

You are viewing one of thousands of biographies – click below for more, including Search box and access to Plant associated organisations.

[Plant Biographies](#)

[Bibliography](#)

---

*Burchellia*

*Rubiaceae*

*Burchellia* commemorates an English explorer, naturalist, artist and writer, William John Burchell (1781-1863). In 1810 he travelled to Cape Town (having previously spent several years on St. Helena as a schoolmaster and eventually official naturalist) and began preparations for a journey into the interior which included acquiring a custom-made wagon. In June 1811 he set off, in the company of six Hottentots, and returned to Cape Town in April 1815 with a remarkable number (some authorities suggest around 63,000) seeds, bulbs and plant specimens, insects, preserved fish, skins and skeletons, in addition to copious accurate notes and sketches (the latter included landscapes, portraits, costumes, plants and animals). Returning to England he spent the next decade sorting out his collection and writing an account of his South African safari before, in 1825, leaving for Brazil. His collection this time included over 20,000 insects. On his return to England in 1830 his financial resources and health were stretched and he appears to have become disillusioned and reclusive, ultimately committing suicide in 1863. After his death his sister, Miss Anna Burchell, donated his botanical collection to Kew Botanical Gardens and his entomological collection to the Hope Department of the University Museum at Oxford. Burchell became a Fellow of the Linnean Society in 1803 and he had one major work published *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*.