

USES OF *VOACANGA* SPECIES

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INTRODUCTION

None of the species of the genus has attained any widespread application and even *V. africana*, the one with the greatest distribution range and the one to which most of the uses described apply, has rather limited local use. A few of the medicinal applications appear to reflect the activities of the alkaloids present in the plants (cf. Phytochemistry, Section 3). The following paragraphs give a brief outline of the uses which have been reported in the literature and as annotations on specimens kept in the herbaria listed on p. 00.

1. THE PLANTS

1.1. *V. AFRICANA* (*ANGUSTIFOLIA?*, *LUTESCENS*, *PUBERULA*)

West Africa: The latex is said to be a rubber adulterant and it is also put into a carious tooth (Dalziel, 1937). The plant is reported to be used in treating scabies (Janot and Goutarel, 1955). **Senegal:** The Noaninka (or Sérère) eat the fruit; they treat wounds with the latex. The plant is also considered to be a panacea – the leafy branches are put into baths morning and evening and a drink prepared from them is given to people affected by unnamed illnesses. A decoction of the leaves is drunk as a tonic and against fatigue due to breathlessness. In the Casamance a decoction of the roots taken three times daily is recommended for women to counteract the effects of premature and rapid birth; it is also given internally for hernial pain (Kerharo and Adam, 1964, 1974). **Ivory Coast:** The leaves have several uses: A decoction is applied as a wash against diarrhoea; it is put into baths against generalized oedema; it is utilized as a friction and in a drink in the treatment of leprosy; a lotion is used to soothe convulsions in children; and the juice is placed in the nostrils to calm lunatics (possibly through confusion with other Apocynaceae – *Rauvolfia vomitoria* or *Tabernaemontana crassa*) (Bouquet and Debray, 1974). **Ghana:** The latex is possibly used for adulterating rubber (*F. R. Irvine 1584, 1931*)*. The roots are ground and boiled with water, and the liquor is drunk to cure gonorrhoea (*F. R. Irvine 773, 1927; J. K. Odamtinn 4, 1933*). **Nigeria:** it is said that the species is a prophylactic for diseases of babies (Oliver, 1968). In the southern part of the country, the bark fibre, together with other fibres, is made into fancy mats (Dalziel, 1937) and arrows are made from the branches (*A. E. Kitson 19/2/09*). The latex does not coagulate and is used for adulterating good rubber (*C. Punch 146, 1901*); it is also known as a remedy against colic, blenorrhagia, and ophthalmia. **S. Thomé:** Here, the plant is said to be medicinal (*Espirito Santo 4767, 1972*). **Congo:** The species is used in the treatment of sores, boils, abscesses, mycoses, and scabies. A decoct is drunk for heart conditions and blenorrhagia (Bouquet, 1969). **Zaire:** A paste of the roots is put on the head to kill lice (*A. Sapin-10/10*; cf.

* Annotations on herbarium sheets are referred to by collector(s) and number (both italicized) and year of collection.

Staner and Boutique, 1937). The white and sticky latex is used to catch birds (*W. Robijns* 1927, 1926). The wood is utilized for construction purposes (*H. Lemaire* 299, 1913; *Léontovitch* 148, no date) and also for making targets (*A. Dewulf* 888, 1935). The bark is used against intestinal worms but is a dangerous remedy (*A. Corbisier-Baland* 1177, 1931). Good fibre can be obtained from the bark (*L. Verdick* 46, 1899) and cords for birds are made from it (*Homblé* 1309, 1913). An infusion of the twigs is applied in bronchitis (*de Giorgi* 5, 1912) and their juice is used in treating ophthalmia and in soothing colic (*de Giorgi* 438 and 499, 1913). The leaves are employed against blenorrhagia (*de Giorgi* 326, 1912). **Tanzania:** The roots are said to be toxic (*H. Koritschoner* 1326, 1935). The grated roots are mixed with copra and used to get rid of scabies and for healing wounds. The latex is boiled with that of *Ficus* species to prepare a birdlime (*Braun*, 1927). A decoction of the roots is drunk against dysmenorrhoea and also as a treatment for heart spasms (angina pectoris?) (*Haerdi*, 1964). The roots (without the outer bark) after drying, powdering, and sieving, are mixed with porridge and taken for kidney troubles and abnormally frequent menstruation in women and urination in men (*Hedberg et al.*, 1982). A decoction of the stem bark is used against heart spasms (angina pectoris?) (*Haerdi*, 1964). The plant supplies poles for building purposes (*C. K. Ruffo* 218, 1969) but is considered to be inferior (*Braun*, 1927). The fruit and seeds are extracted with cold water for 7 days and the extract taken against internal sores (*Hedberg et al.*, 1982). **Angola:** Latex from the fruit is used for treating rheumatism and also for feeding babies (*J. Texeira Gerez* 7654, 1883). **Zambia:** Wood is burnt to obtain the salt it contains (*W. D. Holmes* 1010, 1952). **Mozambique:** Bark is used for making ropes (*J. Gomes Pedro* 4510, 1953).

