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***Fumana laevipes* (Cistaceae), a new record for the Maltese Islands (central Mediterranean)**

Abstract

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Fumana laevipes (Cistaceae) was discovered for the first time in the Maltese Islands in the year 2007 on the coastal boulder screes at iż-Żewwieqa, South Gozo, bringing the total number of *Fumana* recorded for the Maltese Islands to 3. Details regarding population structure, accompanying vegetation and distributional range are given.

Key words: *Fumana laevipes*, Flora, Malta.

On the 7th December 2007, the author discovered a population of *Fumana laevipes* at iż-Żewwieqa, South Gozo. The site in question consists of a coastal downslope with abundant Upper Coralline Limestone landslip boulders (late Miocene) on the lower Blue Clay (middle Miocene) and Globigerina Limestone (early Miocene) strata.

The discovered population consists of 3 widely separated sub-populations:

1) A sub-population consisting of 53 specimens (s.p.i), occurring on a level patch at an altitude of 7m. Most *F.laevipes* occurs in bare stony spaces between large shrubs or within isolated patches of low vegetation (< 50 cm). 2) A sub-population, consisting of 28 specimens (s.p.ii), situated at an altitude of 17m-30m on the bare very stony border between a level stretch of steppic vegetation and an eroded greensand escarpment. 3) A very fragmented sub-population, consisting of 98 mostly stunted specimens (s.p.iii), occurring on exposed isolated and semi-isolated boulders at an altitude of approximately 32m, then downhill to 7m, at a distance of approximately 250m apart from the other 2 sub-populations.

Iż-Żewwieqa area used to be intensively grazed, as is evidenced by the high number of steppic patches dominated by *Ferula communis* L. (s.p. i , iii), *Urginea pancration* (Steinheil) Philippe (s.p. i , ii , iii) *Asphodelus aestivus* Brotero (s.p. i , ii , iii) and *Brachypodium retusum* (Persoon) Beauvois (s.p. i , ii , iii). The recent elimination of grazing animals has permitted garrigue vegetation to extend, with the following shrubs dominating or sub-dominating in different patches: *Erica multiflora* L. (s.p. iii), *Euphorbia dendroides* L. (s.p. ii,iii), *Periploca angustiflora* Labillardiere (s.p. i , ii , iii) and *Thymra capitata* (L.) Cavanilles (s.p. iii). Other important accompanying species are: *Sedum sediforme* (Jacquin) Pau (s.p. i , iii), *Bituminaria*

bituminosa (L.) Stirton (s.p.i), *Ononis ornithopodioides* L. (s.p. i , iii), *Teucrium flavum* L. (s.p. i), *Teucrium fruticans* L. (s.p. i) and *Carlina involucrata* (s.p. i). Also present are: *Capparis orientalis* Veillard (s.p. i , iii), *Lobularia maritima* (L.) Desvaux (s.p. iii), *Euphorbia pepus* L. subsp. *peploides* (Gouan) Rouy (s.p. i), *Mercurialis annua* L. (s.p. iii), *Coronilla scorpioides* (L.) Koch (s.p.i , ii, iii), *Hippocrepis biflora* Sprengel (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Lathyrus clymenum* L.(s.p.i , iii), *Lotus edulis* L. (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Lotus ornithopodioides* L. (s.p.iii), *Medicago monspeliaca* (L.) Trautvetter (s.p. i), *Scorpiurus muricatus* L. (s.p. ii , iii), *Linum strictum* L. (s.p. i , iii), *Linum trigynum* L. (s.p. ii , iii), *Oxalis pes-caprae* L. (s.p. i , ii), *Valantia muralis* L. (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Convolvulus oleifolius* Desrousseaux (s.p. iii), *Convolvulus siculus* L. (s.p. iii), *Cuscuta epithymum* (L.) L.(s.p. ii, iii), *Echium parviflorum* Moench (s.p. iii), *Prasium majus* L. (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Satureja microphylla* (D'Urville) Gussone (s.p. iii), *Acanthus mollis* L. (s.p. i), *Campanula erinus* L. (s.p. i , iii), *Aetheorrhiza bulbosa* (L.) Cassini (s.p. ii), *Atractylis gummifera* L. (s.p. i), *Dittrichia viscosa* (L.) Greuter (s.p. i), *Galactites tomentosa* Moench (s.p. i , iii), *Hedypnois rhagadioloides* (L.) F.W.Schmidt (s.p. i), *Hyoseris scabra* L. (s.p. iii), *Leontodon tuberosus* L. (s.p. i), *Phagnalon* sp. pl. (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Reichardia picroides* (L.) Roth (s.p. iii), *Sonchus oleraceus* L. (s.p. i , ii, iii), *Urospermum picroides* (L.) F.W.Schmidt (s.p. ii, iii), *Scilla autumnalis* L.(s.p. iii), *Allium melitense* (Sommier & Caruana Gatto) Ciferri & Giacomini (s.p. ii), *Allium subhirsutum* L. (s.p. iii), *Narcissus serotinus* L.(s.p. iii), *Asparagus aphyllus* L. (s.p. i , iii), *Bromus fasciculatus* Presl (s.p. iii), *Trachynia distachya* (L.) Link (s.p. iii) and *Arisarum vulgare* Targioni-Tozzetti (s.p. i , ii, iii).

Fumana laevipes occurs in Portugal, Spain, France, Sardinia, Italy, Sicily, Pantelleria, Greece, Crete, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (Burdet & al. 1984; Pignatti 1997).

The plants found in Gozo are most likely to be indigenous since they occur in their typical phytocoenosis, and because the Maltese islands are well within the species' native distributional range. Also, the extensiveness and fragmentary nature of the population give the impression of an old-established colony that has dwindled. *F. laevipes* was previously missed as iż-Żewwieqa area was not explored by past botanists, as is clearly indicated by the absence of records for rare species present, eg. *Asplenium ceterach* L., *Asplenium trichomanes* L., *Parietaria lusitanica* L., *Ononis ornithopodioides*, *Tamus communis* L.

A specimen has been deposited in the private herbarium of Mr. E. Lanfranco.

Fumana laevipes should be listed as 'critically endangered' in future editions of the Red Data Book of the Maltese Islands, in accordance with the IUCN (2001) criteria.

The other *Fumana* occurring in the Maltese islands are: *Fumana arabica* (L.) Spach (frequent) and *Fumana thymifolia* (L.) Spach (frequent).

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