A new species of *Aframomum* (Zingiberaceae) from Central Africa

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Abstract

The new species, *Aframomum sericeum*, is described and illustrated for the first time. It differs from the similar *A. sulcatum* by its dense covering of hairs on the abaxial leaf surface.

Introduction

*Aframomum* Schumann (1904) comprises an estimated 80 species of giant herbs endemic to Africa, where it is the largest genus of Zingiberaceae and is in many places a key ecological component of the forest understory. The genus was described by K. Schumann (1904) to accommodate the African species of *Amomum*. It is monophyletic (Harris et al. 2000) and is thought to have diversified during the late Oligocene to the Miocene (Auvray et al. 2010). The taxonomy of *Aframomum* is notoriously difficult (Lock & Hall 1975) and the genus is currently undergoing revision.

The diversity of *Aframomum* species is centred on Central Africa with several new species described recently (Dhetchuvi 1993, 1995, Dhetchuvi & Fischer 2006). The new species described in this paper was independently discovered and recognised as new by the first author in Gabon and by the corresponding author in the Central African Republic (Harris 2002). Subsequent comparison of specimens showed that the two discoveries were conspecific. Comparison with existing herbarium specimens revealed several more specimens, with an overall distribution including Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and the Republic of Congo.

Taxonomy

*Aframomum sericeum* Dhetchuvi & D.J.Harris, sp. nov. (Fig. 1)


Type:—GABON. Mpassa Forest Reserve, Makokou, 0° 34’ N, 12° 52’ E, 18 November 1994, M.M. Dhetchuvi 1725 (holotype BR!, isotype WAG!).

Clump-forming herbs to 6 m. Rhizomes to 15 mm in diameter, reddish-brown when dry. Stems often swollen up to 4 cm in diameter at base. Leaf sheaths with rounded and branched transverse and longitudinal ridges, glabrous, occasionally ciliate at edges. Ligules rounded, to 9 mm, bilobed towards tip, glabrous. Pseudopetioles to 10 mm, glabrous. Leaves narrowly elliptic, to 55 × 11 cm, base slightly asymmetric, apex caudate, acumen ca. 10 mm, margin glabrous, glabrous adaxially, tomentose abaxially, with erect, swollen-based trichomes to 0.5 mm long on laminae, midribs tomentose, secondary veins usually obscured by strands
FIGURE 1. *Aframomum sericeum*. A. habit and inflorescence, scale bar 5 cm; B, leaf sheath and ligule, scale bar 1 cm; C. detail of leaf sheath ornamentation, scale bar 2 mm; D, leaf, scale bar 5 cm; E, adaxial lamina showing free hypodermal sclerenchyma, scale bar 1 mm; F, abaxial lamina and midrib, scale bar 5 mm; G, detail of internal floral structures, scale bar 4 cm; H, anther, scale bar 5 mm; I, stigma, scale bar 5 mm; J, infructescence, scale bar 3 cm. A, G–I from *Harris 3266*, B–F from *Harris 5614*, J from *Westphal 9754*. Drawing by Claire Banks.
of free hypodermal sclerenchyma adaxially when dry, clearly visible abaxially. Inflorescences arising at or close to the leaf bases, occasionally on rhizomes to 40 cm away, usually branched, each branch bearing ca. 2 flowers, peduncles to 20 cm, borne at or below ground level for most of their length. Flowers trumpet-shaped, delicate. Calyx tubular, greenish to purple. Corolla tubular, dark reddish purple, dorsal petal to 7 cm, lateral petals ca. 4 cm. Labellum pale purple, to 7 × 5 cm, forming a tube with dorsal petal. Stamen included, anther crest to 5 mm, horns to 5 mm, sometimes forked at tips, anther thecae dehiscing for lower three-quarters of their length. Nectaries paired, free for most of their length. Fruits ellipsoid, to 6.0 × 3.5 cm, distinctly ridged, greenish, ripening bright red, persistent calyx forming beak to 3 cm long, persistent bracts at base, pulp sweet and acidic to taste. Seeds ellipsoid, to 5 × 3 mm, dark brown, smooth.

**Etymology:**—Named for the dense covering of hairs on the leaves abaxially.

**Distribution:**—Central and eastern Cameroon, central and northern Gabon, southern Central African Republic, northern Republic of Congo, on cleared land, around villages, fields and roads, occasionally in *Gilbertiodendron dewevrei* forests, at 350–620 m elevation.


*Aframomum sericeum* may be recognised in the field by its large leaves with erect hairs on the lamina and midrib below, dark red corolla and large, ridged fruits. In the herbarium additional useful characters for identification include free strands of hypodermal sclerenchyma cells (Lock & Hall 1975) which can be observed using a ×10 lens on air-dried leaves, and transverse ridging of the leaf sheath.

There is some variability in vegetative characters within *A. sericeum*: occasionally the transverse ridges on the leaf sheath are absent and some specimens (e.g. Tutin 5 and Rogers 151), have almost sessile young leaves. The midrib can also become glabrous towards the base of the leaf with age.
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References


