



A delicate predator

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In the searing dry heat of the Cabral Hills in Minas Gerais, a thin stalk with transparent purple flowers pokes out of the white sand. The sight is poetic, but *Philcoxia minensis* must resort to trickery to survive. One of these tricks is to keep its leaves buried and protected from the sun, which nevertheless reaches them in sufficient amounts for photosynthesis to occur. A second trick, confirmed by ecologist Rafael Oliveira and his student Caio Pereira, is to attract underground worms that can serve as a food supplement in the poor soil. Digestion is undertaken using phosphates secreted from the plant's glands, which can be observed under a scanning electron microscope in the photograph on the left.

*Photo sent by Rafael Oliveira
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