

# William Roxburgh's St Helena plants

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**SYNOPSIS.** William Roxburgh visited St Helena in 1813–14. Although in poor health he described several of the endemic plant species which were published after his death in Beatson's 'Tracts'. Roxburgh's St Helena specimens are in the herbarium of The Natural History Museum in London. Of the 35 names first published in this work, 18 are valid, four illegitimate later homonyms, 11 superfluous, one dubious, and one an incorrect combination. Eight neotypes are proposed for all the valid names without holotypes, two overlooked, valid names are revived with appropriate combinations (*Sium bracteatum* (Roxb.) Cronk, comb. nov. and *Diplazium filamentosum* (Roxb.) Cronk, comb. nov.), a new name is published for one of the illegitimate names (*Acalypha rubrinervis* Cronk, nom. nov.) and one of Roxburgh's species is combined at subspecific rank (*Commidendrum robustum* subsp. *gummiferum* (Roxb.) Cronk, comb. et stat. nov.).

## INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of his life, Dr William Roxburgh (1751–1815) stopped at St Helena to recuperate from illness before continuing his final voyage home to Britain from India. He had studied botany under Hope in Edinburgh and in 1766 was attached to the East India Company (EIC) in Madras. From 1793 he had been Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden and Chief Botanist of the EIC (Desmond, 1977), and had been involved in sending living plants to St Helena, until ill health forced him to leave India in 1813. He arrived in St Helena on 7 June 1813 and left on 1 March 1814; he died in Edinburgh on his return.

Despite his poor health he produced an annotated list of St Helena plants during his stay. This was published as an appendix to Beatson's *Tracts . . . St. Helena* (Roxburgh, 1816) and until 1875 formed the only accessible printed account of the flora, both in its original and subsequent forms, after copying by various writers, especially during the post-Napoleonic St Helena vogue. Barnes (1817) reprinted the 'Tracts' in Linnaean order. Another version was printed in 1825 in St Helena by J. Boyd as *Flora Sta. Helenica* (Roxburgh, 1825), with A. Beatson misspelled as A. Watson! This may have been prepared by Dr Arnott, a doctor to Napoleon (Arnott, 1822), on whose work, it is acknowledged, the version in the St Helena Register for 1843 is based (Roxburgh, 1843). Antommarchi (1825), another of Napoleon's doctors, owes a heavy debt to Roxburgh for his list *Esquisse de la flore de Sainte-Hélène*. Finally Pritchard (1836), again leaning heavily on Roxburgh, compiled a tabulated list of St Helena plants, published at the Cape.

The importance of Roxburgh's list (at least in the original) lies in the new species described and the notes given on certain of the endemics. Its shortcomings reside in its incompleteness, the dubious nomenclature and (especially with the Compositae) its lack of taxonomic clarity. The list is only partially backed by specimens (BM). In the summer of 1814, in the brief period between Roxburgh's arrival in England and his death, he worked with Joseph Banks on the *Flora*

*indica* at Banks' house in Soho Square (Carter, 1988). Roxburgh's death, or shortly before, his specimens apparently came into the Banksian Herbarium (British Museum (Natural History), 1904). Banks had already amassed a large collection of Roxburgh's Indian plants, and on his death in 1820, the Banksian collections, along with Roxburgh's St Helena plants, passed to Robert Brown and subsequently to the British Museum (British Museum (Natural History), 1904). Banks had collected in St Helena during his circumnavigation and with Solander had prepared a manuscript flora.

