Potamogeton × subrufus Hagstr.: a neglected Potamogeton hybrid

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The original material of Potamogeton × subrufus Hagstr. [= P. lucens L. × P. nodosus Poir.] and the herbarium material of the morphologically most similar hybrid, P. × fluitans Roth [= P. lucens L. × P. natans L.], were examined taxonomically. Approximately 45 characters were studied on 42 herbarium specimens of both taxa. The analysis shows that P. × subrufus displays several characters consistently different from those of P. × fluitans. Two new European localities of P. × subrufus found during the study are also provided and a morphological description of the hybrid, including distinguishing characters, is given.

Key words: anatomy, aquatic plants, clones, Denmark, distribution, hybridisation, morphology, taxonomy

Introduction

Hagström (1916) described Potamogeton × subrufus as a hybrid between P. lucens L. and P. nodosus Poir. based on herbarium specimens gathered from two separate locations in Europe and North America. The Gudenå River near Kongensbro, Jutland, Denmark, where the hybrid was collected by I. Baagöe in 1895, 1897, 1899 and 1900, is given in the protologue as the European locality. Baagöe identified these plants as “P. fluitans Roth (P. lucens + P. natans) f. sublucens Baagöe” while Hagström, when he examined the material in 1899, regarded the specimens as a hybrid between P. alpinus Balb. and P. lucens (Hagström 1916). Probably influenced by Hagström, Baagöe later labelled some specimens as “P. alpinus + P. lucens (P. olivaceus mihi non O. F. Lang)”. In fact, plants from all the Danish gatherings are morphologically and anatomically very similar, and are likely to represent the same clone. The lectotype of P. × subrufus was designated by Kaplan (2005) and chosen from among Baagöe’s European collections preserved in UPS. The original view of Baagöe and Hagström, who finally described the plants as a hybrid between P. lucens and P. nodosus, was not adopted later by Potamogeton taxonomists and P. × subrufus was reduced to synonymy with P. × fluitans Roth, a hybrid between P. lucens and P. natans L. (Dandy & Taylor 1942, Wiegleb & Kaplan 1998, Kaplan 2005). Potamogeton × fluitans is fairly common with a very wide range of morphological variability. Plants collected in the Gudenå River near Kongensbro were thought to be part of this variation. The fact that one of
the proposed parental species, *P. nodosus*, had not been recorded either from the area or from other parts of entire Scandinavia was also cited against the existence of a hybrid between *P. lucens* and *P. nodosus* in Denmark (Pedersen 1976, Hultén & Fries 1986).

Potamogeton species abundantly involved in crossing are known to occur in most cases sympatrically in the place of hybrid creation or its vicinity. On the other hand, populations of established Potamogeton hybrids are long persistent and a hybrid population can exist despite the absence of one or both parental species. The case of *P. × bottnicus* Hagstr., a hybrid between *P. pectinatus* L. and *P. vaginatus* Turcz., provides an interesting example. This hybrid was identified in the British Isles, but one of the parents, *P. vaginatus* Turcz., had been missing from the area for some 30 000 years (Preston et al. 1998). It is highly probable that *P. × bottnicus* is a relic in Britain, owing its origin to ancient hybridisation involving indigenous Potamogeton species (King et al. 2001). This shows that the recognition of a Potamogeton hybrid should be based exclusively on taxonomical characters and the actual overlap of the ranges of parental species can only be treated as additional premise and not as decisive argument.

Another hybrid growing together with a plant described by Hagström as *P. × subrufus* was collected by Baagöe on 28 July 1895. It was morphologically different from *P. × subrufus* and was labelled “*P. fluitans* Roth *f. rivularis* Baagöe”. Potamogeton morphotypes within a population of the same taxon are very similar because of the predominance of vegetative propagation and due to the influence of habitat factors (Kaplan 2002). Therefore, it is difficult to explain why two distinct forms of the same (as nowadays regarded) taxonomical entity occurred in one habitat at the same time. Furthermore, stem anatomy characters of the two morphotypes differ markedly. The form “rivularis Baagöe” is a true *P. × fluitans* in the present author’s opinion while morphotypes described as *P. × subrufus* constitute another taxon. A hypothesis that it could be *P. × sparganiifolius* Laest. ex Fr., a third hybrid similar to *P. × fluitans* and *P. × subrufus*, was excluded based on the general morphological appearance of the plants.

The aim of the present study is to evaluate morphological and anatomical characters of *P. × subrufus* using the available original material collected in Denmark, to compare the characters with those of the most similar *P. × fluitans*, and to resolve unequivocally the taxonomical status of *P. × subrufus*.

**Material and methods**

The available original herbarium specimens of *P. × subrufus* collected by I. Baagöe in the Gudenå River near Kongensbro, Jutland, Denmark, and preserved in the Herbarium of the University of Copenhagen (C) were investigated taxonomically. Twenty herbarium specimens of *P. × fluitans* representing a range of distinct morphotypes of this taxon, also preserved in C, were examined for comparison. Morphological characters of the stem, submerged and floating leaves, stipules, inflorescence, peduncles and flowers were measured or described qualitatively. Anatomical characters of all specimens were also assessed. Short pieces of the stem (ca. 2 mm) were cut from the internode of the main stem. Pieces were embedded in water for a few minutes and transverse sections, ca. 0.05 mm thin, were next made. Slices were kept in an aquatic solution of toluidine blue for 1–3 minutes. Stained tissues were washed in distilled water. Stem anatomy was investigated under a transmitted light microscopy at magnification 50× (general anatomical pattern) and up to 400× (detailed view). Approximately 45 morphological and five anatomical characters were examined for each of 42 individuals of both taxa.

