

Rhus acocksii (Anacardiaceae), yet another new endemic from the Mtamvuna area

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Rhus acocksii Moffett, a prostrate to scandent shrub or woody climber related to *R. chirindensis* Bak. f. and confined to the coastal platform of southern Natal and Pondoland is described. It differs from *R. chirindensis* in its habit and in having short recurved spines and smaller ovate leaflets.

Rhus acocksii Moffett, 'n platliggende tot klimmende struik of houtagtige klimplant wat tot die kusplato van Suid-Natal en Pondoland beperk is, word beskryf. Die habitus, teruggebuigde dorings en kleiner eievormige pinna's onderskei die spesie van die naverwante *R. chirindensis* Bak. f.

Keywords: Anacardiaceae, endemism, Mtamvuna, *Rhus*, taxonomy

Introduction

Through the efforts of that modern 'lynx-eyed' trio of Hugh Nicholson, Braam van Wyk and Tony Abbott, a number of new woody endemic species have recently been described from the gorge forests of the sandstone platform of southern Natal and Pondoland. These include species such as *Catha abbottii*, *Colubrina nicholsonii*, *Eugenia umtamvunensis*, *Maytenus abbottii*, *Maytenus oleosa*, *Rinorea domatiosa* and *Putterlickia retrospinosa* (van Wyk 1982, 1983, 1984; van Wyk & Schrire 1986; van Wyk & Archer 1987; van Wyk & Mostert 1987; van Wyk & Prins 1987).

Yet another new endemic species from this unique area, which might profitably be termed the Mtamvuna Centre, is *Rhus acocksii*. This hitherto undescribed species first came to my attention when studying the *Rhus* specimens in the National Herbarium (PRE) prior to embarking on a revision of the genus for the Flora of southern Africa. Among the *incertae* was an Acocks specimen (*Acocks 13250*) collected in January 1947 on the southern edge of the Msikaba gorge between Lusikisiki and Port Edward. The label is brief, merely stating 'Coastal forest; sprawling on rocks at margin, occasional'. It is however, significant that Acocks, who probably knew the South African flora better than anyone else, could not name it. The chances of it being an undescribed species were thus very good. Further unnamed material collected by Strey in 1966 and Nicholson in 1973 from the Mtamvuna and Izotsha area strengthened this view which was finally confirmed in January 1981 when Hugh Nicholson took me on a *Rhus* hunt to the Mtamvuna and surrounds. Besides collecting the rare *R. pondoensis* Schonl. in the Mtamvuna gorge, we found Acocks' *Rhus* near Izotsha Falls where it was growing with, among others, the closely related *R. chirindensis* Bak. f.

Description

Rhus acocksii Moffett sp. nov.

R. chirindensis Bak. f. affinis, sed differt habitu scandentes, spinis brevibus, recurvis, et foliis parvis ovatis.

TYPUS. — Transkei: southern edge of Msikaba Gorge, Lusikisiki District, 13 January 1947, *Acocks 13250* (PRE, holotypus).

A small, usually single-stemmed, dioecious, semi-evergreen prostrate to scandent shrub or woody climber with short, 5–25 mm long recurved spines on older stems and branches. *Bark* smooth, pale to chestnut-brown, surface of young branches striate, peeling in translucent strips. *Leaves* trifoliolate, petiolate; petioles slender, shallowly canaliculate, (4–)27(–46) mm long; leaflets membranaceous, dark green drying olive-brown, glabrous, concolorous, hypostomatous,

petiolulate; petiolules prominently canaliculate above, terminal (3–)6(–11) mm long, lateral (2–)3(–6) mm long; leaflet lamina ovate to elliptical, apex acuminate, often mucronulate, base cuneate to attenuate, margin entire, often slightly undulate, especially towards apex; venation pinnate klado-dromous (*sensu* Hickey 1973), veins slightly raised above, more prominent and paler below, secondaries 5–13, uniformly divergent at 50–60°, tertiaries reticulate, immersed; terminal leaflets (8–)45(–74) mm long, (5–)23(–34) mm wide, lateral leaflets (6–)35(–60) mm long, (4–)18(–40) mm wide. *Panicles* much branched, axillary and terminal, lower part of the axillary peduncles persisting as recurved spines when old; bracts minute, subulate. *Flowers* unisexual, minute, less than 2.5 mm wide; pedicels extremely slender, exceeding flowers in length; sepals 5, less than half the length of the petals, ovate, greenish-yellow; petals 5, ca. 1 mm long, ovate to somewhat rhombic, creamy white; central disc prominent, 10-crenate; male flowers with 5 stamens, female flowers with globoid ovary and 3 short filamentous styles. *Fruit* a globoid drupe, 6 × 5.5 mm–7 × 6 mm, green becoming shining dark red; stone discoid (Figure 1).

