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Source: Willdenowia, 46(1) : 105-112

Published By: Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum Berlin (BGBM)

URL: <https://doi.org/10.3372/wi.46.46108>

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Dionysia robusta (Primulaceae), a new species from W Iran

Version of record first published online on 1 April 2016 ahead of inclusion in April 2016 issue.

Abstract: A new species from the W part of the Iranian Zagros Mountains in Ilam province, *Dionysia robusta* (Primulaceae), is described, illustrated and compared with similar and related species. It differs from these relatives in leaf shape, length and density of glandular hairs, and shape of the calyx. The DNA sequence of the nuclear ribosomal ITS region of *D. robusta* is most similar to that of *D. gaubae*.

Key words: Irano-Turanian region, Iran, Zagros Mountains, new species, Primulaceae, *Dionysia*, ITS sequences

Article history: Received 29 October 2015; peer-review (1) completed 27 January 2016; received (1) in revised form 3 February 2016; peer-review (2) completed 17 February 2016; received (2) in revised form 23 February 2016; accepted for publication 24 February 2016.

Citation: Younesi S., Mehregan I., Assadi M., Nejadsattari T. & Lidén M. 2016: *Dionysia robusta* (Primulaceae), a new species from W Iran. – Willdenowia 46: 105–112. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3372/wi.46.46108>

Introduction

Dionysia Fenzl, one of the larger genera of Primulaceae, consists of more than 50 species. They are suffrutescent herbs that form loose tufts or dense cushions in crevices of rocks and cliffs. During spring, these plants are covered by yellow, purple or pink flowers (Lidén 2007; Grey-Wilson 1989; Melchior 1943; Wendelbo 1961, 1964, 1965, 1971).

The majority of *Dionysia* species (more than 20) are found in the Zagros Mountains of W Iran (Lidén 2007). The number of species of *Dionysia* in other regions of SW Asia is lower: there are eight species in other areas of Iran, 11 species in Afghanistan, three in Turkey, two in Iraq, two in Turkmenistan, two in Tajikistan, one in Oman and one in Pakistan. The majority of species of *Dionysia* occurs in the area covered by *Flora iranica* (Wendelbo 1965). Thanks to the extensive collection of material from different mountainous areas of this region

in recent years, new species have been described (Jamzad 1996, 1999; Lidén 2007; Borjian & al. 2014).

Ilam province in W Iran is a poorly studied area, from which several new species have recently been described (Mozaffarian 2008). Two nearby localities of an unknown *Dionysia* species were found in the Dinar-Kouh mountains in the Abdanan region of this province by the first author. Here, we report the finding of a new species and clarify its relationships to other species of *Dionysia*.

Material and methods

Morphology

We compared our unknown species with other *Dionysia* species reported from W Iran and N Iraq, namely *D. bornmuelleri* (Pax) Clay, *D. gaubae* Bornm., *D. odora* Fenzl and *D. tacamahaca* Lidén (Wendelbo 1965; Jam-

