

## Habitat

Forest clearings and roadside verges, 1400 m.

## Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks go to Dr. Miguel Molinari for providing the original specimen and seeds, and for information on the natural habitat and fate of this interesting local variant of *P. cuneata*. Also to Christabel King for preparing the beautiful illustration and Brian Mathew for his help and advice.

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# Adenia in the Wild

Jean-Jacques Segalen

Barbadine, B.P. 100 - 97832 Le Tampon Cedex, Ile de la Reunion, France

I live on Reunion island, a French department in the Indian Ocean, between Madagascar and Mauritius. Although the island might pretend to be a reliable blueprint of paradise, with both lush tropical vegetation covering a volcanic island and French gourmet food, we do miss some essential items : passionflowers, of course. Well, we grow and eat all kinds of purple and yellow granadilla, sweet granadilla, giant granadilla, sweet calabash, and



Foliage of *Adenia gummifera* on Reunion Is. Photo by Jean-Jacques Segalen

have ornate gardens and pergolas with *P. coccinea*, *P. 'Amethyst'*, *P. vitifolia* etc...but we (well, I do anyway) miss the excitement of running into exotic new species while roaming in the forests and gullies, a great part of my activities. *P. foetida* and *P. suberosa* grow like weeds in most places, but are so common that they would not stop anybody in their tracks.

So when a friend of mine, Roger Lavergne, a local botanist who spends more time in the wild than in his home, told me of an *Adenia gummifera* growing wild in a deep ravine in the Northern part of the island, I grabbed my camera and hiking shoes and went to meet him. Roger ran into this plant a few years ago while working in this area and was quite surprised. Of course, *Adenia* are not unknown in this part of the world, but the closest place where they grow is Madagascar and Africa.

We met at the entrance of the gully and walked for some time amongst large boulders along a small running creek. When we reached a turn Roger pointed to a place on the other side of the ravine, covered by lush plants growing some twenty metres high and said « there's the first one ». I was very impressed to see such a huge plant, really taking over trees and rocks, quite different from what I had seen in Southern Madagascar where they stay quite scraggy. This one grows by a running stream which is one reason why it is so big, but a later description of a plant made in Uganda gave a potential height of 30 meters. This same description indicates that the plant grows also in Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia.

A little further up the ravine was another place with an even more impressive plant growing. The thing is that it seems to root anytime a stem lays on the ground, giving birth to another plant and the final result is a real labyrinth of stems going in every possible direction. No flowers nor buds were seen and Roger said he never saw any, whatever time of the year he came. However, the

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**Adenia...continued from pp. 33**

plant matches the description, the cut stem producing a thick deep red sap which would later dry and look like varnish. We spent some time foraging here and there in search of flowers or fruits, but had no luck. I of course carefully dug up a couple of rooted stems for my own collection, with the secret hope of possibly producing seeds some day (no worry, Bill and Cor, you will have your share for the seed bank...)

Roger kept wondering how this plant came here and I remembered that in Madagascar some species of *Adenia* are used by locals as a fishing poison; they grind stems in streams, intoxicating the fish by doing so. My thought is that the plant was brought by people from Africa, as part of Reunion inhabitants are descendants of African slaves.

It is always a nice thing to admire such plants in natural environment, no matter if they lack the showy colors of



*Adenia gummifera*, it's all over the place! The plant in the foreground is *Rubus alleaefolius* (*Rubiaceae*), a real problem on Reunion Is. because it chokes out the native vegetation.

their Latin American relatives...

**Announcement:**

We have a new member in Belize by the name of Alfred B. Lau. He is an elderly man who has run a missionary school in the Chiapas region of Mexico for much of his life. He has a deep love for the Mayan people. For many years he supported his work by collecting and selling seeds of many very rare plants in all plant families. Many rare endemics are found in that remote part of Mexico. He would also give slide shows across the world on up to 15 plant families (15 different shows) to raise additional funds for the schooling of these Mayan children, many of which he and his wife adopted.

Some years ago the Mexican government made this collecting illegal and stopped his source of income. Nevertheless, he continued his work with the people. A couple of years ago, the guerrillas picked him up and put him on a plane and said never return or we will kill

you. His wife and children are still there. Alfred is living in exile in Belize, which adjoins Mexico. He has no income but is working with Mayan children there teaching some about plants, and building or replanting a major nature trail in Belize. He is in need of fruit bearing *Passiflora* (edible) for his work there. Also, he would love to be hired to give lectures. He is a brilliant man who does not want charity, but finds himself in a terrible situation. If anyone can send seeds or could hire him or send a donation, he is a great candidate. He has contributed many seeds and photos of *Passiflora* from many countries.

If you can help his address is:

Alfred B. Lau,  
c/o Abraham Dueck,  
PO Box 427, Belize City, Belize, Central America

