

Who's in a name: eponymy of the name *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew., with notes on naming species after people

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Summary: Since the name *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew. was published in the mid-1930s, doubt has existed about whom it was named for. We determine that the specific epithet commemorates (Mrs) Edith Awdry ('Googoo') Thompson [née Eastwood] (2 January 1895–2 August 1991) who first collected material on which the name is based. Biographical information is provided for Awdry Thompson, as well as notes on naming species after people.

Zusammenfassung: Seit der Name *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew. in der Mitte der 1930er-Jahre publiziert wurde, herrschten Zweifel, nach wem die Art benannt wurde. Wir stellen fest, dass das Artepithet (Mrs) Edith Awdry ('Googoo') Thompson [geborene Eastwood] (2. Januar 1895–2. August 1991) ehrt, die als Erste Material sammelte, auf dem der Name basiert. Es werden biographische Angaben zu Awdry Thompson gegeben, gefolgt von Bemerkungen über die Benennung von Arten nach Personen.

Introduction

During the course of comprehensively synthesising taxonomic and nomenclatural information on the global *Aloe* L. flora (Smith *et al.*, 2008a, b), we noted discrepancies among several sources regarding the name of the person who is put forward as having been commemorated in the specific epithet used in *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew. This prompted a full review of the history of the derivation and use of the epithet, the outcome of which is presented here. *A. thompsoniae* is a good species of miniature aloe, which is endemic to the Wolkberg in Limpopo Province of South Africa (Glen *et al.*, 1995; Van Wyk & Smith, 2005; Craib, 2005). We also comment in general on the naming of species after people.

Aloe thompsoniae and its affinities

Aloe thompsoniae is one of the smallest species of southern Africa aloe, being rivalled in its small size and unassuming stature by few species (Figure 1), most of which belong in *Aloe* sect. *Graminaloe* Reynolds, the so-called typical grass aloes. Like other small aloes, many of which can easily escape detection and therefore become eradicated from sites where they occur naturally, for example through development, the conservation status of *A. thompsoniae* is currently regarded as Rare (Victor & Smith, 2009). In this regard the tiny, and highly threatened, Eastern Cape endemic, *Aloe bowiea* Schult. & Schult.f., is a case in point (Raimondo *et al.*, 2009). The clump-forming *A. thompsoniae* belongs to *A.* sect. *Leptoaloe* A.Berger, the majority of representatives of which are considerably larger than this species, as they are more reminiscent of large, robust grass tufts. The closest affinities of *A. thompsoniae* lie with *A. nubigena* Groenew., a similar-looking, but larger, species in which the leaves remain distichous rather than becoming rosulate. It has been suggested that the recently described *A. challisii* van Jaarsv. & A.E.van Wyk (Van Jaarsveld & Van Wyk, 2006) from Mpumalanga has affinities with *A. soutpansbergensis* I.Verd. rather than *A. thompsoniae*. *A. thompsoniae* is restricted to a small, mist-belt area in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, above 1500 m of altitude (Van Jaarsveld & Van Wyk, 2006). We were unable to substantiate a previous recording of the species in the Mpumalanga Province of the country (Glen & Hardy, 2000). The voucher for this record appears to be *Van Jaarsveld* 426, PRE, (Mpumalanga, Pilgrims Rest Dist., Graskop Dist., Pirows Grave) which was a specimen cultivated in a garden.

Eponymy of *Aloe thompsoniae*

Since the mid-1930s when Groenewald (1936a) first published the name *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew. (sphalm. *Aloe thompsoni*; see Groenewald, 1936b), confusion has reigned regarding who the species was named for. This situation likely resulted from the fact that Groenewald (1936a) did not provide the name(s) or initial(s) of the person he commemorated. In the protologue he simply stated that the species “...is eers versamel deur Mev. Dr. Thompson na wie dit heet.” [English: “...was first collected by Mrs. Dr. Thompson after whom it was named”]. This statement was repeated in his book on southern Africa aloes (Groenewald, 1941). Within a few years after these two publications appeared, doubt on the derivation of the name ensued as the then generation of aloe students disappeared from active research on the group. Soon, no-one could remember who “Mev. Dr. Thompson” was (Table 1).

