacapa facing the Rio Tambor, about 100 meters from the edge of aldea Agua Caliente (to the left).

The partially rotten trunk could not handle the weight of such a large tree.



Lots of manzanote trees are filled with bromeliads, orchids and other plants that appreciate a place to grow far above ground level.

Hundreds of epiphytes (of two or three species) covered the branches of this *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* cactus tree. The local name for the cactus tree in El Progreso and Zacapa area of Guatemala is manzanote—but there are other local names elsewhere.

When we found the fallen manzanote tree cactus on May 19th, 2025, there were no flowers. But on the following day we were amazed to see the fallen “dead” tree with two fresh flowers.

Flowers of *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora cactus* trees open after 9am or 10am and close in the late afternoon or early evening—so each flower lasts only a single day.

Even when a *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora cactus* tree is blown over, and no longer is connected with the bottom of the trunk with roots—these manzanote trees can continue to grow—and can continue to flower. Amazing, but surely a few other tree species can also continue to sprout when they are blown over.

May 20, 2025, mid-morning.

This is the second flower proudly blooming from the completely fallen *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora cactus* tree.

We have a FLAAR Reports on the discovery of these two white-flowering mutants on June 21, 2023. This report was published now in 2025—but we had already published our discover in 2023 (see the bibliography).

The aged white-flowering manzanote tree that was blown over in mid-May 2025 is painfully visible smashed across the ground.

A dozen meters further down the road is the still-standing white-flowering manzanote tree—the only one in all Guatemala that has yet been found (by Hanel Lopez, Gilberto Salazar, and Nicholas Hellmuth on June 21, 2023).

Photo, May 20, 2025, with FLAAR drone, Mavic 3, piloted by Javier Archila.

The Rio Tambor is down a steep cliff at the right. The aldea of Agua Caliente is about 100 meters above the top of this photo.

We have a separate FLAAR Reports on the white flowers of this sole remaining white-flowering *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* from our photos of late May 2025.

Surely somewhere else in Guatemala, Mexico or other countries, a white-flowering *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* cactus tree can be found. But so far, the two white-flowering manzanote tree cactus that the FLAAR Mesoamerica team found several years ago are unique—and now—since mid-May 2025, one of the two has fallen down.

Since local people need to be able to pass their motorcycles on the dirt road, they understandably cut a path. The branches and twigs that they cut off and other specimens we took back to the Heloderma reserve so that park ranger Gilberto Salazar could plant them and hope some will survive and eventually reach maturity and produce white flowers.

We also collected specimens for the Jardin Botanico in Guatemala City, and for the FLAAR Ethnobotanical Research Garden in Guatemala City.

Since the falling tree trunk crushed the fence around this property overlooking the Rio Tambor, eventually the owners will want to remove the entire trunk and rebuild their fence. It would help if cactus specialists could salvage the entire trunk by moving it to either the Niño Dormindo area or the Heloderma reserve so that the trunk can continue to support sprouts. This *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* cactus tree is fully capable of living a long life even with no roots whatsoever—we know this because we saw another fallen (orange-flowering) manzanote tree that had broken off from its rooted segment of its trunk—but there were branches, twigs, leaves, and flowers even though the entire tree was blown over in a storm years ago.

During May 18-19, 2025, less than 1% of the orange-flowering manzanote trees were flowering. But on May 19 the tall white-flowering manzanote had a few flowers. When we returned on May 20$^{th}$, both the standing tree and the fallen manzanote cactus trees had white flowers. On May 20$^{th}$, a few more orange-flowering cactus trees were flowering. But for cactus research, May is not a good month to study *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* cactus trees. We were in this area in this week because our goal was to find, photograph, and document local wasps that make edible honey. But to study *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* cactus trees, best in late June and early yo mid-July. Obviously since the dry season and rainy season vary at bit each year, the peak of 90% of the manzanote trees flowering will vary slightly each year.

It is very helpful to have a good drone camera (at least Mavic 3 or 3 Pro, or the newer 4 Pro). And essential that the drone is registered in Guatemala and that you have an experienced drone pilot. For photographing the individual flowers, an iPhone 14 Pro Max or 15 Pro Max are great. We skipped the 16 Pro Max but this autumn will outfit our team with an iPhone 17 ProMax camera. We also have ring lights and Sony cameras.

# Introductory Bibliography on the White-Flowering Manzanote Tree

https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/tag/lychnidiflora/
Blog info on Manzanote cactus from year 2021.

https://flaar-mesoamerica.org/2021/01/22/manzanote-a-special-cacti-from-the-dry-forest/
Photo of trunk, of leaves, of spines on trunk; has 3-item bibliography.

https://www.tiktok.com/foryou
FLAAR Mesoamerica video of a few seconds.

https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cu2mI8ptq3q/
FLAAR Mesoamerica, same video as on TikTok of the orange flowers.

https://www.instagram.com/flaarmesoamerica/reel/Cwlp8MlPJeL/
The white flowers discovered by FLAAR two years ago.

https://www.digital-photography.org/digital-camera-vs-iPhone-14-Pro-Max-review/iPhone-14-Pro-Max-macro-mode.php
Posted 2023, shows the white flower variant with a bee ready to pollinate it.

Within a few weeks we will be posting our complete photo corpus of the white-flowering manzanote tree as we found it in June and July, summer 2023.


BUNKENBURG, Alexander and Laia HAURIE

2025 The discovery of dioecious *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* (DC.) Lodé (Cactaceae) in Guatemala. *Bradleya* 43/2025, pages 54-60.

Article kindly sent to FLAAR by Bunkenburg. In the article they document their botanical discovery (by Laia Haurie) that this species is also dioecious. Also has helpful References Cited. The park ranger of the Heloderma reserve took Bunkenburg and Haurie to the same white-flowering manzanote tree in their visit of 2024 that the FLAAR Mesoamerica team had discovered in 2023 and that Hellmuth already published.

HURTADO, Vivian and Nicholas HELLMUTH

2023 FLAAR Annual Report, For Year 2023. 69 pages.

The back cover shows a green-colored bee popping out of the white manzanote flower. Page 35 shows this bee before it dives down into the center of the flower. So FLAAR had published its discovery of the white mutant of *Leuenbergeria lychnidiflora* already in several places in 2023—all on-line.