

Fouquieria columnaris

[Synonyms : *Idria columnaris*]

BOOJUM TREE is a succulent tree-like plant. Unique to the Baja deserts of California in the southern United States, it has a green trunk tapering to an extremely thin top (like an inverted carrot) and greenish-yellow flowers.

It is also known as Boogum tree, and Telegraph pole plant.

The trunk and any side branches are densely covered with very short, thorny branches (leafless in the dry season). During arid periods as its massive amount of stored water reduces the trunk shrinks and can bend over to form an arch – even rooting the tip in the ground.

Columnaris is derived from Latin *columna* (pillar, pole, column) meaning ‘columnar’ with reference to the form of a tree.

The plant was christened with the common name Boojum tree by a respected desert ecologist Godfrey Sykes (and recalls a reference to the creature in *The Hunting of the Snark* by the English author Lewis Carroll (1832-1898).

.....beware of the day,
If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish away,
And never be met with again!”)

Older trees that can have hollow bases in which bees often nest and these cavities are large enough in some instances for the bees to produce as much as 100 lb. of honey. The honey was collected and sold by local American Indian tribes – other than the Seri tribe who were convinced that the tree was of such ill omen that they destroyed any within range of their homes.

Boojum forests change little in even ten years as their growth is extremely slow and rodents eat nearly all the seeds. As a result most of the trees appear to be of similar age. This seems to be explained for some authorities by the likelihood that seeds only manage to germinate in any significant numbers when the rodent population has been drastically depleted – a relatively rare event.