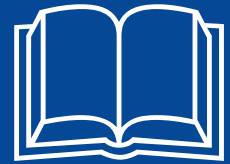


Literature review

Author: Al Laius unless otherwise stated
Layout by Alice Vanden Bon



News and views on recent publications from the world of succulents

McCoy, Tom

The Aloes of Arabia

Published by McCoy Publishing, Temecula, California, 2019.

ISBN 978 1 732373 80 8
(Subscribers' edition)

Price: \$160 (Subscribers' edition), postage extra from the USA.

441 pages, 30.7×23.7cm, 708 colour photos (several full-page or double-page spreads), 51 coloured maps and one page of half tone line drawings, hardbound with embossed cloth binding and laminated dust jacket.

The book is available from the author through his website:

The-aloes-of-arabia.myshopify.com

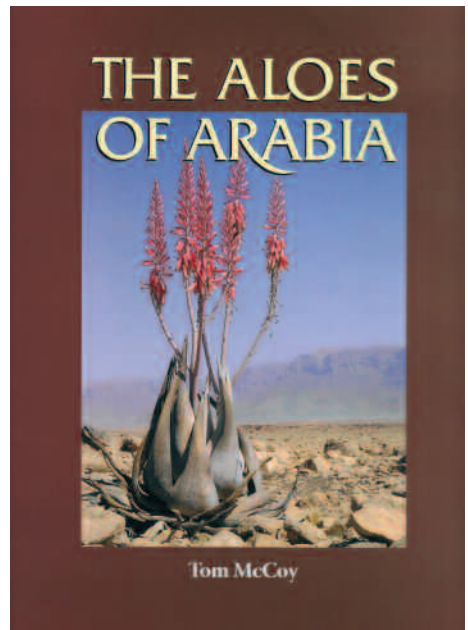
Or you can contact the author by email at:

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Many books have been published on aloes but this is the first to deal exclusively and exhaustively with those from Arabia: Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, including Socotra. The author was well placed to write this book having had a base in Saudi Arabia for the past 30 years. As a result he was able to travel extensively in the region. As author or co-author he has described 12 new Arabian aloes, work commemorated in the name *Aloe mccoyi*. His mentor and close friend was the late John Lavranos, doyen of the study of Arabian succulents since the early 1960s. John is commemorated in the names of many succulents including *Aloe lavranosii* and is author of the foreword to this book. Together they went on several expeditions and made many new discoveries. To a lesser extent Tom also botanised with the late Sheila Collenette, who also has two Arabian aloes named in her honour: *Aloe collenetteae* and *A. sheilae*. This book is the culmination of 30 years' work.

The first 67 pages set the scene: preface; acknowledgements; introduction; geography and geology of the Arabian Peninsula; climate; distribution; ecology and habitats of *Aloe* in Arabia; *Aloe* biology (principally morphology and pollination biology, but nothing on molecular or evolutionary biology); threats to aloes in Arabia; uses of aloes in Arabia and finally history. In the ultimate section I was delighted to see a group photo (page 62) of Sheila Collenette, Len Newton, Tom McCoy, John Lavranos and John Wood, the prime movers and shakers in the study of Arabian aloes over the past 60 years. It is important to realise that the vast majority of Arabian aloes have been described by the five intrepid explorers named above. Overall the history section is very thorough.

The core of the book is coverage of the 50 recognised species, all endemic to Arabia. This is an A-Z treatment without any attempt to order these species into any form of groupings and unusually for such a book there is no key to the species. For each species there is uniform treatment under the headings: type specimen, etymology of name, distribution, habitat, flowering time, description, general notes, population status and natural hybrids. Under general notes there is some discussion of relationships between species. Each species treatment is accompanied by a range of habitat photos and a distribution map. There is usually at least one photo illustrating flower development and it is interesting to note that in many species there are two distinct flower colours, generally red or yellow. This feature is not unique to Arabian aloes since it has been observed in other geographical regions and as yet we have no explanation for this phenomenon. The quality of the photos is truly outstanding and I would suggest that



never before has a group of aloes been so well illustrated. Multiple photos of each species show clearly the range of variation within a species. As mentioned above, many photos occupy full pages and occasionally there are also double-page spreads of single photos. For me personally, the most eye-catching photo is of *A. rubroviolacea* (page 330): this species is a cremnohyte (cliff-dweller) with stems up to 4m long, outstandingly photographed here. Overall, the diversity of Arabian aloes is vividly brought to life for the first time. The range of species in terms of size begins with the diminutive and uniquely (for Arabia) white-flowered *A. whitcombei* which amazingly grows on vertical limestone cliffs at 800m and hence is another cremnohyte. At the other end of the scale is the arborescent *A. sabaëa* with stems up to 3m tall. All other Arabian aloes fall between these extremes. However, several species groups in the genus are absent from Arabia, so there are no spotted (maculate) or grass aloes represented in the book. Additionally

true tree aloes do not occur in Arabia. Whilst *A. sabaëa* was temporarily moved to the tree aloe genus *Aloidendron* its realignment lasted a mere five years. In 2019 it was returned to *Aloe* on the basis of more recent molecular evidence.

