

The red-leaved Faroese dandelion, *Taraxacum rubifolium* Rasmussen

Hans Øllgaard

Lupinstien 7, Birgittelyst, DK - 8800 – Viborg, Denmark

Úrtak

Listi er gjørdur yvir tey serligu merkini á reyðu várhagasóljuni, *Taraxacum rubifolium*, sum gera, at vit kenna hana aftur. Misvísandi latínska heitið má varðveitast. Til at lýsa plantuna er eitt eintak av slagnum valt burtur úr tilfarinum. Viðmerkingar eru um søguna hjá *T. rubifolium* og útbreiðslu hennara.

Abstract

The specific recognition marks of *Taraxacum rubifolium* are listed. The misleading Latin name must be maintained. The species is lectotypified here. Some notes about the history and present distribution of *T. rubifolium* are given.

Description

Taraxacum rubifolium is unique in the genus *Taraxacum* in having brownish red, glossy leaves. It is a clear member of *Taraxacum* section *Spectabilia* because of un-winged petioles, adpressed broadly lanceolate outer involucre bracts, large achenes (fruits) with a very short cone and a comparatively short rostrum. The fully flowering capitulum is lax, ca. 45 mm in diameter, with a plane profile, the outermost flower ligules are striped red beneath. The anthers produce no pollen. The stigmas are discoloured.

One of its closest relatives, common in

the Faroes, is *T. faeroense* (Dahlst.) Dahlst., which, however, differs in having slightly bluish grey-green lustreless leaves with dispersed dark violet spots.

Latin name

When Rasmussen described *Taraxacum rubifolium* he clearly intended to name it after its red leaves (Faroese: Reyð Várhagasólja). His original spelling '*rubifolium*', used both in literature and on herbarium labels, means »with leaves like *Rubus*«. Even if the spelling '*rubrifolium*' would agree better with Rasmussen's intention no change can be made here without affecting the authority and publication date of the taxon, according to the international rules for botanical nomenclature (ICBN).

History

T. rubifolium was detected by the Faroese botanist Rasmus Rasmussen, along streets through a meadow area about 1 km SW of Tórshavn town center (about 62°00'15"N; 6°46'50"W), between Álaker and Heyggin Mikla/Haraldstrøð, first in 1909 (Rasmussen, 1952a), without voucher specimen. Recognizing the species as a specialty, Rasmussen in July 1938 sent achenes



Taraxacum rubifolium Rasmussen in Botanical Garden, Debesartrøð, Tórshavn 1992, originating from the type location.

(fruits) of it to O. Hagerup, Bot. Museum, Copenhagen, to have it cultivated and possibly identified there. Hagerup 1938 in a letter asked the Danish taraxacologist M.P. Christiansen to cultivate Rasmussen's achenes and describe the cultivated plants. In labelling the cultivated voucher specimens (in herb. C) *T. vinosum* M.P.Chr. 1940 Christiansen must have stated the species as unknown. A description of *T. vinosum* has never been published. It is uncertain whether Rasmussen was informed by Hagerup or Christiansen that his species ought to be described. However, Rasmus-

sen described it as *T. rubifolium* Rasmussen (in *Føroya Flora*, 2nd ed., 1952:182), adding no other localities to the above mentioned area SW of Tórshavn. The following voucher specimens, all collected in the same area by Rasmussen, and seen by me, are present in herb. FAER :

Aalekær (Álaker), Rossatrøðin 6.7.1930, labelled '*T. naevosum* ???'

Haraldstrøð 21.6.1949, determined as *T. rubifolium* by Rasmussen (the upper left specimen is LECTO-TYPE, selected here).

Haraldstrøð, Aalaker (Álaker) Hav 23.6.1953, det. *T. rubifolium* by Rasmussen.

In Copenhagen (herb. C) *T. rubifolium* is represented by the above mentioned *T. vinosum* specimens, leg. M.P. Christiansen 4.6.1940. Besides, O. Hagerup collected many specimens of it, mounted on several sheets, labelled 'Thorshavn, cult. in the Bot. Garden of Copenhagen from seeds 1 July 1947'. This sample has been determined by G. Haglund as *T. faeroense*.