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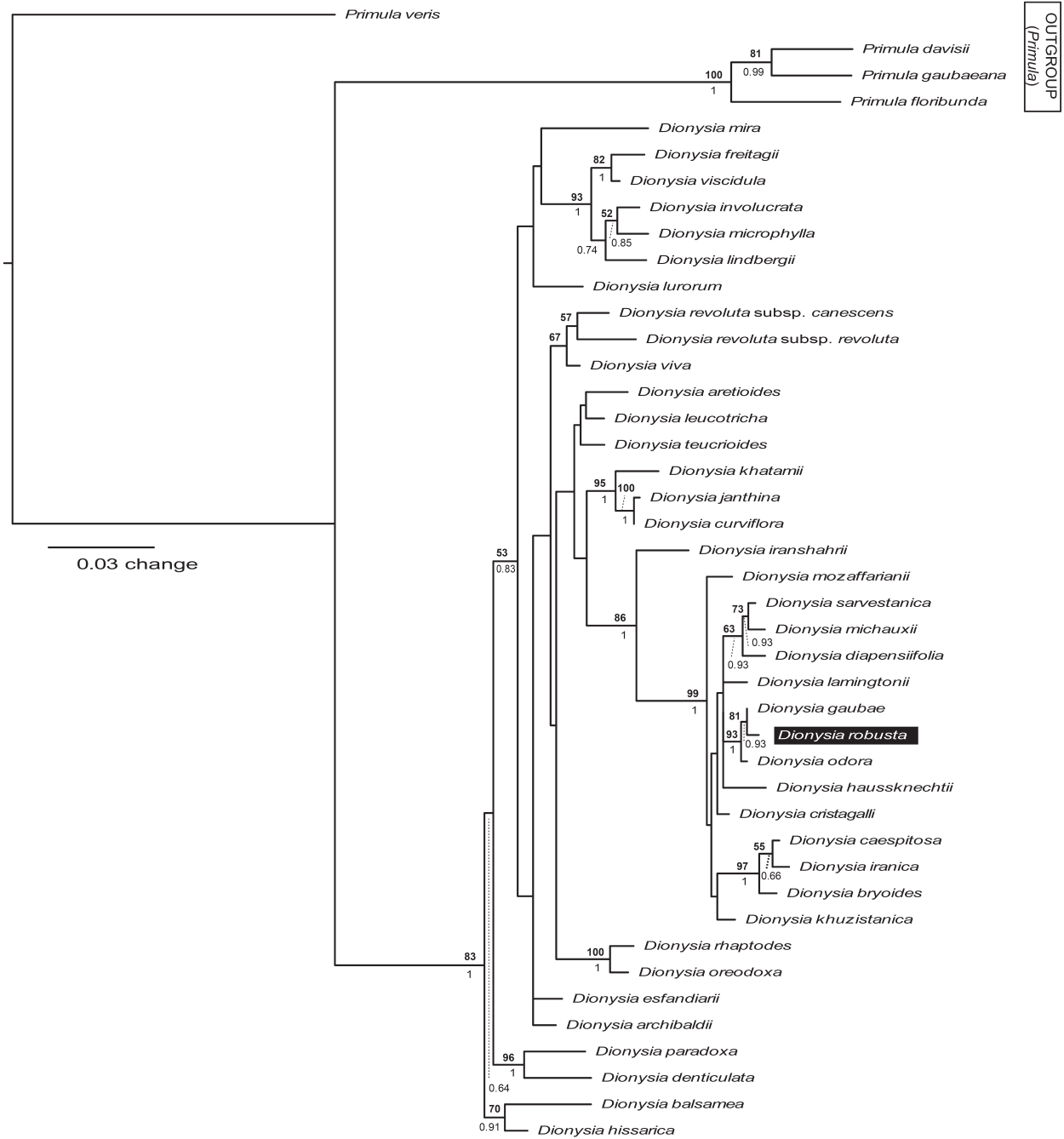


Fig. 1. Phylogram obtained from a maximum likelihood (ML) analysis of ITS DNA sequences. The numbers above the branches are ML bootstrap values, the numbers below the branches are posterior probabilities (PP). Bootstrap values equal to or less than 50 % and PP equal to or less than 0.5 are not shown.

zad 1999; Lidén 2007), as well as all Iranian species with similar morphology. All type specimens of the above-mentioned species were studied. Vegetative and floral parts were observed and measured under a stereomicroscope (NTB-3A, Wuzhou New Found Instrument Co., Guangxi, China). Voucher specimens were prepared and deposited in the herbarium of Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University (IAUH), Tehran, with duplicates in B and UPS (herbarium codes according to Thiers [continuously updated]).

Molecular markers

Total DNA was extracted from either silica-gel dried leaves collected from the wild or leaf fragments of herbarium material using the NucleoSpin Plant II kit (Machery-Nagel, Düren, Germany) following the manufacturer's instructions. The complete internal transcribed spacer (ITS) region of the nuclear ribosomal cistron was amplified by using the forward primer AB101 (5'-ACG AAT TCA TGG TCC GGT GAA GTG TTC G-3') and the reverse primer AB102 (5'-TAG AAT TCC CCG

GTT CGC TCG CCG TTA C - 3'; Douzery & al. 1999) in a PCR reaction under the following conditions: a pretreatment of 5 min at 95 °C, 35 cycles of 30 sec at 95 °C, 30 sec at 50 °C, and 90 sec at 72 °C, and a final extension of 7 min at 72 °C. Amplicons were sequenced on an ABI 3730 DNA Analyzer (Hitachi-Applied Biosystems, Waltham, Massachusetts, U.S.A.). Sequences were visually checked and edited with the software tool Sequencher 4 (Gene Codes Corporation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, U.S.A.).

