

**Passion flowers from the Atlantic Rain Forest
around the Tropic of Capricorn,
and Costa Verde, Brazil**

David Costen Oct/Nov 2007

To celebrate my fiftieth birthday my partner and I went to explore the Mata Atlantica in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro States of S.E. Brazil. We stayed with Mauro Peixoto who lives on the outskirts of Biritiba Ussu near Mogi das Cruzes in Sao Paulo state and he guided us on field trips to see those species of Passiflora on my wish-list.



P. haematostigma

On the day after arrival and to recover from the journey our initial foray was on foot through the countryside around Mauro's home. The first species that we came across was that pictured left growing on the roadside verge. Although not on my list this was an unexpected treat.

Other species seen that day included amethystina and alata. The other highlight of the day was to marvel at Mauro's wonderful collection of plants in his nursery. Yes, I specialise in Passiflora but I grow many other 'exotics'. It was an inspiration to see his orchids, begonias and gesneriads amongst other treasures: he is a true plantsman.

On the second day Mauro drove us to Campos do Jordao where we saw the first species on my list. Again a case of passiflora growing by the side of the road at a place called 'fim do mundo' literally (end-of-the-earth) or perhaps more aptly top-of-the-world in view of the fact that it is the fifth highest point in Brazil at 2035 metres - Pico do Itapeva. We also found colonies on another peak across the valley from the town centre where Mauro said that he had never previously encountered the species and where the picture (right) was taken.



P. mendoncaeii



P. mendoncaeï

This species on the wish-list was ticked off.

On the third day we made a shorter excursion to nearby Salesópolis and it was a pleasure to find another rare species although none of the buds were open. Again, another case of a passion-flower growing at a high-point past the commercial plantations of eucalyptus grown for paper production at lower elevations. As it was to turn out passiflora thrive at the edges of cleared spaces. Unfortunately the crew employed to clear the vegetation at the sides of highways must always be chopping these vines down. We nicknamed them the “passion flower killers”. These beauties (right) were climbing a granite rock face by the side of a trail cleared by the national Brazilian oil company. I could now tick a second item on my list.



P. ischnoclada



P. sp nov. 'Itatiaia'

On the fourth day our trip took us to Parque Nacional do Itatiaia the oldest established area of protected forest in Brazil (1937). Itatiaia means “many-pointed rock” in the tupi language.

It was here that we found the third item on my list: a new species previously discovered by Mauro. As it was a place with idyllic waterfalls and also my birthday. I couldn't resist stripping down to my underwear and swimming in a beautiful rock pool – I'll always remember that day.



piscina do Maromba: Itatiaia

At Itatiaia we also found *organensis* and *jileki*. Unfortunately, we would have needed a four-wheel drive jeep to reach the summit in order to go in search of *marginata* the last species on my list but that will have to be for a return trip!



P. deidamioides

On our last day with Mauro we made another local journey this time to a favourite location of his Pedra do Garrafão (big-bottle rock). Here we found the species pictured on the left: both by the roadside and on the summit of the mountain. We also found *campanulata* on our descent.

Other species that we encountered during our stay with Mauro and not mentioned previously include *capsularis* and *vellozia*. After leaving Mauro we headed for the beach to stay at Paraty. His advice on what to search for on the coast was *Passiflora ovalis*.

Paraty is a Unesco World Heritage site preserving as it does colonial architecture from the time of the greatest exportation of gold. Paraty is also in the middle of what is called the Costa Verde ("Green Coast") an area where the forest (*mata*) reaches down onto the shoreline (*restinga*). Many of the place names between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo are a challenge to pronounce and are a heritage from the first inhabitants: they include Pindamonhangaba, Caraguatatuba, Ubatuba, Jabaquara and Paraty Mirim where a community of Guarani remain to this day.



commercial yellow passion fruit

Whilst at Paraty we were frustrated by a cold front passing through from northern Argentina which gave us three days of constant downpour additional to that falling because we were visiting in the rainy season. This frustrated the beach experience somewhat but I was able to still discover aspects of *Passiflora* new to me. I was fascinated by the size of *edulis flavicarpa* grown locally. I have large hands and the fruit was certainly larger than those of *ligularis* which can be bought in English supermarkets. They were also delicious! The leaves were equally an impressive size. I could believe these are tetraploid.

Near the beach at Praia do Sono which is within an area where commercial development is restricted: the APA do Cairuçu - we saw a juvenile plant of possibly *Kermesina* (right). We also saw two other unidentified species. Below you can see the ripe fruit of one of them and a picture of the beach. Note the absence of big hotels! One cannot see it but there is a small village tucked away here. All in all the trip was a great success. We were able to find and photograph at least a dozen species of *Passion* flowers: one for each day there. Of course not all were in flower but then we went at a date and time to coincide with my anniversary!



P. kermesina?



Unidentified species



Praia do Sono