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## Molecular identification and pathogenicity assessment of a rust fungus infecting common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) in its native North American range --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Abstract:</b>	A rust fungus collected from common ragweed ( <i>Ambrosia artemisiifolia</i> ) in Texas, USA, was identified as belonging to the <i>Puccinia xanthii</i> morphospecies based on its nrDNA ITS sequence. Pathogenicity studies carried out with this rust accession under quarantine conditions in the UK showed that the fungus was highly virulent on <i>A. artemisiifolia</i> plants from Australia. Recently, <i>P. xanthii</i> has been proposed as a potential classical biological control agent (CBCA) for common ragweed in its invasive range, focusing on Europe, despite previous doubts about its biocontrol potential. The results of the pathogenicity tests reported here support the suitability of this pathogen as a CBCA for common ragweed.	
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1 **Molecular identification and pathogenicity assessment of a rust fungus**  
2 **infecting common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) in its native North**  
3 **American range**

4

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17

18 **Abstract**

19 A rust fungus collected from common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) in Texas, USA, was  
20 identified as belonging to the *Puccinia xanthii* morphospecies based on its nrDNA ITS  
21 sequence. Pathogenicity studies carried out with this rust accession under quarantine conditions  
22 in the UK showed that the fungus was highly virulent on *A. artemisiifolia* plants from  
23 Australia. Recently, *P. xanthii* has been proposed as a potential classical biological control  
24 agent (CBCA) for common ragweed in its invasive range, focusing on Europe, despite  
25 previous doubts about its biocontrol potential. The results of the pathogenicity tests reported  
26 here support the suitability of this pathogen as a CBCA for common ragweed.

27

28 **Keywords:** allergenic weed, classical biological control, fungal species concept, *Pucciniaceae*,  
29 *Pucciniomycetes*, invasive alien species

30

## 31 **Introduction**

32  
33 Common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) is a North American native that was introduced  
34 repeatedly and inadvertently to Europe in the eighteenth century (Chauvel et al. 2006; Gaudeul  
35 et al. 2011; Gladieux et al. 2011) and has since become invasive and problematic in a number  
36 of countries. Besides its economic impact on crop yield, this plant presents a major health and  
37 social problem because of its highly allergenic pollen. As a consequence, common ragweed has  
38 become the best-known alien weed in the affected European regions - namely Central and  
39 Eastern Europe, southern France, and northern Italy - due to campaigns launched to bring  
40 attention to this noxious weed (Kiss 2007a). Thereby, *A. artemisiifolia* has, like no other plant,  
41 raised the awareness of invasive plants in Europe (Gerber et al. 2011).

42 In addition to more traditional herbicide and mechanical control methods, biological  
43 control has also been considered as a strategy to deal with the ragweed invasion in Europe  
44 (Kiss 2007a; Gerber et al. 2011). Research into the suitability of fungal plant pathogens as  
45 classical biological control agents (CBCA) represents a special field of applied mycology and,  
46 in particular, some species of the rust fungi (*Pucciniomycetes*) have already successfully been  
47 used against invasive alien weeds (Evans 2013). Well known examples include: the  
48 Madagascan rust *Maravalia cryptostegiae* against *Cryptostegia grandiflora* (rubber-vine) and  
49 the South African rust *Puccinia myrsiphylli* against *Asparagus asparagoides* (bridal creeper),  
50 both exotic and invasive plant species in Australia; the rust *Uromycladium tepperianum*  
51 controlling its invasive Australian host *Acacia saligna* (Port Jackson willow) in South Africa;  
52 and, the Neotropical rust *Puccinia spegazzinii* employed successfully against invasive  
53 *Mikania micrantha* (mile-a-minute weed) in a number of Asian and South Pacific countries.  
54 Based on these successes, Gerber et al. (2011) suggested exploring the potential of natural

