

A first record of a South African aloe, *Aloe spectabilis*, becoming naturalized elsewhere in the country

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Summary: The only recorded exotic species to become naturalized in South Africa is *Aloe camperi* Schweinf. It is well known that *Aloe arborescens* Mill. can become naturalized in Mediterranean areas outside of southern Africa. Here we report on a South African aloe, *Aloe spectabilis* Reynolds that has become naturalized in the country outside of its natural distribution range.

Zusammenfassung: Die einzige in Südafrika verwilderte exotische Art der Gattung ist *Aloe camperi* Schweinf. Darüberhinaus ist gut bekannt, dass ausserhalb des südlichen Afrikas *Aloe arborescens* Mill. im Mittelmeergebiet eingebürgert ist. Hier stellen wir eine südafrikanische Aloe vor, nämlich *Aloe spectabilis* Reynolds, welche innerhalb des Landes aber ausserhalb ihres natürlichen Vorkommens, verwildert ist.

Introduction

Thus far only one exotic species of *Aloe* L. has been recorded as having become naturalized in South Africa (Smith *et al.*, 2003). The species, *Aloe camperi* Schweinf., a native of the Horn of Africa, has a very wide ecological amplitude and thrives in a diverse range of climatic conditions. Beyond South Africa it has been shown that *Aloe arborescens* Mill. is spreading in Portugal, where the species grows exceptionally well in the Mediterranean climate prevalent over much of the Iberian Peninsula (Smith & Figueiredo, 2009). In South Africa it has been suggested that

this species has been introduced to the Cape Peninsula, which also has a typical Mediterranean climate with wet, mild winters and hot, dry summers (Smith *et al.*, 2008).

With the increasing popularity of aloes in amenity horticulture and domestic gardening in South Africa (Smith & Van Wyk, 2008), it is somewhat surprising that indigenous aloes have not yet escaped cultivation and invaded natural habitats away from their natural distribution ranges, given the ease with which the majority of species can be grown and propagated.

A South African aloe naturalized in South Africa

However, an extensive naturalized population of *Aloe spectabilis* Reynolds, a KwaZulu-Natal species, occurs on the farm Bester Schrik (Besterskrik) in the Free State, 5 km north of the Korannaberg, with a single individual known from the Korannaberg itself (Figure 1). This population has an interesting history that dates back to the start of the Anglo Boer War when plants were brought back to Bester Schrik from the Ladysmith area in a cake tin in 1900. Three plants were planted on a koppie on the farm and have multiplied to more than 30,000 plants (Oliver, 1986; Eloff & Powrie, 1990).

Spread of the naturalized plants

Aloe spectabilis is adapted to the warmer climate of KwaZulu-Natal and not to the extremely cold winters of the Free State. The naturalized population is therefore very localized and restricted to

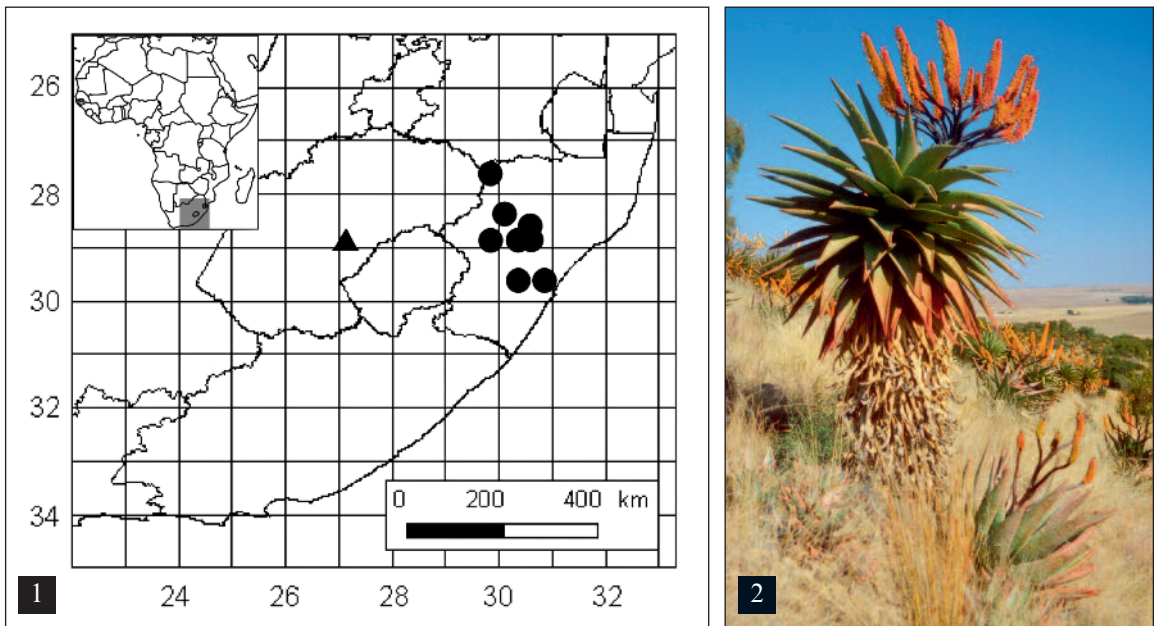


Figure 1. Natural distribution of *A. spectabilis*, based on specimens at PRE, ●; naturalized distribution in the Free State, ▲. **Figure 2.** Naturalized plants of *A. spectabilis* on the farm Bester Schrik in the Free State. In general seed set and germination is very good in the suitable microclimate on the koppie. However, plants are prevented from spreading further by climatic factors. Photo: P.C. Zietsman.

the more protected northwestern slopes of the koppie above the old farmhouse. Here it has found the perfect microclimate in which it could establish and thrive, but it is prevented from spreading further by climatic factors.

The population consists of many big, mature plants, as well as a large number of small, immature plants indicating that, in general, there is good seed set and germination (Figure 2). However, extreme cold spells can kill young inflorescences and prevent flowering, as was the case in August–September 2009.

Specimens cited

FREE STATE.—2827 (Senekal): Farm Bester Schrik, NW slope of koppie above farm house, (–CC), 2009-09-08, R.R. Klopper, A.W. Klopper & P.C. Zietsman 245 (PRE, NMB); Korannaberg, N front van klipkoppie, (–CC), 1989-07-24, P.C. Zietsman 956 (NMB).

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