1.2. *V. BRACTEATA*

Gabon: The bark is said to be used to become 'high' (*F. J. Breteler* 6673, 1970). **Congo:** The pulp of the fruit is used topically as a friction in treating rheumatism (*Bouquet*, 1969). **Zaire:** The latex (*Staner and Boutique*, 1937) or juice of the fruits (*S. de Giorgi* 1497, 1913) is used against rheumatism.

1.3. *V. CHALOTIANA*

Congo: The species is involved in a complicated treatment for hernia (*Bouquet*, 1969).

1.4 *V. FOETIDA*

Indonesia: The latex is applied externally against various skin diseases. On Madura the leaves warmed over a fire are laid on chronic leg sores. In South

Sumatra the leaves are moistened with coconut oil and used externally against head- and stomach-ache, while the wood is used for making sheaths for knives and other weapons (van den Burg, 1885; Heyne, 1950).

1.5 *V. GLOBOSA*

Philippines: The pounded roots are reported to be used for stupefying eels (Brown, 1921). On Biliran Island a decoction of the leaves is used for cleaning *alipuñga*, a kind of eczema (PNH (M. D. Sulit) 21647, 1954).

1.6. *V. GRANDIFOLIA (PAPUANA)*

Indonesia: In Central Java the young leaves are mashed and rubbed on the stomach against illness from worms and diarrhoea (Leeuwenberg and Rudjiman 13121, 1984). **Papua-New Guinea:** The plant is said to be taken as a medicine for malaria (M. Fallen et al. 344, 1977).

1.7. *V. HAVILANDII*

Sarawak: Birds eat the fruit (Hewitt 475, 1906).

1.8. *V. AFF. MEGACARPA*

Philippines: Chicle is obtained from the latex. A preparation of the bark is drunk for internal pain, and the roots are boiled and the extract drunk in treating abdominal rigidity (von Reis Altschul, 1973).

1.9. *V. SP.*

Central African Republic: To combat fatigue in the leg muscles the Aka pygmies mix powder from the stem bark with a little water to make a plaster which they warm before applying to the muscles (Motte, 1980).

1.10. *V. THOUARSII (OBTUSA)*

Sierra Leone: The latex is said to be very dangerous to the eyes and skin and is used as a cure for toothache (Pyne 25, no date). **Liberia:** On rice farms when the grain is ripening the fruits are scattered on the ground as this is thought to frighten away wild hogs (G. Proctor Cooper 431, 1929). **Ivory Coast:** The

local inhabitants do not distinguish this plant from *V. africana* (q.v.) and its medicinal uses are the same (Bouquet and Debray, 1974). **Mali:** Decoctions of the leaves and roots are drunk or used in baths to combat fatigue and weakness and for the treatment of wounds and against inflammation (Adjanooun *et al.* 1980). **Southern Nigeria:** The species is said to be a prophylactic against diseases of babies (Oliver, 1960). **Zaire:** The fruits (*R. E. Delhaye 219*, 1957) and latex (*Smeyers 152*, 1951) are used for catching birds. **Uganda:** The wood has been used for making tool handles (*A. G. Bagshawe 82*, 1904). **Tanzania:** Latex from the fruit serves as an insecticide (*G. Watkins 140* (FH 2413), 1948); boiled with that from other plants it yields a bird-lime. The thickened latex is used to fix the blades of knives in their handles and for repairing baskets. Hunting nets are made from the bast and sheaths for knives from the wood. It is said that insects will not attack the soft wood (Braun, 1927). **Mozambique:** A glue is made from the plant (*H. Junod 365*, 1893). **Southern Africa** (Natal): Here also the milky juice from the plant serves as a bird-lime (*J. Thode 4297*, 1916).

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INDEX OF CHEMICAL SUBSTANCES

Page numbers printed in *italics* indicate the page on which the structural formula is shown.