55 enemies, including the microcyclic autoecious rust *Puccinia xanthii*, for classical biological  
56 control of common ragweed in its introduced range. Gerber et al. (2011) proposed to study the  
57 *P. xanthii* lineage infecting *A. artemisiifolia* in its native range because it has been posited that  
58 *P. xanthii* represents a morphospecies comprising distinct accessions each of which is  
59 specialized to one or a few hosts within the Asteraceae (Seier et al. 2009). This has been  
60 exemplified for the specific hosts *Xanthium occidentale*, *X. italicum*, *Parthenium*  
61 *hysterophorus* and *A. trifida* (Batra 1981; Morin et al. 1993; Lu et al. 2004; Kiss 2007b, Seier  
62 et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2011). Two other little known rust species, the autoecious *P. conoclinii*  
63 and the heteroecious *P. canaliculata*, have also been listed as pathogens of *A. artemisiifolia* in  
64 the USA (Farr et al. 2015), but were not identified here as potential CBCAs of common  
65 ragweed.

66 During the study of the narrow host specialization of selected *P. xanthii* lineages, Seier  
67 et al. (2009) introduced the variety, *P. xanthii* var. *parthenii-hysterophorae*, for the rust  
68 accession infecting *Pa. hysterophorus*, which has been released as a CBCA against this weed in  
69 Australia (Tomley et al. 2004; Seier 2005). Seier et al. (2009) further concluded that other *P.*  
70 *xanthii* lineages specialized on different asteraceous hosts should also be assigned varietal  
71 status; however, to date, this has not been done. For example, the rust accession infecting giant  
72 ragweed (*A. trifida*), but not *A. artemisiifolia* or other asteraceous species (Batra 1981; Lu et al.  
73 2004; Zhang et al. 2011), should formally be described as a variety, although it was named by  
74 Batra (1981) as a *forma specialis*, *P. xanthii* f. sp. *ambrosia-trifidae*. This specific accession  
75 had already been proposed as a CBCA of invasive giant ragweed in China, even before it had  
76 become widespread on *A. trifida* in that region (Lu et al. 2004; Zhang et al. 2011).

77 Amongst the *P. xanthii* lineages, the one infecting *A. artemisiifolia* is one of the lesser  
78 researched varieties within this morphospecies and, to date, no detailed studies have been

79 undertaken with this lineage; however, pathogenicity studies were performed under quarantine  
80 conditions at CABI in the UK in the 1980s. Interestingly, while herbarium specimens document  
81 the presence of the rust on *A. artemisiifolia* in the USA between 1855 and 1963, attempts to re-  
82 collect this accession in the field in North America in 2002-2003 were unsuccessful (Kiss  
83 2007b). This recent failure to find *P. xanthii* on *A. artemisiifolia* in the USA may be explained  
84 by the fact that the surveys were not conducted in most of the places where herbarium material  
85 had been collected previously (Kiss 2007b). Nevertheless, there is a lack of any data  
86 concerning *P. xanthii* on *A. artemisiifolia* in Canada, where other *P. xanthii* lineages commonly  
87 occur on *A. trifida* and *Xanthium* spp. (Parmelee 1977; Ginns 1986). This, in addition to the  
88 unsuccessful attempts to collect the rust on *A. artemisiifolia* in the USA, suggests that *P.*  
89 *xanthii* occurs only infrequently on *A. artemisiifolia*, possibly causing little damage and no  
90 noticeable epidemics. Thus, doubt has been cast on the suitability of this pathogen as a CBCA  
91 of common ragweed in its exotic range (Kiss 2007b).

92           However, the results presented here seem to contradict this scenario. We report as yet  
93 unpublished pathogenicity studies carried out in 1989 with a rust accession collected from *A.*  
94 *artemisiifolia* in Texas, USA (W. A. Palmer, pers. comm. 1989) and deposited as a voucher  
95 specimen in the CABI Herbarium (Herb IMI), now hosted by RBG Kew, under the accession  
96 number IMI 503827. These results were not published earlier because the identity of this rust  
97 has only recently been confirmed, based on a re-examination of the original herbarium  
98 specimen. The rust fungus had been tentatively identified as *P. xanthii* in 1989, based on  
99 morphology, but molecular support to confirm its identity was considered to be essential.  
100 Therefore, the main goals of this work were to (i) determine the internal transcribed spacer  
101 (ITS) sequence of the nuclear ribosomal DNA (nrDNA) in the rust specimen IMI 503827, and

102 compare this ITS sequence with that of other *P. xanthii* lineages, and (ii) report the  
103 pathogenicity tests carried out with this rust accession.

