

POACEAE

ODONTELYTRUM: A NEW GENERIC RECORD FOR SOUTH AFRICA

During an aquatic weed survey in December, 1974, Mr F. de W. Brand, a member of the Transvaal Provincial Administration, collected an aquatic grass, *Odontelytrum abyssinicum* Hack., in the municipal dam at Belfast (c. 2 000 m) in the eastern Transvaal. This gathering, *Brand* 44, represents a new generic record for South Africa. It has subsequently been re-collected by the author at Belfast, *Du Toit* 1083.

The monotypic genus *Odontelytrum*, first described by Hackel, was based on a Schimper specimen, collected in Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in stagnant water between Paffat and Dewra Tabor (c. 2700 m). The nearest known locality outside Ethiopia is Oljoro Nyuki on the Ngorongoro crater floor (c. 1900 m), in a *Cyperus*-swamp in Tanzania. The grass seems to prefer a cool climate in stagnant or slow-flowing water. It is possible that this grass spread to South Africa via the eastern mountain ranges being dispersed by waterbirds. This view is strengthened by the observations of Mr Brand, who stated that waterbirds relish the seeds and young shoots.

Although superficially resembling *Oryza longistaminata*, the wild rice, and *Oryzidium barnardii*, *Odontelytrum* is closely allied to *Pennisetum*, a genus with which it cannot be confused. On close examination, the long "awn" of *Odontelytrum* proves to be an

elongate bristle of the involucre surrounding the spikelet. In the case of *Oryza* and *Oryzidium*, the awn arises from the lemma.

The specimen from the eastern Transvaal was identified in time for the genus to be included in Volume 2 of *The Genera of Southern African Flowering Plants* by R. A. Dyer (1976). Readers are referred to this publication for a full description of the genus. To facilitate identification and to encourage further observations on its distribution, a brief diagnostic description is given here.

***Odontelytrum abyssinicum* Hack.** in Oestr. Bot Zeitschr. 48: 86 (1898); Stapf in Hook. Ic. Pl. 31. t. 3074 (1922). Type: Aethiopia, between Paffat and Dewra Tabor, *Schimper* 1121.

Aquatic perennials, with soft spongy culms, leaves light green or purplish, minutely scabrid. *Inflorescence* a stout raceme, sheathed at the base. *Spikelets* solitary, purple or straw-coloured, and enveloped by an involucre of partially fused bristles. *Spikelets* two-flowered, the lower male, the upper bisexual. At maturity spikelets fall entire with the involucre.