## ROXBURGH NAMES IN THE ST HELENA FLORA

The following is the complete list of the 34 names first published in Beatson's *Tracts St. Helena* (Roxburgh, 1816):

- Acalypha rubra* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 295 (1816), nom. illeg., non Willd., *Enum. pl.*: 992 (1809). Neotype: St Helena, 1806, 'The Stringwood. From Plantation house gathered by Col. Hardwicke', *Burchell* 165 (K), hic desig. As no Roxburgh gatherings survive, a good contemporaneous specimen has been chosen as a neotype.
- Acrostichum lanceolatum* Roxb., op. cit.: 296, nom. illeg., non L., *Sp. pl.* 2: 1067 (1753), = *Elaphoglossum nervosum* (Bory) H. Christ in *Neue Denkschr. Allg. schweiz. ges. Naturw.* 36: 50 (1899), basionym: *Acrostichum nervosum* Bory in Duperrey, *Voy. monde Crypt.*: 252 (1828).
- Alopecurus paniculatus* Roxb., op. cit.: 296, nom. nud. et obsc., non Gueldenst. ex Ledeb., *Fl. ross.* 4: 465 (1853). It possibly results from confusion with *A. paniceus* L., *Sp. pl.* 2nd ed.: 90 (1762), = *Polypogon monspeliensis*, a plant known to have been present on St Helena at this date.
- Angelica bracteata* Roxb., op. cit.: 297, syn. *Sium helenianum* Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1032 (1868). Neotype: St Helena, 1956, 'Jellico, Peaks 2,200', Peaks from Actaeon to Diana', *N.R. Kerr* 7 (K), hic desig. No material from Roxburgh

