A plant that Linnaeus forgot: taxonomic revision of Rhodalsine (Caryophyllaceae)

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A plant that Linnaeus forgot: taxonomic revision of *Rhodalsine* (*Caryophyllaceae*)

Abstract: The mainly Mediterranean genus *Rhodalsine* (*Caryophyllaceae*) is revised and a single species, *R. geniculata*, is recognized, distributed from the Canary Islands in the west to Somalia in the east. The history of the taxon, which was known already during the 17th century but entirely overlooked by Linnaeus, is outlined. Variation and taxonomy are discussed and illustrations and a distribution map are provided. Many names are placed in synonymy and most of the names are typified, including six lectotypes designated here.

Key words: Caryophyllaceae, Mediterranean region, *Minuartia*, nomenclature, *Rhodalsine*, Spergulae, taxonomy, typification

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Introduction

According to the results presented in several recent phylogenetic studies (for a summary, see Kool & Thulin 2017), there is good evidence for the view that *Minuartia* subg. *Rhodalsine* (J. Gay) Graebn. is a member of the tribe *Spergulaeae* and sister to *Spergula* L. and *Spergularia* (Pers.) J. Presl & C. Presl together. This mainly Mediterranean subgenus therefore needs to be removed from the polyphyletic *Minuartia* L. (Dillenberger & Kaderet 2014) and treated as a genus of its own. No comprehensive overview of the group has been presented since Williams (1898), who treated it as the genus *Rhodalsine* J. Gay with two species and several varieties. Since then many other names have been associated with the group and its now fairly complex taxonomy and nomenclature is the subject of the present paper.

The first illustrations of members of *Rhodalsine* were published by Boccone (1674), as “*Alsine maritima longius radicata, Herniariae foliis*”, from Sicily. Two forms were described and illustrated, one main form with leaves of the same shape and size as *Herniaria* L., and one more narrow-leaved form called “*Alsine maritima altera angustis foliis*”. Material from Sicily is preserved in the Boccone herbarium in P (Bonnet 1883).

Despite Boccone’s illustrations and the mention of the plant many times in the pre-Linnaean literature (e.g. Morison 1680: 552), it was completely overlooked by Linnaeus, presumably as he did not have access to any herbarium material and therefore could not study it properly. Forsskål collected a member of *Rhodalsine* in Egypt 1761–1762, but misidentified it as *Cherleria sedoides* L. (Forsskål 1775) and his material is now lost (Christensen 1922; Hepper & Friis 1994). Not until Poiret (1789) de-
scribed *Arenaria geniculata* Poir. from Algeria did a member of the group first get a valid binomial.

Gay (1845) coined the name *Rhodalsine* and made the combination *R. procumbens* (Vahl) J. Gay, based on *Arenaria procumbens* Vahl (Vahl 1791). However, *R. procumbens*, the type of *Rhodalsine*, was nomenclaturally superfluous when published, and is therefore illegitimate, as *Arenaria geniculata*, the name with priority, was cited in synonymy.

Graebner (in Ascherson & Graebner 1918) treated the group as *Minuartia* subg. *Rhodalsine*, and since then it has mostly been seen as part of *Minuartia*. According to McNeill & Bassett (1974), the number of species in the subgenus is four or five. However, during the last decades *Rhodalsine* has, to some extent, come back into use again at the generic level (for details, see Kool & Thulin 2013).

In the analysis presented by Kool & Thulin (2017), three samples of *Minuartia* subg. *Rhodalsine* were included, representing *M. geniculata* (Poir.) Thell. from the Mediterranean region (Spain), *M. platyphylla* (J. Gay ex Christ) McNeill from the Canary Islands (Lanzarote) and *M. vestita* (Baker) McNeill from Somalia. In the resulting phylogeny, the three samples formed a strongly supported clade and within this clade the samples of *M. platyphylla* and *M. vestita* were weakly supported as sisters. When here revising the group, as *Rhodalsine*, we argue for the recognition of a single variable species in this genus.

