



## Article

### ***Euphorbia melanohydrata* subsp. *conica* (Euphorbiaceae), a new subspecies from Namibia, with notes on the identification of similar medusoid euphorbias**

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#### **Abstract**

*Euphorbia melanohydrata* subsp. *conica*, here described as a new subspecies, is only known from a small area within the Gariiep Centre of Endemism, southwestern Namibia. Diagnostic characters for subsp. *conica* include a distinctly conical or ovoid habit, a thickened main root usually without rhizomatous branches (plants not clump-forming), tuberculate lateral branches that often rebranch and persistent, stellate peduncles. A comparative table with diagnostic morphological features to distinguish between the two subspecies of *E. melanohydrata* and three other medusoid euphorbias (*E. friedrichiae*, *E. multiceps* and *E. namibensis*) is provided.

#### **Introduction**

Several species of dwarf succulent *Euphorbia* Linnaeus (1753: 450) with stout, partly buried main stems, covered with numerous tuberculate lateral branches are presently known from the *Flora of southern Africa* region. Popularly known as "miniature medusoid euphorbias", at least ten species of this group are known from the Richtersveld and Sperrgebiet (southern Namib Desert), quite a few of which are endemic to these areas (Williamson 1996, 2010, Germishuizen & Meyer 2003). The Richtersveld and Sperrgebiet form part of the Gariiep Centre of Endemism in the Northern Cape and southern Namibia, a cross-border biogeographical region rich in restricted range plants and animals (Van Wyk & Smith 2001). In this contribution, yet another new taxon of *Euphorbia* endemic to the Namibian part of the Gariiep Centre is described.

In 2006 during a botanical expedition to the Namus-Huns Mountain complex in southwestern Namibia, the author encountered an unusual dwarf succulent *Euphorbia*, with a conspicuous conical habit. At first it was thought to represent *E. multiceps* Berger (1905: 182), but careful examination showed that it differs from this species in several characters and is in fact most closely related to *Euphorbia melanohydrata* Nel (1935: 31). More plants with this conical habit were subsequently found on two separate plains in the Namus Mountains, and they are here proposed as representing a distinct new subspecies of *E. melanohydrata*. A study of the *Euphorbia* holdings in PRE and WIND revealed no other collections of the taxon.

Populations of the new subspecies and the typical form of *E. melanohydrata* were studied in the field and morphological states presented in the present contribution are based on living plants, fresh flowering material and mature fruits. For *E. multiceps*, *E. namibensis* Marloth (1909: 318) and *E. friedrichiae* Dinter (1914: 29), diagnostic features were obtained from field observations and/or the literature (White *et al.* 1941, Williamson 1996, 2010, Court 2010).