We added the ITS DNA sequence of the new species presented here to those of the species already present in the phylogeny of *Dionysia* by Trift & al. (2004). This new dataset was aligned using the software tool MacClade 4.08 (Maddison & Maddison 2000). A maximum parsimony (MP) analysis of the ITS dataset was performed via PAUP* (Swofford 2002) under the following parameters: heuristic search, number of replicates: 100, swapping method: TBR. The shortest trees recovered under MP were combined to form a strict consensus tree. Support for each branch was calculated via bootstrapping (Felsenstein 1985) using 100 replicates and the same setting as described above. Phylogenetic inferences were also conducted under the maximum likelihood (ML) criterion using the software tool RAxML 2.0 (Stamatakis 2014) on CIPRES Science Gateway (Miller & al. 2010). In addition, a Bayesian analysis was performed using the software tool MrBayes 3.1.2 (Ronquist & Huelsenbeck 2003). Prior to phylogenetic analyses, the best-fitting model of DNA nucleotide substitution was selected using the software tool Modeltest 3.7 (Posada & Crandall 1998, 2001). Following this analysis, the following sequence model priors were set for the analysis in MrBayes: TrN+I+G (Nst = 6, rates=gamma, A–C substitution rate = 1.0000, A–G = 4.5110, A–T = 1.0000, C–G = 1.0000, C–T = 9.3590, G–T = 1.0000, proportion of invariable sites = 0.4147, shape parameter of the gamma distribution = 0.6374). A Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) sampling was conducted for 5 000 000 generations in four simultaneous chains, with trees being sampled every 100 generations for a total of 50 000 trees in the initial sample. The first 25 percent of the sampled trees were discarded, and the posterior probability of the resulting phylogeny and its branches was determined from the remaining trees.

Results and Discussion

Material of the new putative species showed some morphological dissimilarity to those species already described from W Iran, as summarized in Table 1. Morphologically, our material also showed resemblance to *Dionysia iranica* Jamzad and *D. sarvestanica* Jamzad & Grey-Wilson, which were described from localities further south. Genetically, the new material can be distinguished from these and other species, as shown in Table 2.

We found that the ITS DNA sequence of the new species is most similar to that of *Dionysia gaubae* and differs from it by only four bases (Table 2 and Fig. 1). MP analysis identified a set of 142 parsimony-informative characters and resulted in 449 most parsimonious trees with a length of 491 steps, a consistency index (CI) of 0.607 and a retention index (RI) of 0.749. The strict consensus tree displayed the following characteristics: length = 502 steps, CI = 0.594, and RI = 0.735 (tree not shown). In all three analyses of the ITS dataset (Fig. 1), our new putative species showed to be closely related to *D. gaubae*. It did not display close relationships to the morphologically similar species *D. iranica* and *D. sarvestanica*. Hence, we conclude that that our newly gathered material indeed represents a new species.

Dionysia robusta Younesi, sp. nov. – Fig. 2 & 3.

Holotype: Iran, Ilam Province, SW of Abdanan, Dinan-Kouh protected region, Pizeleh, 32°56'09.6"N, 47°18'35.4"E, 1720 m, 11 May 2015, *Younesi 14494* (IAUH; isotypes: B, TARI).

Description — Cushions very dense, bluish grey-green, up to 70 cm in diam. Branches tightly packed, very densely leafy, with cream-coloured marcescent leaves long persistent. Basal part of leaf suberect, distal part widely spreading, subspatulate-obovate, 4–7 mm long, 2–3 mm wide, covered with subsessile glands to 0.1 mm long, more sparsely so abaxially, margin entire (rarely slightly lobed at apex), apex obtuse to subacute. Inflorescence with a single sessile flower. Bract 1, oblanceolate, 4–5 mm long, c. 1 mm wide, base very shortly ciliate, margin entire or apically with a few minute denticles. Calyx 4–5 mm long, divided to $\frac{2}{3}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$; lobes broadly lanceolate, often overlapping in basal $\frac{1}{3}$, outside shortly glandular hairy, especially at base, on veins and on margin, inside sparsely glandular, base keeled, margin entire, apex subacute. Corolla yellow, glandular hairy, rather densely so toward base, less so apically, hairs 0.1–0.2 mm long; tube 20–24 mm long; limb c. 10 mm wide; lobes not or slightly overlapping, apex rounded or very slightly emarginate. Stamens in long-styled flowers inserted c. $\frac{2}{3}$ from base; anthers c. 2 mm long. Ovary with 3 or 4 ovules; style in long-styled flowers conspicuously exerted; style in short-styled flowers c. $\frac{2}{3}$ as long as corolla tube. Capsule broadly ovoid, c. 3 mm long, 3- or 4-seeded; valves thick, not twisted. Seeds 1.4–1.6 × 0.6–0.7 mm.

