



# Novitates Gabonenses 70. The advantages of a specimen database: *Alafia velutina* is a synonym of *Farquharia elliptica* (Apocynaceae)

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## Key words

Africa  
*Alafia*  
Apocynaceae  
*Farquharia*  
specimen database

**Abstract** The type of *Alafia velutina* Leeuwenb. proves to be conspecific with *Farquharia elliptica* Stapf and hence becomes a new synonym of the latter name. Maintaining a specimen database may help in avoiding mistakes like this.

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## INTRODUCTION

During database editing I ran into a specimen of *Farquharia elliptica* Stapf (*Le Testu 7078*) that, according to the database, was also the single known collection and type of *Alafia velutina* Leeuwenb. Examination of the two sheets present at WAG revealed that these two sheets indeed are conspecific with *Farquharia elliptica*; moreover, both sheets have been cited by Zwetsloot (1981) in his revision of *Farquharia*.

## DISCUSSION

In his generic key to African Apocynaceae, Leeuwenberg (2001) distinguishes *Alafia* from the monotypic genus *Farquharia* by two characters: *Farquharia* has supra-axillary glands on the petiole (colleters) and sub-erect corolla limbs, while *Alafia* is lacking these glands and has spreading or recurved corolla limbs. The WAG material of *Le Testu 7078* does show the glands on the petiole, whereas the orientation of the corolla limb is hard to assess from a dried specimen, but in pressed state it varies from sub-erect to spreading, as does other pressed material of *Farquharia*. A comparison of the description of *Alafia velutina* by Leeuwenberg (1996, 1997) and that of *Farquharia elliptica* by Zwetsloot (1981) shows that nearly all characters or ranges given by Leeuwenberg fall within the variation given for *F. elliptica* by Zwetsloot, except that Leeuwenberg does not mention colleters on the petiole and explicitly states colleters are missing on the inside of the sepals while the WAG isotype does show some colleters inside the flower next to the sepal base. The US herbarium, that holds the holotype of *Le Testu 7078* (US sheet no 02679680, barcode 00588980), has made scans of its types available on the internet (<http://botany.si.edu/types>, last accessed March 2011). The resolution of these scans is not enough to see details like colleters on the petiole, but it does permit one to see that the US sheet belongs to the same gathering as the more plentiful WAG sheets, and hence the study of the WAG isotype suffices to determine this really is *Farquharia elliptica*.

## *Farquharia elliptica* Stapf (1912) 279.

= *Alafia velutina* Leeuwenb. (1996) 271. — Type: G.M.P.C. *Le Testu 7078* (holo US; iso BM, G, P, WAG), *syn. nov.*

Leeuwenberg probably made this error because the US sheet was previously misidentified as *Alafia schumannii* Stapf and he received that sheet on loan while working on his revision of *Alafia*, and did not realize it belonged to the closely allied *Farquharia*.

We should realize that if Leeuwenberg would have used a specimen database this error would probably have been avoided. He would have discovered that this specimen had been cited already in the revision of *Farquharia* that was carried out under his supervision, and that his home institution actually had two sheets of this gathering, that he did not see while working on *Alafia*, since they were already correctly stored under *Farquharia*.

*Alafia velutina* was mentioned by Sosef et al. (2006) as one of the 508 endemic species of Gabon. This new synonym results in a reduction by one of this number of endemics, and one less species to be included in red data lists of critically endangered plant species.

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