

Jubaeopsis afra – A New Name for an Old Species

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As a result of deliberations by the Nomenclature Section of the 20th International Botanical Congress, which took place on 15–19 July 2024 in Madrid, a well-known palm, *Jubaeopsis caffra* from South Africa, has changed its name to *Jubaeopsis afra*. The International Botanical Congress meets every six years and is the leading international forum for the botanical community. Every Congress is preceded by the week-long meeting of the Nomenclature Section at which proposals to amend the International Code of Nomenclature, the rules that govern the naming of algae, fungi and plants, are debated and voted upon. Among the 433 proposals discussed this year, the most controversial related to the changing of offensive or culturally inappropriate names and attracted widespread attention in the global media. The Nomenclature Section approved a proposal to change all botanical names based on the root caff[e]r (or caf[e]r) (Smith & Figueiredo 2021). These names are derived from a word that was originally used by botanists to denote a plant's African origins without offensive intention, but has since become a serious racial slur for people from Africa or of African heritage (Norris 2004). All such names were changed with immediate effect at the Congress,

dropping the “c” and “f” where necessary such that “caffra” becomes “afra.” The plant species epithets *afra* or *afrum* are already used in other plant names to indicate African geographical origins. Other proposals to allow the rejection of culturally offensive and inappropriate names were not passed in full (Hammer & Thiele 2021), but a mechanism to propose names for rejection if they are derogatory to a group of people will be enacted from 2026 onward. As the recent changes to the names of many palm species formerly included in *Dypsis* demonstrate, palm enthusiasts are adaptable and swift to accommodate nomenclatural change, and will no doubt quickly adopt this change in *Jubaeopsis*.

LITERATURE CITED

- HAMMER, T.A. AND K.R. THIELE. 2021. (119–122) Proposals to amend Articles 51 and 56 and Division III, to allow the rejection of culturally offensive and inappropriate names. *Taxon* 70: 1392–1394.
- NORRIS, B. 2024. Word stories: “kaffir”. Oxford English Dictionary <https://www.oed.com/discover/kaffir/?tl=true> (accessed 23 August 2024).
- SMITH, G.F. AND E. FIGUEIREDO. 2021. (126) Proposal to add a new Article 61.6 to permanently and retroactively eliminate epithets with the root caf[e]r- or caff[e]r- from the nomenclature of algae, fungi and plants. *Taxon* 70: 1395–1396.

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1. *Jubaeopsis afra* in its spectacular South African habitat (Photo: Troos van der Merwe CC BY-NC 4.0).



2. *Jubaeopsis afra* is still uncommon in cultivation (Photo: M.D. Ferrero).