

## The Weekly Plant 24 January 2016

**Common names:** Warnock condalia, snakewood, javelina bush, crucillo

**Scientific name:** *Condalia warnockii* var. *kearneyana*<sup>1,2</sup>

**In our Community:** there are several plants across Galileo from lots 13-16, behind and to the left of bench

### Discussion

There are some plants you can almost identify from a distance, the “gestalt” method of plant identification. The closer you get, however, and especially if you are using a plant identification book, the harder the identification becomes. The descriptions are so broad<sup>3</sup> and are so similar to descriptions of other closely related plants that the details become confusing.

So, step back and look at the form of the plants on Galileo. They are dense, with dark green leaves. Even from a distance you can tell that the leaves are small. Once you are familiar with that look, you will recognize it again.



Warnock condalia is a large shrub, at best a small tree, reaching to 6, perhaps 7 feet in height. It is common in portions of Saguaro National Park East where it often grows together with other large shrubs, especially desert hackberry. Warnock condalia is found in dry washes, drainages, and occasionally on open slopes at elevations between 1500 and 5000 feet in southern Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and adjacent Mexico.

If you do get a close-up view of this plant you'll see lots of short branches ending in sharp, red thorns. At several places along each branch several tiny, evergreen leaves are clustered together. You'll have an impression of controlled chaos as the branches cross and recross, creating a barrier valued by the small birds and animals that seek shelter in its branches.



A key ID characteristic for those with eagle eyes is the raised, thickened veins on the underside of the leaves. You'll seldom notice the scented flowers - less than 2 mm across - that can appear March-November in response to rain. The edible red-turning-black fruit soon follows and is loved by birds. Because it provides both food and shelter, Warnock



condalia is an excellent addition to a wildlife garden but may be hard to find commercially except in native plant nurseries.

<sup>1</sup> [Tropicos](#) is the source of the currently accepted scientific name.

<sup>2</sup> var. *kearneyana* is found in the Sonoran Desert. Var. *warnockii* is found in the Chihuahuan Desert.

<sup>3</sup> Warnock condalia leaves are “ob lanceolate to elliptic to obovate or occasionally spatulate”.

*Left: a short branch showing small clusters of leaves and the sharp, red terminal thorn; the complex, crossing branching of Warnock condalia; the underside of a leaf showing the swollen, raised veins. Each leaf is no more than 8 mm long and 2 mm wide.*

*Right: flowers and fruit. Flower photo by RiesLindley, found on <http://swbiodiversity.org/seinet/imagelib/imgdetails.php?imgid=216445>*

