Aristida oligantha – a new alien species on the eastern Adriatic coast

Danijela Stešević1*, Đorđije Milanović2, Milica Stanišić-Vujačić1, Urban Šilc3

1 University of Montenegro, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Džordža Vašingtona bb, 81000 Podgorica, Montenegro
2 University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Forestry, S. Stepanovića 75a, 78000 Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
3 Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts - ZRC SAZU, Institute of Biology, Novi Trg 2, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Abstract – An alien and potentially invasive species of North American origin Aristida oligantha Michx. was found in the hinterland of Velika plaža, a sandy beach in the town of Ulcinj (Montenegro), the second known record of this plant in Europe. Here we describe the Aristida oligantha community. Further monitoring is suggested in order to evaluate its invasiveness and to plan appropriate eradication measures.

Keywords: Aristida oligantha community, invasive species, northeastern Mediterranean, sandy beach, south Montenegro

Introduction

Genus Aristida L. is one of the exotic grasses in the European flora. It belongs to the subfamily Aristidoideae, which consists of three genera: Aristida L., Stipagrostis Nees and Sartidia De Winter, being easily recognisable by one-flowered spikelets, with 3-awned lemmas, involute margins, a sharp pointed callus, and a line of hairs for a ligure (Cerros Tlatilpa et al. 2011). So far, Stipagrostis and Sartidia have not been reported in Europe, while the genus Aristida has been noted as having two representatives: A. adscensionis L. and A. oligantha Michx. (Euro+Med 2006, Rakaj and Pagad 2020). The first was been recorded in Spain, Italy, Greece (Euro+Med 2006), Belgium (Desmet et al. 2020) and France (Thevenot et al. 2020), while the second was recently reported in central part of Albania (Rakaj and Pagad 2020).

Within its native area of distribution, which includes North America, Aristida oligantha grows on waste or bare ground, old fields and dry hills (Allred 1986). It is considered an extremely aggressive weed species, which is rather dangerous for cattle, since its awns and sharp callus cause injuries to the mouth, nostrils, and eyes. It disperses in two ways, by wind or by attachment to passing animals thanks to its retrorsely-barbed, pointed callus (Owensby and Launchbaugh 1977).

Finding of the species in the hinterland of the Velika plaža sandy beach in the town of Ulcinj (Montenegro) represents its first record along the eastern Adriatic coast.

Aim of this paper is to warn of the newly discovered alien species Aristida oligantha, to present the new records, as well as the species composition and structure of the Aristida oligantha plant community.

Material and methods

The collected plant material was deposited in the Herbarium Collection at the University of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro (TGU), under the voucher number: TGU 1570528. The specimens were identified according to Allred (1986).

Phytosociological relevés were recorded according to the method of Braun-Blanquet (1964), stored in a Tubrovec (Hennekens and Schaminée 2001) and incorporated into the vegetation database of Montenegro (EU-ME-001, http://www.givd.info /ID /EU-ME-001). The nomenclature of the taxa follows the Euro+Med (2006).

* Corresponding author e-mail: danijela.stesevic@ucg.ac.me
Results and discussion

*Aristida oligantha* (Fig. 1) was recorded in full bloom during the autumn field survey at sandy beach of Velika plaža in town of Ulcinj (Montenegro), just along the narrow road that passes through the hinterland. The plant builds almost monodominant stands in rather anthropogenized but poorly trampled sites, at which *Brachypodietalia* dune grasslands with annuals (Annex I habitat type, code 2240) dominate during the spring. From the roadside, *Aristida* stands are mainly connected with a narrow line of trampled vegetation dominated by *Cynodon dactylon*, and on the opposite side there is either forest vegetation of planted maritime pines or the association *Eriantho-Schoenetum nigricantis* (Pignatti 1953) Géhu in Géhu et al. 1984 within which *Aristida* colonizes the area between tussocks of *Schoenus nigricans* (Tab. 1). The substrate is mostly sandy; exceptionally it is of crushed stones, which are used in this area as construction material for both car parks and paths. The total vegetation cover is mostly greater than 90%. In the *Aristida oligantha* community, the most frequent taxa were *Cynodon dactylon*, *Erigeron canadensis* (100%), *Artemisia campestris*, *Tragus racemosus*, *Petrorhagia saxifraga* and *Verbascum sinuatum* (77.7%, Tab. 1). The combination of late summer and autumn species, notably *Cynodon dactylon*, *Tragus racemosus* and *Euphorbia maculata* define the

Tab. 1. Phytosociological table of the *Aristida oligantha* community (rels. 1-9) and the *Eriantho-Schoenetum nigricantis* association (rel. 10). See Appendix for place of the relevés.