- survives, so a recent specimen matching his description has been chosen as a neotype. The Melliss material of this taxon at Kew has not been chosen as some of this represents type material of *Sium helenianum* and although only one taxon is involved it is judged less confusing to have separate types for the two names. The smaller, related species *Sium burchellii* (Hook.f.) Hemsl. does not match Roxburgh's description and can be excluded.
- Asplenium tenellum* Roxb., op. cit.: 299, nomen superfl., = *Asplenium erectum* Bory ex Willd., *Sp. pl.* 5: 328 (1810).
- Asplenium filamentosum* Roxb., op. cit.: 299, syn. *Diplazium nigropaleaceum* Kunze in *Linnaea* 24: 270 (1851). Neotype: St Helena, 1955, 'Cason's Gate 1800'. Roadside banks, shady places, ridge. Fronds very large up to 5' long. Bright blue-green, very soft with black hair at base', *N.R. Kerr* 65 (BM), hic desig. This is the earliest name for the plant usually referred to as *Diplazium nigropaleaceum*. In the absence of a Roxburgh specimen I have chosen one which exactly matches Roxburgh's very clear description of this distinctive fern. Christensen (1906), in *Index filicum*, wrongly assumed that *A. filamentosum* was a synonym of *A. furcatum* Thunb. (*A. praemorsum* Sw.) as it appears next to that taxon in the 'Tracts'. He clearly did not read the description.
- Aster glutinosus* Roxb., op. cit.: 300, nom. superfl., = *Commidendrum rugosum* (Aiton) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 345 (1836), basionym: *Conyza rugosa* Dryand. in Aiton, *Hort. kew.* 1st ed., 3: 184 (1789).
- Beatsonia portulacifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 300, = *Frankenia portulacifolia* (Roxb.) Spreng., *Syst. veg.* 2: 134 (1825). Holotype: St Helena, 'St Helena Tea', *Roxburgh* 51 (BM). No specimens were cited in Roxburgh's description but as only one Roxburgh specimen exists, it constitutes the holotype.
- Bidens arborea* Roxb., op. cit.: 301, nom. superfl., = *Petrobium arboreum* (J.R. & G. Forst.) R. Br. in *Trans. Linn. Soc. Lond.* 12: 113 (1818), pro parte (foem.), basionym: *Laxmannia arborea* J.R. & G. Forst., *Char. gen. pl.*: 93, t. 47 (1775), nom. rej., non *Laxmannia* R. Br.
- Conyza gummifera* Roxb., op. cit.: 304, = *Commidendrum gummiferum* (Roxb.) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 344 (1836). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM) [on sheet of *Commidendrum spurium* material].
- Conyza robusta* Roxb., op. cit.: 304, = *Commidendrum robustum* (Roxb.) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 344 (1836). Neotype: St Helena, '15.9.1815, Gumwood tree. Longwood', *Burchell* s.n. (K), hic desig.; isoneotype: St Helena, 'Sept. 1815, comm. 1823, Longwood', *Burchell* s.n. (GE). As no Roxburgh specimen is extant, I have chosen a good contemporaneous specimen matching Roxburgh's description as neotype. Burchell sent part of this gathering to De Candolle in Geneva, who consulted it while making the new combination of Roxburgh's name. The Geneva specimen is a scrap, however, and is not suitable to serve as a neotype.
- Dombeya melanoxylon* (R. Br. ex W.T. Aiton) Roxb., op. cit.: 307, = *Trochetiopsis melanoxylon* (R. Br. ex W.T. Aiton) Marais in *Kew Bull.* 36: 645 (1981), basionym: *Melhania melanoxylon* R. Br. ex W.T. Aiton, *Hortus kew.* 2nd ed., 4: 146 (1812). Specimen: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).
- Erodium sempervivum* Roxb., op. cit.: 308, nom. superfl., = *Pelargonium cotyledonis* (L.) L'Hér., *Geraniologia*: t. 27 (1792), basionym: *Geranium cotyledonis* L., *Mant. pl.* 2 (App.): 569 (1771).
- Fimbristylis textilis* Roxb., op. cit.: 309, nom. superfl., = *Scirpus nodosus* Rottb., *Descr. icon. rar. pl.*: 55 (1773).
- Hedyotis arborea* Roxb., op. cit.: 310, = *Nesohedyotis arborea* (Roxb.) Bremek. in *Verh. K. ned. Akad. Wet.*, ser. 2, 48(2): 23, 29, 152 (1952). Neotype: St Helena, 'Jan. 1954, Nr. High Peak. Island Dogwood now very rare', *N.R. Kerr* 9 (BM), hic desig. There is no Roxburgh specimen and Bremekamp did not specify a neotype when he made the new combination, so I have chosen a recent specimen which agrees in all particulars with Roxburgh's description.
- Hymenophyllum capillaceum* Roxb., op. cit.: 311. Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).
- Lobelia scaevolifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 312, = *Trimeris scaevolifolia* (Roxb.) Mabb. in *Kew Bull.* 29: 579 (1974). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM) [in Mabberley (1974), as lectotype].
- Lycopodium axillare* Roxb., op. cit.: 312. Neotype: St Helena, 11 August 1807, 'In the grass on Diana's Peak', *Burchell* 197 (K), hic desig. No Roxburgh specimen has been found, and I therefore choose as type a contemporaneous specimen from the same locality and habitat as in Roxburgh's protologue, and which matches his description.
- Mikania arborea* Roxb., op. cit.: 313, = *Lachanodes arborea* (Roxb.) B. Nord. in *Op. bot. Soc. bot. Lund* 44: 38 (1978). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM) [in Mabberley (1975), as lectotype].
- Phylica elliptica* Roxb., op. cit.: 316, = *Nesiota elliptica* (Roxb.) Hook.f. in Benth. & Hook.f., *Gen. pl.* 1: 380 (1862). Neotype: St Helena, 1843, 'Diana's Peak', *Hooker* s.n. (K), hic desig. As no Roxburgh specimen exists, I have chosen the Hooker specimen, which he would have used in founding the genus *Nesiota*.
- Phylica rosmarinifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 316, nom. superfl., = *Phylica polifolia* (Vahl) Pillans in *Jl S. Afr. Bot.* 8: 24 (1942), basionym: *Rhamnus polifolius* Vahl, *Symb. bot.* 3: 41 (1794).
- Physalis begonifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 317, = *Mellissia begonifolia* (Roxb.) Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1021 (1867). Holotype: St Helena, July 1813, 'St Helena boxwood', *Roxburgh* 18 (BM).
- Plantago robusta* Roxb., op. cit.: 317. Neotype: St Helena, 23 February 1810, 'from the waterfall', *Burchell* 63 (BM), hic desig. As no Roxburgh specimen exists I have chosen a contemporaneous specimen which accords with Roxburgh's protologue.
- Polypodium molle* Roxb., op. cit.: 318, nom. illeg., non Jacq., *Collectanea* 3: 188 (1789), = *Pseudophegopteris diana* (Hook.) Holttum in *Blumea* 17: 21 (1969).
- Polypodium dicksonifolium* Roxb., op. cit.: 318, nom. superfl., = *Cheilanthes multifidum* Sw., *Syn. fil.*: 129, 334 (1806).
- Polypodium viscidum* Roxb., op. cit.: 319, nom. superfl., = *Hypolepis rugosula* (Labill.) J. Sm. in *Curtis's bot. Mag.* 72: 8 (1846), basionym: *Polypodium rugosulum* Labill., *Nov. Holl. pl.* 2: 92, t. 241 (1806).
- Pteris semiserrata* Roxb., op. cit.: 319, nom. superfl., = *Pteris dentata* Forssk., *Fl. aegypt.-arab.*: 186 (1775).
- Pteris paleacea* Roxb., op. cit.: 319. Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).
- Roella angustifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 320, = *Wahlenbergia angustifolia* (Roxb.) A.DC., *Monogr. Campan.*: 162 (1830). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).
- Roella paniculata* Roxb., op. cit.: 320, = *Wahlenbergia*

