

## ‘Ahakea

*Bobea sandwicensis* (Gray) Hillebr.

Madder or coffee family (Rubiaceae)

Native species (endemic)

The genus *Bobea*, common name ‘ahakea, is known only from the Hawaiian Islands and has 4 or fewer species of trees distributed through the islands. They have small paired pale green leaves with paired small pointed stipules that shed early, 1–7 small flowers at leaf bases, with tubular greenish corolla, the four lobes overlapping in bud, and small round black or purplish fruit (drupe), mostly dry, with 2–6 nutlets. This species, described below, will serve as an example.

Medium-sized evergreen tree to 33 ft (10 m) high and 1 ft (0.3 m) in trunk diameter. Bark gray, smoothish, slightly warty, fissured, and scaly. Inner bark light brown, bitter. Twig light brown, with tiny pressed hairs and with rings at nodes.

Leaves opposite, with pinkish finely hairy leafstalks of  $\frac{3}{8}$ – $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (1–1.5 cm) and paired small pointed hairy stipules  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) long that form bud and shed early. Blades ovate or elliptical, 2–3½ inches (5–9 cm) long and 1–2 inches (2.5–5 cm) wide, short- to long-pointed at apex and blunt at base, with edges straight or slightly wavy, thin. Upper surface slightly shiny green, hairless, with pinkish midvein and few curved side veins; lower surface light green with pinkish raised midvein and tiny hairs in vein angles.

Flowers mostly 1–3 at leaf bases on slender stalks of  $\frac{1}{4}$ –1 inch (6–25 mm),  $\frac{5}{16}$  inch (8 mm) long, finely hairy, composed of greenish base (hypanthium)  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) long; calyx of 4 spreading elliptical green lobes to  $\frac{3}{16}$  inch (5 mm) long; whitish green corolla  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) long with narrow cylindrical tube and four spreading narrow lobes overlapping in bud; four stalkless stamens in notches of corolla; and pistil with inferior ovary, short style, and 4–6-lobed stigma.

Fruit (drupe) round, about  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch (1 cm) in diameter, purplish black and slightly shiny, with tiny pressed hairs, with 4 enlarged rounded calyx lobes more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (6 mm) long remaining at apex, containing 2–6 stones (nutlets), each 1-seeded.

Wood yellow, hard and heavy, straight-grained. Used by the Hawaiians for the carved end covers and gunwales of canoes for its yellow appearance and for its

wearability. Modern canoes are often painted yellow at the gunwales to simulate ‘ahakea wood. Also used for poi boards and paddles.

Scattered in wet to dry forests and on open lava flows at 300–4000 ft (105–1220 m) elevation.

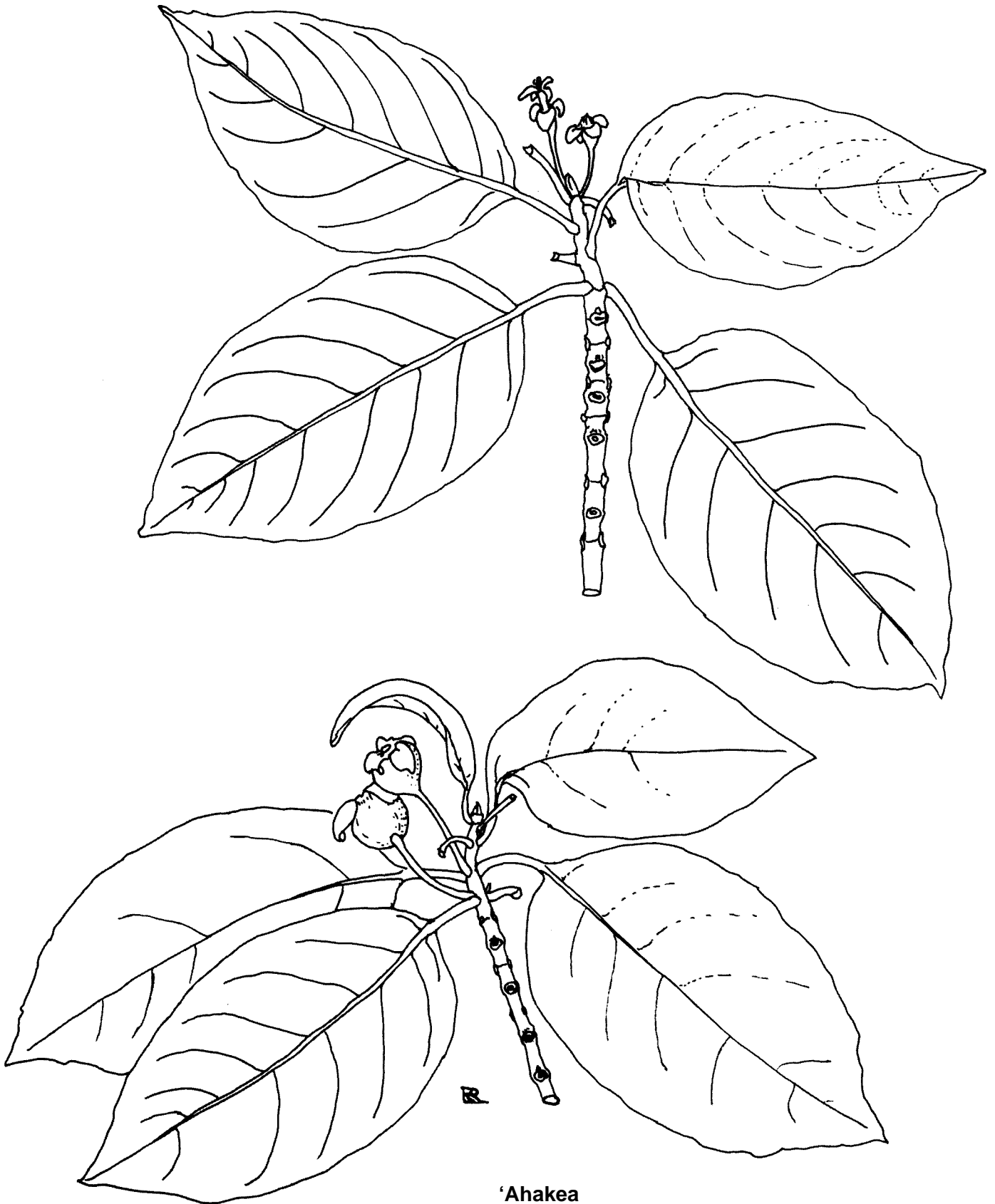
### **Range**

Maui, Lanai, Molokai, and Oahu

### **Botanical synonym**

*Bobea hookeri* Hillebr.

This genus was named in 1830 for M. Bobe-Moreau, physician and pharmacist in the French Marine. Three other species are found on the large islands of Hawaii.



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Flowering twig (above), fruiting twig (below), 1 X.