Phenology — Flowering in May, fruiting in June.

Distribution and ecology — *Dionysia robusta* is known from two localities in Ilam Province, Iran (Fig. 4). Each locality is a strip on the SE face of two parallel, deep gorges between 32°55'N, 47°18'E and 32°57'N, 47°22'E in an altitudinal range of 1550–1800 m. The type material was collected from the more northern strip. The spe-

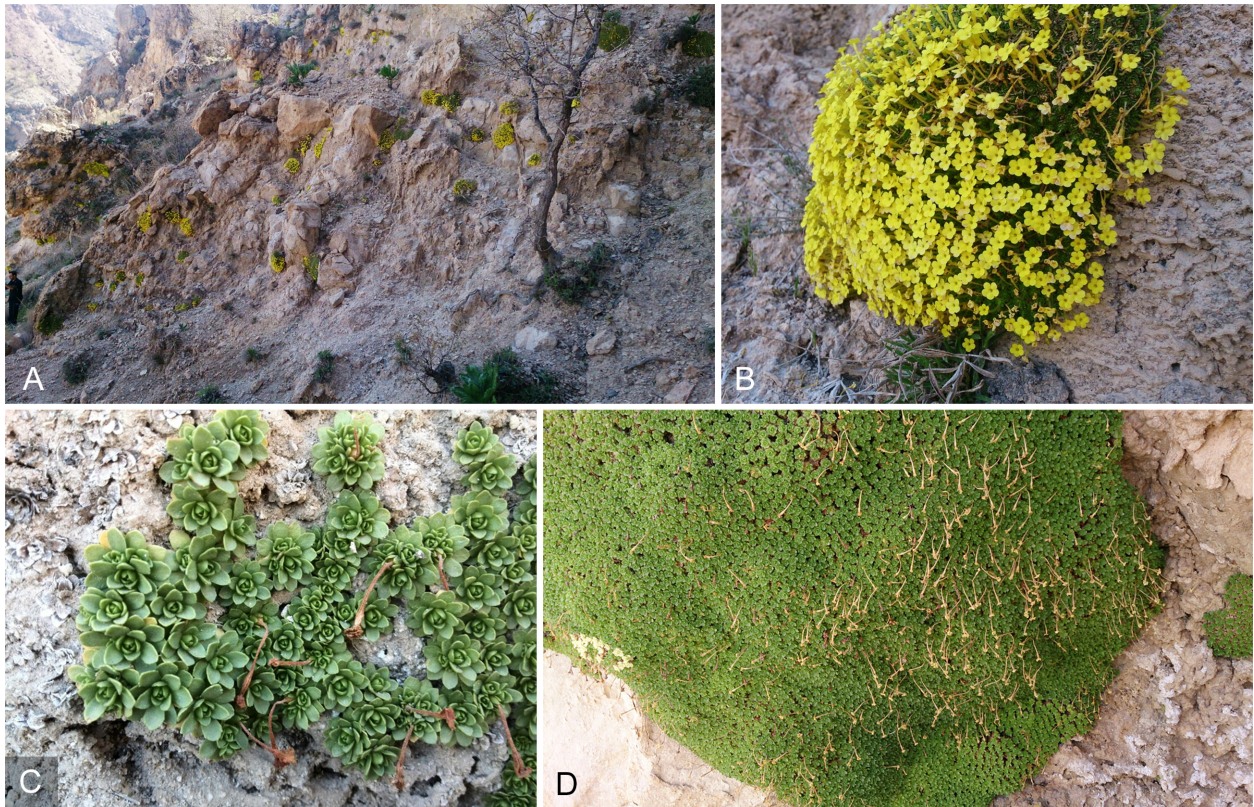


Fig. 2. *Dionysia robusta* in its natural habitat – A, B: at anthesis; C, D: after anthesis. – All photographs taken at the type locality by S. Younesi; A, B: 11 May 2015; C, D: 15 June 2014.