*roxburghi* A.DC., *Monogr. Campan.*: 162 (1830), non *W. paniculata* Schrad., *Blumenbachia*: 38 (1827), nec *W. paniculata* Eckl. & Zeyh., *Enum. pl. afric. austral.*: 380 (1837). Holotype: St Helena, 'Dwarf Cabbage Tree', *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).

*Roella linifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 321, = *Wahlenbergia linifolia* (Roxb.) A.DC., *Monogr. Campan.*: 162 (1830). Holotype: St Helena, 'Top of Sandy Bay Ridge', *Roxburgh* 32 (BM).

*Solidago integrifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 323, nom. illeg., non Desf., *Tabl. école bot.* 1st ed.: 103 (1804), = *Melanodendron integrifolium* DC., *Prodr.* 5: 280 (1836). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).

*Solidago cuneifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 324, nom. superfl., = *Pladaroxylon leucadendron* (G. Forst.) Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1055 (1870), basionym: *Solidago leucadendron* G. Forst. in *Commentat. Soc. Scient. gotting.* 9: 69 (1789). Specimen: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM). The description matches best to this species, but it is possible that elements of the description derive from confusion with *Commidendrum spurium* (G. Forst.) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 344 (1836) (basionym: *Solidago spuria* G. Forst. in *Commentat. Soc. Scient. gotting.* 9: 68 (1789)), which *Roxburgh* also collected (St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM)).

*Solidago rotundifolia* Roxb., op. cit.: 324, = *Commidendrum rotundifolium* (Roxb.) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 344 (1836). Holotype: St Helena, *Roxburgh* s.n. (BM).

*Splianthes tetrandra* Roxb., op. cit.: 325, nom. superfl., = *Petrobium arboreum* (J.R. & G. Forst.) R. Br. in *Trans. Linn. Soc. Lond.* 12: 113 (1818), pro parte (masc.), basionym: *Laxmannia arborea* J.R. & G. Forst., *Char. gen. pl.*: 93, t. 47 (1775), nom. rej., non *Laxmannia* R. Br.

## A NOTE ON THE TYPIFICATIONS

Although *Roxburgh* cited no specimens in his protologues published in the 'Tracts', where there is only a single specimen, I have treated this as the holotype. In fact, for *Roxburgh's* St Helena names, there is never a choice of specimens, so lectotypification is unnecessary. This differs from the practice of *Mabberley* (1974, 1975) who designated lectotypes without a choice of specimens. Where there is no *Roxburgh* specimen, I have chosen the most suitable alternative specimen as a neotype. This begs the question of why so few *Roxburgh* specimens from St Helena survive, and whether we can be sure that they are all in The Natural History Museum.

