116. Dypsis fibrosa

This is one of the most widespread of species in the “Vonitra” group, occurring throughout the north-west and eastern rain forest belt. In habitat it differs from the much larger D. crinita that often grows in nearby valley bottoms and riversides, while the present species will grow on ridges and slopes. The sheaths produce abundant piassava, leaf sheath fibre, and hence the species name. This species has been cultivated in many botanical gardens and private collections where the combination of neat dark green leaves that are flushed red when newly emerged and attractive brown fibre make it particularly ornamental. Its ability to branch dichotomously adds to its appeal.

**Distribution.** NW and E Madagascar.

**Habitat.** Moist upland forest or coastal hill forest on steep slopes or less often on ridge tops, also in littoral or peatswamp forest overlying white sand at low altitudes; alt. 5–800 m.

**Local names.** Vonitra (widespread), Vonitrambohitra (mountain vonitra, fide Jumelle), Ravimbontro (Nosy Mangabe).

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**Note.** This is the most robust member of the “Vonitra” group.

**Specimens seen.** Moramanga: Analamazaotra (fl.), Perrier 12005 (Holotype P); idem, Feb. 1924 (fl.), Perrier 16067 (P); idem, Oct. 1963 (fl.), Moore 9005 (BH, TAN); idem, March 1991 (ster.), Beentje & Raharilala 4409 (K, TAN); Maromiza, March 1991 (fl., fr.), Beentje & Raharilala 4417 (BH, K, MO, P, TAN).

**Sight record.** A specimen from Ranomafana was brought to us by Dan Turk and was definitely this species (because of the length of the leaf and the branching of the inflorescence).

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Dypsis utilis (x: sight records)

Dypsis fibrosa, surviving in a cleared area, Sahavary.
USES. Leaf extensively used for thatching (Masoala), inflorescences sold as brushes (Masoala). Formerly one of the main piassava producers (30–50 francs a kg in 1951).

CONSERVATION STATUS. Not threatened. Widespread.

Dypsis fibrosa (Wright) Beentje & J. Dransf. comb. nov.

SYNONYMS:

Dictyosperma fibrosum Wright, Kew Bull. (1894): 359. Type: Madagascar, Proctor Brothers s.n. (Holotypus K).

Vonitra fibrosa (Wright) Becc., Agric. Colon. 5: 322 (1911); Becc., Palme del Madag.: 8, figs. 3, 4 (1912).


Solitary or clustering palm, when clustering in groups of 2–6. Trunk 3–9 m, branched once or twice (rarely three times) a few meters above the ground, rarely unbranched, the branches closely parallel, 5–18 cm diam.; distal part of the trunk covered in fibrous piassava; base swollen, sometimes with surface roots resembling stilt roots; bark pale brown to grey, ringed, internodes 0.8–2 cm; wood hard, white. Leaves 8–25 in each crown, occasionally with up to 8 marcescent leaves; leaves arching, held on edge in the distal half; sheath 40–60 cm long, red-brown floccose, proximally 10–12 cm wide, more distally with a central woody part and a fibrous part together with a 30–34 cm long pale brown tongue opposite the
petiole becoming turred and so producing the piaassava clothing the upper part of the trunk; petiole 40–170 cm long, proximally 1.2–2.6 x 0.8–1.5 cm, distally 0.9–1.6 x 0.8–1 cm, with red-brown patches of tomentum but glabrous, adaxially slightly convex or channelled, with sharp edges; rachis 1.4–2 m long, in mid-leaf 0.9–1 cm wide and keeled, with red-brown patches of tomentum but glabrous; leaflets regular, 34–51 on each side of the rachis, in one plane, dull dark green (red in young leaves), the proximal 45–82 x 0.8–2.5 cm, median 46–71 x 2.6–4.3 cm (108 x 7.3 cm in Perrier 14097), distal 10–42 x 0.5–2.3 cm, acute, the terminal pair in young plants wide (up to 5 cm) and conuate for up to 25 % of their length, main veins 5–7, the midrib prominent adaxially, glabrous, apices unequally attenuate. **INFLORESCENCE** interfoliar; erect in bud, procerf-arcing in flower and fruit, branched to 3 orders (once to 4 orders); peduncle 70–94 (= 150) cm long, proximally 1.5–2.5 x 0.9–1.6 cm, distally 1.7 x 0.7–1 cm, green, glabrous; prophyll 39–56 x 36–9 mm, reddish-tomentose, glabrous; peduncular bract 103–188 mm, 6–8 cm wide, splitting only near its apex, beaked for 2–12 cm, coriaceous, inserted at 17–20 cm from the base of the peduncle, abscising and carried upwards with the lengthening inflorescence, brown with patches of red-brown pubescence; rachis 37–60 cm long, green, glabrous, with 15–17 branched and 6–14 unbranched branches; first order branches flattened, 0.8–1.3 x 0.3–0.5 cm, with basal swelling; rachillae arcing to almost pendulous (4.5–) 17–53 cm long (up to 78 cm in fruit) and with spaced triads in slight pits.


**NOTE.** The fruit is said to be eaten by wild pig, and have we seen signs which seem to confirm this. Though Beccari (1906) thought he was making a new combination based on Dypsis thouarsiana when coining the name Vonitra thouarsana, the descriptions, both of the new genus and of the species, were based on Baron 3190, quite distinct from the types of Dypsis thouarsiana. Beccari saw the types of Dypsis thouarsiana and thought the leaf was a young one, possibly a seedling, of his new taxon; he also considered the inflorescence of Dypsis thouarsiana as too young to analyse. The taxa, however, are clearly distinct, the types of Dypsis thouarsiana having three most peculiar stamens and leaves with 3–4 leaflets on each side of the rachis (see under 109. Dypsis thouarsiana).


**117. Dypsis antanambensis**

This is a new species in the "Vonitra" group; it thrives on steep slopes and on ridge tops in low-canopy forest on ultramafic rock. It tends to branch near ground level and have several more or less equal rather slender trunks that are clothed in long persistent short piaassava fibre. The leaves are distinctive having rather short leaflets that diverge from the rachis at an acute angle and tend to be held rather stiffly. The name is derived from the type locality. As far as we know, this species is not in cultivation.

**DISTRIBUTION.** Only known from one small area in the Mananara Avaratra Biosphere Reserve.

**HABITAT.** Rather open rain forest, on ultramafic soils on steep mid slopes and ridge tops; 250–290 m.

**LOCAL NAMES.** Not recorded.

**USES.** Not recorded.

**CONSERVATION STATUS.** Endangered. Despite its occurrence in a protected area, the number of individuals seems to be less than fifty.