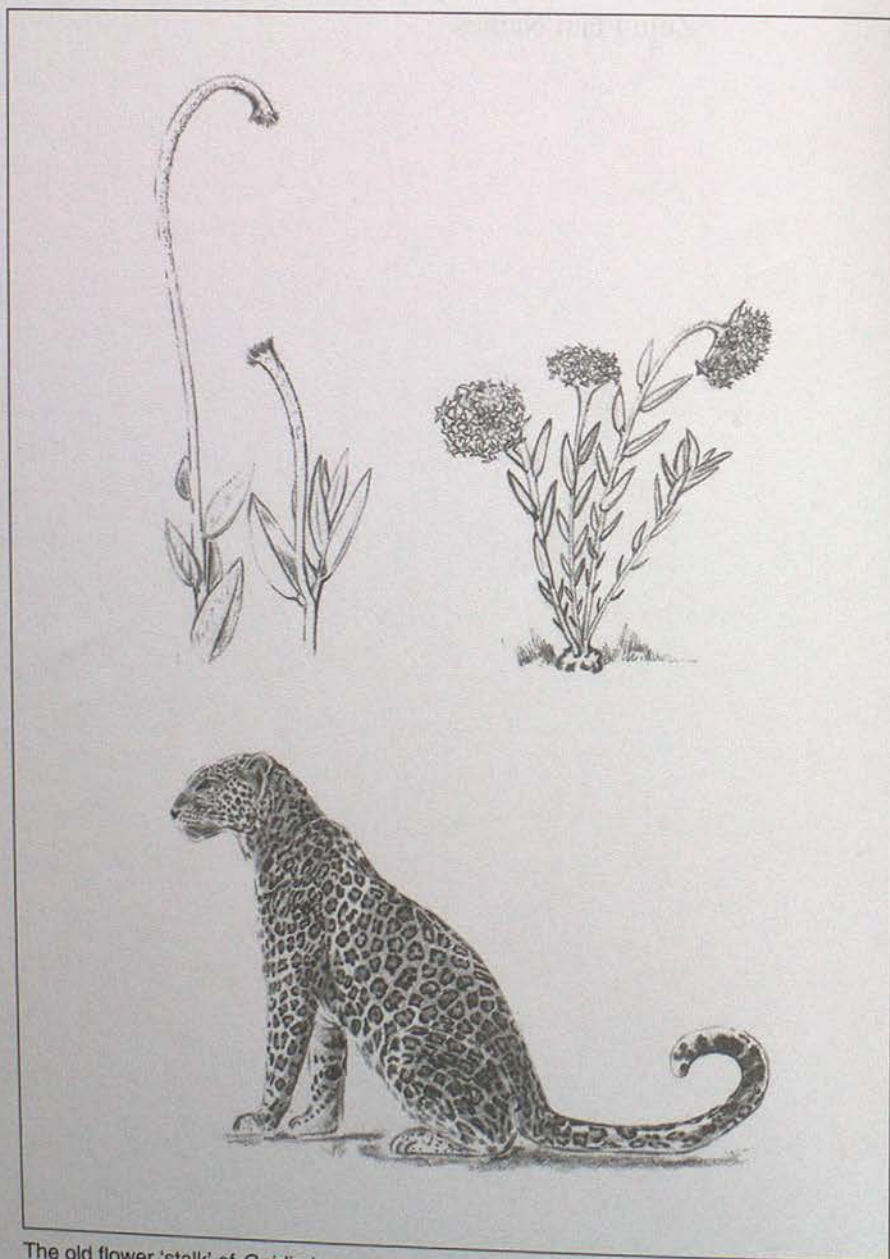
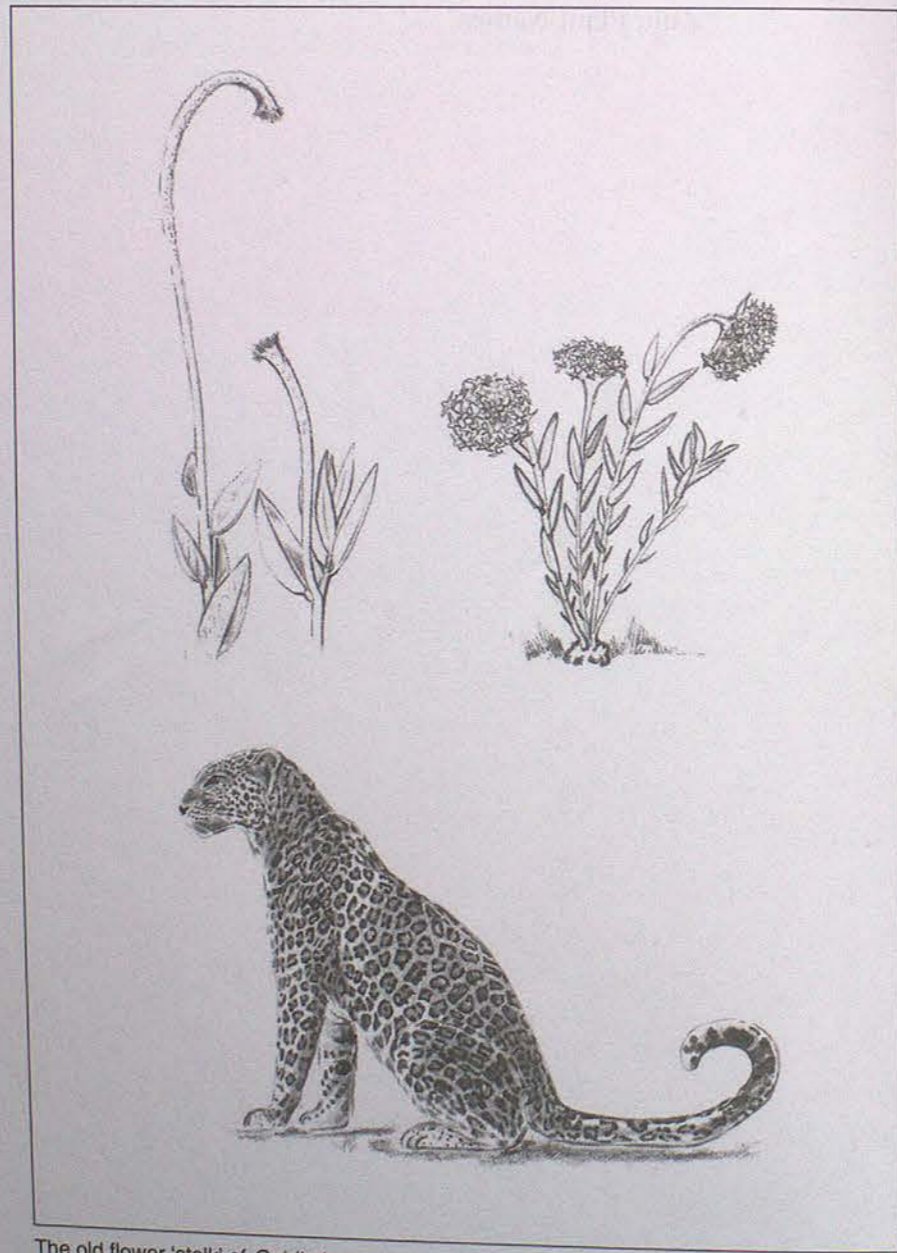


