



***Malva aethiopica*, a new name for *Lavatera abyssinica* (Malvaceae): an endemic species of the Ethiopian Highlands.**

CHRISTOPHER J.S. DAVIS

Department of Botany, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, UK.
E-mail: c.davis@nhm.ac.uk

Linnaeus (1753) delineated the genera in the *Malva* generic alliance on the basis of epicalyx conformation, *Althaea* having six or more basally fused bracteoles, *Lavatera* with only three fused bracteoles, and *Malva* with two or three bracteoles attached separately around the base of the calyx.

Epicalyx characters are not informative at the generic level (although useful in species delimitation), due to their highly homoplasious nature, and this circumscription has since been shown to be “untenable based on extensive morphological and molecular analyses” (Ray 1995). Finding that fruit characters correspond very well with the molecular phylogeny, Ray proposed the monophyletic “malvoid group” (including the type species *Malva sylvestris* L.): having 6–12(–15) mericarps each generally completely enclosing a seed, with angled margins between lateral and dorsal faces, the whole acting as a “dispersal unit”. Ray (1998) thus accommodated malvoid *Lavatera* species by transferring them to *Malva*.

Banfi *et al.* (2005) have gone further, transferring many remaining “lavateroid” species (including the type, *Lavatera trimestris* L.) to *Malva*. Escobar García *et al.* (2009) established beyond doubt that the annual species of *Althaea*, *A. hirsuta* L. (*Malva setigera* K.F.Schimp. & Spenn.) and *A. ludwigii* L. (*M. malwensis* Edgew.) belong within the *Malva* complex. Stace (2010a) has also followed this view, applying *Malva* in its broad sense.

The three shrubby Mediterranean-Macaronesian malvoid species (previously included in *Lavatera*)—*Malva arborea* Webb & Berthel., *M. subovata* (DC.) Molero & J.M.Monts. and *M. canariensis* M.F.Ray—mark the first branching lineages sister to the rest of the malvoid clade, with the ruderal group of Mediterranean-Eurasian species forming most of its core. Escobar García *et al.* (2009) further devised the “extra-Mediterranean” subclade of shrubby malvoid species—*M. preissiana* Miq., *M. pacifica* M.F.Ray, *M. lindsayi* (Moran) M.F.Ray, *M. occidentalis* (S.Watson) M.F.Ray and *M. assurgentiflora* (Kellogg) M.F.Ray—which represents a radiation from tropical Africa to Australia, Mexico and California, with ambiguous relationships to ruderal taxa.

Although Ray (1995) pointed out the somewhat intermediate nature of its rounded mericarp margins, morphological and molecular evidence clearly places *Lavatera abyssinica* Hutch. & E.A.Bruce in the extra-Mediterranean sub-clade. Within this group, the Australian endemic *Malva preissiana* is the nearest geographically and most similar morphologically to *L. abyssinica*. Both species have a less robust habit, smaller flowers, and fruits divided into smaller, more numerous mericarps, relative to the four island-endemic Mexican-Californian species. *Lavatera abyssinica* is the only extra-Mediterranean species not yet transferred to *Malva*, which I hereby propose:

Malva aethiopica* C.J.S.Davis, *nom. nov.

Basionym: *Lavatera abyssinica* J.Hutchinson & E.A.Bruce in J.B.Gillett (1941:107), *non Malva abyssinica* A.Braun (= *Malva verticillata* L.).

Type: Ethiopia (‘Abyssinia’). Slopes of Mt Sarerta, 8000 ft, 23 February 1933, *J.B. Gillett 5195* (holotype K-000240293, isotypes FT, P), Figure 1.