



(1443) Proposal to Reject the Name *Gaura mollis* (Onagraceae)

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(1443) Proposal to reject the name *Gaura mollis* (Onagraceae)Warren L. Wagner¹ & Peter Hoch²

(1443) *Gaura mollis* James, Long Exped. (Phila. ed.) 2: 77. Jan 1823 [*Onag.*], *nom. utique rej. prop.*

Type: U.S.A., SW branches of the Arkansa[s] [Colorado, Las Animas Co., Brachicha Canyon], *E. James s.n.* (NY).

The sole species of *Gaura* sect. *Schizocarya* (Spach) P. H. Raven & Gregory is very distinctive in the genus, and has universally been known both in the literature and herbaria as *G. parviflora* Dougl. ex Lehm. There has been confusion about the authorship of the name and its place of publication. It was attributed solely to Douglas (in Hooker, Fl. Bor.- Amer. 1: 208. 1836 [‘1832’]) in the comprehensive revision of the genus by Raven & Gregory (Mem. Torrey Bot. Club 23: 23. 1972), and recently shown by K. N. Gandhi (in Harvard Paps. Bot. 4: 295-299. 1999) to have been published in 1830 by Lehman (Nov. Strip. Pug. 2: 15.1830).

Recently, the detailed analysis of Goodman & Lawson (Retrac. Long’s Exped.: 258. 1995) revealed an earlier name for this distinctive widespread North American species, *Gaura mollis* James, published in a footnote in James’ account of the Botany of the expedition (James, l. c.). It was not clear until the research on Long’s Expedition by Goodman & Lawson precisely when James’ names were published. The exact date may never be known, but the work was clearly printed before 3 Jan 1823, based on a letter of that date from Stephen Long to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun stating “I transmit by this day[’]s mail, six copies of the ‘Account’ of the late expedition [to the Rocky Mountains] under my command being the residue of the dozen copies which you have instructed me to furnish to the War Department. They would have been forwarded at an earlier period, but that the publishers could not obtain sufficient supplies from the binding [plant] to answer the numerous demands for the work” (Hempill, *The papers of John C. Calhoun*, vol. VII, 1822-1823: 404. 1973). Thus *Gaura mollis* James has seven years priority over *G. parviflora*, since both refer to the same taxon. We have examined the type of *G. mollis* and it clearly is the highly distinctive species long known as *G. parviflora*.

To further complicate the situation there are two other publications of the name *Gaura mollis*. The first, *G. mollis* Kunth (Nov. Gen. et Sp. 6: 93, pl. 529. 6 Aug 1823) was published later in the same year as the James binomial. It applies to a Mexican species published in the previous century as *G. mutabilis* Cav. The second is *G. mollis* Nutt. ex Torr. (in Ann. Lyceum Nat. Hist. New York 2: 200. 1828). It was described in an account of collections made by James by John Torrey. It appears to be based on the same specimen as the type of James’ name, the locality of which was reconstructed

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according to Goodman & Lawson (l.c.: 258). It is thus an isonym, and of no nomenclatural consequence.

Beginning with the Tokyo Code (1994), and especially its Article 56, there is greater flexibility in making decisions to conserve or reject, especially those “which best serve stability of nomenclature”. A name change for this taxon, which is one of the most widespread species of the genus in its native North American range and now established at least in Argentina, China, Japan, and Australia, would be disruptive not only in the strictly taxonomic literature of these countries, but also in that of weed science, plant ecology, and even horticulture literature (e.g. *Hortus Third*, 1976). In the past there were much more limited conditions under which names could be conserved or rejected but the Code has changed, and the committee has recently given much greater emphasis to nomenclatural stability, a position that seems to have broad support in general biological circles, and in the systematics community when it is applied with care and discrimination. As the Code’s editors stated in the preface to the ICBN, “individual users of the Code also have a responsibility to help ensure nomenclatural clarity and stability by making appropriate proposals for conservation or rejection rather than change names for purely nomenclatural reasons”. As far as we have been able to determine, the name *Gaura mollis* has not been used or even included as a synonym anywhere until Goodman and Lawson pointed out in 1995 James’ long-overlooked name. *Gaura parviflora* has always been used for this taxon (e.g., Torrey & Gray, Fl. N. Amer. 1(3): 359. 1840; Rydberg, Fl. Rocky Mts., ed. 2, 605. 1923; Shreve & Wiggins, Veg. Fl. Sonoran Desert 2: 1061. 1964; Munz, N. Amer. Fl. II, part 5, 184. 1965; Weber, Colorado Fl. W. Slope 344. 1987; Thompson, Fl. Australia 18: 217. 1990; Cronquist et al., Intermt. Fl. 3a: 220. 1997; Wagner & Hoch, in Flora of Japan IIc: 240. 1999). The genus has been revised twice this century, with *G. parviflora* used both times (Munz, in Bull. Torrey Bot. club 65: 108. 1938; Raven & Gregory, in Mem. Torrey Bot. Club 23: 23. 1972). *Gaura mollis* James has never appeared in standard indices such as *Index Kewensis* or *Gray Cards*. As far as we have been able to determine, since 1995 *Gaura mollis* has been adopted only in one instance (John Kartez’ “A synonymized checklist of the vascular flora of the United States, Canada, and Greenland,” online at <http://www.csd.tamu.edu/FLORA/b98/check98.htm>). We here urge rejection of *Gaura mollis* James so that this distinctive species can continue to be known under the name by which it has gone for nearly two centuries.

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