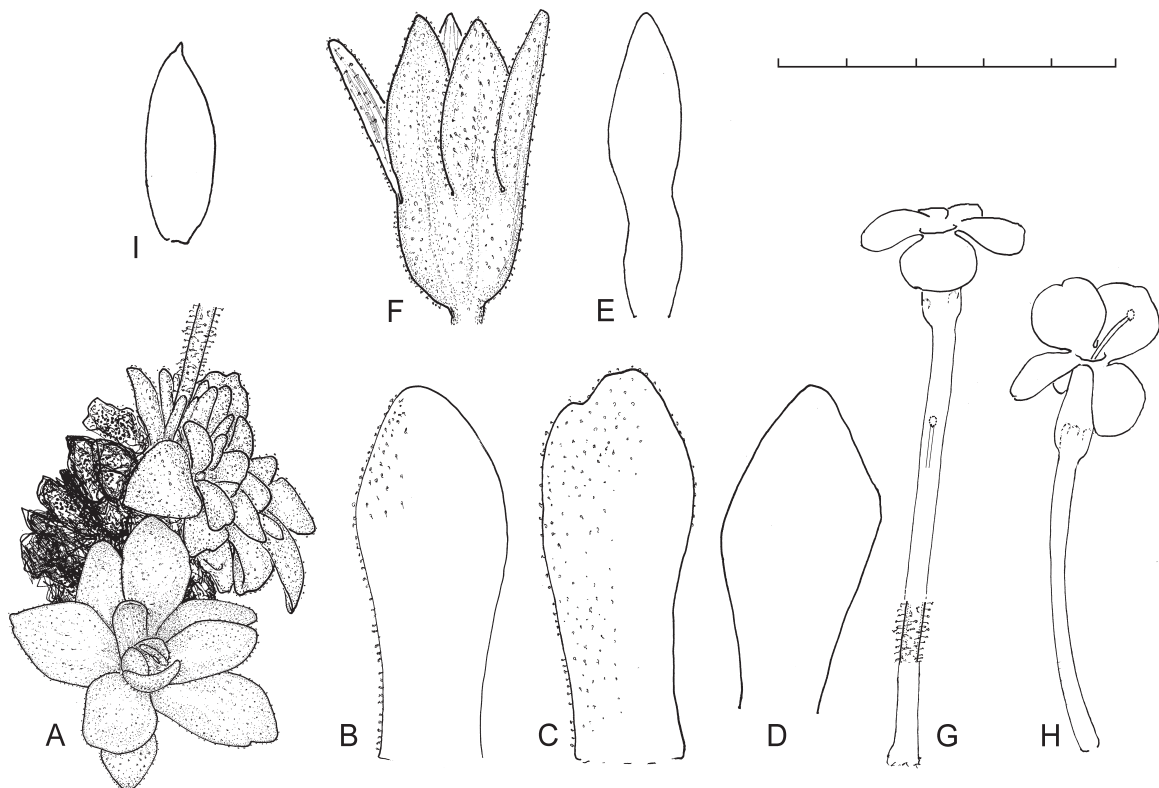


Fig. 3. A–G: *Dionysia robusta* – A: flowering branch; B–D: leaves; E: bract; F: calyx; G: corolla of short-styled flower; H: corolla of long-styled flower; I: fruit valve. – Scale bar: for A, G, H = 10 mm; for B–F, I = 5 mm. – Drawn by M. Lidén from part of the type material (Younesi 14494, IAUH).

