

THE CORRECT SPELLING OF THE GENERIC NAME MITRACARPUS
(RUBIACEAE)

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Mitracarpus Zuccarini was published as an "Observation" by Schultes and Schultes in their third Mantissa (1827, p. 210) on the basis of a letter from Zuccarini. Unfortunately the description was not in the usual form, and nowhere does the generic name appear in the nominative case. The two sentences in which the name appears are quoted below:

Genus a SPERMACOCIBUS separandum, et ad quod plures hujus generis species brasilienses sibi pertinere videntur, benigne communicavit clis Zuccarini, ob superiorem capsulae partem deciduam mitraeformem MITRACARPUM ab illo dictum. . . Zuccarini in litt., qui hujus generis unicam nobis indigitavit speciem: "M. *scabrum* in *sabulosis prope Forte Louis* crescentem."

In 1828 Schlechtendal and Chamisso took the spelling *Mitracarpum* directly from this description and described a number of new species. In 1830 de Candolle followed their lead, spelling the name *Mitracarpum* and describing more new species. Index Kewensis accepted the spelling *Mitracarpum* until Supplement VII was issued in 1929, as did Willis and Airy Shaw in their dictionaries, and some modern authors continue to use this spelling, e.g. Correll and Johnston in their new Manual of the Vascular Plants of Texas. On the other hand, Schumann spelled the name *Mitracarpus* in Die Natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien, and his spelling is accepted by many modern herbaria and workers in the Rubiaceae. Thus there is persistent uncertainty as to the correct spelling of this name. This is unfortunate and unnecessary, since it can actually be shown that Zuccarini intended the spelling to be *Mitracarpus*, not *Mitracarpum*.

In the first sentence quoted above, "MITRACARPUM" stands in apposition to "genus", the object of the verb, and therefore "MITRACARPUM" is in the accusative case. Since the spelling *Mitracarpum* would be used in the accusative of either *Mitracarpus* or *Mitracarpum* in the nominative, but not of *Mitracarpa* in the nominative, it can be deduced from this sentence that the generic name is intended to be masculine or neuter, but not feminine. Now considering the second sentence, in which Schultes was quoting from Zuccarini's letter, it is obvious that "crescentem" modifies "M. *scabrum*." "[C]rescentem" is in the accusative case, which means that "M. *scabrum*" is also in the accusative; it was probably the object of the missing verb in Zuccarini's incompletely-quoted sentence. Since *scabrum* is the accusative form of *scaber* when it modifies a masculine or neuter noun, but not a feminine noun, it is again clear that the generic name must be either masculine or neuter. When *crescens* is declined in the accusative case, it takes the form *crescentem* in the masculine and feminine but *crescens* in the neuter. Therefore *crescentem* must be modifying a masculine or feminine name, and since it has been shown above that the name cannot be feminine, it must be masculine! Zuccarini and Schultes clearly intended the name of the genus to be the masculine nominative *Mitracarpus*, and of the type species to be *Mitracarpus scaber*. The fact that the names were declined in the accusative in the original description does not affect the correct spelling of the generic name, which is that of a nominative substantive, as demanded by standard practice and as intended by Zuccarini. It is of some incidental interest to note that before the publication of *Mitracarpus* Martius and Zuccarini had already published the name *Psyllocarpus* for another genus in the Rubiaceae. This shows Zuccarini's preference for the common spelling of the suffix -carpus, as opposed to the rarely-used spelling -carpum.

I hope that this note will resolve the problem and that future editions of floras and influential dictionaries will take up the correct spelling of this name.

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