*Roxburgh's* St Helena herbarium (BM) consists of the following 37 species:

### Pteridophyta

Adiantaceae – *Pteris paleacea* Roxb.

Aspidiaceae – *Dryopteris cognata* (C. Presl) Kuntze, *Dryopteris napoleonis* (Bory) Kuntze

Aspleniaceae – *Asplenium platybasis* Kunze ex Mett.

Cyatheaceae – *Dicksonia arborescens* L'Hér.

Dennstaedtiaceae – *Hypolepis rugosula* (Labill.) J. Sm. [23 (July 1813)]

Grammitidaceae – *Grammitis ebenina* (Maxon) Tardieu [43]

Hymenophyllaceae – *Hymenophyllum capillaceum* Roxb.

Lomariopsidaceae – *Elaphoglossum nervosum* (Bory) H. Christ, *Microstaphyla furcata* (L.f.) Fée

Lycopodiaceae – *Lycopodium cernuum* L.

Polypodiaceae – *Pleopeltis macrocarpa* (Bory ex Willd.) Kaulf.

### Spermatophyta

#### Dicotyledoneae

Campanulaceae – *Trimeris scaevolifolia* (Roxb.) Mabb., *Wahlenbergia angustifolia* (Roxb.) A.DC., *Wahlenbergia linifolia* (Roxb.) A.DC. [32], *Wahlenbergia roxburghi* A.DC.

Compositae (Asteraceae) – *Commidendrum gummiferum* (Roxb.) DC., *Commidendrum rotundifolium* (Roxb.) DC., *Commidendrum rugosum* (Ait.) DC., *Commidendrum spurium* (G. Forst.) DC., *Lachanodes arborea* (Roxb.) B. Nord., *Melanodendron integrifolium* (Roxb.) DC., *Pladaroxylon leucadendron* (G. Forst.) Hook.f.

Frankeniaceae – *Frankenia portulacifolia* (Roxb.) Spreng. [51]

Malvaceae – *Hibiscus diversifolius* Jacq.

Rosaceae – *Rubus pinnatus* Willd.

Solanaceae – *Mellissia begonifolia* (Roxb.) Hook.f. [18]

Sterculiaceae – *Trochetiopsis ervthroxylon* (G. Forst.) Marais, *Trochetiopsis melanoxyylon* (W.T. Aiton) Marais

#### Monocotyledoneae

Cannaceae – *Canna indica* L.

Cyperaceae – *Bulbostylis lichtensteiniana* (Kunth) C.B. Clarke, *Carex diana* Steud.

Juncaceae – *Juncus bufonius* L., *Juncus lomatoxyllus* Spreng.

Poaceae – *Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers. [45], *Digitaria ciliaris* (Retz.) Koeler, *Setaria welwitschii* Rendle

A few bear a collection number [square brackets], the highest being 51. We know therefore that at least 14 and possibly many more of his specimens are missing. From the date attached to the *Hypolepis rugulosa* specimen [23] it is evident that he had collected 23 specimens in under two months of his nine month stay. He would presumably have wished to collect a specimen of all the species he considered to be indigenous, and there are 55 species marked with an 'I' (for indigenous) in the 'Tracts'.

In addition to BM, I have made enquiries at K, BR, E, G, and LIV, where the major *Roxburgh* holdings are located (*Stafleu & Cowan*, 1983), and have failed to find any further specimens. However, if further specimens come to light the neotypes designated here will be invalid and lectotypification will be required in cases where presently only one specimen (holotype) is known. *Laségue* (1845: 302) mentions *Roxburgh* material from St Helena in the Delessert herbarium (G), probably obtained with the herbarium of A.B. Lambert (Miller, 1970). However, there are apparently no *Roxburgh* St Helena specimens in G, and if any were acquired by Lambert and dispersed on the sale of his herbarium in 1842, they have not been found.

