

***Scilla hyacinthoides*, a new taxon for Cyprus**

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Abstract. – *Scilla hyacinthoides* (Asparagaceae) is recorded in Cyprus for the first time. Its distribution, habitat, and floristic status are provided. Regarding its Red Data Book status in Cyprus two proposals are discussed, and further studies are needed.

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Introduction and finding history

The Cyprus Flora has been well studied, both in the past and in current days. Despite this, new taxa are still being found hidden away in areas where little botanising takes place. Some taxa are recent introductions, but others are probably native. On searching for other species in March and November 2020 I had initially found, in a small area, about a dozen of plants, the leaves of which did not fit any known Cypriot taxon. I assumed they were some *Scilla* that may have escaped a garden. In the following year I visited the site at a later time, specifically in April 2021, and found the plants in flower. I recognised that they were not a cultivated taxon, but rather *Scilla hyacinthoides* L., a plant native to neighbouring countries.

On further searching the nearby fields hundreds more were found in flower. The plants occurred in the margins of cultivated fields, as well as on the rocky boundaries between them. The site is located away from habitation, indicating that the plants have not escaped from cultivation. Also, the occurrence in neighbouring countries increases the likelihood that the species is native to the island. Furthermore, the extent of the population suggests it has been there for a long time. It is likely that perhaps there was a more extensive population, which however is now confined to the field margins as a result of cultivation, in recent years, of many fallow fields.

Habitat and distribution

The vegetation at the site consists of scattered stands of woody species such as *Quercus infectoria* subsp. *veneris*, *Q. coccifera* subsp. *calliprinos*, *Styrax officinalis* and *Pistacia terebinthus*, as well as herbaceous plants such as *Crocus veneris*, *Allium nigrum*, *A. neapolitanum*, *Cyclamen cyprium* and *Smyrniolum olusatrum*.

The newly discovered species has been found in division 1 (sensu Meikle 1977) in the west of Cyprus, off the main road, between the villages of Kritou Tera and Choli, with no habitation in the immediate area. The altitude of the area is about 350 m above sea level. The geological substrate belongs to Nicosia Formation, composed of biocalcarenes, sandstones, silts, gravels, sandy marls, marls, limestones and conglomerates (Geological Survey Department 1995).

S. hyacinthoides is a geophyte, native to the E Aegean region and the Middle East, e. g. in Turkey, Syria, Israel and eastwards to Iraq, but also naturalised in many other countries namely in the W Mediterranean (see Speta 1980). It has been listed by Osorio-Tafall & Seraphim (1973) for Cyprus, a source to which also Speta (1980) refers who specifies the locality as "Cap al Greco" (division 4). Meikle (1985) mentions these and says that no specimens have been seen, nor is he aware that any other collector has found this plant. Furthermore, he says that the plant is recorded from the shores adjacent to Cyprus and it is a likely occurrence on the island. However, he does not formally accept the species as found in Cyprus, but provides a short description of the taxon.

Conservation status

The species has been found at one location, restricted to a small area (around 0.5 km²) and it is in danger from further encroachment of cultivation. Considering the small geographical range, the single location and the threat from agriculture and possible future changes in land use (IUCN Standards and Petitions Subcommittee 2014) it could be provisionally characterised as Critically Endangered [CR; IUCN criteria: B1ac(iv)+2ac(iv)]. However, owing to the recent discovery and the incomplete knowledge of its geographical distribution and population it should be classified as data deficient until more information is available on the distribution, population size and threats.

Specimens from the new locality

Division 1 (sensu Meikle 1977): Between Kritou Tera and Choli, roadside, alt. 340 m, 18.04.2021, Y. Christofides in Hadjikyriakou 7768 (Hadjikyriakou pers. herb.); *ibid.*, 18.04.2021, Y. Christofides (CYP 6572); *ibid.*, margins of cereal fields, alt. 340 m, 15.04.2022, K. Iosif, G. Chrysostomou & C. S. Christodoulou (CYP 6588).

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 1: *Scilla hyacinthoides*, between Kritou Tera and Choli, 15.4.2022. – Charalambos S. Christodoulou.



Fig. 2: *Scilla hyacinthoides*, between Kritou Tera and Choli, 15.4.2022. – Charalambos S. Christodoulou.