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A new species of *Monechma* (Acanthaceae) from South West Africa/Namibia

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Monechma callothamnum J. Munday, a new species from southern South West Africa/Namibia, is described. It is distinguished by its glabrescent leaves, hair-lined fissures on the stem and large bud-sheathing bracteoles. Distinguishing characteristics of the species are illustrated and a distribution map is given.

Monechma callothamnum J. Munday, 'n nuwe spesie uit suidelike Suid-Wes Afrika/Namibië word beskryf. Dit word uitgeken deur sy haarlose blare, harige stingelgroewe en groot botselomsluitende skutblare. Onderskeidende kenmerke word geïllustreer en 'n verspreidingskaart word verskaf.

Keywords: Acanthaceae, *Monechma*, taxonomy

Introduction

During the course of studies in the genus *Monechma* Hochst. several undescribed species have been found. One of them is described here and its relationship with closely related species examined.

Monechma callothamnum *J. Munday,* sp. nov., *M. mollissimo* (Nees) P.G. Meyer affinis sed foliis subglabris caulibus tomentellis fissuris pilis inclusis bracteolis magnis alabastrum includentibus bene distincta.

TYPUS. — Namibia—**2717** (Chamaites): Bethanie district, Zaracheibis, *Merxmuller & Giess 28867* (PRE, holotypus; WIND, isotypus).

Branched shrub up to 1,20 m high. Branches more or less terete, simple or branched, about 5 mm thick, slightly swollen at nodes, internodes up to 25 mm long, yellow-green or brown with numerous hair-lined longitudinal fissures and a dense indumentum of short straight hairs. *Leaves* petiolate, crowded, fairly hard, blades usually elliptic but also ovate or obovate, up to 35(40) × 19 mm, obtuse, often with a small point, or acute, tapering or slightly rounded at base, entire, minutely hairy when young becoming glabrous at maturity, slightly rough to the touch due to presence of numerous large cystoliths which are arranged parallel with midrib, 3 or 5 nerves prominent and arching from base, or only midrib visible; petiole up to 5 mm long, often widened at base. *Flowers* axillary, solitary, subsessile, borne towards ends of branches. *Bracteole* large, elliptic or ovate, up to 18 × 7 mm, enclosing bud, glabrous, faintly 3- or 5-nerved or nerves indistinct. *Calyx* unequally 5-lobed, glabrous, adaxial lobe widest, ovate, 4 × 1,5 mm, emarginate at apex, other lobes elliptic, obtuse. *Corolla* 2-lipped, white, 17 mm long, hairy and delicately glandular on outside, upper lip hooded, bifid at apex, lower lip 3-lobed, prominently veined, base of tube with 2 small pouches surmounted by hairy swellings (? staminodes) on adaxial side, and nectar pouch 1,5 × 2 mm, with short hairs inside the rim on abaxial side. *Stamens* 2, filaments hairy at base. *Ovary* glabrous, surrounded by a disc at base, bilocular, ovules in each locule 2, arranged one above the other. *Capsule* 9,5 mm long (immature), glabrous with a few apical hairs. *Seeds* by abortion 2, roundish, 3 × 2,5 mm, flattened but convex on back, brown with dark brown specks (Figures 1 & 2).

Distribution

The species has only been recorded from the Witputz-Fish River area of southern Namibia (Figure 3). The earliest collection that has been seen is that of P. Range, collected in August 1909. The writing on the label is illegible and neither the number nor the precise locality is known with any degree of certainty. More recent collections have been made by H. & E. Walter (1956), Merxmuller & Giess (1963 & 1972) and W. Giess (1976), but the species needs to be further collected in order to record its distribution with greater accuracy. Unfortunately, as with so many species of *Monechma* in southern Africa, it inhabits a most desolate, arid area which is both difficult to reach and sparsely inhabited.

Discussion

M. callothamnum has a distinctive appearance which stems from its curious lack of leaf indumentum and this separates it from *M. mollissimum*, its nearest relative. The leaves, though glabrous, are slightly rough to the touch due to the presence of numerous cystoliths that are arranged parallel to and often over the veins. There is a very uniform and dense stem covering of minute, straight hairs. The same hairs are found lining the numerous longitudinal fissures that occur on the stem. Together with this distinctive indumentum, the dried plants also have a characteristic bright, yellow-green colour. This colour is found very rarely in *M. mollissimum* but is not then coupled with a lack of hairs on the leaves. Other characters which separate *M. callothamnum* from *M. mollissimum* are the larger, broadly elliptic or obovate acute bracteoles, 16 × 6 mm, which sheath the bud and the broadly elliptic or ovate calyx lobes, 5 × *ca.* 2 mm.

In spite of its preferred habitat, *M. callothamnum* has an attractive appearance, being smooth, bright green and often robust with relatively large white flowers, in a genus where many of the representatives are hairy, small and stunted. The specific epithet *callothamnum* (beautiful shrub) alludes to this appearance.

