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Notes on African plants

VARIOUS AUTHORS

EUPHORBIACEAE

EXCOECARIA MADAGASCARIENSIS; A FIRST RECORD FOR THE *FLORA OF SOUTHERN AFRICA* REGION

While collecting specimens for the compilation of the *Tree atlas of Swaziland*, an unknown plant was collected by P. Loffler & L. Loffler in the Lubombo Mts near the Mozambique border. A literature search led to the specimen's tentative identity as *Excoecaria madagascariensis* (Baill.) Müll.Arg (1866). Since the Swaziland locality was so far distant from its nearest locality in Chirinda Forest, Zimbabwe, the site was re-visited in November 2002. Despite intensive searching of the area, only a single specimen of *Excoecaria* was found, although not the same as the original plant, which was not re-located. However, it's identity was undisputed, the new glossy red leaves which gives it the Zimbabwean common name of 'red-ears' being conspicuous. The plant was in both flower and fruit (Figure 1A, B).

Described from Madagascar, *E. madagascariensis* also occurs in Somalia (Thulin 1993), the coastal forests of Kenya and isolated inland forests in Tanzania (Radcliffe-Smith 1987). A disjunct locality is represented by its occurrence as a fairly common understorey species in Chirinda Forest in southeastern Zimbabwe. The new locality extends its distribution by almost 700 km and represents a further considerable disjunction for the species, as well as a new record for the *Flora of southern Africa* region.

The habitat in which the *Excoecaria* occurs in the Lubombo Mountains, is in dry, evergreen forest situated on the floor of a valley near the Mtibhlati River at an altitude of 240 m a.s.l. The canopy is dominated by *Atalaya alata* (Sapindaceae), *Balanites maughamii* (Balanitaceae), *Chionanthus foveolatus* subsp. *foveolatus* (Oleaceae), *Ficus polita*, *F. petersii* (Moraceae), *Homalium dentatum* (Flacourtiaceae), *Margaritaria discoidea* subsp. *fagifolia*, *Spirostachys africana* (Euphorbiaceae), *Strychnos usambarensis*, *S. gerrardii* (Strychnaceae) and *Wrightia natalensis* (Apocynaceae). Understorey small trees and shrubs include *Diospyros natalensis* subsp. *nummularia* (Ebenaceae), *Erythroxylum emarginatum* (Erythroxylaceae), *Hyperacanthus amoenus* (Rubiaceae), *Salacia leptoclada* (Celastraceae), *Teclea gerrardii* (Rutaceae), *Tinnea barbata* (Lamiaceae) and *Uvaria lucida* (Annonaceae). A herb layer is almost absent.

The immediate area in which the *E. madagascariensis* grows is severely threatened by the uncontrolled spread of alien invader plants, particularly *Melia azederach* and *Chromolaena odorata*, both of which form pure stands along the nearby flood-damaged river. Despite being in relatively undisturbed climax forest, the entire area around the single *Excoecaria* plant was dotted with small *Melia* seedlings. Further down the river the riverine vegetation and adjacent forest is being cleared for cultivation, a process which may well reach the *Excoecaria* site. In addition, certain trees (notably *Wrightia natalensis*) are being felled either for medicinal plant material or construction purposes. In view of the apparent extreme rarity of this plant, *Excoecaria madagascariensis* must be regarded as critically threatened in Swaziland.

Excoecaria madagascariensis *(Baill.) Müll.Arg.* in DC., Prodromus systematis naturalis regni vegetabilis 15,2: 1219 (1866); Radcl.-Sm.: 383, t. 72 (1987); Thulin: 306, t. 176 E–G (1993); Radcl.-Sm.: 316 (1996); M. Coates Palgrave: 518 (2002). *Stillingia madagascariensis* Baill.: 522 (1858). *Spirostachys madagascariensis* Baill.: t. 8/19, 21 (1858). *Sapium madagascariensis* (Baill.) Prain: 1010 (1913), non Pax (1890); Brenan: 226 (1949). Type: Madagascar, Nosy Bé (Nossi Be), *Perville 475* (P, holo., G, K).

Excoecaria sylvestris S.Moore in Rendle et al.: 204 (1911). Syntypes: Zimbabwe, Chipinge Dist., Chirinda Forest, 31 Jan. 1906, *Swynnerton 72* (BM, K, SRGH) & Oct 1908, *Swynnerton 72a* (BM).

SWAZILAND.—2632 (Bela Vista) Lubombo Mts, Siteki Dist., Mtibhlati/Mtibalati River, 26°33'13"S, 32°06'22"E, 240 m, 22 Nov. 2002, *Burrows & Loffler 7893* (Buffelskloof Herb., PRE, SDNH).

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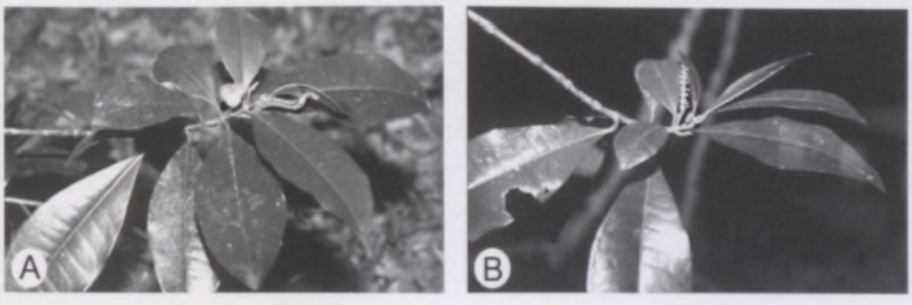

FIGURE 1.—*Excoecaria madagascariensis*, *Burrows & Loffler 7893*: A, fruiting branch; B, inflorescence.

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J.E. BURROWS*, S.M. BURROWS*, P. LOFFLER+ & L. LOFFLER+

* Buffelskloof Herbarium, P.O. Box 710, 1120 Lydenburg, South Africa.
+ P.O. Box 764, Mbabane H100, Swaziland.

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