104

## 105 **Materials and methods**

### 106 Fungal and plant material

107 An accession of *P. xanthii* ex *A. artemisiifolia* collected in Austin, Texas, USA, on 5 October  
108 1989 was used for pathogenicity tests and molecular studies. Infected leaf material bearing telia  
109 free of hyperparasites was dried in a plant press, to prevent teliospore germination due to  
110 excess humidity during transport, and shipped to the quarantine facilities of the International  
111 Institute of Biological Control (IIBC) of CABI, Silwood Park, Ascot, UK. Upon arrival,  
112 teliospore material was used immediately for pathogenicity studies under quarantine  
113 greenhouse conditions. *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* plants were grown from seeds obtained from  
114 Australia (Queensland). Seeds were sown in seed trays filled with sterilized John Innes Seed  
115 Compost (2 parts sterilized loam : 1 part peat : 1 part sand; 0.6 kg ground limestone and 1.2 kg  
116 superphosphate added per m<sup>3</sup> of mix) and maintained at a temperature regime of 25/13°C  
117 day/night under natural light conditions. Established young plants were transplanted into 10 cm  
118 diameter plastic pots filled with a 1:1 mixture of John Bowers Multi Purpose Compost  
119 (containing peat, composted wood, green compost, fertiliser and non-ionic surfactant) and John  
120 Innes No. 2 soil-based compost (7 parts loam : 3 parts peat : 2 parts sand; 0.6 kg ground  
121 limestone, 2.4 kg hoof and horn meal, 2.4 kg superphosphate and 1.2 kg potassium sulphate  
122 added per m<sup>3</sup> of mix). Prior to experimental use, plants were maintained in a quarantine  
123 greenhouse fitted with negative pressure and HEPA filtration at an average temperature of  
124 25°C day/20°C night, and an average relative humidity of 60% day / 80% night. Supplementary

125 lighting was provided by metal halide and sodium lamps (full spectrum, light intensity ranging  
126 from 8,000 to 13,000 lux) for 16 hours daily.


127

#### 128 Pathogenicity tests

129 Pathogenicity studies were undertaken using vigorously growing *A. artemisiifolia* plants past  
130 the six leaf stage. Plants to be inoculated were placed in a dew chamber (Mercia Scientific,  
131 Birmingham, UK) underneath a fine mesh which was suspended at a distance of *ca* 5 cm above  
132 the foliage. Five to eight leaves per plant were inoculated by positioning pieces of rust-infected  
133 leaf material bearing up to three telia onto the mesh, telia facing down, directly above  
134 individual leaves. Plants were kept in the dew chamber running at 18 °C for 48 h and then  
135 removed and maintained in a designated greenhouse compartment under controlled  
136 temperature, relative humidity and light conditions, as outlined above. Inoculated plants were  
137 assessed at three-day intervals over a four-week period for the appearance of disease  
138 symptoms, in the form of leaf chlorosis and telia formation. Three replicate plants were used  
139 and the experiment was repeated once. All plant and fungal material used in the quarantine  
140 facility was incinerated after the study.

141

#### 142 DNA extraction and PCR amplification of the nrDNA ITS region

143 To extract the total genomic DNA from the IMI 503827 specimen, teliospores were picked up  
144 with sterile glass needles under a dissecting microscope, or small pieces of infected host  
145 materials were excised from the dried leaves, placed in  pendorf tubes, and processed using a  
146 DNeasy Plant Mini Kit (Qiagen). The nrDNA ITS region was PCR-amplified separately in five  
147 DNA samples obtained as described above using the rust specific primers ITS5-u and ITS4-u



148 (Pfunder et al. 2001). PCRs were done in 20 µl total volume containing 10 µl Dream Taq Green  
149 Master mix (Fermentas), 0.75 µl DMSO, 50 pmol of each primers (SIGMA), 6.25 µl mQ water,  
150 and 2 µl isolated genomic DNA template. PCR conditions were as follows: 5 min at 94°C  
151 followed by 35 cycles of 45s at 94°C , 45s at 50 °C and 1 min at 72 °C, followed by 10 min at  
152 72 °C.


