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Notes on African plants

VARIOUS AUTHORS

CONVOLVULACEAE

NOTES ON *DICHONDRA* AND *XENOSTEGIA* IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Dichondra micrantha

In the revision of the South African Convolvulaceae by Meeuse (1957), the name *Dichondra repens* J.R. & G.Forst. (1776) is accepted for the only species of the genus *Dichondra* occurring in the region. This name is also accepted by Verdcourt (1963) for tropical East Africa, by Gonçalves (1987) for the *Flora zambesiaca* region, by Lejoly & Lisowski (1993) for Central Africa and by Welman (1993) for southern Africa, as well as by various other authors in publications dealing with the Convolvulaceae or the weeds in Africa south of the Sahara.

In South Africa this small procumbent, creeping herb is often cultivated as a ground cover or soil binder and sold under various names e.g. dewdrop lawn, wonder lawn. It grows as a weed in moist places in grassland and in cultivated and other disturbed areas and is recorded from isolated localities in mainly the eastern and northern parts of South Africa; so far there are no records in PRE from Swaziland.

Tharp & Johnston (1961) indicated that *D. repens* is endemic to Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand and that records from other areas under this name belong to various other species, chiefly *D. micrantha* Urban. Lawalree (1970) showed that the species that is widespread throughout the warmer regions of both hemispheres, is actually *D. micrantha* Urban which is accidentally or voluntarily spread by man as a weed or horticultural subject. He listed two important differences between the two species. In *D. micrantha* the peduncle is 3–20 mm long and recurved at maturity; the sepals are rounded or obtuse, shorter than 2.5 mm and shorter than the fruit. In *D. repens* the peduncle is 10–40 mm long and remains erect; the sepals are acute-acuminate, up to 5 mm long and longer than the fruit.

Bailey & Bailey (1977) accepted the name *D. micrantha* for the commonly cultivated *Dichondra*, although the name *D. repens* is still used in the horticultural trade. Forde (1978) proved that the species cultivated in lawns in New Zealand is *D. micrantha*. She pointed out that it differs from the native *D. repens* by the virtually glabrous upper leaf surfaces, the appressed silky pubescence below, the short-stalked flowers with violet anthers, the narrow pointed corolla lobes and the fruits greatly exceeding the calyx at maturity. The abundant and usually self-pollinated flowers are mostly hidden below the leaves on very short peduncles, which later recurve almost to bury the swollen indehiscent fruits.

Austin (1998) reported that Sebsebe Demissew and Austin investigated specimens of *Dichondra* from Africa and compared them with lawn seed sold by American companies. It was found that the commercial plants as well as all African specimens are *D. micrantha*. He pointed out that only two species of *Dichondra* are native to the Old World and they both occur in New Zealand and Australia. All other species of *Dichondra* are indigenous to the New World. *D. micrantha* is probably originally from North America, though the type was collected in Cuba where apparently it was already naturalised. It has been cultivated and distributed by man for the past 200 years and as a result is now widespread in both hemispheres, particularly in the warmer regions. It is used as a herbal medicine in China, presumably because of its resemblance to the medicinal *Centella asiatica* (L.) Urban (Apiaceae).

Dichondra in southern Africa should be listed as follows:

Dichondra micrantha *Urban* in Symbolae Antillanae 9: 243 (1924). Type: Cuba, Oriente province, Taco Bay, *E.L.Ekman 3851a* (S, holo.; B?, iso.).

D. repens auctt., non J.R. & G.Forst.: 40, t. 20 (1776).

Xenostegia tridentata subsp. *angustifolia*

In an article by Meeuse & Welman in *Bothalia* (1996), Meeuse published the combination *Xenostegia tridentata* (L.) Austin & Staples subsp. *angustifolia* (Jacq.) A.Meeuse. This was superfluous as this combination had previously been published by Lejoly & Lisowski in 1993.

The correct author citation is as follows:

Xenostegia tridentata (L.) *Austin & Staples* subsp. **angustifolia** (*Jacq.*) *Lejoly & Lisowski* in Fragmenta Floristica et Geobotanica 38: 379 (1993).

Ipomoea angustifolia Jacq.: 367 (1789). Iconotype: Jacq., Icones plantarum rariorum 2: 10, t. 317 (1786–1793), based on a specimen from Guinee.

Lejoly & Lisowski (1993) also published the new combination of another subspecies of *X. tridentata* namely subsp. *alatipes* (Dammer) Lejoly & Lisowski. This subspecies from tropical Africa has so far not been recorded for southern Africa.

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