| Relevé no. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Plot size (m²) | 10 | 25 | 25 | 10 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Vegetation cover (%) | 95 | 100 | 90 | 97 | 95 | 90 | 50 | 97 | 90 | 100 |
| *Aristida oligantha* | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| *Cynodon dactylon* | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | + | + | 1 |
| *Erigeron canadensis* | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | 1 |
| *Tragus racemosus* | 1 | 1 | 1 | + | 2 | 2 | 1 | . | . | . |
| *Verbascum sinuatum* | + | 1 | . | + | + | . | + | 1 | + | 1 |
| *Petrophragia saxifraga* | 1 | + | . | 1 | + | . | + | + | + | . |
| *Plantago lanceolata* | + | + | 1 | + | 1 | + | . | . | 2 | |
| *Tortella tortuosa* | 2 | + | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | . | . | . | 1 |
| *Euphorbia maculata* | 1 | + | 1 | . | 2 | 2 | 1 | . | . | . |
| *Artemisia campestris* | 1 | 3 | 1 | + | 2 | . | . | 2 | 1 | . |
| *Prospero autumnale* | + | 1 | + | . | + | . | . | . | + | . |
| *Scirpoides holoschoenus* | . | . | 1 | 1 | 1 | + | + | . | . | 1 |
| *Crepis foetida* | 1 | + | 1 | . | . | . | + | + | + | . |
| *Trifolium lappaceum* | 1 | + | . | + | 1 | 1 | . | . | . | . |
| *Tridium ravennae* | . | . | + | 1 | + | . | + | + | + | . |
| *Sanguisorba minor* subsp. *muricata* | . | . | + | 1 | . | + | 1 | 1 | . | . |
| *Hypericum perforatum* subsp. *veronense* | 1 | + | + | . | + | . | . | . | . | . |
| *Bothriochloa ischaemum* | 1 | . | + | . | + | . | . | + | . | . |
| *Alkanna tinctoria* | 1 | . | 1 | . | + | 1 | + | . | . | . |
| *Lomelosia argentea* | + | . | + | + | + | . | . | . | . | . |
| *Ditrichia graveolens* | . | . | + | . | + | . | + | + | . | . |
| *Ditrichia viscosa* | . | + | + | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| *Teucrium capitatum* | 1 | . | . | . | . | . | + | . | . | . |
| *Asphodelus ramosus* | . | . | + | + | . | . | . | 1 | . | . |
| *Echium plantagineum* | . | . | + | + | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| *Digitaria ciliaris* | . | . | . | . | + | + | . | . | . | . |
| *Oenothera biennis* aggr. | . | . | . | . | + | . | + | . | . | . |
| *Riparus ulmifolius* | . | . | + | + | + | . | . | . | 1 | . |
| *Helianthemum jonium* | . | . | . | . | . | + | + | . | . | 5 |

Sporadic taxa: rel. 1 – *Salsola kali* (1), *Setaria viridis* (1), *Ajuga chamaeepitys* (+), rel. 2 – *Trifolium stellatum* (+), *Odontites vernus* ssp. *serotina* (+), *Scolymus hispanicus* (+), rel. 3 – *Plantago arenaria* (+), *Hypochaeris radicata* (+), rel. 6 – *Medicago minima* (1).
Aristida oligantha IN MONTENEGRO

Syntaxonomic affiliation of this community to the alliance Eragrostion of the order Eragrostietalia and class Digitario sanguinalis-Eragrostietea minoris.

Aristida oligantha was recently reported in Albania as a new alien species in European flora (Rakaj and Pagad 2020). Actually, the species was recorded from the banks of the Osum River, near the town of Berat, South Albania, in 2013 (Marash Rakaj, pers. comm.). As the sites are far apart, the introduction is probably independent. Nevertheless, due to the extremely close connection between the municipality of Ulcinj and Albania (trade, construction, tourism, and vigorous cross-border traffic), it is possible that species was imported from Albania. Introduction of species via construction material is a common means of spreading invasive species in Montenegro, as has been demonstrated by the spread of Ambrosia artemisiifolia (Stešević et al. 2014).

In autumn, in the hinterland of the Velika plaža beach, A. oligantha was recorded in monodominant stands – A. oligantha community (Tab. 1), as well as within the association Eriantho-Schoenetum nigricantis, which represents the vegetation type equivalent of NATURA 2000 habitat 2190 Humid dune slack.

Taking into consideration the great invasive potential of this species, we propose further monitoring and assessment of its invasive status and the planning of eradication measures. In order to deepen our knowledge on the synecology of this species beyond the boundaries of its natural range, as well as to describe any new association that might arise, it is necessary to do more detailed phytocenological research within the boundaries of the secondary range, which up to now covers only Albania and Montenegro in Europe.

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Appendix

Date and coordinates (WGS84) of the relevés (Tab. 1). All relevés were collected at 1 m a.s.l. Rel. 1 – 2019/10/06, 41.90632 N, 19.26582 E; Rel. 2 – 2019/10/06, 41.89915 N, 19.2901 E; 3 Rel. – 2019/10/06, 41.90543 N, 19.26919 E; Rel. 4 – 2019/10/06, 41.90363 N, 19.27509 E; Rel. 5 – 2019/10/06, 41.90321 N, 19.27589 E; 6 Rel. – 2019/10/06, 41.90544 N, 19.27069 E; Rel. 7 – 2019/10/06, 41.90127 N, 19.28215 E; Rel. 8 – 2019/10/06, 41.90242 N, 19.27777 E; Rel. 9 – 2019/10/06, 41.90249 N, 19.27758 E; Rel. 10 – 2019/10/06, 41.90542 N, 19.26927 E.

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