## Zulu Plant Names

Adrian Koopman



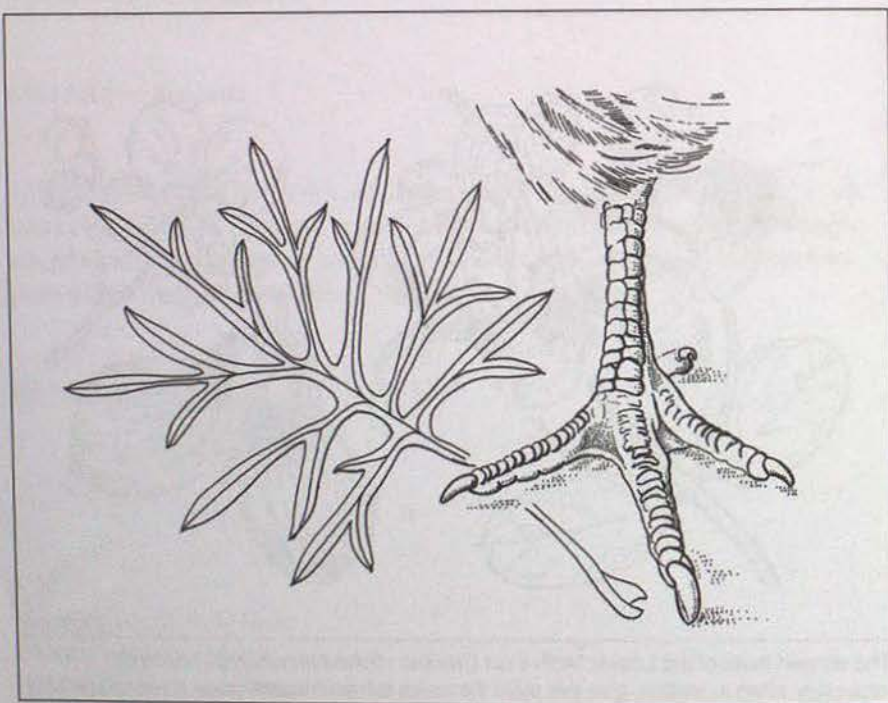
The old flower 'stalk' of *Gnidia kraussiana* looks like the tail of a leopard, hence its Zulu name **umsilawengwe** (leopard's tail) (drawing by Angela Beaumont).



