M. Montserrat Martínez-Ortega1, Alberto Herrero2 & Luz M. Muñoz-Centeno1

1 Departamento de Botánica, Universidad de Salamanca, E-37007 Salamanca, Spain. mmo@usal.es (author for correspondence)
2 Real Jardín Botánico, CSIC, Plaza de Murillo 2, E-28014 Madrid, Spain.

(1728) Proposal to reject the name Veronica melissifolia (Scrophulariaceae)

Veronica subsect. Multiflorae Benth. (in Candolle, Prodr. 10: 473. 1846) is represented in the Iberian Peninsula by two species: the endemic V. micrantha Hoffmanns. & Link (Fl. Portug. 1: 286. 1813, pl. 57. 1813–20) and the widely distributed species V. chamaedrys L. (Sp. Pl.: 13. 1753). In Turkey and the Caucasus there is another endemic of this group currently known with the name V. magna M. A. Fisch. (in Pl. Syst. Evol. 128: 293. 1977).

The latter name was proposed as a substitute of V. melissifolia auct., as Fischer (l.c.: 294) selected as lectotype of V. melissifolia Desf. ex Poir. material from Desfontaines nowadays lodged at [Philip Barker] Webb’s collections in FI (according to Stafflue & Cowan, Taxonomic Literature ed. 2, 1: 628. 1976), the general herbarium of Desfontaines was acquired by Webb), that can be determined as V. micrantha. Because V. melissifolia was published five years before V. micrantha, the latter name is threatened as a result of this typification.

The protologue of V. melissifolia reads: “Cette plante est cultivée au Jardin des Plantes de Paris. Son lieu natal m’est inconnu. (V. S. in herb. Desfont.).” As far as we have been able to check (see also Riek in Repert. Spec. Nov. Regni Veg. Beih. 50: 1: 61–62. 1935), there is no further extant material relevant for lectotypification of this name than that selected by Fischer. Concerning V. micrantha, a lectotype plus an epitype was selected by Martínez-Ortega & Rico (in Taxon 50: 544. 2001), where details about original material were given.

Fischer (l.c.) proposed the rejection of the ambiguous name V. melissifolia citing the newly amended text of then-Art. 69 of the ICBN (Stafflue & al., Int. Code Bot. Nomencl., Seattle. 1972) from Voss (in Taxon 25: 512. 1976) which stated that “a name must be rejected if it has been widely and persistently used for a taxon not including its type”-wording largely incorporated in current Art. 57 (Greuter & al. in Regnum Veg. 138. 2000). Although Voss (l.c.) had recommended that such proposals be referred to Special Committees for their consideration, a procedure for this was not formalized by the 1975 Leningrad Congress, so Fischer’s proposal was never officially considered by a Permanent Nomenclature Committee. In our opinion V. melissifolia clearly met the conditions for rejection by Fischer under the newly worded Art. 69 despite his failure to submit this for Committee examination, a procedure not formalized until 1983 (Voss & al. in Regnum Veg. 111. 1983). Until 1977, V. melissifolia had been used mainly for V. magna, e.g., Boissier (Fl. Orient. 4: 447. 1879), Elenevsky (in Byull. Moskovsk. Obschh. Isp. Prir., Otd. Biol. 82(1): 154. 1977), Riek (l.c.: 61), Römpp (in Repert. Spec. Nov. Regni Veg. Beih. 50: 132. 1928), Shishkin & Bobrov (Fl. URSS 22: 432. 1955), Stroh (in Beih. Bot. Centralbl., Abt. 2, 61: 421. 1942), Walters & Webb (in Tutin & al., Fl. Europ. 3: 247. 1972), Wulff (in Trudy Tifliss. Bot. Sada 15: 104. 1915), especially since Bentham (l.c.: 472) combined V. melissifolia with var. maxima (Steven) Benth. and associated clearly the epithet melissifolia with the Caucasian species.

The name V. micrantha enjoys a long tradition of usage, e.g., Coutinho (Fl. Portugal, ed. 2: 663. 1939), Elenevsky (l.c.), Franco (Nova Fl. Portugal 2: 250. 1984), Merino (Fl. Galicia 3: 574. 1909), Riek (l.c.: 60), Stroh (l.c.), Walters & Webb (l.c.). A Google search on 23 December 2005 returned 461 hits for “Veronica micrantha” and the name is widely used not only in floras, but also in books on plant conservation, as well as lists of threatened plants (including the extension of the Habitats Directive 92/42/CEE, i.e., Directive 97/62/CE). Replacing this name by V. melissifolia would be destabilising, therefore we propose V. melissifolia for rejection.

Alternatively, we could have made a proposal to conserve V. micrantha over V. melissifolia, but we believe it is better to reject V. melissifolia outright, as this name was never used for the Iberian plant (V. micrantha) but was consistently misapplied to the Caucasian V. magna. Therefore, rejection of V. melissifolia under Art. 56 of the ICBN (Greuter & al., l.c.) seems the most effective way to establish a clear, stable nomenclature for both species of Veronica.

Acknowledgements

This work was financed by the Spanish Dirección General de Investigación Científica y Técnica through the project Flora iberica VI (REN2002–04634–C05–02). We thank P. Cuccuini, Ch. Nepi and E. Luccioli for kindly sending photographs of type material. Thanks go also to Dr. M. D. Lleó, Prof. S. Castroviejo and Prof. R. K. Brummitt for their generous help and Drs. J. McNeil and J. Wiersema for editorial improvements of the final proposal.