

MELIACEAE

TURRAEA PULCHELLA REDISCOVERED

The first and previously only collections of *Turraea pulchella* (Harms) Pennington were made by Alice M. Pegler in the Kentani District, Transkei, between April 1900 and October 1913. Originally described by Harms (1917) as the sole member of the genus *Nurmonia*, it was transferred to *Turraea* L. by Pennington & Styles (1975). As more than 70 years have passed without recollections, the species had been considered to be either extremely rare or extinct.

On September 17, 1987, a few plants of *T. pulchella* were found on the Matabetule Plateau \pm 20 km northwest of Durban during a plant collecting trip organized by staff of the Natal Herbarium. During several subsequent visits to the area, *T. pulchella* was found to be locally abundant, particularly in heavily grazed grassland burnt in July/August. The plants had prominent, perennial rootstocks 80–200 mm long, \pm prostrate to spreading annual shoots and pure white flowers with a singular spicy fragrance.

The vegetation of the Matabetule Plateau is a mosaic of *Aristida junciformis* Trin. & Rupr. subsp. *junciformis* grassland and bush clumps associated with termitaria. Prominent among the trees are *Syzygium cordatum* Hochst., *Spirostachys africana* Sond., *Combretum molle* R. Br. ex G. Don and *Faurea saligna* Harv. Although many plants of *T. pulchella* grow in open grassland, they also tend to be associated with the isolated low-growing woody shrublets scattered between bush clumps—particularly geoxylic suffrutex forms of *Faurea saligna* and *Sclerocarya birrea* (A. Rich.) Hochst. subsp. *caffra* (Sond.) Kokwaro.

The soils on the plateau are very sandy, light grey to reddish and derived from Natal Group Sandstone (formerly known as Table Mountain Sandstone). Fortunately the Matabetule Plateau (which is in KwaZulu) is earmarked as a nature reserve and will form part of the Durban Metropolitan Open Space System (M.O.S.S.).

In its subherbaceous suffrutescent habit *T. pulchella* is very different from most other members of the genus. A rather similar habit is shown by *T. streyi* F. White & B. T. Styles, described in 1986, another rare species known from only two localities in Natal. Subsequent to the rediscovery of *T. pulchella*, several plants of *T. streyi* were relocated at the type locality near St. Michael's-on-Sea. Detailed studies on these two interesting species can now be undertaken to elucidate aspects of their taxonomy, biology and ecology.

VOUCHER SPECIMENS

NATAL.—2930 (Pietermaritzburg): Matabetule Plateau, \pm 20 km NW of Durban (—DB). *Van Wyk 8141, 8238* (PRU); *Williams 36, 84* (NH).

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