Table 1. Comparison of morphological characters of *Dionysia robusta*, *D. gaubae*, *D. iranica*, *D. sarvestanica* and *D. tacamahaca*.

| | <i>D. robusta</i> | <i>D. gaubae</i> | <i>D. iranica</i> | <i>D. sarvestanica</i> | <i>D. tacamahaca</i> |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Plant habit | very dense cushions | lax to moderately dense cushions | moderately dense cushions | dense cushions | dense cushions |
| Marcescent leaves colour | cream | brown | dark brown | brown | brown |
| Leaf shape | subspatulate-obovate, apex obtuse to subacute | obovate to spatulate, apex obtuse | obovate to spatulate, apex obtuse | oblong to obovate, apex obtuse | narrowly obovate, apex subacute |
| Leaf size [mm] | 4–7 × 2–3 | 4–8 × 2–4 | 2–10 × 2–3 | 4–5 × 2–3 | 3–5 × 2 |
| Leaf indumentum | subsessile glandular hairs | short glandular hairs | subsessile glandular hairs | short glandular hairs | short and long glandular hairs |
| Leaf margin | entire (rarely slightly lobed at apex) | lobed, rarely entire | entire or lobed | entire | entire |
| Bracts number | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 or 2 |
| Bract shape | oblanceolate | narrowly oblong to oblanceolate | linear | oblanceolate | linear |
| Bract length [mm] | 4–5 | 4–7 | c. 4 | c. 4 | 3–4 |
| Calyx length [mm] | 4–5 | 5–7 | c. 5.5 | c. 4 | 3.5–4.5 |
| Calyx division | divided to 2/3–3/4 | divided to 4/5–5/6 | divided to c. 4/5 | divided to base | – |
| Calyx lobes shape | broadly lanceolate, margin entire, apex subacute | oblanceolate | lanceolate to oblanceolate | narrowly oblanceolate | ovate-lanceolate, apex acute |

Table 2. Comparison of different bases in ITS DNA sequences of *Dionysia robusta*, *D. gaubae*, *D. iranica*, *D. odora* and *D. sarvestanica*. – Alignment length = 681 bases; each column represents a position with dissimilar bases.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| | 6 | 6 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 3 | |
| | 0 | 9 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 4 | |
| <i>D. robusta</i> | C | G | A | A | G | C | G | C | G | C | G | C | G | C | C | G | T | C | C | T | C | C |
| <i>D. gaubae</i> | C | G | A | G | C | C | G | C | A | C | G | G | T | C | G | T | C | C | T | C | C | C |
| <i>D. iranica</i> | A | A | G | G | C | C | A | T | A | T | G | T | T | T | A | C | C | A | T | T | | |
| <i>D. odora</i> | C | G | A | G | G | C | G | C | A | C | G | G | C | C | G | T | C | C | T | C | C | C |
| <i>D. sarvestanica</i> | C | A | A | G | G | T | G | C | A | T | A | G | T | C | C | A | T | T | C | C | C | C |

