

A NEW SPECIES OF MOUNTAIN HEATH FROM TASMANIA

by

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Richea curtisiae sp. nov.

Frutex erectus vel decumbens, interdum diffusus, 30–150cm. altus, fortasse originis hybridae, *R. scoparium* Hook. f. atque *R. dracophyllum* R.Br. maxime accedit, sed differt: a *R. scoparia* foliis multo majoribus (10–20cm. longis) mollioribus vix pungentibus atque usitate recurvatoribus, spatii inter pedunculos inferiores elongatos quam his inter pedunculos superiores sessiles congestos majoribus, corolla parviore (6–8mm. longa) aliquanto deplanata; a *R. dracophylla* habitatione omnino alpina vel subalpina, foliis rigidioribus persistentibus (in caulibus omnibus, non apud extremitates rami restrictis) sed in parte $\frac{2}{3}$ inferiore caulis mortuis et putrescentibus, corolla rosea usque ad aurantium parviore aliquanto deplanata atque multo minus congesta.

HOLOTYPUS: Lake Fenton, Mt. Field National Park, Tasmania, Alan M. Gray, 11.1.1970 (HO—ISOTYPI in MEL).

An erect, spreading or decumbent shrub 30–150cm. high. Branches few, divaricate, clothed with persistent leaves, those on the lower $\frac{2}{3}$ of the stem dead and decaying. Leaves 10–20cm. long, narrow-lanceolate to lanceolate, spreading, recurved or somewhat erect, flexuous; the base broad, sheathing and imbricate; margins cartilaginous, minutely and sharply serrate; apex tapering to a long acuminate point. Lower bracts of inflorescence similar to the foliage leaves although usually somewhat smaller and more erect, the base broadening widely and with narrow, membranous wings. Upper bracts with a broad base and membranous wings, the apex tapering suddenly to an erect, acute point. Inflorescence a terminal panicle 10–20cm. long; fertile flowers occurring only on the upper $\frac{2}{3}$ of the floral axis, absent on the lower $\frac{1}{3}$ (or minute, vestigial and abortive); fertile and abortive flowers subtended by 3 to 4 small caducous bracteoles 6–9mm. long, the outer ones with a broad base, the inner ones narrower and somewhat smaller, the apices of these bracteoles minutely hooked. Peduncles 5- to 10-flowered, short, 2–4mm. long, longest peduncles at the base of the fertile portion of the inflorescence and becoming progressively shorter towards the apex. Internodes between the lower peduncles lengthening slightly after the outer bracts have fallen. Individual flowers borne on very short pedicels and subtended by 2–3 (4) small linear bracteoles or 1 or 2 larger ovate-lanceolate bracteoles, all of which are caducous, the base and middle of the larger bracteoles expanded and half-enclosing each flower. Sepals 5, broadly triangular, obtuse, 1–3 mm. long. Corolla pink to orange in colour. Operculum 6–8mm. long, narrowly obovoid to cylindrical-conical, occasionally somewhat flattened, its apex obtuse

* Fern Tree, Tasmania.

and with 5 minute obscure teeth. *Anthers* versatile, 3–4mm. long, joined to the filament slightly below the middle and opening by a single longitudinal slit. *Style* half as long as the stamens and inserted in a depression in the top of the ovary. *Nectar scales* 5, broadly elliptic-oblong, truncate, half as long as the ovary. *Nectar* copious. *Fruit* a 5-locular capsule 3–4mm. diam., depressed at summit, with persistent style; *seeds* bright brown, lustrous, ellipsoid, slightly flattened, 0.7–1.0mm. long.

DISTRIBUTION:

Known only from scattered localities within Mt. Field National Park, Tasmania (i.e. Lakes Fenton and Dobson and at Wherrett's Lookout), also from Carruthers' Creek in the northern portion of Cradle Mountain National Park.

HABITAT:

Found as isolated specimens, at fairly high altitudes (\pm 4,000 ft.), among populations of *Richea scoparia* Hook. f. and the tall *R. pandanifolia* Hook. f. usually in the shelter of a protecting boulder or bush at the margins of tarns and creeks.

DISCUSSION:

It has been suggested that *R. curtisiae* may be of hybrid origin, with *R. scoparia* and *R. pandanifolia* as parent species. Affinities with *R. scoparia* and *R. dracophylla* R.Br. certainly seem to be close, and the characters of the three taxa are comparable. This novelty differs from *R. scoparia* in its very much larger, softer, usually more recurved leaves that are scarcely pungent, in the more elongated lower peduncles of the inflorescence (more distant from each other than the very short upper peduncles which are crowded) and in the smaller somewhat flattened corolla. From the typically lowland-inhabiting *R. dracophylla* its most noticeable departure is in the persistence of leaves on all the stems (instead of being confined to the ends of branches); flowers are somewhat smaller than in *R. dracophylla* and much less crowded toward the base of the "spike", while the corolla-colour is pink to orange (cf. white or creamy and never flattened in *R. dracophylla*).

The new *Richea* has been named in honour of Dr. Winifred M. Curtis, in recognition of her interest in its occurrence and of her monumental works on Tasmanian vegetation, e.g. *Student's Flora of Tasmania* (in four parts—three published) and the text for Lord Talbot de Malahide's sumptuously illustrated *Endemic Flora of Tasmania* (three volumes published).

REFERENCE:

- Gray, A. M. (1969)—A new *Richea* species. *Australian Plants* 5 (39): 130-131 (with line drawing)—preliminary description.