Reconfirmation of *Asplenium hemionitis* L. in São Vicente (Cabo Verde Islands, Western Africa)

Reconfirmación de Asplenium hemionitis *L. en São Vicente (Islas de Cabo Verde, Africa occidental)*

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ABSTRACT

The fern *Asplenium hemionitis* L. has been located again in the island of São Vicente (Cabo Verde). It was catalogued as «desappeared» because was not seen since 1866, and this observation reconfirms its presence in this island.

KEY WORDS

Asplenium hemionitis
Pteridophyta
São Vicente
Cabo Verde
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RESUMEN

El helecho *Asplenium hemionitis* L. ha sido localizado nuevamente en la isla de São Vicente (Cabo Verde). Estaba considerado «extinguido» porque no se había encontrado desde 1866, esta observación reconfirma su presencia en esta isla.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Asplenium hemionitis
Pteridophyta
São Vicente
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San Vicente Island belongs to Cabo Verde, the southernmost of all the Atlantic archipelagos known by the name of Macaronesia (the Azores Islands, the archipelago of Madeira, the Canary Islands and the Cabo Verde Islands). São Vicente, in particular, is situated at the intersection between the 17th north parallel and the 25th west meridian. It is a mountainous island with steep profiles, high coasts, deep valleys and many extinct craters; the highest point is Monte Verde (750 m). The climate is dry and hot, with average temperatures ranging between 22°C and 28°C; two seasons alternate during the year: the dry season, from the end of October to the beginning of July, and the wet season, from July to October (Peroni *et al.* 2003).

Asplenium hemionitis L. is a Macaronesian endemism, except for the isolated and relict stations in western Portugal (Sierra de Mafra and Sierra de Sintra, in Estremadura) and northern Africa (Marocco, northern Algeria, Tunisia). In the past some varieties were described (Bolle 1864), which were afterwards considered to be just variations within the species (Kunkel 1966, Benl 1969).

Asplenium hemionitis is one of the rarest ferns on the Cabo Verde Islands. It prefers humid and shaded habitats in rock crevices or small caves, mostly at lower altitudes (between 500 and about 1600 m). Benl (1969) described the ecology of this species more in detail, as he had observed it on the Canary Islands and Madeira, and he shows that it inhabits shaded forests, but also humid ravines at lower altitudes, where it grows in caves or between rocks. As in the Cabo Verde Islands shaded forests does not exist, *A. hemionitis* can only be found in the other habitat type described by Benl (1969). Probably, it is here at its southernmost distribution limit, and this locality differs from the northern ones in that are situated at higher altitudes. The ravines where it is growing are at the altitudes occupied by laurel forests in the Canary Islands and Madeira (Lobin *et al.* 1998).

In the Cabo Verde Islands this species is critically endangered and it is thus facing extinction. Although, it is presently not endangered on Fogo, it is endangered on São Nicolau and Brava and has not be seen for a long time in São Antão and São Vicente. This taxon was catalogued by Lobin & Ormonde (1996) as «desaparecido» (PA) at São Vicente, in which the last record was «Top of Monte Verde, Lowe 2.1866» (Lobin *et al.* 1998).

We observed *A. hemionitis* on Monte Verde at 740 m during an expedition accomplished in November 2002. There were some tufts made of rather strong plants in a rocky ravine facing NE. There were also a lot of *Davallia canariensis* (L.) Sm. growing nearby, and some plants of *Nephrolepis undulata* (Afz. ex SW.) J. Sm. (Peroni *at al.* 2003).

This finding, almost 140 years from the last observation, is rather interesting because it reconfirms the presence of this interesting species in the island.

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