153

#### 154 Cloning and sequencing of the ITS region

155 PCR products were purified with a PCR Clean up-M kit (Viogene, Hong-Kong, China) and  
156 cloned into a pGEMT Easy Vector system (Promega, Madison, WI, USA). The purified  
157 amplicons were A-tailed using a normal Taq polymerase and dATP (MBI Fermentas, Vilnius,  
158 Lithuania) before cloning, and purified again using the PCR Clean up-M kit. Subsequent steps  
159 of the cloning procedure were performed as described by Kovács et al. (2007). At least three  
160 positive clones from each amplicon were sent for sequencing to LGC Genomics (Berlin,  
161 Germany) using universal primers. Altogether, the ITS region was successfully sequenced in 12  
162 clones.


163

#### 164 Data analysis


165 Sequences were compiled from electrophoregrams using using Pregap4 and Gap4 (Staden et al  
166 2000), aligned with Multalin (Corpet 1988) and subsequently checked and adjusted manually  
167 with ProSeq 2.9 (Filatov 2002). The newly obtained sequences were aligned together with  
168 those reported by Morin et al. (2009) and Seier et al. (2009) for *Puccinia* spp. ther, more than  
169 90% similar, ITS sequences were also sourced from GenBank using BLAST searches.


170

## 171 **Results and Discussion**

172 The ITS sequence for the herbarium specimen IMI 503827 was deposited in GenBank under  
173 the accession number KM114871. The sequence is 553 bp long and was identical in all the 12  
174 clones sequenced. This is important to note because in some rust specimens, ITS sequences can  
175 exhibit considerable intra-sample variability, occasionally up to a few dozen variable  
176 nucleotide positions (e.g., Alaei et al. 2009; Feau et al. 2011; Tanner et al. 2015). The ITS  
177 sequence in the *P. xanthii* specimen studied here is identical to that of *P. xanthii* var. *parthenii-*  
178 *hysterophorae* collected from *Pa. hysterophorus* in Australia (EU659697), and approximately  
179 98% similar to four other accessions of *P. xanthii* which, in turn, were identical to each other  
180 despite their diverse geographic origins (Fig. 1). During BLAST searches, no other ITS  
181 sequences showed more than 90% similarity with the sequence determined in the rust accession  
182 used in greenhouse tests. This strongly suggests that the rust isolate tested in quarantine in the  
183 UK in 1989, is indeed a *P. xanthii* accession. Also, it has become clear that this group of rusts,  
184 forming the *P. xanthii* morphospecies, and its closest relatives, are still poorly known from a  
185 molecular point of view, currently being represented by only six ITS, and a very few other   
186 DNA sequences in GenBank. Although the ITS sequence of the *P. xanthii* accession used in the  
187 pathogenicity tests is identical to that of *P. xanthii* var. *parthenii-hysterophorae*, preliminary  
188 cross-inoculation studies showed that *Pa. hysterophorus* was not susceptible towards the rust  
189 accession ex *A. artemisiifolia*. Conversely, the rust lineage ex *Pa. hysterophorus*, introduced as  
190 a CBCA for this invasive plant in Australia, proved not to be infective to *A. artemisiifolia*  
191 (unpublished data).

192 All pathogenicity tests undertaken with the rust accession ex *A. artemisiifolia* from  
193 Austin, Texas, resulted in heavily infected *A. artemisiifolia* plants grown from seeds collected

194 in Australia. Disease symptoms first became visible as chlorotic leaf spots which appeared, on  
195 average, nine days after inoculation, with telia formation commencing after a further 2- days.  
196 Telia developed predominantly on the lower leaf surface, spreading outwards from the centre of  
197 the initial chlorotic lesion. Over time, the disease progressed and on some inoculated plants  
198 sporulation covered most of the lower leaf surface, frequently including the petiole (Figure 2a  
199 and b).