The book ends with an extensive glossary, photo credits, literature consulted, index to *Aloe* names (but no general index) and the names of recipients of the three different editions of the book.

For the record, three taxonomic omissions should be noted. Firstly, on page 384, the natural hybrid *Aloe squarrosa* × *A. perryi* is illustrated and clearly shown to be intermediate between its putative parents. However, the author omits to indicate that this hybrid has a valid name: *Aloe* × *buzairiensis* Lodé (2011). Secondly, *Aloidendron sabaëum* should have been given as a synonym of *Aloe sabaëa*. Finally, the provisional name *Aloe vulcanica* Lavranos & I.S. Collenette (2000), based on a single habitat-collected plant, is omitted but deserved a mention. This name was never formally described, but material has since been distributed by the ISI (2009-15) as the cultivar *Aloe* 'Vulcanica'.

These minor omissions aside, this is a stunningly illustrated and well researched monograph of Arabian aloes. It is a feast for the eyes and I

often dip into it just to peruse the wonderful photos. Regrettably, relatively few of the species covered are generally available in cultivation and indeed many are exceedingly rare both in habitat and in living collections. Remarkably I found no typographical errors – a rare feat for a book, even in this age of electronic spellcheckers! I unreservedly recommend this book to all aloe fans and enthusiasts of Arabian succulents.

Colin C Walker

Stutchbury, Ralph *Baobab*

Published by Camera Africa, Zimbabwe, 2013.

ISBN 978 0 797452 75 6

Price: £33, postage extra from Zimbabwe.

126 pages, 26×34cm (landscape), 220 colour photos (many full-page and one double-page spread), hard-bound with laminated dust jacket.

The book is available from the author through his website:

www.ralphstutchbury.com/books.php

Or you can contact the author by email at: ralph@camera-africa.co.zw

Baobabs (*Adansonia digitata*) are iconic pachycaul trees of the African landscape. They are the world's

largest succulents and are widespread throughout the continent south of the Sahara. They play a major role in the ecology, myth, history and culture of African life and also have economic importance. Ralph Stutchbury is a wildlife photographer who has captured all these aspects of African baobabs in this stunning pictorial book.

Baobabs are trees with only moderate height but extensive girth and usually exceedingly wide canopies, so the landscape format of this publication is perfect for displaying the images at their best. The book is a true feast for the eyes covering every aspect of the life of the baobab. The photos are accompanied by minimal text, usually little more than captions and often there is no text at all. Photos depict the plant in growth with canopies full of leaves but the more eye-catching ones show the trees in their leafless summer resting state. Indeed, my favourite photo (page 7) shows a mammoth specimen with a hugely swollen trunk. Baobabs are shown in a wide diversity of habitats ranging from arid savanna to precarious sites next to running water, waterfalls or up mountainsides. The large number of full-page spreads beautifully portray the majesty of these venerable icons. Smaller images depict details of seedlings, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds. Baobabs are valued as a source of food, fibre and medicine and all these aspects are illustrated. Thomas Baines, an intrepid Victorian explorer and artist, immortalised baobabs in 1862 and three of his paintings are included there. One of these depicts a group of baobabs in Botswana which Ralph has revisited and photographed, so that we can compare these plants over a 150-year timespan.

I was aware that elephants can cause substantial damage to baobabs and this is starkly brought to life in Ralph's photos. These powerful animals chew the bark to extract minerals, gouge out the spongy fibrous tissue for food and even demolish whole trees.

The author does not address the fact that there are other baobabs: six species in Madagascar, one in Australia and even a second African species: *Adansonia kilima*, described the year before this book was published. However, this book is a



tribute to Adanson's baobab and as such it does a splendid job through the high quality of the images. I thoroughly recommend *Baobab* to all with an interest in African wildlife.

Colin C Walker

**Möller, Alma & Becker,
Rolf**

Field Guide to the Succulent Euphorbias of Southern Africa

Published by Briza Publications.

ISBN 978 1 920217 77 8

320 pages, 870 colour photographs and illustrations, distribution maps for each species. 24.6×17.2cm. Hardbound with illustrated boards.