The old flower 'stalk' of *Gnidia kraussiana* looks like the tail of a leopard, hence its Zulu name **umsilawengwe** (leopard's tail) (drawing by Angela Beaumont).

## Zulu Plant Names

Adrian Koopman



This drawing shows clearly why the Stalk-Flowered Pelargonium (*Pelargonium luridum*) has the Zulu name **unyawolwenkuku** (hen's foot) (see pages 77 and 137) (drawing by Angela Beaumont).

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## Explanatory preface

This is a book about the Zulu language. More specifically, it is a book about Zulu names for plants: trees, shrubs, herbs, grasses and so on. The emphasis throughout is on the relationship between the underlying meanings of the words that refer to plants, the plants themselves, and the ways in which they are both used and perceived in Zulu society. Many Zulu plant names do not have underlying meanings and thus little or nothing to say about the word-plant-culture interface. By and large these Zulu names have been left out of this book.

This is not a dictionary of Zulu plant names, nor is it a reference book of any kind. Although there is a strong focus on Zulu names, because this book deals with plants they are inevitably identified by their botanical names and, where relevant, names in English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa and so on. As much of my data came from collections of Zulu plant names that are 50 years old and older (often considerably older), many of the botanical names are out of date although every attempt has been made to provide the most recent version. In this book, a botanical name preceded by an asterisk indicates that the name given in the source has been superseded by a new name to be found in the list of synonyms after the bibliography. Thus an entry such as 'imfe: Sweetreed (\**Andropogon sorghum*)' indicates that *Andropogon sorghum* is no longer in current use. A check of *Andropogon sorghum* in the list of synonyms will show that this plant is now *Sorghum bicolor*.

At the time of writing (2011 to 2013) there was talk in the world of botany that some species of South African acacias would be reclassified in the genus *Vachellia*, so that *Acacia nilotica* would become *Vachellia nilotica*, *Acacia sieberiana* would become *Vachellia sieberiana*, and so on. As the proposed change was still being debated when this manuscript was nearing completion, it was decided to leave the several acacias in this book as they are. If the change goes ahead, the following species of *Acacia* would be affected: *A. ataxacantha*,

*A. goeringi*, *A. karroo*, *A. luederitzii* var. *retinens*, *A. natalitia*, *A. nilotica*, *A. robusta*, *A. sieberiana*, *A. swazica* and *A. xanthophloea*.

In the process of checking botanical names for both currency and accuracy, a number of errors have been discovered in the source books, particularly in Doke and Vilakazi's *Dictionary*. Rather than use the clumsy tag '[sic]' followed by a footnote giving the correct form, it was decided to leave such errors as given by the source, but put the correct version in square brackets after the erroneous form, with an equal sign, as in the following example:

"species of forest tree *Protorhus longifolius*" [= *longifolia*] (Doke and Vilakazi 1958: 320).

Although all botanical names have been checked, there will inevitably be some errors. They remain the responsibility of the author.

Following standard convention, all botanical names are given in italics. As this book is primarily about Zulu plant names, they have been marked by the use of bold characters. All words in languages other than English (Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa, etc.) are in italics and this includes Zulu words if they are not the names of plants. Thus statements such as 'The name **umafuthasimba** (*Kedrostis foetidissima*) is derived from *amafutha* (fat) and *isimba* (excrement)' are common. The symbol < indicates 'derived from' while > means 'from which is derived' or 'gives rise to'.

The sources quoted in this book use a wide variety of styles regarding capitals, hyphens and spaces in the rendering of vernacular plant names, and no attempt has been made to standardise them.