## TWO VALID NAMES REVIVED WITH NEW COMBINATIONS

### *Diplazium filamentosum* (Roxb.) Cronk, **comb. nov.**

Basionym: *Asplenium filamentosum* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 299 (1816).

Synonyms: *Diplazium nigro-paleaceum* Kunze in *Linnaea* 24: 270 (1851) – Melliss, *St. Helena*: 354, n. 892 (1875); *Asplenium arborescens* Mett., *Fil. hort. bot. Lips.*: 78, t. 13 (1856), pro parte, sensu Hook., *Sp. fil.* 3: 256 (1860); *Asplenium nigropaleaceum* (Kunze) A. Braun in *Index Seminum Hort. bot., Berl.* (App.): 2 (1862); *Diplazium loddigesii* J. Sm. ex Diels in Engl. & Prantl, *Nat. Pflanzenfam.* 1: 226 (1899).

### *Sium bracteatum* (Roxb.) Cronk, **comb. nov.**

Basionym: *Angelica bracteata* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 297 (1816) – DC., *Prodr.* 4: 169 (1830).

Synonym: *Sium helenianum* Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1032 (1868) – Melliss, *St. Helena*: 279, n. 331, t. 34 (1875) – Hemsl., *Rep. Challenger, Bot.* 1(2): t. 48 (1885).

## A NEW NAME FOR ACALYPHA RUBRA ROXB.

*Acalypha rubrinervis* Cronk, **nom. nov.** pro *Acalypha rubra* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 295 (1816), **nom. illegit.**, non Willd., *Enum. pl.*: 992 (1809), non Wight ex Wall., *Numer. List*: no. 7781 (1847).

Synonyms: *Acalypha rubra* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 295 (1816) – Hemsl., *Rep. Challenger, Bot.* 1(2): t. 49 (1885); *A. arborea* auct., non Comm. ex Poir.; *A. reticulata* Müll. Arg. in DC., *Prodr.* 15(2): 851 (1866), var. *rubra* (Roxb.) Müll. Arg., *op. cit.* – Melliss, *St. Helena*: 318, n. 607, t. 52 (1875).

## NEW STATUS FOR COMMIDENDRUM GUMMIFERUM (ROXB.) DC.

*Commidendrum robustum* (Roxb.) DC. subsp. *gummiferum* (Roxb.) Cronk, **comb. et stat. nov.**

Basionym: *Conyza gummifera* Roxb. in Beatson, *Tracts St. Helena*: 304 (1816).

Synonyms: *Commidendrum gummiferum* (Roxb.) DC., *Prodr.* 5: 344 (1836); *Aster gummiferus* Hook.f. [= *Com-*

*midendrum spurium*] var. *B.*, Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1056 (1870); *Aster burchellii* Hook.f., *Icon pl.* 11: t. 1056 (1870) – Melliss, *St. Helena*: 283, n. 357 (1875); *Commidendrum burchellii* (Hook.f.) Benth. & Hook.f. ex Hemsl., *Rep. Challenger, Bot.* 1(2): 71 (1885); *Commidendrum robustum* (Roxb.) DC., sensu Hemsl., *Rep. Challenger, Bot.* 1(2): 71 (1885), pro parte; 'conferta' ined. [Burchell MS.].

*Commidendrum gummiferum* differs from *C. robustum* only in degree, having less indumentum, more toothing of the leaf and less drooping capitula. It now appears to be extinct but many of the trees of *Commidendrum robustum* at Peak Dale, St Helena, approach *C. gummiferum*, and are probably of hybrid origin. In my forthcoming *Endemic flora of St Helena I* treat this taxon at subspecific rank (Cronk, in press).

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