Reynolds (1946) was apparently the first author to misinterpret the commemorated person, referring to her as a “Dr (Mrs) Thompson” and noting that “Dr Thompson first collected the plants around 1924”. The title ‘Dr’ was repeated by subsequent authors but, in fact, as initially indicated by Groenewald (“Mev. Dr. Thompson”) the person commemorated was the wife of Dr Thompson, a medical doctor. His wife, Awdry, did not have a doctoral degree herself.

Groenewald (1936a) did not designate a type specimen for *A. thompsoniae*, but the name was lectotypified later by Glen & Smith (1995). The specimen selected is labelled as having been collected by “Mrs Thompson” in 1930, not 1924 as suggested by Reynolds (1946) and Prinsloo (1972). Glen & Smith (1995) appear to be the first to associate the surname Thompson to the first names ‘Sheila Clifford’, referring to the commemorated person as “Dr (Mrs) Sheila Clifford Thompson”. This error may have been introduced into the



Figure 1. *Aloe thompsoniae* Groenew. Photo: G.W. Reynolds

literature because Sheila Thompson was listed in the seminal work of Gunn & Codd (1981) on botanical collectors of southern Africa, while no ‘Mrs Thompson’ was included in that book. ‘Dr/Mrs Sheila Clifford Thompson’ was mentioned by subsequent authors as being the mother of Louis Clifford Thompson (Wiktorowski, 1998–2011; Egli & Newton, 2004) and ‘Clifford’ was interpreted as being her maiden name (Wiktorowski, 1998–2011; Figueiredo & Smith, 2010). Alternatively, and to add to the confusion, it was thought that the person commemorated was a daughter of Sheila Thompson, by the name of Audrey (Charters, 2006–2011; Van Jaarsveld, 2009) (see Table 1).

The way the information on this eponymy got corrupted in the course of c. 70 years (Table 1) is an example of how incomplete and unverified information can be misleading and a source of further errors. This is particularly relevant for internet information sources which are not reviewed before publication. As the errors in the etymological information provided for the derivation of the epithet *thompsoniae* seem to perpetuate in the literature and internet, it is important to clarify the issue. The person commemorated in *A. thompsoniae* is Edith Awdry (‘Googoo’) Thompson [née Eastwood] (2 January 1895–2 August 1991) (Figure 2). She was married to Dr Louis Clifford Thompson and two of her children were Sheila (‘Box’) Clifford Thompson (1917–1998) and Louis (‘Potty’) Clifford Thompson (1920–1997). Neither Gunn & Codd (1981), nor the recent re-edition of that work (Glen & Germishuizen, 2010), gave any information on Awdry Thompson, although her children S.C. Thompson and L.C. Thompson have entries in these works. All three were collectors, but the plant that was described as *A. thompsoniae* was undoubtedly collected by, and named for, E.A. Thompson. This became clear after the publication of her memoirs as a little-known book (Wongtschowski, 2003) unknown to the majority of subsequent authors, with the exception of Craib (2005).

Awdry Thompson arrived at Woodbush, near Haenertsburg (Limpopo Province, South Africa) as a child in 1903. She started her collecting activities influenced by her parents, Arthur Keble Eastwood (1867–1932), a Forestry Officer, and Jane Mary Emma Eastwood [née Bidwell] (1863–1930), both of whom had some experience in plant collecting. A visit by Paul Ayshford Methuen (1886–1974) in 1910 and the opportunity to accompany him on collecting trips further fostered Awdry’s interest in collecting plants and animals. She would later be commemorated through the epithet *eastwoodae* in some names of animals described from her collections. In her recollections recorded by Wongtschowski (2003), Awdry describes how she found *A. thompsoniae* “...growing amongst some rocks on the Wolkberg when I, with

Table 1. Individuals put forward as having been commemorated in the name *Aloe thompsoniae*.