200 The virulence of the rust accession observed during our greenhouse studies contradicts  
201 to some extent the reported "elusiveness" of the pathogen encountered during recent field  
202 surveys in the USA (Kiss 2007b). It could be assumed that such a virulent pathogen should be  
203 more widespread, unless the host is able to occupy a wider ecological niche than the fungus.  
204 Such a scenario has been documented for two rust species infecting *Pa. hysterophorus* in its  
205 native range in Mexico: *Puccinia abrupta* var. *partheniicola*, the winter rust, being restricted to  
206 the dry cool highlands (>700 m); whilst *P. melampodii*, the summer rust (= *P. xanthii* var.  
207 *parthenii-hysterophorae*), occurs only in the humid sub-tropical regions, below 600 m (Evans  
208 1997, 1998; Evans and Ellison 1990). Theoretically, therefore, it is possible that *A.*  
209 *artemisiifolia* is able to persist in regions where critical abiotic factors, such as temperature are  
210 suboptimal for severe rust infection. However, even if this assumption  correct, it would be  
211 expected that *P. xanthii* should be more abundant on its host in some areas of its North  
212 American range. The *P. xanthii* accessions infecting *Xanthium* spp. and *A. trifida*, respectively,  
213 are widespread in North America wherever their host plants are found (Parmelee 1977; Ginns  
214 1986; Farr et al. 2015), and it is unlikely that their climatic requirements are very different from  
215 those of the accessions infecting common ragweed. Another possible explanation for the  
216 scarceness of *P. xanthii* on *A. artemisiifolia* in the USA could be that the native *A.*  
217 *artemisiifolia* biotypes have developed an increased resistance towards the rust, which would

218 either enable the plant to tolerate the pathogen without exhibiting symptoms of disease, or  
219 prevent fungal infection altogether. In contrast, however, the Australian biotype of *A.*  
220 *artemisiifolia* used during our pathogenicity tests proved to be highly susceptible to the rust  
221 accession from Texas, under the prevailing optimum conditions for spore germination and  
222 infection.

223         Clearly, more comprehensive cross-inoculation studies are needed to ascertain the host  
224 specificity and varietal status of the rust lineage from *A. artemisiifolia*. A more detailed  
225 molecular characterization of this lineage - based, for example, on sequences of the translation  
226 elongation factor (TEF) gene available for some *P. xanthii* accessions (Seier et al. 2009) -  
227 would also facilitate its taxonomic classification. Our attempts to amplify the TEF gene in the  
228 herbarium specimen IMI 503827 failed, thus the ITS sequence reported here is the only  
229 molecular marker currently available for this fungus.

230         Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) is of particular interest in host range studies, since this  
231 non-host species has previously been shown to be susceptible to *P. xanthii* lineages in host-  
232 range screening studies (Alcorn 1976; Seier et al. 1997). However, to our knowledge, no viable  
233 *P. xanthii* accessions infecting *A. artemisiifolia* are currently available worldwide; therefore, at  
234 present, it is not possible to carry out pathogenicity tests with this rust. More extensive surveys  
235 focusing on sites in North America where the *P. xanthii* on *A. artemisiifolia* has been  
236 previously collected, and more detailed studies with newly collected isolates are needed to  
237 investigate the suitability of this rust as a CBCA of *A. artemisiifolia* outside the native range of  
238 its host plant, especially in Europe.

239


240


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245



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350 FIGURE LEGENDS

351 **Fig. 1.** Nucleotide positions with variable characters detected when the nrDNA ITS sequences  
352 were compared in the following six *Puccinia xanthii* specimens: (1) the isolate used in this  
353 work (IMI 503827 / KM114871\*); (2) *P. xanthii* var. *parthenii-hysterophorae* collected from  
354 *Parthenium hysterophorus* in Australia (BRIP 51793 / EU659697); (3) *P. xanthii* collected  
355 from *Xanthium italicum* in Hungary (BRIP 48819 / EU659694); (4) *P. xanthii* collected from *X.*  
356 *strumarium* sensu lato in Brazil (BRIP 48822 / EU659695); (5) *P. xanthii* collected from *X.*  
357 *strumarium* sensu lato (BRIP 48821 / EU659696); and (6) *P. xanthii* collected from *X.*  
358 *occidentale* in Australia (BRIP 49131a / EF635903).