### Material and methods

Herbarium material and/or images from the following herbaria have been studied: BM, BORD, C, FI, H, K, MA, MPU, O, P, P-Desf, P-LA, PRC, S, TO and UPS. The material studied comprises a representative sample from all parts of the area of distribution, roughly 300 collections in total. As far as possible, the names have been typified, and all type material cited has been seen, either during personal visits to herbaria or as digital images. The distribution map is based almost entirely on information from herbarium labels, but in a few cases also on reliable literature sources, such as Fiori (1923) and Phitos (1997).

### Taxonomy


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**Fig. 1.** Flowers of *Rhodalsine geniculata* from Spain, Lagunas de La Mata, Torrevieja, April 2012, photograph by Marta Rubio-Texeira.

**Fig. 2.** Scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of seed of *Rhodalsine geniculata* (Rainha 984). – Scale bar = 30 μm.

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**Note — Psammanthe** Rchb. (Reichenbach 1841) was published as a replacement name at generic level for the validly published generic subdivision *Alsine* [unranked] *Psammophilae* Fenzl (Fenzl in Endlicher 1840). Two species names, *Arenaria thymifolia* Sm. and *A. procumbens* Vahl were cited by Fenzl. Mattfeld (1921) assigned sectional rank to *Psammophilae* under *Minuartia* and placed *M. procumbens* (Vahl) Graebn. (Arenaria procumbens) in this section, whereas *M. thymifolia* (Sm.) Bornm. was placed in *M.* sect. *Sabulina* (Rchb.) Graebn. *Psammanthe*
Rchb., a name not used since its publication, would have had priority over Rhodalsine, but is now, following a proposal by Kool & Thulin (2013), a rejected name (Appepquist 2014; Wilson 2016; Turland & al. 2017).

Description — Herbs perennial or sometimes annual, with indumentum of glandular hairs. Leaves opposite, without stipules, but leaves of each pair with shortly connate bases. Flowers in lax cymes. Sepals 5, connate at base into a short hypanthium. Petals 5, pink or white, inserted at apex of hypanthium, shortly clawed at base. Stamens 10, in 2 whors, of outer whorl inserted at base of petals, of those inner whorl antise-palous, inserted on a low, ring-shaped rim surrounding base of ovary; pollen trizonocolpate. Ovary shortly stig-mate, subglobose, thin-walled; styles 3, filiform. Capsule opening by 3 valves. Seeds many, orbicular-reniform, wingless; radicle of embryo accumbent. Chromosome base number x = 9.

Distribution — A genus of a single variable species distributed in the Canary Islands, around the Mediterranean and in the Horn of Africa region.


Note — According to Poiret (in Lamarck 1804), he collected Arenaria geniculata “dans les environs de la Calle”. “La Calle” is a former French name for Annaba in NE Algeria.


Note — Vahl (1791) stated concerning the provenance of Arenaria procumbens: “Legi in ruderatis Tunetii. Forsk. in Aegypto”. The reference to “Forsk.” is based on the report by Forskål (1775) of “Cheraleria sedoides” from Cairo, collected during his stay in Egypt 1761–1762. Cheraleria sedoides was an obvious misidentification by Forskål. There is no extant Forskål material of C. sedoides (Christensen 1922; Hepper & Friis 1994), but two sheets annotated by Vahl as A. procumbens are present in C: (1) a sheet from “Barbaria” without collector [C10000449] and (2) a sheet collected by “Tönder Lund” in “Tuneti” [C10000450]. The second sheet, which consists of a well-preserved flowering branch, is here designated as the lectotype. Vahl’s tab. 33 illustrates a richly branched specimen that does not match any of these two sheets. It was most probably based on the now lost Forskål material from Egypt. This illustration would also be possible as a lectotype, but we prefer the specimen.


Note — Presl (1826) in the protologue of Arenaria rosea (as “A. rosea a. lancifolia”) cited “t.10, f.1A” in Boccone (1674), an illustration that is therefore available for typification. However, Presl’s collection in PRC is preferred as the lectotype.