Published price: South African Rand 495.00 (postage extra). Available from either www.floratrust.co.za or direct from the publishers at: http://www.briza.co.za/uploads/Briza_catalogueMarch2020.pdf

An alternative would be the Devon-based NHBS (<https://www.nhbs.com/>) who are offering it at £29.99 as a pre-order at the time of writing (March 2020).

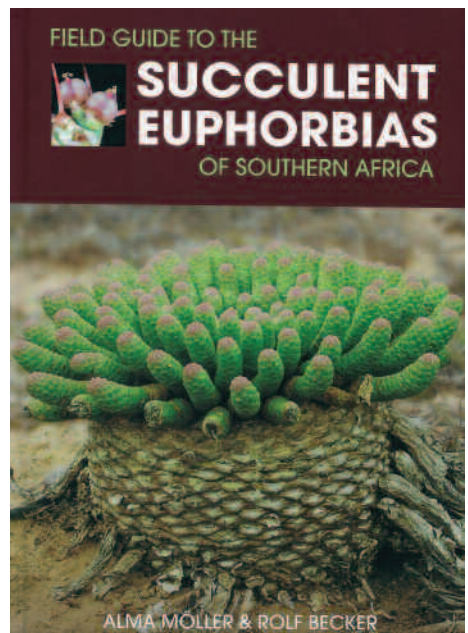
In this book the authors celebrate the diversity of southern Africa's succulent *Euphorbia*. Intended as a field guide it aims to assist the reader to distinguish between the widely differing growth forms of this popular genus of succulent plants. As the title indicates, the book covers southern Africa, which is generally recognised as Africa south of the Kunene and Zambezi Rivers and therefore, includes the succulent *Euphorbia* species occurring in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique south of the Zambezi River, Botswana, Swaziland, (Eswatini) Lesotho and South Africa. Similar-looking species are grouped together, based on recognisable morphological characteristics, as one would encounter them in nature. This should assist the reader to locate them more easily in the text and thus expedite their identification. In essence, the guide gives the person in the field the best possible opportunity to identify the *Euphorbia* they are confronted with, but it can also be useful for collectors at home in other

countries. A very useful feature is the annotation of photographs to highlight characteristics typical of the species concerned, and this is a very convenient tool to assist in the identification of troublesome taxa.

The book came about because the authors were motivated by the frustration that they experienced when trying to identify the species they encountered during their extensive field work. It has been thoroughly researched and has taken more than 15 years to compile. As well as each species being illustrated with at least two photographs, it also includes habitat photographs of some of the rarest plants in southern Africa, for example *Euphorbia leistneri*, known from only one locality on the banks of Kunene River in Koakoland, Namibia, and *Euphorbia clivicola* growing in the vicinity of Polokwane in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The authors have personally contributed most of the photographs, all of them taken in the field as they encountered the plants. In addition it contains a unique collection of the beautiful cyathia (flowers) that distinguishes this genus of plants from all others.

In detail, the contents consist of acknowledgements, foreword and a preface. These are followed by sections entitled: about this book and how to use it; what is an *Euphorbia*; evolution of *Euphorbia* in southern Africa; taxonomic classification of *Euphorbia*; conservation status and the IUCN guidelines; growing euphorbias in cultivation; gardening; look-alike species; medicinal and other uses of *Euphorbia*, and herbaceous species and alien invaders. Then the main section of the book, which as mentioned above, consists of groups of similar-looking species. These pages are colour coded which is a useful feature and makes navigation around the pages much easier. Towards the end there is a detailed taxonomy table, a glossary, a list of photo credits, a bibliography and an index.

Each species fills a page and begins with a description. This is followed by notes about similar species, habitat,



distribution, conservation status, name derivation, common names and further notes to help distinguish between similar-looking species. A small but more than adequate distribution map is found at the top right-hand corner, and the lower part of the page includes the photographs, ranging from two to four images. In many cases these photos show what the plant looks like overall, together with a more detailed close-up of a stem as well as the cyathia. Although the illustrations are small, they are good quality and more than amply illustrate the key features of the species. In many cases annotations in the photographs pinpoint extra identification features.

Although the book is quite small in size and contains fairly small images, it cannot be stressed enough how much valuable information is packed into this volume. As far as I am aware there has not been an attempt to put together (with colour illustrations) all the southern African euphorbias since the 1941 *The Succulent Euphorbieae (Southern Africa)* by White, Dyer and Sloane. Indeed with two hefty volumes it was unlikely to have been used as a field guide, which this new book with its compact size is perfectly designed to do.

If you have even the slightest interest in succulent euphorbias then this book is not only highly recommended but is a must-have for your library.