- Akuammidine 86, 94, 95, 98, 105
 Alkaloid C (ex *V.globosa*) 94
 Alkaloids C, E, G, and I (ex *V.thouarsii*) 96
 Alkaloids G and H (ex *V.bracteata*) 93
 Amataine 90, 94, 95, 96
 Amataine, 18-oxo- 96
 β -Amyrin acetate 108
 Apocuanzine, decarbomethoxy- 88, 94
 Apovincamate, ethyl 108
 Apovincamine, Δ^{14} - 103
 Apovincamine, Δ^{14} -3-oxo- 103, 108
 Apovincamine derivatives 103, 107-108
 Apovincaminol 103
 Apovincaminol derivatives 108
 Beninine 88, 94
 Bis-indoles 89-91, 97-98
 Cavinton 103, 108
 Conoflorine, see: Voaphylline
 Coronaridine 88, 89, 92, 105-106
 Cuanzine 88, 94, 98, 105
 Deoxyvincamine derivatives 104, 108
 Dregamine 87, 95, 105
 Epivoacangarine, see: Voacristine, 19-*epi*-
 Folicangine 90, 93
 Grandifoline, see: Amataine
 Ibogaine 89, 92, 95, 96, 98, 105-106
 Ibogamine 89, 92, 105-106
 Ibogamine pseudoindoxyl 89
 Iboluteine 89, 92, 95
 Iboxygaine 89, 92, 105-106
 Isovoafoline 90, 93
 Kaempferol glycosides 108, 109
 Lochnericine 88, 97
 Lupeol 108
 Lupeol acetate 108
 Minovincinine 88, 97
 OC-231E 103, 107-108
 OC-231N 103, 107-108
 OC-233 103, 107-108
 Papanine 95
 Perakine 87, 92
 Perivine 87, 92, 105
 Phenolic acids 108
 Polyneuridine 86, 94
 Protein 108
 Pseudoyohimbine 86, 92
 Quercetin glycosides 108
 Quimbeline 90, 94
 Reserpine 86, 92, 104
 RGH-2910 and -2915 - 107
 RGH-4405 103, 108
 Rhazine, see: Akuammidine
 Rubber 108
 Rutin 108
 Saponins 108
 β -Sitosterol 108
 Strictosidine synthase 108
 Subsessiline, see: Amataine
 Subsessiline lactone, see: Amataine, 18-oxo-
 Tabernaemontanine 87, 94, 104, 105
 Tabersonine 88, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99-
 104, 105
 Tabersonine, 14,15-dihydro- 100-104
 Tabersonine, 3-oxo- 102, 103
 Tabersonic acid 102, 104
 Tetrahydroalstonine 85, 94
 Vincadiffine 96 (f.n.)
 Vincadiformine 100-104, 101
 Vincadiformine, 3-oxo- 102, 104
 Vincamine 99, 101-102, 107-108
 Vincamine, Δ^{14} - 88, 94, 101-102
 Vincamine amides 102, 104
 Vincamine derivatives 102-104, 107-108
 Vincamine, 16-*epi*- 101-102
 Vincamine, Δ^{14} -16-*epi*- 101-102
 Vincamine, Δ^{14} -3-oxo- 102, 103
 Voacafricine 92, 96 (f.n.)
 Voacafrine 92
 Voacaline = ? Voacorine
 Voacamidine 89, 92, 97, 107
 Voacamidine, 20'-hydroxy- 92, 100, 107
 Voacamine 89, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 104,
 106-107
 Voacamine, 18-decarbomethoxy- 92, 95
 Voacamine, *N*-oxide 92, 93
 Voacaminine = Vocamine + Voacorine
 Voacangarine, see: Voacristine
 Voacangine 89, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98,
 105-106
 Voacangine hydroxyindolenine 89, 92

Voacangine lactam 92
 Voacangine, 3,6-oxido- 92
 Voacangine pseudoindoxyl 89, 92
 Voacanginine, see: Voacamine
 Voacarpine 87, 94
 Voachalotine 86, 94, 98, 105
 Voachalotine, 17-*O*-acetyl-dihydro- 94
 Voachalotine, dehydro- 94
 Voachalotine, 3-hydroxy- 94
 Voachalotine, 21(?)-hydroxy- 94
 Voachalotine oxindole 94
 Voacorine 89, 92, 93, 94, 97, 98, 104, 106-107
 Voacorine, 20-*epi*- 93, 96
 Voacristine 89, 92, 93, 95, 97, 105-106
 Voacristine, 19-*epi*- 93
 Voacryptine 89, 92
 Voafolidine 90, 93
 Voafoline 90, 93
 Voafrines A and B 91, 97
 Voaluteine 89, 95
 Voamonine 94
 Voaphylline 87, 93, 97
 Voaphylline hydroxyindolenine 93
 Voaphyllinediol 93
 Vobasine 87, 92, 95, 97, 105
 Vobasinol 92
 Vobtusamine 91, 94, 98
 Vobtusine 90, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 107
 Vobtusine, 12-demethyl- 96
 Vobtusine, 2-deoxy- 90, 93, 95
 Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-, lactam, see: Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-3'-oxo-
 Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-, lactone, see: Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-18-oxo-
 Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-3'-oxo- 90, 96
 Vobtusine, 2-deoxy-18-oxo- 93
 Vobtusine, 3 ζ -hydroxy- 94
 Vobtusine lactam, see: Vobtusine, 3'-oxo-
 Vobtusine lactam *N*-oxide, see: Vobtusine, 3'-oxo-, *N*-oxide
 Vobtusine lactone, see: Vobtusine, 18-oxo-
 Vobtusine, 3'-oxo- 90, 96
 Vobtusine, 3'-oxo-, *N*-oxide 96
 Vobtusine, 18-oxo- 93, 95, 96
 α -Yohimbine, 3-*epi*- 86, 92
 β -Yohimbine 86, 92, 105