As already mentioned, *T. rubifolium* was found in its type location in 1909 and has been collected there sometimes since then. In 1978, the last year it was seen in nature, road- and building constructions were carried out in that area, threatening a few specimens of *T. rubifolium*. An amateur botanist, Eyðun Winther, who knew of the occurrence and rarity of *T. rubifolium*, saved those specimens by digging them out (before the bulldozer did) and transplanting them to his private garden (in Skarvanes, Sandoy). From there specimens have been distributed to the botanical garden (Debesartrøð) in Tórshavn and to some other private gardens, eg. that of the keepers of Debesartrøð, the late Mads and Kristianna Jensen, Kvívík. The late Eyðun Winther also transplanted (sowed ?) specimens of *T. rubifolium* into a meadow near his home in Skarvanes.

Consequently, it is a fact that, at present, all known living specimens of *T. rubifolium* in the Faroe Isles are offspring of the growth from Rasmussen's original locality. A sample from Suðuroy, quoted by Kjeld Hansen (1966), is, in fact, *T. faeroense*.

In spite of careful investigations of the type locality area by the present author (in 1992, 1993, 1996) no specimens of *T. rubi-*

folium have been observed there since 1978. However, Faroese friends of plant life are asked to look for (and protect) this unique dandelion. Several meadows in neighbouring regions, eg. Argir (1 km SE of the type location), are potential localities for *T. rubifolium*. In fact, nowadays nobody knows about the ecological preferences of *T. rubifolium*.

Present distribution of *T. rubifolium* outside the Faroes

Since Rasmussen sent achenes of it to the botanical garden in Copenhagen *T. rubifolium* has been in cultivation there (however with the name *T. faeroense* (Dahlst.) Dahlst., determined by G. Haglund and K. Wiinstedt), pressed specimens of *T. rubifolium* looking much like badly prepared *T. faeroense*. Through seed exchange 1962 the botanical garden in Uppsala got fruits of *T. rubifolium* from the Copenhagen cultivation. In 1967 the Uppsala growth was re-determined by C.-F. Lundevall as *T. rubrifolium* Rasmussen (sic!). This cultivation is represented, at least, in the private herbaria of C.-F. Lundevall and H. Øllgaard.

Nurseries in many parts of the world have shown interest for this remarkable dandelion. In the Netherlands it has been sold as *T. 'falconense'* (a misreading of handwritten *faeroense*), otherwise as *T. faeroense*, eg. from a nursery in Seattle, Washington, USA, where it was said to hail from China. I know of 2 Danish nurseries which grow and sell *T. rubifolium*, now with correct name.

It is a tempting thought to assume that all

plants, sold from nurseries, more or less indirectly, originate from the growths in the botanical gardens of Copenhagen and Uppsala (i.e. originally from Tórshavn), because nurseries are often offered seeds from these botanical gardens.

Illegal seed collection in the botanical gardens is supposed to take place as well (Iwarsson, *in litt.*). Even if it is impossible to prove, I feel sure that all red-leaved dandelions of *Taraxacum sect. spectabilia*, occurring in gardens or nurseries outside the Faroe Isles, originate from Rasmussen's fruit sample, sent to Copenhagen 1938. Kjeld Hansen (1966) characterizes *T. rubifolium* as '?native', but neither he nor Christiansen has seen it in the wild, and no other occurrences of this conspicuous species have been registered, so far, apart from cultivated specimens.

It is a matter of discussion if *T. rubifolium* can be called a Faroese endemic species, when no spontaneous occurrences of it are known. However, the present author has no hesitation in considering Tórshavn as its origin.

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank F. Arnklit (Bot. Garden, Copenhagen), M. Iwarsson (Bot. Garden, Uppsala), Kristianna Jensen, Kvívík, and Dr. R. Lancaster, Eastleigh, UK., for information and kind help.

References

- Hansen, K. 1966. Vascular Plants in the Faeroes. Dansk Bot. Arkiv 24 (3): 116
Lancaster, R. April 1993. *Taraxacum officinale*. In: The Garden (ed.: Mitchell, S.): 170-171 (London)
Rasmussen, R. 1952a. Viðbót til Føroya plantutal. Fróðskaparrit (1. bók): 16
Rasmussen, R. 1952b. Vár-Hagasólja. Føroya Flora (2nd ed.): 180-182