SHORT COMMUNICATION

Astartea pulchella (Myrtaceae: Chamelaucieae), a new combination for Baeckea pulchella, and the reduction of A. laricifolia to synonymy

The true identity of Baeckea pulchella DC. has been obscured by an incorrect locality, ‘east coast’, given in the protologue (de Candolle 1828) and the subsequent misapplication of the name by Bentham (1867). Like many other early taxonomic authors, de Candolle gave very little information on each of his new species. For B. pulchella his description of the leaves as densely arranged and the pedicels as one-flowered suggested the most likely candidate on the east coast of Australia would be Harmogia densifolia Schauer, although that species differs in tending to have flower stalks shorter than the leaves, rather than about equal in length as in B. pulchella.

Bentham did not examine type material but assumed, based on the brief description in the protologue, that the name B. pulchella applied to a Western Australian species that had been placed in a new genus by Turczaninov (1847) as Ericomyrtus drummondii Turcz. Even ignoring the ‘east coast’ locality given in the protologue, this seemed a highly unlikely fit for de Candolle’s species. Baeckea pulchella must have been one that occurred near the coast for it to have been collected well before the publication date of 1828. Ericomyrtus drummondii occurs at least 75 km from all such early collecting sites in Western Australia. It differs from de Candolle’s description of B. pulchella in having persistent bracteoles, and by having flower stalks that tend to be longer than the leaves. It is clear, therefore, that Bentham misapplied the name B. pulchella to the species known today as E. drummondii (Rye 2015).

Recent examination of images from G-DC has revealed a surprising identity for B. pulchella, as it is based entirely or partially on material of the species that was later named as Astartea laricifolia Schauer. Apparently, de Candolle overlooked the fact that the stamens were in antisepalous fascicles, a character that would have shown the specimen to belong to his own new genus Astartea DC., which was named earlier in the same publication (de Candolle 1828: 210).

In view of the above, a new combination in Astartea is provided here for Baeckea pulchella, a lectotype is designated for this name, and A. laricifolia is reduced to synonymy.

New combination and typification

Astartea pulchella (DC.) Rye, comb. nov.


Notes. Images of two sheets at G-DC were examined, both annotated in the same handwriting, with ‘Leptospermum Nouvelle Holland, côte orient. Mus. de Paris 1821’ attached to the base of the specimens. Only one of the sheets, that chosen as a lectotype (G 00487261), has a further label in the bottom right-hand corner of the sheet giving the name Baeckea pulchella DC., and material mounted on the other sheet (G 00486347) is clearly of a different species. However, both collections belong to the genus Astartea and match the protologue of B. pulchella in their vegetative characters and in having solitary, axillary, pedicellate flowers.

G 00487261 is also a good match for the description of the flowers as numerous and ebracteolate. Fortunately, this specimen is readily identifiable from the image because it has two distinctive characters that are unique within Astartea, these being the distinct wings on its young stems and the small size of its peduncles relative to the size of its pedicels. This is the species that was treated as A. laricifolia by Rye (2013) and therefore that name is now reduced to a synonym under A. pulchella.

The other specimen, G 00486347, represents a species of Astartea that cannot be identified further based on the image alone. It differs from the lectotype in not having the young stems conspicuously winged and in having peduncles longer than the pedicels. There are only a few flowers on the specimen but one of them has a persistent bracteole. A number of Astartea species could match the image. Whether or not this specimen should be regarded as a syntype is doubtful in view of its small number of flowers and the lack of a sheet label identifying it as B. pulchella. However, the label attached to its base is identical to that of the other specimen; this suggests that choosing a lectotype may be the safest course of action rather than assuming that G 00487261 is a holotype.

As to the locality of the type material, King George Sound seems most likely. Several collections of Western Australian plants were made at King George Sound prior to 1821, which was indicated as the year that material from Paris was received in Geneva. Astartea pulchella certainly was collected there in January 1818 by Allan Cunningham (the type collection for A. laricifolia) during the species’ peak summer flowering period from mid-December to early February. Although Robert Brown visited King George Sound during the summer of 1801–1802, he apparently did not collect this species (Western Australian Herbarium 1998–). The following summer, Nicolas Baudin, Antoine Guichenot and Jean-Baptiste Leschenault de la Tour visited King George Sound (see George 2009), so they may well have collected the type material. Another possible locality is Geographe Bay, visited by Baudin’s expedition in March 1803, although this would probably have been after the flowering season had ended for A. pulchella.

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References


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