

New records for the Maltese flora: *Centaurea acaulis* L. (Family: Asteraceae)

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Centaurea acaulis L. is native to Tunisia and Algeria (Pottier-Alapetite, 1981) and is also known to occur in Lampedusa, one of the Pelagian Islands, 210km south of Sicily, 128 km from the Tunisian coast (Bartolo et al. 1988) and 150 km from Malta (Sommer, 1908), and in the north of Spain (Guinea Lopez & Ceballos Jimenez, 1974). In the February of 2001, one of us (RB)

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encountered a population of this species in leaf on the Nuffara plateau in Gozo. This flowered in the second week of April (Buttigieg, 2001). This population occurred in a rocky steppe community. The chief accompanying species were *Oxalis pes-caprae* (which had dried up by the time *C. acaulis* was in flower), *Psoralea bituminosa*, *Stipa capensis*, *Carlina involucreta*, *Mercurialis annua*, *Silene colorata*, *Calendula arvensis*, *Convolvulus althaeoides*, *Lagurus ovatus*, *Sonchus oleraceus*, *Ferula communis* and *Galactites tomentosa*, thus a mixture of typical steppic elements and opportunistic species of disturbed ground indicating the somewhat degraded nature of the site. The soil in the area where *C. acaulis* was found was alkaline with a pH of 8.1, the highest recorded on the plateau, the minimum recorded being 7.7 (Buttigieg R., *op. cit.*). Although confined to this part of the plateau, the population was quite large, including over a hundred flowering individuals as well as numerous non-flowering specimens and covering an area of some 30m². The impression was that the population must have been established for a considerable time.

The first record for Lampedusa was provided by Sommier (*op. cit.*), who states that it was brought to his attention in 1907 but to have been introduced about twenty years before that date. Although the extra-African populations are reputed to be introduced (Sommier, *op.cit.*, Guinea Lopez & Ceballos Jimenes, *op. cit.*), it is possible that in the case of the Maltese islands and Lampedusa the relatively recent appearance may be a case of natural range extension due to the close proximity to Tunisia where it is common (Pottier-Alapetite, *op.cit.*). It may also have been introduced with bird-seed imported from Tunisia for use by trappers.

A voucher specimen is deposited in the private herbarium of EL.

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