



Maerua sebrabergensis (Capparaceae), a new species from Namibia

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Abstract

Maerua sebrabergensis, here described as a new species, has a restricted range and is only known from the Zebra Mountains within the Kaokoveld Centre of Endemism, northwestern Namibia. Diagnostic characters for *M. sebrabergensis* include a geoxylic suffrutescent habit (rarely a small tree), simple, alternate leaves, petaliferous flowers with the disc not or only slightly produced and smooth, cylindrical, slightly torulose fruit. A comparison of some of the more prominent morphological features to differentiate between *M. sebrabergensis* and its possible nearest relative, *M. parvifolia*, are provided.

Introduction

At present twelve described species of *Maerua* Forsskål (1775: 104) are recognized in the *Flora of southern Africa* region, six of which occur in Namibia (Germishuizen & Meyer 2003, Swanepoel 2006). One of these, *Maerua kaokoensis* Swanepoel (2006: 81), is endemic to the Kaokoveld Centre of Endemism, a biogeographical region rich in restricted-range plants and animals in northwestern Namibia and adjacent southwestern Angola (Van Wyk & Smith 2001, Swanepoel 2006). In this contribution, yet another new species of *Maerua* confined to the Kaokoveld Centre is described. During a botanical expedition to the remote Zebra Mountains in September 2012, the author encountered an unfamiliar *Maerua* with cylindrical, slightly torulose fruit and a habit ranging from a woody subshrub with shoots ascending from underground runners, to rarely with a ramet developing into a small tree. The plants were in flower, enabling the material to be collected on which this description is based. The new species seems to be closely related to *M. parvifolia* Pax in Engler (1894: 135) due to similarities in leaf and flower morphology. In the field (at least in southern Africa), however, *M. sebrabergensis* is quite distinct because of its thin stems arising from underground runners (Figure 1), a habit unlike that of any other member of *Maerua* in southern Africa. A study of the *Maerua* holdings in PRE and WIND revealed no earlier collections of the new species.

Taxonomic treatment

Maerua sebrabergensis Swanepoel, *sp. nov.* (Figs. 1 & 2)

A geoxylic suffrutex ± 1 m tall (rarely up to 2 m tall) related to *M. parvifolia*, from which it differs in having branches that are not rigid (vs. rigid), not spinescent (vs. spinescent), with dark brown, reddish brown or grey bark (vs. white or grey bark), the leaves alternate (vs. alternate or fasciculate), the lamina usually larger, 8–110 × 3–55 mm (vs. smaller, 4–30 × 1–15 mm), narrowly obovate, oblanceolate, obcordate or elliptic (vs. obovate-oblong or oblong-elliptic), glabrous (vs. pubescent, papillose), the inflorescences few-flowered corymbose racemes (vs. flowers solitary or paired), the floral disc margin entire, sinuate or with concavities opposite petal bases (vs. entire or denticulate), the sepals and petals consistently 4 (vs. sepals 3–5, petals 0–4), stamens 46–66 (vs. 15–21) per flower, the ovary cylindrical (vs. ellipsoid), the fruit cylindrical, slightly torulose (vs. cylindrical, torulose or moniliform).

Type:—NAMIBIA. Kunene Region: Zebra Mountains, 4 km northwest of Okaoraore, 1713BC, 1320 m, 30 September 2012, *Swanepoel 320* (holotype WIND!; isotype PRE!).