

Newly described endemic tree from the Soutpansberg, Vhembe Biosphere Reserve.

Dr Norbert Hahn, SARChI Postdoctoral Research Fellow, recently published in the journal *Phytotaxa* a description of a proposed new *Senegalia* species (previously *Acacia*) endemic to the Soutpansberg. *Senegalia montis-salinarum* (the specific name meaning “salt-pan mountain”) is only known from two widely separated localities where it grows on rocky scree slopes along the hot, dry northern aspect of the mountain. Norbert Hahn, through some 20 years of botanising, has been instrumental to the recognition of the Soutpansberg as a centre of endemism and floristic diversity. This new species brings to 24 the number of endemic plants from the Soutpansberg (57 in the biosphere reserve) and to 594 the number of trees known to occur in the mountain and direct vicinity.

Morphologically most similar to *Senegalia burkei*, the Black Monkey Thorn or Swartapiesdoring, the new species differs by being multi-stemmed, having smaller flowers that produce a greater number of seeds and soft, almost semi-succulent wood that rapidly decays compared to the relatively hard wood of *S. burkei*.



Senegalia montis-salinarum in habitat on Soutpansberg northern foothills.

Inflorescence of *S. montis-salinarum*.

Described by the author as an “enigmatic tree” known to him since 1992 and which he loosely assigned to the *S. burkei* complex, the new description came about as part of his postdoctoral work revising the flora of the Soutpansberg region, the latest study following his PhD on the floristic diversity of the region and MSc on the endemic flora of the mountains. Noting the morphological differences as well as the unusual habitat, to determine the identity of this unknown taxon all *S. burkei* and related species at the National Herbarium in Pretoria (PRE), the Schweickerdt Herbarium (PRU) at the University of Pretoria and the author’s personal collection (Herbarium Soutpansbergensis, ZPB) were studied, as well as fresh material in the field.

Given the size and disjunct nature of the two known populations, estimated at no more than 250 adult trees, the new species would qualify as Endangered under the IUCN Red List and this is suggested in the paper. Furthermore, the type locality is situated a mere 450 metres from the approved Makhado Colliery project. It is also suggested therefore that active monitoring be undertaken to avoid habitat degradation further endangering this rare tree through the operation of the mine.

The scientific article, ***Senegalia montis-salinarum*, a new species of Fabaceae: Mimosoideae endemic to the Soutpansberg, South Africa**, can be accessed by registered users of the *Phytotaxa* journal website at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.244.2.5>