Distribution and habitat

Rhus acocksii occurs on the coastal platform from Oribi Gorge in southern Natal to the Ntsubane region just south of the Msikaba River in Transkei. It is always found growing among quartzitic rocks in the understory of forest margins along the upper edges of the riverine escarpments (Figure 2).

Discussion

Rhus acocksii is a shrub which is usually partly scandent with long shoots often straggling among other shrubs and maintaining its support by means of recurved spines, a feature unique among the old world species of *Rhus*. The presence of spines together with similar flowers, inflorescences, fruit, leaf texture and venation indicate a close affinity to the sympatric *R. chirindensis*, a taxon widespread in southern Africa. The latter species however, is generally a large erect tree in South Africa with long straight spines on the lower part of its stems. The petiolules of *R. acocksii* are significantly longer than those of *R. chirindensis* and the leaflet blades of the former are ovate rather than broadly elliptic-lanceolate as in *R. chirindensis*.

The leaves and branchlets of *R. acocksii* are also similar to herbarium material of *R. monticola* Meikle, a metre-high shrub occurring among rocks in grassveld and endemic to Mount Mlanje, Malawi. *R. monticola*, however, lacks spines and the leaflets have a more pronounced reticulate venation.

As it occurs in three nature reserves (Oribi Gorge, Mtamvuna and Mkambati) *Rhus acocksii* is considered adequately protected.

Specimens examined

—3030 (Port Shepstone): Hell's Gate, Oribi Gorge (—CA), *Balkwill* & *Cron* 285 (J, PRE); Hammerpoint Rocks, Oribi Gorge (—CA),