Author (date: page number)	Suggested commemoration	Date of collection
Groenewald (1936a: 64)	Mev. Dr. Thompson	Not given
Groenewald (1941: 88)	mevr. dr. Thompson	Not given
Reynolds (1946: t. 980)	Dr (Mrs) Thompson	1924
Reynolds (1950: 132)	Dr. (Mrs.) Thompson	1924
Bornmann & Hardy (1971: 21)	Mrs Thompson	Not given
Prinsloo (1972: 17)	Dr (Mrs) Thompson	1924
Glen & Smith (1995: 37)	Dr (Mrs) Sheila Clifford Thompson	Not given
Wiktorowski (1998–2011)	Dr. Sheila Thompson [born Clifford], mother of Louis Clifford Thompson	fl. 1930s
Glen & Hardy (2000: 15)	Mrs Thompson	Not given
Eggl & Newton (2004: 239)	Dr (Mrs) Sheila Clifford Thompson, mother of Louis Clifford Thompson	fl. ± 1930
Craib (2005: 111)	Awdry Thompson	Not given
Van Wyk & Smith (2005: 296)	Mrs Thompson	Not given
Charters (2006–2011)	Audrey Thompson, daughter of Sheila Thompson	fl. 1970
Van Jaarsveld (2009)	Audrey Thompson, daughter of Sheila Thompson	fl. 1970
Figueiredo & Smith (2010: 101)	Dr Sheila Thompson (née Clifford)	fl. 1930s
Grace <i>et al.</i> (2011: 152)	Dr Sheila Thompson (née Clifford)	fl. 1930s

my husband and Harry Whipp, a farmer from the Lowveld, rode on horseback to the flat area below the peak to inspect Harry's cattle, which were grazing there".

Naming species after people

Awdry Thompson is one of only 19 women commemorated in the name of a taxon of *Aloe* (Figueiredo & Smith, 2010). People have been commemorated in plant binomial nomenclature since Linnaeus' time. Over the past more than 250 years this has been mostly done as a way of



Figure 2. (Mrs) Edith Awdry ('Googoo') Thompson [née Eastwood] (2 January 1895–2 August 1991). Photo reproduced with the kind permission of Ms Martie Eloff, Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria.

honouring the people for their achievements in the field of botany or their contribution to the discovery of the plant. For example, twelve *Aloe* names commemorating people were published from 2009 to 2011, all of which refer to collectors, botanists or amateur botanists (Smith *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, in other plant groups, over the past few years a new practice has emerged whereby plants are named for those who are wealthy enough to buy their right to be so commemorated. As is the case where honours can be obtained in exchange for money, many botanists find this practice highly deplorable.

In aloes, naming plants after people is the second most popular way of constructing names (Figueiredo & Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, when the plant name is published, the person's name is sometimes devoid of further information, which defeats the purpose of commemorating that person (see for example Smith & Crouch, 2006, on the derivation of the name *A. vanrooyenii* Gideon F.Sm. & N.R.Crouch). A more recent example is *A. esteveii* Rebmann, dedicated to an unnamed friend of the author who accompanied him on his expeditions. In such a case, the identity of the commemorated person is only known to the author and that person. There are of course no rules against such a practice, but authors should bear in mind that, sometimes only a few years later, plant names can be mistakenly and undeservedly associated with the wrong person. It is therefore advisable that when commemorating a person, names should be accompanied by information about that person. Furthermore, the gender of the person should be stated so that the right Latin ending for the epithet can be confirmed. *A. thompsoniae*, for example, was initially published as *A. thompsoni* (which would mean it was named after a male), and later had to be corrected to agree with the gender of the commemorated person.

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