

A report of a new discovered species of Aloe from the Haroni Gorge.

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Earlier this year in June I had the honour of being invited to speak at the Aloe, Cactus and Succulents Society of Zimbabwe's third international congress, Xerophytica 2014.

As I have always been impressed with this organization and its publications I quickly accepted this exciting offer.

Although I have visited Zimbabwe several times over the last thirty years, the cliché "there is always something new to see" came to mind, so plans were made to do some botanizing after the conclusion of the event, with two of my close friends, Darrel Plowes and Obety Baptista. Little did I know then, that the aforementioned cliché would prove true in such a dramatic way on this trip with the discovery of a fantastic new species of aloe!

One of my priorities was to see, and hopefully photograph flowering individuals of the Zimbabwe endemic *Aloe tauri* Leach, as it was the flowering season of this species, and another goal was to make a trip into the spectacular Haroni Gorge.



Aloe tauri - Mberengwa

With Darrel at the helm we began our trip south, where we did indeed get to the *Aloe tauri* locale, and luck was with us, as the population was in full flower, allowing me to make some long desired photos of this species in flower in its native habitat. After completing the successful day, we spent the night in Masvingo, where we enjoyed a rock



The first specimen of *Aloe haroniensis* encountered with the author, Tom McCoy

shandy or two, a fine dinner and rest. From Masvingo the next part of our journey took us to the Chimanimani Mountains.

Our next objective was the Haroni Gorge, this being the type locality of the endemic *Aloe balli* Reynolds. Once we reached the site of the Haroni Forest area, Darrel decided he would remain on the western side of the Haroni River to look for butterfly specimens in the forest there. So Obety and I crossed over to the eastern side of the river, where we pushed on through the thick bush. Here we soon encountered the steep sides of the river gorge, where the forest remained intact, and was home to many species of ferns, orchids, gingers and other plants normally associated with a more tropical jungle. While working our way through the tangled undergrowth, I came upon a free-standing rock outcrop, and here in this heavily forested area to my great surprise was an aloe growing on it. Upon close inspection it was easy to determine that this was a member of the "maculate complex" of aloes. But one that matched no known species description. This group has been a special interest to me for many years, and in fact, with the exception of two species, I have been fortunate enough to see and study all presently known members of this complex in their native habitats. It was easy to realize that here was a previously unknown, new species of "maculate" aloe. I called Obety to view the plant so he

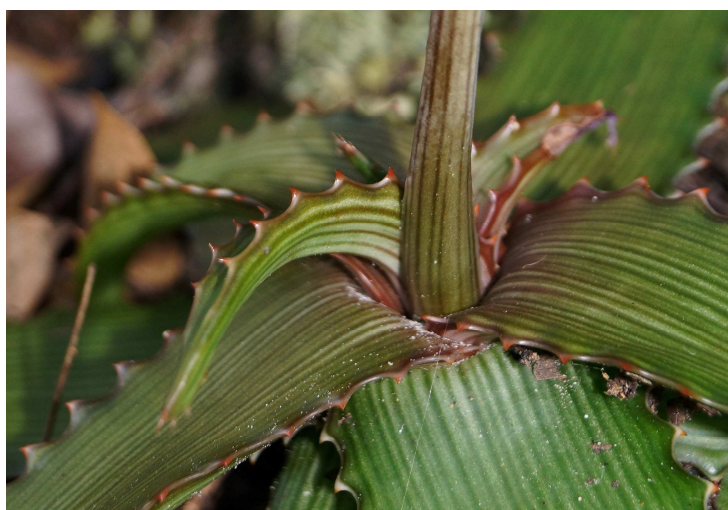
could join in the hunt, and it was not long until other specimens were encountered. Further investigation produced many more examples of this aloe and soon several meters away on the sheerest rock faces was also the aloe we had hoped to see *Aloe balli*.

We were fortunate that several flowering specimens of the new aloe were located, giving us the opportunity to collect specimens that were used in the formal description of the species.



Inflorescence and flowers of *Aloe haroniensis*

Quite unlike the majority of the maculate aloe group, most of the plants we found displayed dramatically white striped, bright green, unspotted leaves. This characteristic was present on both the upper and lower leaf surfaces. In fact when Plowes was later shown leaf specimens collected to preserve as herbarium vouchers, he even joking asked "Which side is top or bottom?" Another interesting character were the distinctive, broad uninterrupted stripes running the entire length of peduncle.



The unusual striped peduncle, an important characteristic of this new species *Aloe haroniensis*

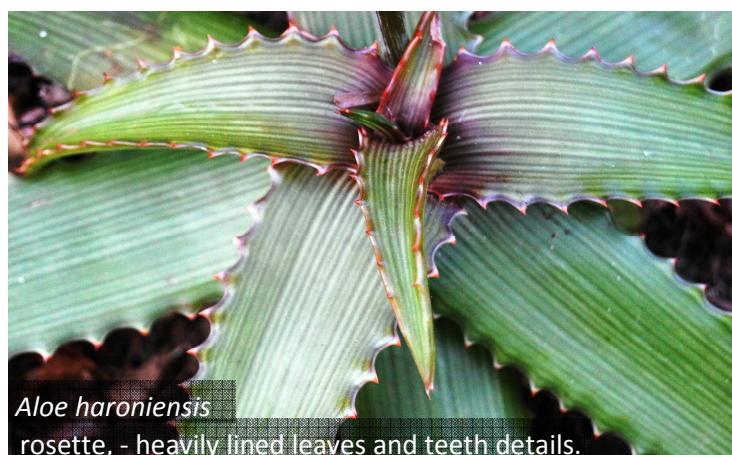


Type specimen

of Zimbabwe's new species *Aloe haroniensis* in habitat.

We have choose to name this unexpected new species in honour of its type locality, the Haroni Gorge, so it is with great pleasure that *Aloe haroniensis* TA McCoy, Plowes, Baptista is a name that can be added to the important list of aloe species occurring in Zimbabwe.

In closing I would like to once again thank my travelling partners Darrel Plowes and Obety Baptista for many wonderful days together and much assistance, and thank you to the many friends new, and old in Zimbabwe who have always made me feel so welcome in your great country.



Aloe haroniensis

rosette, - heavily lined leaves and teeth details.