Finally, not every Zulu plant name in this book has been assigned to a particular species. Occasionally Bryant or Doke and Vilakazi have given a plant name in their respective dictionaries, glossing it as "species of straggling bush" or "species of large forest tree". If the plant name is of sufficient interest and has an underlying meaning relevant to the themes of this book, then that name has been included even if the botanical identity of the plant cannot be pinned down. Examples are **ukhasikhulu** (big leaf), which Doke and Vilakazi (1958: 383) gloss as "sp. of large-leaved shrub"; **ilalamanzini** (what lies in water) for "a species of tree growing near water" (44); and **umchaphamanzi** (the water-lapper) for an unidentified species of fruit tree growing near water (109).

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank Ndela kaBhekifa Ntshangase, a friend and a colleague for over 20 years in the discipline of isiZulu Studies on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of Natal, later the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I thank him for the years of wonderful discussions about the meanings of Zulu plant names, and the different ways in which plants are perceived and used in Zulu culture. He has shared freely his deep knowledge of Zulu culture and the natural world.

Then I would like to thank Noleen Turner (another isiZulu Studies colleague at the University of KwaZulu-Natal), Mkhhipheni Ngwenya (botanist at the KwaZulu-Natal Herbarium, based at the Botanical Gardens in Durban) and Elsa Pooley (well-known botanist and botanical author). All three read earlier drafts of the manuscript and made pertinent and useful suggestions.

A great deal of thanks go to Angela Beaumont (botanist and botanical artist attached to the Botany Department on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal). I thank Dr Beaumont for her painstaking checking of every botanical name in the manuscript, and for providing the correct versions for plant names no longer in current use. I thank her also for her fine colour illustrations in this book, for the black-and-white pencil sketches and for her contribution of botanical terms to the glossary. Thanks are also due to Dr Benny Bytebier, the Curator of the Bews Herbarium (NU) of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and to Mrs Alison Young of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Botanical Garden for allowing Dr Beaumont to consult the botanical material in their collections for her illustrations.

From the University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, I would like to thank Sally Hines (managing editor), Christopher Merrett (copy editor), Trish Comrie (typesetter) and Marise Bauer (cover designer) for their work in the editing and production of this book.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Jewel Koopman, for her help with the indexing, and for her encouragement and for her interest every time I brought her a new snippet of Zulu 'botanico-culture' to share.

### The tree with no name

Hiram Wild in *A Southern Rhodesian Botanical Dictionary of Native and English Plant Names* writes about the tree \**Schrebera mazoensis*, with the Shona name *muti-usinzita*:

The Native name means "the tree without a name", and has a special significance in that it was the tree under which the old Baroswe crowned their Mambos or kings (1952: 122).

It is not clear whether "the tree without a name" was a name for a single specimen of this species, or for the species as a whole. Wild also gives the Shona name *mutisi* for this tree. Keith Coates Palgrave suggests that "the tree without a name" refers to one single specimen:

One particular tree at Waddilove Mission in the Marandellas area in Rhodesia is called *muti-usina-zita*, meaning "tree without a name". The Rev. Brandon Graaf says that it is so named because it was thought not to occur elsewhere in that area and to have been introduced by the ancients who worked gold deposits there; it is also believed that it was through this specimen that God talked to his people in the days gone by. It should be noted that the name *muti-usina-zita* is also applied to *Cleistanthus schlechteri* but by the peoples in the Buhera district of Rhodesia (1977: 755).

While Coates Palgrave links the tree to the "ancients" and God talking to his people, and Wild links the tree to the crowning of kings, it is clear from both sources that this tree has a high symbolic and cultural importance among the community. In effect, while both naming and simultaneously not naming the



**thorn** (bot.) = a short or long, straight or curved, usually hard, pointed branch, e.g., species of *Acacia*, *Dalbergia armata*.

**toponym** (ling.) = place name, geographical name > 'toponymy', 'toponomastics'.

**tree diagram** (ling.) = a means of illustrating the structure of a sentence (sometimes a word) with a diagram showing the constituents of a sentence (or words) and the relationship between them. For example, a sentence may be divided between noun phrase and verb phrase at the first level of analysis and these may be broken down further as [preposition + noun + adjective] in the case of the noun phrase and [verb + object + adverb] in the verb phrase.