**Results**

Potamogeton × subrufus and *P. × fluitans* are morphologically very similar. Consequently, variation ranges of most of their features overlap. The analysis, however, reveals some characters that differentiate these two taxa (Table 1). The best distinguishing characters are those of stem anatomy. Potamogeton × fluitans is rich in sclerenchyma while the number of sclerenchymatous strands (subepidermal and cortical ones) is always reduced in *P. × subrufus*. 

**Description of $P. \times$ subrufus**

*Stem* up to 1.5 m, robust, terete, unbranched; nodal glands absent. *Submerged leaves* with lamina (160–)170–250(–340) mm long, (15–)21–26(–29) mm wide, 6.4–11.3 times as long as wide, translucent, brownish green when dried, narrowly elliptical, gradually tapering to a peti- olate base and semiacute or acute apex, minutely denticulate at margin, midrib bordered by a band of lacunae; lateral veins 4–6 on each side of the midrib, two stronger than others; secondary veins numerous, ascending; petioles 20–50 mm long. *Floating leaves* with lamina 135–215 mm long, 21–34 mm wide, 4.8–10 times as long as wide, opaque, coriaceous, broadly elliptical, cuneate at base and obtuse or apiculate at apex; lateral veins 6–9 on each side of midrib, secondary veins numerous, obscure; petioles 34–83 mm. *Stipules* 52–120 mm, open, enfolding stem, translucent, pale brown when dry, fairly persistent, veins inconspicuous when dry, 2 more prominent than others, forming ridges or narrow wings along stipule. *Turions* absent. *Inflorescences* 20–31 mm long, 3–6 mm wide; peduncles 62–95 mm long, robust, terete, broader, spongy and wider than spike. *Flowers* numerous, contiguous with 4 carpels. *Fruits* not seen. *Stem anatomy*: stele or complex oblong type, endodermis of U(O)-type, interlacunar bundles present in 1(2) circles (inner one not fully developed), subepidermal bundles absent or only few present, pseudohypodermis absent or only partly developed.

**New localities of $P. \times$ subrufus**

Two localities not published previously were found during the study in the herbarium C. One locality is situated in the Gudenå River, near Ans, not far away from the *locus classicus*. *Potamogeton × subrufus* was collected there by J. Grøntved and K. Jessen on 14 August 1918 and identified as $P. lucens \times P. alpinus$. The other locality was originally indicated as Ostpreussen, Darkehmen, in Angerapp bei Dombrowken (nowadays the Węgorapra River near Dąbrówka Nowa, Węgorzewsco district, north-eastern Poland), where H. Kuehn collected the plant on 6 July 1892. Kuehn identified the specimen as “*Potamogeton lucens L. γ longifolius Gay*”.

**Discussion**

An appropriate evaluation of variation limits of taxa is blurred by high levels of plasticity observed in *Potamogeton* individuals (Kaplan 2002). Formal descriptions of almost all morphotypes commonly applied in their systematics in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries resulted in a very complicated nomenclature. James E. Dandy and George Taylor were the first to elucidate the taxonomy of *Potamogeton*. In their studies of British pondweeds, they introduced a broader concept of *Potamogeton* species, under which many varieties and forms

### Table 1. Diagnostic features distinguishing *Potamogeton × subrufus* and *P. × fluitans*.

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<th>$P. \times$ subrufus</th>
<th>$P. \times$ fluitans</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Morphological characters</strong></td>
<td>apex of submerged leaves</td>
<td>semiacute or acute, never mucronate</td>
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<td>lacunae along stronger lateral veins</td>
<td>broad band up to the apex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>length of petiole</td>
<td>20–50 mm long</td>
<td>mucronate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stem anatomy characters</strong></td>
<td>up to 2 strands</td>
<td>narrow band not reaching the apex</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 or 2 circles (but inner one not fully developed)</td>
<td>25–90 mm long</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2–3 fully developed circles</td>
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described previously were regarded as developmental stages only, unworthy of taxonomical recognition (Taylor 1949). As a consequence, many taxonomical names were reduced to synonyms (see Preston 1995 and literature cited therein). A broad concept of taxa was also adopted in a recent worldwide treatment of Potamogeton (Wiegbleb & Kaplan 1998). While undoubtedly more appropriate in the case of morphologically plastic plants such as pondweeds, this approach can also be misleading. Aquatic habitats restrict potential morphology, thereby limiting the range of phenotypic differences between species (Niklas 1997). In specific ecological conditions, different taxa can produce morphotypes impossible to distinguish using morphological or even anatomical characters. Only a careful and thorough evaluation of the plant material, cultivation experiments, biochemical or molecular approaches can finally resolve taxonomical problems. Dandy and Taylor (1942) did not provide a detailed study of P. × subrufus and P. × fluitans characters, but simply indicated that the former is the riverine state of the latter. Their point of view characters, but simply indicated that the former is regarded as development stages only, unworthy of taxonomical recognition. The present study, however, was later adopted by Wiegbleb and Kaplan (1998) and Kaplan (2005). The present study, however, shows that P. × subrufus should be placed among taxa worth recognising. It is currently known from three localities and appears to be one of the rarest Potamogeton hybrids, but individuals of this taxon may have been overlooked and identified as P. × fluitans.

The occurrence of P. × subrufus in Denmark could be an argument for the ancient presence of P. nodosus in the area although the latter was not identified in fossils (Jessen & Milthers 1928). A historical long-distance dispersal of hybrid seeds seems to be an equally probable scenario. The available evidence however is too scanty to support any of these hypotheses.

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References