Specimens examined

Namibia—**2716** (Witputz): South of Swartpunt (– BC), *Merxmuller & Giess 3174* (WIND)

– **2717** (Chamaites): Farm Hope (– AD), *W. Giess 14604*

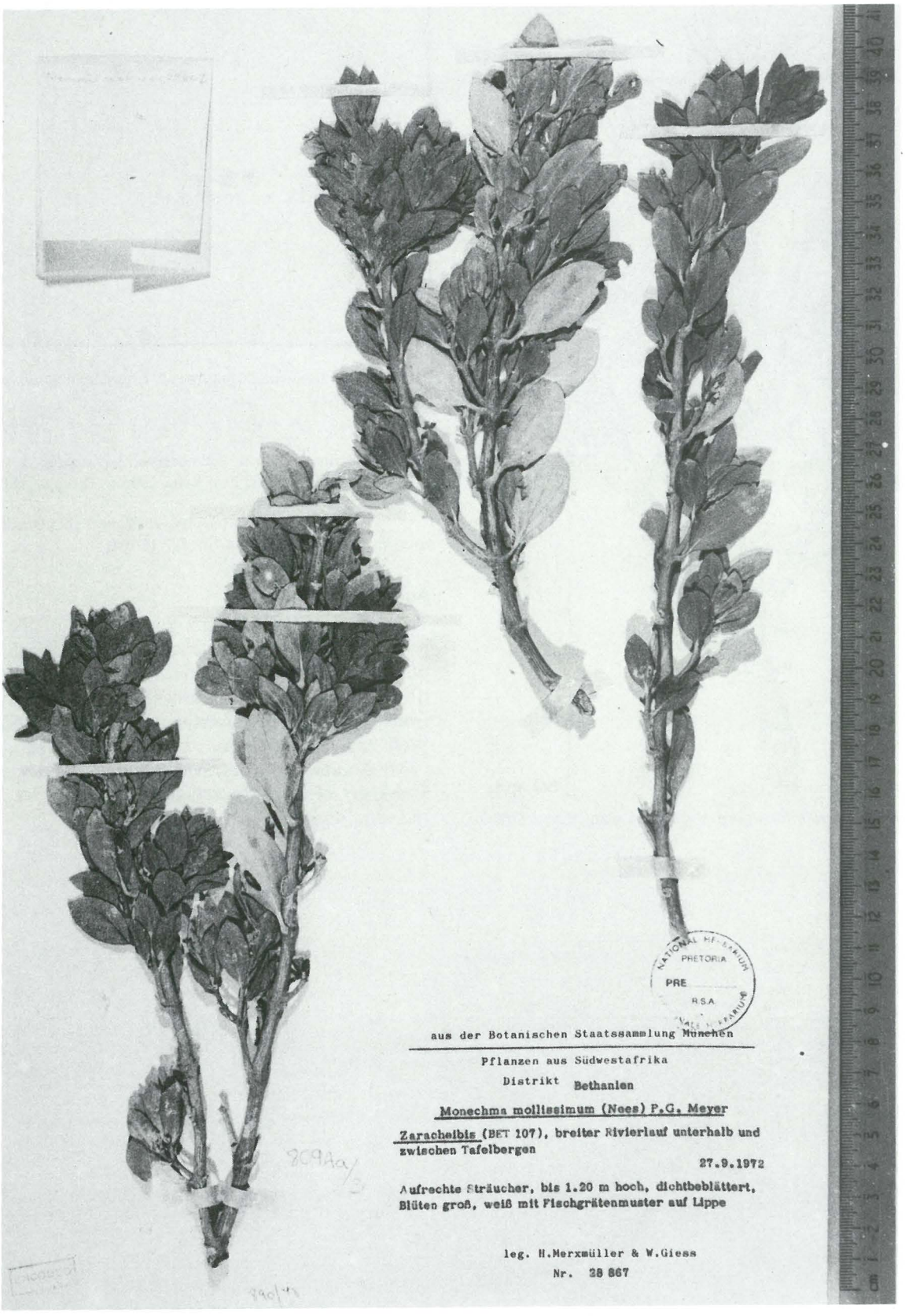

Figure 1 Holotype of *Monechma callothamnum* (*Merxmuller & Giess 28867*).

Figure 2 *Monechma callothamnum*. Portion of plant (*Giess 14604*).

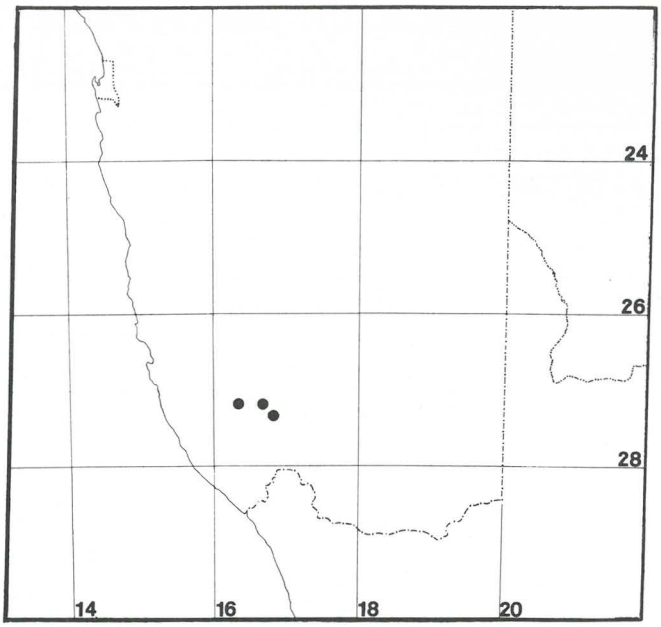

Figure 3 The known distribution of *Monechma callothamnum*.

(WIND); Bethanie district, Zaracheibis, *Merxmuller & Giess 28867* (PRE, holo; WIND); Nr. Fish River Canyon camp (–DA), *H. & E. Walter 2293* (WIND)

—Without precise locality, *P. Range*, number illegible, but given as *707* (BOL) and *717* or *727* (SAM)

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