**var.** (bot.) = abbreviation of variety.

**variety** (bot.) = a level of classification within a species or sub-species. It refers to individuals within a population with one or two distinctive features, for example, leaf shape.

**v.l.** (ling.) = abbreviation for variant, from the Latin *vario lecto*.

## List of synonyms

*Acalypha villicaulis* > *Acalypha brachiata*  
*Adhatoda Andromeda* > *Duvernoia Andromeda*  
*Agapanthus umbellatus* > *Agapanthus africanus*  
*Albizia mossambicensis* Sim. > *Albizia versicolor*  
*Alchemilla vulgaris* > *Alchemilla xanthochlora*  
*Andropogon sorghum* > *Sorghum bicolor*  
*Anthericum elongatum* > *Trachyandra revoluta*  
*Anthericum humile* > *Anthericum angustifolium*  
*Aptenia cordifolia* > *Mesembryanthemum cordifolium*  
*Asclepias physocarpa* > *Gomphocarpus physocarpus*  
*Asparagus plumosus* > *Asparagus setaceus*  
*Asparagus sprengeri* > *Asparagus aethiopicus*  
*Aster muricatus* > *Felicia muricata*  
*Canthium mundianum* > *Afrocanthium mundianum*  
*Canthium obovatum* > *Psydrax obovata*  
*Cassia occidentalis* > *Senna occidentalis*  
*Cassinia phyllicifolia* > *Tenrhynea phyllicifolia*  
*Cassipourea gummiflua* var. *verticillata* > *Cassipourea gummiflua*  
*Cassipourea verticillata* > *Cassipourea gummiflua*  
*Chenopodium ambrosioides* > *Dysphania ambrosioides*  
*Chlorocodon whitei* > *Mondia whitei*  
*Cissus connivens* > *Cyphostemma natalitium*  
*Cissus lanigera* > *Cyphostemma lanigerum*  
*Clerodendrum glabrum* > *Volkameria glabra*  
*Coccinia palmata* > *Coccinia rehmannii*  
*Colpoon compressum* > *Osyris compressa*  
*Combretum glomeruliflorum* > *Combretum erythrophyllum*  
*Combretum suluense* > *Combretum collinum* subsp. *suluense*  
*Conopharyngia ventricosa* > *Tabernaemontana ventricosa*  
*Coronopsis didymos* > *Lepidium didymium*

*Crassula platyphylla* > *Crassula nudicaulis* var. *platyphylla*  
*Crassula turrata* > *Crassula capitella* subsp. *thyrsiflora*  
*Curtisia faginea* > *Curtisia dentata*  
*Cussonia umbellifera* > *Schefflera umbellifera*  
*Dicoma zeyheri* > *Macledium zeyheri*  
*Diospyros nummularia* > *Diospyros natalensis* subsp. *Nummularia*  
*Eclipta erecta* > *Eclipta prostrata*  
*Ekebergia velutina* > *Ekebergia benguelensis*  
*Elephantorrhiza burchellii* > *Elephantorrhiza elephantina*  
*Elionurus argenteus* > *Elionurus muticus*  
*Eriospermum abyssinicum* > *Eriospermum flagelliforme*  
*Euclea daphnoides* > *Euclea racemosa* subs. *daphnoides*  
*Euclea multiflora* > *Euclea natalensis* subsp. *angolensis*  
*Eulophia robusta* > *Eulophia livingstoneana*  
*Euphorbia pugniformis* > *Euphorbia procumbens*  
*Ficus hippopotami* > *Ficus trichopoda*  
*Ficus sonderi* > *Ficus glumosa*  
*Gardenia neuberia* > *Hyperacanthus amoenus*  
*Gasteria glabra* > *Gasteria carinata* var. *carinata*  
*Gnidia kraussii* > *Lasiosiphon kraussii*  
*Grumilea capensis* > *Psychotria capensis*  
*Harpochloa capensis* > *Harpochloa falx*  
*Helichrysum leiopodium* > *Helichrysum nudifolium*  
*Hippobromus alata* > *Hippobromus pauciflorus*  
*Homeria pallida* > *Moraea pallida*  
*Hypoxis latifolia* > *Hypoxis colchicifolia*  
*Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* > *Kalanchoe tetraphylla*  
*Lachnopylis floribunda* > *Nuxia floribunda*  
*Landolphia capensis* > *Ancylobothrys capensis*  
*Lantana rugosa* > *Buddleja salviifolia*  
*Lippia asperifolia* > *Phyla scaberrima*  
*Litanthus pusillus* > *Drimia uniflora*  
*Littonia modesta* > *Gloriosa modesta*  
*Maerua woodii* > *Bachmannia woodii*  
*Maesa rufescens* > *Maesa lanceolata* var. *rufescens*  
*Millettia sutherlandia* > *Lonchocarpus sutherlandii*  
*Moraea spathacea* > *Moraea spathulata*  
*Moraea spathulata* > *Moraea pallida*  
*Moschosma riparia* > *Tetradenia riparia*  
*Myrica serrata* > *Morella serrata*  
*Myrsine melanophloeos* > *Raphanea melanophloeos*

