

An overlooked earlier record for *Baldellia ranunculoides* from Cyprus

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Abstract. – *Baldellia ranunculoides* (*Alismataceae*) was thought to be first observed in Cyprus at the southern tip of the island in 1991. However, an older specimen collected near Syrianochori in 1952 has hitherto been overlooked. It is recommended to expand the search for this “Regionally Extinct (RE)” water plant to the northwest of Cyprus.

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Introduction

The growing number of digitised herbarium specimens from public collections published on the internet opens up new perspectives in botany. A specimen dated 1952, found by coincidence in Kew herbarium online when searching for other material, refers to the helophyte *Baldellia ranunculoides* (L.) Parl. s. str., which according to present knowledge was observed for the first time in Cyprus in 1991.

Following Hadjikyriakou & al. (2004; specimens no. 2718, 2729 in herb. Hadjikyriakou), Tsintides & al. (2007) and personal communication from Christodoulos Makris to Georgios Hadjikyriakou, the plant was observed for the first time in 1991 and confirmed in 1997 at Livadi Akrotiriou, also known as Fasouri Marsh, close to the southern tip of the island. Since 2000 there have been no further records, despite extensive searching. Its extinction is due to a fire which occurred at the end of 1998 that soon became subterranean and lasted for about a month (Georgios and Thomas Hadjikyriakou, pers. comm.). This fire may even have destroyed the soil seed bank. Consequently, the species ranks among the few taxa to be classified as “Regionally Extinct (RE)” in the “Red Data Book” (Tsintides & al. 2007).

The record

Among the specimens from Cyprus published online so far by Kew Gardens two sheets refer to a collection by Merton (Kew, Royal Botanic Gardens 2021). The label reads (additions by the author in square brackets):

Flora of Cyprus No. 790

Name: [no entry by the collector]

Locality: Syrianochori marshes

Altitude: 15'

Date: 28.4.[19]52

Habitat and Description: Corolla purple-rose, c. 1 cm. across. In mud just covered with water: very rare.

Collector: L. F. H. Merton

The two sheets, of which only the first has been digitised, undoubtedly both belong to a single collection number:

<https://apps.kew.org/herbcat/getImage.do?imageBarcode=K000318466>

<http://apps.kew.org/herbcat/detailsQuery.do?barcode=K000318467>

No information is provided about who originally identified the specimen. Merton does not give any information on species identity. This may be the reason why Meikle (1985) did not include this remarkable species in his flora. The specimen may have been stored with other unidentified material and may have escaped his attention. Generally, specimens collected by Merton are an important and often cited source for the "Flora of Cyprus". Merton's contribution has been highly acknowledged by Meikle (1977: 16). No duplicates were found in the herbarium ARI (Agricultural Research Institute, Lefkosia; Angelos Kyrtzis, pers. comm.) where Merton used to deposit material of various species from Cyprus.

Syrianochori is a village near to the coast of Morphou Bay in the northwest of Cyprus belonging to division 6 according to Meikle's (1977) phytogeographical classification. Although, as in many parts of Cyprus, coastal regions have changed dramatically as regards to land use, at least in some places in the wider area habitats are left which may host this rare helophyte. It should be searched for in the vicinity of Syrianochori especially after wet winters. *Baldellia* taxa, which are generally very weak competitors, may regenerate from a viable seed bank if habitat restoration is attempted (Kozłowski & al. 2008).

From a taxonomical point of view the specimen is clearly identifiable as belonging to *B. ranunculoides* s. str. or to *B. ranunculoides* subsp. *ranunculoides* respectively, if one follows the currently prevailing treatment of *Baldellia* in the Euro-Mediterranean region (for a summary see Kozłowski & al. 2008). There are good arguments for both taxonomic solutions. From a chorological point of view the occurrences in Cyprus belong to the easternmost in the Mediterranean region (Kozłowski & al. 2008) but are not mentioned by Kozłowski & al. (2008).

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