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***Paraserianthes lophantha* (Willd.) J. Nielsen (*Mimosaceae*) a new alien species naturalised to Sicily**

Abstract

Villari, R. & Zaccone, S.: *Paraserianthes lophantha* (Willd.) J. Nielsen (*Mimosaceae*) a new alien species naturalised to Sicily. — Fl. Medit. 9: 287-290. 1999. — ISSN 1120-4052.

Paraserianthes lophantha (Willd.) J. Nielsen, native to Australia, has been found naturalised in the neighbourhoods of Messina, Sicily. The finding of this species, recorded as spontaneous from Corsica since the beginning of 20th century, is the first for Italy.

Paraserianthes lophantha (Willd.) J. Nielsen (syn.: *Albizia lophantha* (Willd.) Bentham, *Albizia distachya* Macbr., *Acacia lophantha* Willd.) is an evergreen tree native to Australia, grown for its ornamental foliage (Traverso 1926). It occurs naturalised in Madeira (Kunles 1978) and Corsica (Thellung 1911), where new other localities have been recently recorded (Lambinon 1986). In Italy it is cultivated but it has never been found growing spontaneous. In fact references of Fiori (1925) and Zangheri (1976) concern Corsica. As regards other European regions neither Heywood & Ball (1968) nor Greuter & al. (1989) mention *P. lophantha*. In other countries besides Europe such species is naturalised to Canary Isles, Hawaii, south-eastern Africa (Kunkel 1978) and New Zealand (Webb & al. 1988).

In 1995 *P. lophantha* has been found, and so far growing, naturalised in several localities of the Messina neighbourhood. This is the first record of such species for Italy. Specimens are kept in the herbaria of Messina (MS), Florence (FI), and in the Herbarium Mediterraneum of Palermo (PAL).

Location and ecology

The distribution of *P. lophantha* in the area close to Messina (Fig. 1) is shown by the following voucher specimens: Zaffaria (Messina) dozens of individuals at the homonymous stream banks, c.da Mulinazzo, 230 m, Mar 1995, R. Villari & S. Zaccone (FI, PAL, MS); Colli S. Rizzo (Messina), loc. Quattro strade, about 400 m, several

individuals in the pine plantation, Aug 1997, R. Villari & S. Zaccone (MS); Gazzi (Messina) isolated individuals in waste land near Policlinic, Oct 1997; Curcuraci (Messina) some individuals along SP 45 up to the Masse, km 1500, May 1999, S. Zaccone (MS); Badiazza (Messina) some individuals at the edge of a grove, Nov 1999, S. Zaccone (MS).

The early clearly naturalised individuals of this species have been observed in spring 1995 at Zaffaria at the edge of the road along the stream, near some mature plants of the same species likely to be introduced by man owing to their location. Such population, periodically surveyed, has gradually increased in number of individuals over the years.



Fig. 1. Finding localities of *Paraserianthes lophantha* (●) near Messina (map 1 : 100000).



Fig. 2. *Paraserianthes lophanta*: particular of the inflorescence.



Fig. 3. *Paraserianthes lophanta*: seedlings in one of the new Sicilian localities.

At present it consists of about thirty mature plants, 1-6 m high (Fig. 2) and of about one hundred seedlings 10 cm high (Fig. 3). Below this population, at a distance between 50 and 200 m but along the stream bed, a specimen about 4 m high, three specimens about 1 m high and a dozen about 50 cm high can still be seen.

Following a survey made up in October 1998 near the specimen growing along the provincial road of Colli di S. Rizzo it appears that several individuals (at different heights) infest the adjacent pine plantation.

From the carried out observations it results that under our climate *P. lophantha* shows a rapid growth, a winter flowering (November-March) and produces vital seeds - a datum confirmed by the high number of seedlings seen in spring in several localities.

Such taxon is likely to be naturalised to the Messina area not only owing to its nursery trade but also because of the natural propagation of the early introduced individuals; the probable displacement of the soil containing such seeds adds to its spreading.

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