*Mystroxydon aethiopicum* > *Cassine aethiopica*  
*Oeceoclades mackenii* > *Oeceoclades maculata*  
*Oldenlandia decumbens* > *Oldenlandia affinis* subsp. *fugax*  
*Olea foveolata* > *Chionanthus foveolatus*  
*Olea laurifolia* > *Olea capensis*  
*Oncinotis inandensis* > *Oncinotis tenuiloba*  
*Ophiocaulon gummifera* > *Adenia gummifera*  
*Oxyanthus gerrardii* > *Oxyanthus speciosus* subsp. *gerrardii*  
*Pachystigma pygmaeum* > *Vangueria pygmaea*  
*Pavetta assimilis* > *Pavetta gardeniifolia*  
*Pelargonium aconitophyllum* > *Pelargonium luridum*  
*Penanisia variabilis* > *Penanisia prunelloides*  
*Phytolacca abyssinica* > *Phytolacca dodecandra*  
*Piliostigma thonningii* > *Bauhinia thonningii*  
*Piptadenia buchananii* > *Newtonia buchananii*  
*Plumbago capensis* > *Plumbago auriculata*  
*Podocarpus falcatus* > *Afrocarpus falcatus*  
*Popowia caffra* > *Monanthes caffra*  
*Protea hirta* > *Protea welwitschii*  
*Pygeum africanum* > *Prunus africana*  
*Ranunculus pinnatus* > *Ranunculus wallichianus*  
*Rauwolfia natalensis* > *Rauwolfia caffra*  
*Rhynchelytrum setifolium* > *Melinis nerviglumis*  
*Royena lucida* > *Diospyros whyteana*  
*Sapium ellipticum* > *Schirakiopsis elliptica*  
*Sapium integerrimum* > *Sclerocroton integerrimus*  
*Sapium reticulatum* > *Sclerocroton integerrimus*  
*Schizoglossum woodii* > *Aspidoglossum woodii*  
*Schotia transvaalensis* > *Schotia capitata*  
*Schrebera mazoensis* > *Schrebera alata*  
*Schrebera saundersiae* > *Schrebera alata*  
*Scilla nervosa* > *Merwillia nervosa*  
*Sclerocarya caffra* > *Sclerocarya birrea*  
*Senecio dieterlenii* > *Senecio rhomboideus*  
*Sonchus ecklonianus* > *Sonchus dregeanus*  
*Stangeria paradoxa* > *Stangeria eriopus*  
*Strelitzia augusta* > *Strelitzia alba*  
*Strychnos gerrardii* > *Strychnos madagascariensis*  
*Synadenium arborescens* > *Euphorbia cupularis*  
*Synadenium cupulare* > *Euphorbia cupularis*  
*Tapinanthus natalitius* > *Agelanthus natalitius*

*Tecomaria capensis* > *Tecoma capensis*  
*Testudinaria elephantipes* > *Dioscorea elephantipes*  
*Trema bracteolata* > *Trema orientalis*  
*Trichopteryx simplex* > *Loudetia simplex*  
*Urginea delagoensis* > *Drimia delagoensis*  
*Vellozia retinervis* > *Xerophyta retinervis*  
*Vernonia anisochaetoides* > *Distephanus anisochaetoides*  
*Vernonia hirsuta* > *Hilliardiella hirsuta*  
*Vernonia podocoma* > *Gymnanthemum myrianthum*  
*Vigna glabra* > *Vigna luteola*  
*Vigna triloba* > *Vigna unguiculata* subsp. *stenophylla*  
*Vitex wilmsii* > *Vitex obovata*  
*Warburgia breyeri* > *Warburgia salutaris*  
*Zornia tetraphylla* > *Zornia tetraphylla* var. *capensis*

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