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# *Aloe tewoldei* – a rare cliff-dwelling Ethiopian endemic

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## Introduction and habitat

*Aloe tewoldei* was named for Tewolde-Berhan Gebre-Egziabher, joint leader of the Ethiopian Flora Project. He first collected a single plant in the 1970s along the road to the south from Asbe Teferi in the Harerge Region of southern Ethiopia (Gilbert & Sebsebe Demissew, 1997). Thus this species is only known from a single living plant and is therefore considered to be a highly localised Ethiopian endemic. The late Frank Horwood took cuttings from Addis Ababa which were grown successfully and the plant thrived in cultivation, notably at Kew from which the type specimen was prepared and the new species described by Gilbert & Sebsebe Demissew (1997).

The species grows on limestone cliffs in Harerge and hence is another example of an obligate cremnohyte (cliff-dweller). There are no known definitive photos of this species growing in habitat. However, it may also occur

in the Bale Region as discussed and illustrated by Sebsebe Demissew & Nordal (2010) but this second specimen from the latter area is of uncertain identity. Since this species is very poorly known there is an urgent need for it to be recollected in the wild.

## In cultivation

My plant (fig 1) came as a cutting from Al Laius with the accession number ES 15476, indicating that this is from the German nurseryman Ernst Specks. I have no further data, but I suspect that this is a propagation from the original collection since I have no evidence of further collections. My plant has leaves up to 15 cm long and 2 cm wide, modestly irregularly spotted on both surfaces, glaucous-green in colour with small marginal teeth. The stem is only about 10 cm long, but the original description indicates that this can grow up to 50 cm long. It has a single young basal offset.

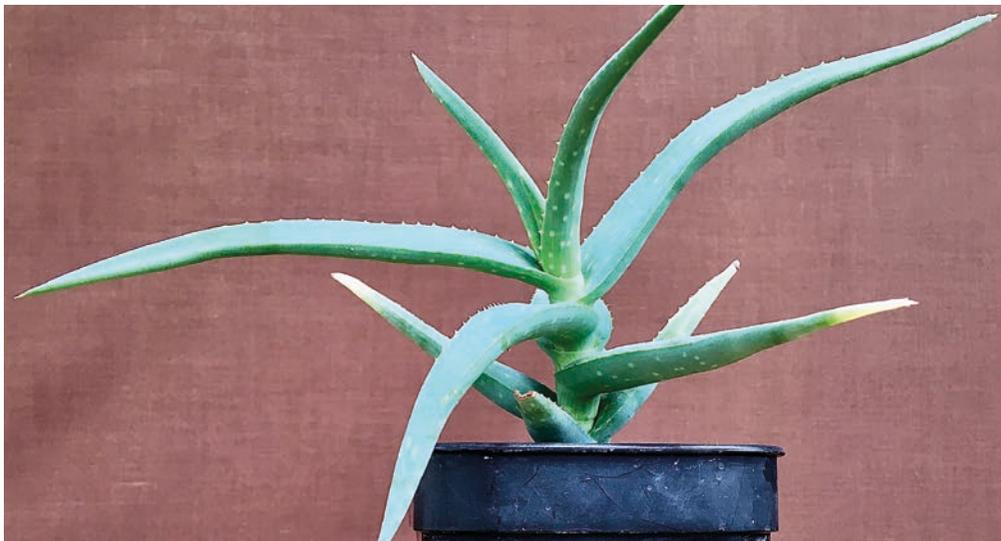


Fig 1. *Aloe tewoldei* in an 8.5 cm pot.



Fig 2. *Aloe tewoldei* in flower.

Fig 3. Close-up of part of the slender pendulous inflorescence of *A. tewoldei*.



The plant flowered for the first time in June–July 2020 and I was somewhat surprised to have it flower as such a young plant (fig 2). The inflorescence is unbranched, 55 cm long with flowers up to 4 cm apart, making this very laxly arranged. The peduncle is 3 mm across at the base, tapering to just 1 mm across at the tip; very slender and pendulous. This arrangement of the inflorescence is unlike any other aloe I have ever flowered. However, the flowers themselves are unremarkable being coral pink and swollen at the base fading to greenish-striped tepals (fig 3).

## Relationships

Gilbert & Sebsebe Demissew (1997) compared their new species to *Aloe jacksonii*, another apparently highly localised Ethiopian endemic (Walker, 2017). The two species are similar in having narrow spotted leaves with marginal teeth and lax unbranched inflorescences. *Aloe jacksonii* differs however in having densely spotted leaves with slightly fewer marginal teeth. The inflorescence is denser (3–4 flowers per cm) and erect, not pendulous; the flowers are also more brightly coloured. Carter *et al* (2011) also agreed that *A. jacksonii* was the closest relative to *A. tewoldei*. Another interesting point of similarity between these two species is that *A. jacksonii* is also only known from a single original collection, such that there is just a single clone available in cultivation (Walker, 2017).

However, Sebsebe Demissew & Nordal (2010) compared *A. tewoldei* to *A. welmelensis*, another Ethiopian endemic, from which *A. tewoldei* is distinguished by having 2 mm long pinkish marginal spines, flowers arranged on all sides, pedicel 12 mm long and perianth 20 mm long. In contrast, *A. welmelensis* has white marginal teeth to 1 mm long, second flowers (arranged only on one side of the peduncle), pedicel 5–7 mm long and perianth 30–32 mm long.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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