Note — Presl (1826) in the protologue of Arenaria rosea var. saphulata (as “A. rosea ß. saphulata”) cited “t.10, f.1B” in Boccone (1674), an illustration that is therefore available for typification. However, Presl’s collection in PRC is preferred as the lectotype.

Note — Moris (1837), in the protologue of Arenaria procumbens var. linearifolia, gave the following information: “In maritimis Cagliari alla Scaffa, alla Maddalena; Porto scuso. Fl. aprili, junio”. In the Moris Herbarium at TO, there are two extant specimens of “Arenaria procumbens var. linearifolia”, one with the annotation “littorea maritima majo” and the other with “la Maddalena aprili”, but smaller; terminal and axillary lax cymes; flowers in April, May, June.


Note — In the protologue of Alsine platyphylla, Christ (1888) cited “Bourg. et Bolle”. Bourgeau 717 [FI000058] and Bolle s.n. [FI000057], both from Handia, are present in FI, and the Bourgeau specimen is here designated as the lectotype.


= Minuartia procumbens var. glabrascens Pamp. in Arch. Bot. (Forli) 12: 27. 1936. – Holotype: Libya, Cirenaica, Bengasi, Giocchi el Chebri (Lefe), 9 Mar 1933, Panampani 2459 (FI! [FI003770 digital image!]).


Description — Stems from a usually ± woody taproot, prostrate to ascending or suberect, 10–70 cm long, often much branched, sparsely to densely pubescent with glandular hairs 0.2–1(–1.5) mm long, particularly in the upper part. Leaves sessile or almost sessile, linear to oblong or almost orbicular in outline, 4–35 × 0.5–9 mm, sparsely to densely pubescent with glandular hairs, with prominent midrib abaxially, apex acute to obtuse. Flowers in terminal and axillary lax cymes; bracts similar to leaves but smaller; pedicel 3–25 mm long, erect to spreading, slender, glandular pubescent. Sepals lanceolate to narrowly ovate, 2.5–5 mm long, obscurely 1–3-veined, particularly inner sepals with ± wide scarious margin, glandular pubescent abaxially, apex obtuse to subacute.
Petals broadly elliptic to ovate, slightly shorter to slightly longer than sepals, apex obtuse to subacute. Stamens shorter than petals; filaments slender, glabrous; anthers yellow, oblong, 0.5–0.8 mm long. Styles 1–2 mm long. Capsule ovoid-oblong, about as long as sepals, thin-walled, splitting to base into 3 boat-shaped valves. Seeds dark brown, shiny, 0.5–0.8 mm in diam., shallowly channelled on back, faces narrowly reticulate with radiating, elongate cells with sinuate margins. — Fig. 1 & 2.

Taxonomic remarks — Already Boccone (1674) captured much of the variation within *Rhodalsine geniculata* in his illustrations of a broad-leaved and a narrow-leaved form of "*Alsine maritima ..." in Sicily. Many of the names in the synonymy above have been coined for forms with different leaf shapes, but also density of the indumentum and length of the hairs, flower colour and seed characters have been used to differentiate taxa.

During the last decades there has been a general agreement in floristic treatments in Europe and most of North Africa that only a single variable species, *Rhodalsine geniculata* (or *Minuartia geniculata*), can be recognized (e.g. Meikle 1977; Ghafoor 1978; Jalas & Suominen 1983; Favarger & Montserrat 1990; M. webbii as “annual to perennial” and *M. platyphylla* as having ovate to suborbicular leaves in contrast to the “narrower-leaved Mediterranean species *M. geniculata*”). In Morocco a distinction is currently made between a more broad-leaved *Rhodalsine (Minuartia) sennisiana* with longer hairs and a narrow-leaved *R. geniculata* with shorter hairs (Ouyahya 1999; Fennane & Ibn Tattou 2005). However, the variation seen in the Canary Islands and Morocco is part of a continuous variation across the whole area of distribution.

*Minuartia vestita* falls entirely within the variation of *Rhodalsine geniculata*.

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