359

360 \*voucher / GenBank accession number of the ITS sequence; BRIP = Plant Pathology  
361 Herbarium, Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Australia; IMI =  
362 CABI Herbarium (Herb. ) II, Kew Gardens, London, UK.

363

364 **Fig. 2.** *Ambrosia artemisiifolia* severely infected with *Puccinia xanthii* in a quarantine  
365 greenhouse at CABI: **a.** leaf showing telia on the lower surface and the petiole; **b.** extensive  
366 telial sporulation causing leaf necrosis and die-back.

367

ITS sequence accession number	Nucleotide positions with variable characters*						
	63-65	111	133-138	144	154	175	502
KM114871	ttt	c	-----	c	-	t	a
EU659697	ttt	c	-----	c	-	t	a
EU659696	a--	t	tttttt	a	t	-	g
EU659695	a--	t	tttttt	a	t	-	g
EU659694	a--	t	tttttt	a	t	-	g
EF635903	a--	t	tttttt	a	t	-	g

*\*Nucleotide positions were numbered starting with the first position in the KM114871 sequence.*







[Click here to view linked References](#)

## REPLY TO THE EDITOR'S AND THE REVIEWER'S COMMENTS

MANUSCRIPT NO.: EJPP-D-15-00300

TITLE: "Molecular identification and pathogenicity assessment of a *Puccinia xanthii* accession infecting common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) in its native North American range"

AUTHORS: Kassai-Jáger et al.

### REPLY TO THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Dear Professor Jeger,

We are very grateful for your comments on our work and also for judging it as suitable for publication in EJPP after a major revision. Apologies for the very long delay in submitting the revised version of this work.

Please find below our point-by-point replies and reactions to the Reviewer's comments. The manuscript was fully revised in line with these comments.

### REPLY TO THE REVIEWER'S COMMENTS

We are grateful to the Reviewer for his/her comments, shown in red colour below, and also for the time spent on reviewing our work. We do hope our reply to the comments and the changes made during revision are appropriate and the revised version is suitable for publication in EJPP.

Our point-by-point answers to the specific comments are as follows:

I would change 'Puccinia xanthii' to 'rust fungus' in the title since it doesn't make sense to have 'Molecular identification.... of a Puccinia xanthii accession'... How can you identify something that you have already given a name to?

Title changed as suggested.

The abstract will most likely have to be rewritten after the paper has been revised.

Done.

I must say I struggled while reading the introduction. It just didn't flow well. Starting with a paragraph on rust fungi used for weed biological control is fine, but it should be followed with a paragraph on common ragweed, providing details on its importance in Europe, some info on its biology and why biological control is being considered.

The Introduction was fully re-structured based on these comments. The revised Introduction starts with a paragraph on common ragweed and continues with the first paragraph of the original Introduction, etc.

Then it would be logical to focus on the rust fungi known to occur on common ragweed in the USA (*P. conoclinii*, *P. canaliculata* and *P. xanthii*) and why the most promising is *P. xanthii* (i.e. known to represent a morphospecies that comprises different lineages each specialized on different hosts and thus highly specific; doesn't have an alternate host (as *P. canaliculata* does); successfully used for biological control of other weeds).

It is beyond the goals of this work to evaluate the biocontrol potential of *P. xanthii*, *P. canaliculata* and *P. conoclinii* against *A. artemisiifolia*. Therefore, we did not address this question in the manuscript, neither in the original nor in the revised version, but mentioned these two other rust species right after introducing the paper by Gerber et al. (2011), as suggested by the Reviewer. Gerber et al. (2011) identified *P. xanthii* only as a promising CBCA of *A. artemisiifolia*, and, as explained in our manuscript, it was their paper which triggered our work.

Following this I would include details of where it has been recorded over the years and the failed attempts to collect the specific common ragweed lineage of *P. xanthii* in 2002-03).

We think it is important to expand the narrow host specialization issue in *P. xanthii* first, as done in the original submission. We did this together with the presentation of the taxonomic aspects of the host range issue which is another side of the same problem, and has to be addressed here because it mirrors the results of host range tests. During revision, we deleted the term 'taxonomy' because the taxonomic issue is not the main message from this part and we think it was misleading to mention this term here.