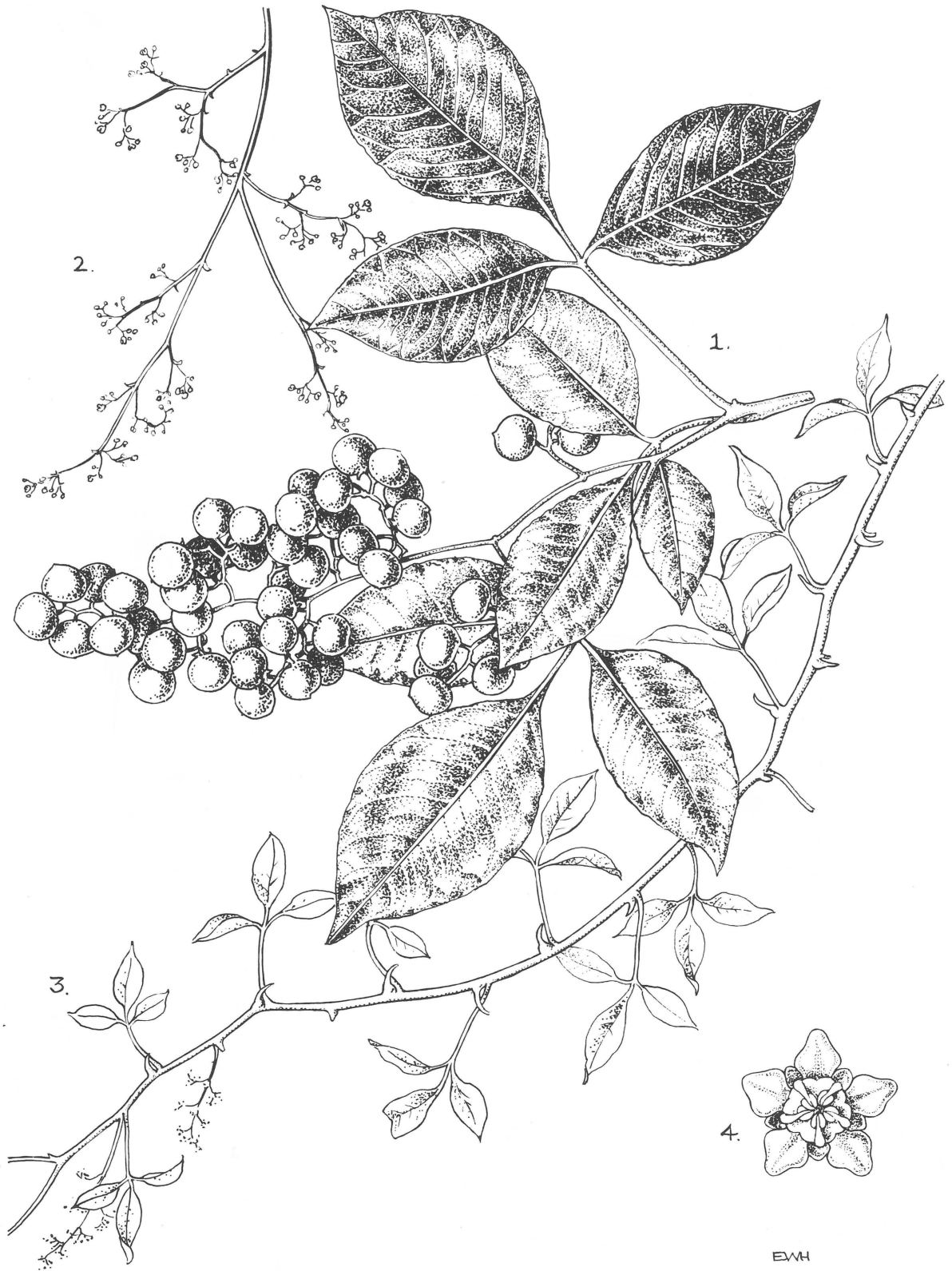


Figure 1 *Rhus acocksii*: 1. fruiting branchlet $\times 1$ (*Nicholson* 465); 2. male inflorescence $\times 1$; 3. climbing shoot $\times 1/3$; 4. male flower $\times 10$. 2, 3 & 4 (*Acocks* 13250).

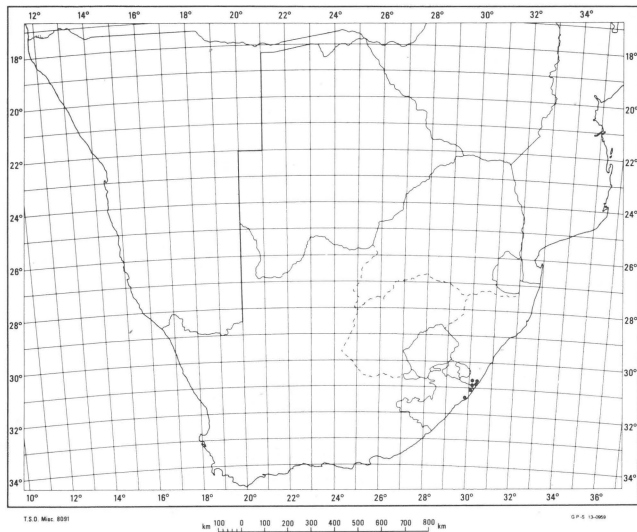


Figure 2 Distribution of *Rhus acocksii*.

Nicholson 1190 (PRE); Rossler's Gorge, Paddock (-CB), *Nicholson s.n.* (PRE); Beacon Hill Farm, near Port Edward (-CC), *Abbott 1491* (NH), *Nicholson 465* (PRE), *Strey 6531* (BR, K, NH, NU, PRE), *7204* (BR, K, NH, NU, PRE, S), *7204I* (NH, NU, PRE), *7204II* (NH); Mtamvuna Nature Reserve, amphitheatre (-CC), *van Wyk 5396* (PRE, PRU); Izotsha Falls, Twin Streams Estate, near Marburg (-CD), *Moffett 3122* (PRE), *Nicholson 1300* (PRE).

—3129 (Port St Johns): Msikaba Gorge, Lusikisiki District (-BD), *Acocks 13250* (PRE); Mkambati River, Mkambati Nature Reserve (-BD), *Schrire et al. 1810* (NH).

—3130 (Port Edward): Hazel Ridge, Mtamvuna Nature Reserve (-AA), *Nicholson s.n.* (PRE).

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