

## Book Review

### Grasses of Namibia

**Müller, M.A.N. (revised and updated by van Eck, J.) 2007**

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Towards the end of the last millennium when Müller's 1984 field guide, *Grasses of South West Africa/Namibia*, became sold out, students started relying on South African field guides. This coincided roughly with the untimely death of Mike Müller in a car accident. The void led to frequent misidentification of Namibian grasses as South African ones, some of which do not even occur in Namibia. The void has at last thankfully been filled with the re-publication of Müller's field guide, as revised by Johan van Eck with the help of some of his colleagues at the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI).

The original guide had 112 entries, mostly of individual species with a few sub-species and varieties. The revised guide has 142 entries, each with the names, description, discussion and distribution map on one page, and line drawings on the opposite page. The order of entries has been changed from purely alphabetical to inflorescence type followed by alphabetical. Icons have been added to show inflorescence type, grazing value and veld condition that the species is normally associated with. There is also an icon for endemic species, although it only applies to three entries, namely *Brachiaria schoenfelderi*, *Eragrostis omahekensis* and *Stipagrostis damarensis*. Namibian languages for common names of grasses have increased from three to eleven, while the derivation of the scientific names from Latin, Greek or Arabic is given if known.

The guide still appears in A5 size, making it convenient for taking into the field, more so that the revised guide is thinner, despite having 32 more pages. The advances in publishing are also apparent from the good quality of the print and the laminated soft cover. The original guide had an index for the scientific names and one for common names for each of English, Afrikaans and German. The revised guide has only one index, which makes it easier to use. Scientific names can be recognised by their italics, while current scientific names stand out in bold. Some old names that appeared in the original guide have been omitted from the revised

guide, such as *Cymbopogon plurinodis* and *Pseudobrachiaria deflexa*, the latter of which was actually the current name given in the original guide. These omissions might make it slightly more difficult to keep track of the frequent changes in plant names that taxonomists seem to enjoy. Some current names of species that appeared in the original guide are also absent from the revised guide. For example, the entry on *Bothriochloa radicans* only mentions “all three *Bothriochloa* species occur in Namibia” without naming the other two. The larger number of Namibian grasses not appearing in the guide, although less abundant than those in the guide, will still result in some misidentifications. Readers requiring a complete check list of all grass taxa occurring in Namibia are advised, in the guide’s Introduction, “to consult Klaasen & Craven (2003) and Fish (2003)”. It would have been helpful if more species had been listed in the revised guide, under entries for species most similar to them.

The revised guide did not include the map, photographs and descriptions of the preliminary vegetation types of Namibia as proposed by Giess in 1971. The reason given in the Introduction of the revised guide is that “Intensive research work is currently being undertaken to more accurately delimit and describe vegetation types for Namibia”. The black and white photographs that accompanied just less than half of the entries in the original guide have not been included in the revised guide. This is not much of a loss as they had not been very useful. The excellent line drawings by the late Blythe Loutit are much more useful, as are those drawn by Wilma Roux and Wendy Hitchcock for the 30 additional entries in the revised guide. The distribution maps are presumably based on records from specimens kept at the NBRI, so are likely to be more restricted than actual distributions.

The “updated and improved key” to the genera in the guide is said to be “based upon characteristics that can be distinguished with the naked eye”. However, a magnifying glass would be of help to distinguish, for example, whether a lemma has 5 awns that are smooth or 9 awns that are toothed or finely feathery. The glossary of botanical terms can be of help when using the key. The glossary in the revised guide has about twice as many entries as in the original guide.

The availability of the revised guide, at a very reasonable price of N\$60 if bought from the NBRI, is greatly welcomed by farmers and students alike. The incidence of misidentification of Namibian grasses as South African ones is bound to decline.

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