By the way, this part (the next two paragraphs) contains all the information requested by the Reviewer: we mentioned here *P. xanthii* records in different parts of the world (and the papers cited here contain even more information in this respect) and also the absence of this rust in the surveyed areas of the USA in 2002-2003.

The last paragraph of the introduction should then clearly states what this paper is about, i.e. report on results from i. sequencing of the rust accession collected in 1989 from common ragweed in Texas confirming that it belongs to *P. xanthii* morphospecies and ii. pathogenicity tests of the rust accession on common ragweed plants from Europe.

Done.

You need to first present results confirming identification and then results from pathogenicity tests. Although these activities were done in reverse, it just doesn't work for the 'story' to present them in chronological order.

We had to explain first where does the herbarium specimen examined with molecular tools come from - we think this is unavoidable before listing the goals (i) and (ii) as suggested by the Reviewer and as it was done in the revised version. Following this explanation, we re-wrote all the parts of the manuscript, including the Results and Discussion part, in line with the Reviewer's suggestions.

I don't think you have to justify why results from the pathogenicity tests have not been published before and keep on repeating throughout the paper that this work was done in 1989.

All parts dealing with this issue were re-written during revision to avoid this repetition.

In the materials and methods, you should be consistent and use pathogenicity tests throughout and not interchange with 'inoculation studies' and 'greenhouse studies'.

Done.

It would be good if the composition of the John Innes products used was included in parentheses.

We added the composition of all the compost types used in this work to the manuscript. However, it should be noted that the seeds of *A. artemisiifolia*, which is a pioneering plant, germinate in almost any kind of soil, thus the lack of information on the exact composition of the composts used would not affect the repeatability of the pathogenicity tests.

P6, L36-39: I don't understand why you have this sentence, considering that you give precise conditions above.

This was a mistake, the sentence was deleted during revision.

You need to state in results and discussion that you obtained similar results in each set of pathogenicity tests performed (I assume it was the case - if not then elaborate).

Done.

P9, L1-10: Your argument here is tenuous. The severe symptoms you obtained in your tests do confirm that the rust accession used was pathogenic on common ragweed, but it doesn't mean that you would necessarily see such symptoms in the field. Plants in your tests were placed for 48 h in a dew chamber - this is not typical field conditions. The common ragweed *P. xanthii* lineage may be rare in the field simply because environmental conditions are sub-optimal for disease development where the host plant occurs.

We carefully considered each part of our arguments listed in this paragraph and we still think we cannot provide a better discussion of our results. The Reviewer's idea, i.e. this rust is rare because environmental conditions are sub-optimal, was mentioned in this paragraph even in the original submission, but was immediately rejected because other *P. xanthii* lineages infecting *Xanthium* spp. and *A. trifida* are widespread in North America, and it is unlikely that their climatic requirements are very different from those of the accessions infecting common ragweed.

P10, L36 & L41: HC Evans and MK Seier are authors on this paper so it should be 'unpublished data' not 'personal communication'.



Corrected.

P11, L1-7: This sentence is totally out of place.

We do not agree with this comment: it is important to highlight in the discussion that previously some genotypes of *Calendula officinalis* were susceptible to different *P. xanthii* lineages; these infected only their host plants of origin AND *C. officinalis*. To separate this part from the previous one, we placed the information concerning *C. officinalis* in a new paragraph.

P11: You need to add at least one additional paragraph at the very end of the paper to wrap up. The first thing that came to my mind is how you plan to source an accession of the rust fungus for further research considering previous failures. Will you keep on surveying and hoping for the best? Will you rely on collaborators in the US? It would also be good to elaborate on what would be the key research activities that would be undertaken once an accession is found. It is always good to finish a paper by opening up.

Done.

Once again, we would like to acknowledge all the comments on our manuscript. We do hope our replies to the comments and the changes made during revision were appropriate and the revised version is suitable for publication in EJPP.

Sincerely,

Levente Kiss  
Corresponding author for this submission