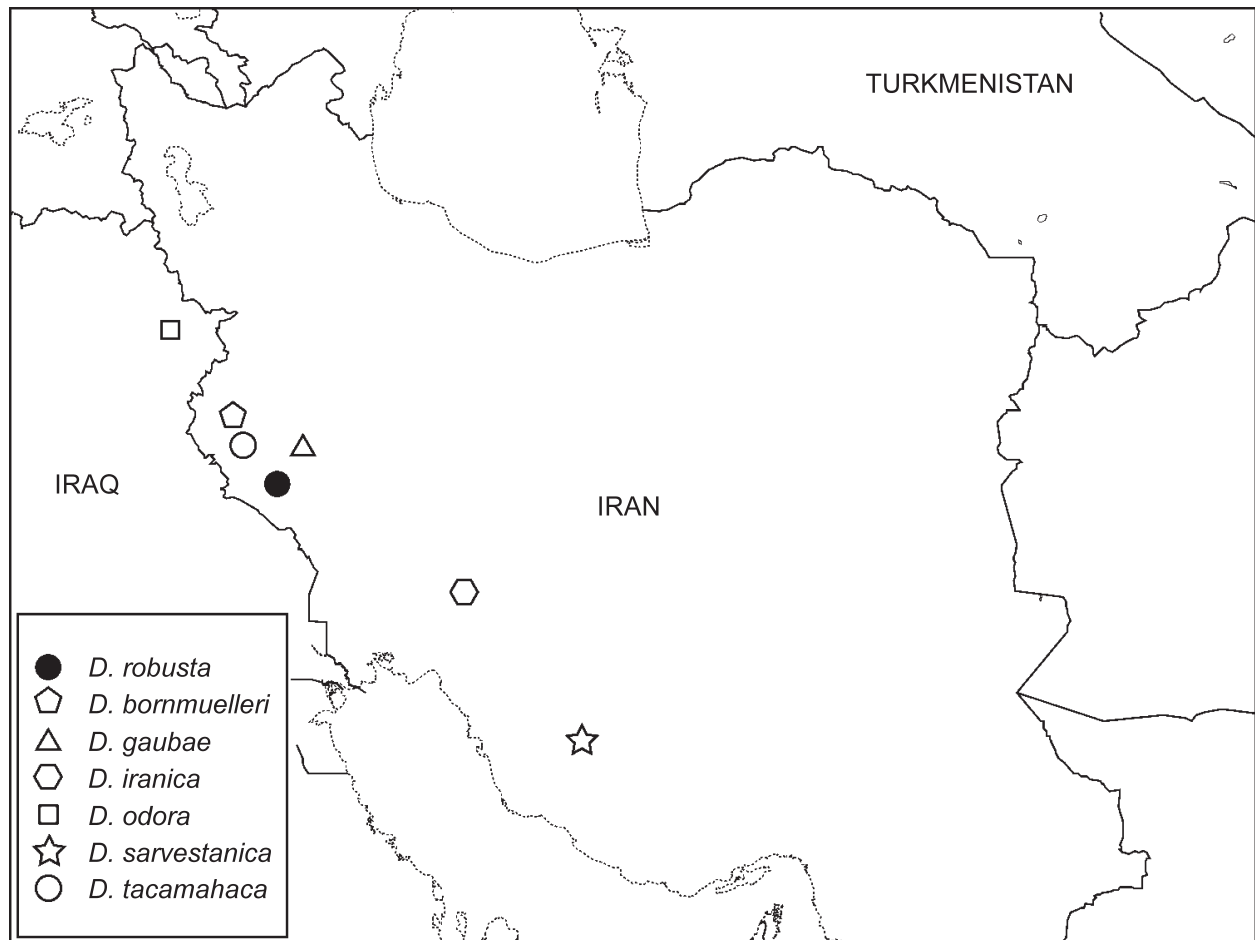


Fig. 4. Geographical distribution of *Dionysia robusta*, *D. bornmuelleri*, *D. gaubae*, *D. iranica*, *D. odora*, *D. sarvestanica* and *D. tacamahaca* in Iran and Iraq.

cies forms large subpopulations at both localities – not common for most species of this genus. The plants grow in crevices of vertical calcareous rocks and N-facing slopes. The general vegetation is dominated by *Quercus brantii* Lindl. accompanied by *Acer monspessulanum* L., *Amygdalus orientalis* Mill., *Crataegus azarolus* var. *aronia* L., *Ficus carica* subsp. *rupestris* (Hauskn. ex Boiss.) Browicz and *Pistacia atlantica* Desf.

Conservation status — According to our observations, the number of mature individuals of *Dionysia robusta* is rather high (probably more than 10 000). We observed the population in two large localities in the form of two strips up to 10 km long and 400 m wide. The area of occupancy of *D. robusta* is less than 10 km². There is no information on population size reduction, but we project a decline in the area of occupancy, quality of habitat, and number of mature individuals due to recent severe droughts in the area. We suggest, therefore, that this species should be placed under the IUCN (2012) category Critically Endangered with the criteria CR B2ab(ii,iii,v).

Etymology — The epithet *robusta* refers to the robust habit and large size of the plants.

Comparison with other species — *Dionysia robusta* is easily distinguishable from other species growing in the region by having cushions very large, up to 70 cm in diameter, and leaves entire or slightly divided. It is similar to *D. gaubae*, *D. iranica*, *D. sarvestanica* and *D. tacamahaca* (Table 1). However, *D. gaubae* differs in having leaves longer and usually more divided, marcescent leaves strongly reflexed so as to become more or less coiled, glands on the leaves more clearly stalked, and calyx much more deeply divided. *Dionysia iranica* differs in its dark green colour, usually less dense habit, and more deeply divided calyx. *Dionysia sarvestanica* differs in having leaves not or only slightly spreading, smaller, and always entire, more densely glandular with hairs clearly stalked, and calyx divided to the base. *Dionysia robusta* is similar to *D. tacamahaca* in the outcurved leaves and distinct calyx cup, but is very different in indumentum.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Libing Zhang (MO), an anonymous reviewer and Nicholas Turland (B) for their

very accurate scrutiny of the earlier versions of this paper.

