

SHORT COMMUNICATION

Illecebrum verticillatum (Caryophyllaceae), a new record for Australia

In October 1996 a small alien herb, *Illecebrum verticillatum* L., was found on Big Rock, near Dunsborough, Western Australia. It was collected by Ralf Ohlemueller (*Ohlemueller* 252), a visiting botanist from Munich, who was studying the plants occurring on granite outcrops in this State. According to his recollection the plant covered several square metres near the top of the granite hill and grew in a mossy sward. Given that it is evidently well established at this one locality, and its rather insignificant appearance, it is likely that the plant occurs in other sites in the south west of Western Australia that have a similar environment.

It is considered rare in England where it "forms prostrate mats several inches in diameter on damp heathy ground, particularly where the soil has been disturbed" (Gilmour & Walters 1954) and has been given the "common" name *Illecebrum*. Other common names listed in some European plant books are Whorled Knotweed (Hutchinson 1955) and Coral Necklace (Hanf 1983, Martin 1982), although it is unclear as to whether any of these names are truly in common usage.

No record can be found of any previous discovery of this species in Western Australia or, in fact, in Australia. In New Zealand it has been found in only one locality and that was in a forest on a damp sandy open site (Webb *et al.* 1988). Its natural distribution is western, central, and southern Europe (Kubitzki 1993).

This plant has only been noted as a weed of native vegetation in Australia and New Zealand but it might become a minor agricultural weed in Western Australia since it is recorded as a weed of damp arable sites on sandy and marshy soils throughout its range in Europe (Hanf 1983).

Illecebrum is a monotypic genus that has been placed sometimes in the Caryophyllaceae (e.g. Eckardt 1964) and sometimes in the segregate family Illecebraceae (e.g. Friedrich 1961). The Western Australian Herbarium follows Kubitzki *et al.* (1993), the most authoritative recent treatment of the caryophyllid families, and places it in the Caryophyllaceae subfamily Paronychioideae.

Illustrations of the plant may be found in Fitch & Smith (1880: Figure 833), Hanf (1983: Figure 66), Hutchinson (1955: Figure 401), Martin (1982: Plate 71), and Ross-Craig (1968: Plate 7).

According to Lewis & Short (1966) the Latin word *illecebra* means an enticement, in a good or bad sense; it was also used for a plant to which the Romans applied the alternative name *andrachne agria*. The name *andrachne* itself referred to the common weed *Portulaca oleracea*. Both *Portulaca oleracea* and *Illecebrum verticillatum* are unlikely candidates for an "enticement" and it is difficult to understand how this word could have become applied to them. It is more likely that the Romans had other plants in mind when using the name and that the identity of these is now lost.

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