Short Communication

Polyscias (Araliaceae) not *Brucea* (Simaroubaceae) is native to the Arabian PeninsulaMartin Cheek¹

Summary. It is shown that the single record of the genus *Brucea* J. F. Mill. (Simaroubaceae) from Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula (Wood 2886), identified as *Brucea antidysenterica* J. F. Mill., is based on a misidentification. The specimen is actually *Polyscias fulva* (Hiern) Harms in the Araliaceae, a genus and species not previously recorded from the Peninsula although a common pioneer tree of submontane forest in neighbouring continental Africa.

Key Words. Arabian Peninsula, Araliaceae, *Brucea*, *Polyscias*, Simaroubaceae.

A sterile specimen from Yemen (Ja'fariyah region of Jabal Raymah, in a gully between Sha'af and Ulooja, 1500 m alt., st. 13 July 1979 Wood 2886 (K)), that had previously been named as *Brucea antidysenterica* J. F. Mill. (Simaroubaceae), was later rejected from that family by Brian Stannard (pers. comm.). On identifying it as *Polyscias fulva* (Hiern) Harms (Araliaceae) I found that no previous material of that genus from the Arabian Peninsula existed at K. Sabina Knees, co-editor of *Flora of the Arabian Peninsula* confirmed that this was also the situation at E. Neither is *Polyscias* listed for Yemen by Wood (1997: 207) nor for Saudi Arabia by Collett (1999). It is unknown from Oman according to Shahina Ghazanfar who is compiling the Flora of that country (pers. comm.). Frodin & Govaerts (2004) do not list any species of *Polyscias* from the Arabian Peninsula. They do list *Polyscias fulva* as occurring in 21 countries in continental Africa (2004: 289), where it is a common pioneer tree, particularly in tropical submontane evergreen forest in the altitudinal band 700 – 2500 m (pers. obs.). Therefore Wood 2886 appears to be the first record for both the species and genus in the Arabian Peninsula.

Brucea antidysenterica is a tree of high altitude forest in Tropical Africa like *Polyscias fulva* though it is less frequent. Within the Arabian Peninsula *Brucea* has only been reported from Yemen where Wood believed that he had discovered it sterile at two locations, one at 1500 m, the other at 1800 m (Wood 1997: 200), citing the single specimen reidentified above as *Polyscias fulva*. The confusion appears to stem from the fact that both taxa are trees with alternate, pinnately compound leaves which are tomentose below. *B. antidysenterica* however, lacks the curry-like scent, when dried, of the

araliad, has a rusty rather than a white tomentum, and sinuous rather than straight leaflet margins.

Wood's description of the collection site of his specimen, in a gully on a path between two villages, suggests that *Polyscias fulva* is not planted, but native in Yemen. It is not clear whether his record represents a recent dispersal event (perhaps mediated by birds since the fruits are juicy) from neighbouring Ethiopia or a remnant of a former, more diverse submontane forest community. There are no data to support the second possibility. Given that it is a vigorous pioneer in tropical Africa, the first is considered most likely here.

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