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Appendix

Voucher information: GenBank accession numbers of material used in the molecular analysis of the ITS region. Except for two newly sequenced samples (indicated in **boldface**), all other accessions are from Trift & al. (2004) and Lidén (2007).

| | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| <i>Dionysia archibaldii</i> Wendelbo | AY680737 | |
| <i>D. aretioides</i> (Lehm.) Boiss. | AY680723 | |
| <i>D. balsamea</i> Wendelbo & Rech. f. | AY680709 | |
| <i>D. bryoides</i> Boiss. | AY680728 | |
| <i>D. caespitosa</i> (Duby) Boiss. | | AY680738 |
| <i>D. cristagalli</i> Lidén | | AY680746 |
| <i>D. curviflora</i> Bunge | | AY680739 |
| <i>D. denticulata</i> Wendelbo | | AY680721 |
| <i>D. diapensiifolia</i> Boiss. | | AY680713 |
| <i>D. esfandiarii</i> Wendelbo | | AY680712 |
| <i>D. freitagii</i> Wendelbo | | AY680729 |
| <i>D. gaubae</i> Bornm. | | AY680740 |
| <i>D. haussknechtii</i> Bornm. & Strauss | | AY680720 |
| <i>D. hissarica</i> Lipsky | | AY680725 |
| <i>D. involucrata</i> Zaprjag. | | AY680705 |
| <i>D. iranica</i> Jamzad | | AY680741 |

| | | | |
|---|----------|--|----------|
| <i>D. iranshahrii</i> Wendelbo | AY680735 | <i>D. revoluta</i> Boiss. subsp. <i>revoluta</i> | AY680731 |
| <i>D. janthina</i> Bornm. & C. Winkl. | AY680711 | <i>D. rhapsodes</i> Bunge | AY680745 |
| <i>D. khatamii</i> Mozaff. | AY680742 | <i>D. robusta</i> Younesi ¹ | KU697386 |
| <i>D. khuzistanica</i> Jamzad | AY680727 | <i>D. sarvestanica</i> Jamzad & Grey-Wilson | AY680715 |
| <i>D. lamingtonii</i> Stapf | AY680743 | <i>D. teucroides</i> P. H. Davis & Wendelbo | AY680734 |
| <i>D. leucotricha</i> Bornm. | AY680717 | <i>D. viscidula</i> Wendelbo | AY680722 |
| <i>D. lindbergii</i> Wendelbo | AY680748 | <i>D. viva</i> Lidén & Zetterl. | AY680736 |
| <i>D. lurorum</i> Wendelbo | AY680718 | <i>Primula davisii</i> W. W. Sm. | AY680710 |
| <i>D. michauxii</i> (Duby) Boiss. | AY680714 | <i>P. floribunda</i> Wall. | AY680707 |
| <i>D. microphylla</i> Wendelbo | AY680706 | <i>P. gaubaeana</i> Bornm. ² | KU697387 |
| <i>D. mira</i> Wendelbo | AY680733 | <i>P. veris</i> L. | JQ927145 |
| <i>D. mozaffarianii</i> Lidén | AY680716 | | |
| <i>D. odora</i> Fenzl | AY680719 | ¹ Type locality (see above). | |
| <i>D. oreodoxa</i> Bornm. | AY680744 | ² Iran: Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province, Si- | |
| <i>D. paradoxa</i> Wendelbo | AY680708 | sakht, Meymand, Kataa, Pol-e Kataa, 31°11'24.6"N, | |
| <i>D. revoluta</i> subsp. <i>canescens</i> (Boiss.) | | 51°14'57.0"E, 1560 m, 21 Apr 2012, <i>Mehregan & Yeganeh</i> | |
| Wendelbo | AY680730 | 14883 (IAUH). | |

Willdenowia

Open-access online edition www.bioone.org/loi/will 

Online ISSN 1868-6397 · Print ISSN 0511-9618 · Impact factor 0.721

Published by the Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin

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