



On the identity of *Anchusa leucantha* (Boraginaceae) from northern Greece

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Abstract

Anchusa leucantha, previously considered an ophiolithic endemic restricted to a small area in north central Greece, is shown to be a heterotypic synonym of *A. officinalis* var. *ochroleuca*. It occurs in southeastern Albania, the southern part of F.Y.R. Macedonia and northern Greece. We treat this taxon as part of the polymorphic *A. officinalis*, for which *A. officinalis* subsp. *leucantha* is proposed as a new combination.

Introduction

In the year 2003 Selvi and Bigazzi described a new and rare species of *Anchusa* endemic to a small area with ophiolithic rock outcrops in north central Greece. They named it *Anchusa leucantha* as the flowers were creamy white. It was stated to differ from *A. officinalis* Linnaeus (1753: 133) in having a more specialized ecology and a less variable morphology, being closest to the taxon known as *A. officinalis* var. *ochroleuca* Boissier (1875: 152). *Anchusa leucantha* Selvi & Bigazzi (2003: 436; Fig. 1) was first collected by P. Hartvig, A. Strid and Kit Tan during a student excursion from the University of Copenhagen to NW Greece in May 1999. The collected material was labelled and distributed as *A. officinalis*.

The morphological characteristics which defined *A. leucantha* are the caespitose habit with a rosette of basal leaves arising from a partially woody taproot. These basal leaves are narrowly oblanceolate, obtuse at the apex, slightly undulate at the margins and already withered at anthesis. The cauline leaves are linear to elliptic-lanceolate, and the whole plant is hispid-setose with simple, spreading hairs up to 2.2 mm long. On the basal leaves, the hairs are often tuberculate-bulbose at the base. The cymes have a flower inserted at the branching points and the corolla is always creamy white, turning pale yellow in dried specimens. The calyx is usually subdivided to half and distinctly pedicellate in fruit. This combination of characters was stated by Selvi & Bigazzi (2003) to be found neither in any variety of *A. officinalis* nor in *A. ochroleuca* Bieberstein (1808: 125), and to persist in cultivation.

Another unusual aspect of *A. leucantha*, stated to be unique within the genus, is that it is an ecological endemic of ophiolithic rocks. In its *locus classicus* near Edessa it grows on rocky outcrops with other lithophytic species such as *Alyssum*, *Thymus striatus*, *Trinia glauca* and *Euphorbia myrsinites*. It was stated to disappear when the parent rock changes to limestone or when the soil becomes nutrient-rich.

Anchusa officinalis subsp. *officinalis* var. *ochroleuca* was accepted by Selvi & Bigazzi (2003) as a morphotype of *A. officinalis* with pale yellow flowers. It occurs in the area between Edessa, Bitola and Prilep in F.Y.R. Macedonia, and from our present work is also known to exist in southeastern Albania. In Greece it was previously known only from two collections, in the prefectures of Kozanis and Florinis in the north central mainland (Fig. 2). The record from Kozanis is the southernmost one. In F.Y.R. Macedonia this plant