
Nepeta sphaciotica P.H. Davis

LABIATAE

Endangered

Status

Endangered due to overgrazing, although apparently recovering since goats were recently completely replaced by sheep. The flowers are destroyed and this prevents any regeneration by seed. Only about 40-50 plants were found surviving in 1966, with no seedlings. A second, more thorough count by Baden in 1980 yielded c. 100 individuals with a very restricted variation amplitude (Baden 1987). Six years later in July 1986, Z. Kypriotakis counted almost 500 plants, and estimated that there were perhaps 600 (Kypriotakis, pers. comm.).

Description

Perennial herb with several stems 5-20 cm high from a woody rootstock. Leaves arranged in opposite pairs up the stems, pale green, oblong to ovate, softly hairy, 13-20 mm long, with coarsely crenate margins. Flowers in whirled clusters (verticillasters) which are aggregated into a spike at the tip of the stem; calyx 7-9 mm long, grey-villose and glandular-hairy, ending in 5 pointed lobes; corolla white, with pink spots, 10-12 mm long, two-lipped with the upper lip two-lobed and the lower lip three-lobed with an expanded, dentate, concave middle lobe.

Distribution

Endemic to Kriti; restricted to the northern side of Mt. Zvousichti in the Levka Ori (White Mountains) at the west of the island.

Out of 155 species known to be endemic to Kriti, 101 are believed to be rare or threatened. Fortunately, 77 of these fall into the Rare category, reflecting their very localized distribution and, in many cases, their inaccessibility in the mountains, especially in crevices of vertical rock faces protected from grazing. Much of the en-

demie flora is of horticultural merit and includes species of *Campanula*, *Colechicum*, *Crocus*, *Dianthus*, *Ebenus*, *Helichrysum*, *Paeonia*, *Stachelina*, *Tylosa* and the monotypic genus *Petrovarula* of the *Campanulaceae*.

Habitat and ecology

Among calcareous rocks and scree at 2300 m altitude, on a north-facing slope.

Conservation measures taken

None.

Conservation measures proposed

Consideration should be given to controlling the number of sheep in the area. The species should be brought into cultivation, propagated in a botanic garden, and subsequently established in a protected area.

Biology and potential value

It is of considerable scientific interest as a member of a critical group relevant to studies of plant geography and taxonomy. A biosystematic investigation (Baden 1987) has shown that it is reproductively isolated from its European relatives and can be considered as a palaeoendemic species.

References

- Baden, C. 1987: Biosystematic studies in the *Nepeta sibthorpii* group (*Lamiaceae*) in Greece. - *Opera Bot.* 93: 1-54.
- Davis, P.H. 1952: Notes on the summer flora of the Aegean. - *Notes Roy. Bot. Gard. Edinburgh* 21: 136-137.

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