

Molecular study on *Senecio fontanicola* (*S. doria* group, *Asteraceae*) and its conservation status

Elisa Pellegrini¹ , Valentino Casolo^{1,*} , Duilio Iamónico² ,
Giuseppe Oriolo³, Nicola Rovere⁴ & Massimo Vischi¹ 

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Ključne besede: bazična nizka barja, sistem črtnih kod DNK, ohranitveni status, *Senecioneae*.

Abstract

Senecio fontanicola is endemic to black-bog-rush fens of southern Austria, north-western Slovenia and north-eastern Italy. It is characterized by oblanceolate leaves, a low number of supplementary bracts and glabrous achenes and it grows in marshy spring areas, fens and reed beds, between elevations from 20 to 850 m. The species was never described with molecular traits and during the last decades, *S. fontanicola* showed a dramatic decline due to land reclamation for agriculture. Therefore, the present study aims to characterize *S. fontanicola* using the molecular barcoding technique and to updated its distribution to propose a global risk category for the species, based on IUCN criteria. The three molecular markers used in this study (*trnH-psbA*, *rbcL*, and ITS) clearly distinguished *S. fontanicola* from *S. doria* s.s. and the revised distribution allowed the definition of the conservation status of the species, that is *Endangered*-EN B2ab(i, ii, iii, iv) following the B criterion of the IUCN guidelines.

Izvleček

Senecio fontanicola je endemit barij s črnkastim sitovcem v južni Avstriji, severozahodni Sloveniji in severovzhodni Italiji. Ima značilne ozko narobejčaste liste, majhno število dodatnih krovnih listov in golih rožk. Uspeva v močvirnatih povirjih, barjih in trstičih na nadmorskih višinah med 20 in 850 m. Vrste do sedaj še niso opisali z znaki, pridobljenimi z molekularnimi analizami. V zadnjih desetletjih je *S. fontanicola* doživela dramatičen upad rastišč zaradi melioracij v kmetijska zemljišča. V naši raziskavi smo želeli opisati *S. fontanicola* z molekularno tehniko črtnih kod DNK in prikazati najnovejšo razširjenost vrste. Predlagali smo tudi globalno kategorijo ogroženosti po IUCN kriterijih. Uporabili smo tri molekulske markerje (*trnH-psbA*, *rbcL*, and ITS), s katerimi smo jasno ločili vrsto *S. fontanicola* od *S. doria* s.s. S kritično presojo pojavljanja vrste smo opredelili ohranitveni status kot *Ogrožena vrsta*-EN B2ab(i,ii,iii,iv) v skladu z B kriterijem po navodilih IUCN.

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1 Department of Agriculture, Food, Environmental and Animal Science, University of Udine, via delle Scienze 206, 33100 Udine, Italy.

2 Laboratory of Phytogeography and Applied Geobotany, Department of Planning, Design, and Technology of Architecture, University "La Sapienza", Via Flaminia 72, 00196 Rome, Italy.

3 Via T. Ciconi 26, 33100 Udine, Italy.

4 Via Mazzini, 14 - 33100 Udine, Italy.

* Corresponding author. Plant Biology Unit, Department Agriculture and Environmental Science, University of Udine, via delle Scienze 91, 33100 Udine, Italy. E-mail: valentino.casolo@uniud.it Tel. (+39) 0432558797; Fax. (+39) 0432558784

1. Introduction

Senecio L. (Compositae, Senecioneae) is a genus of approximately 1250 species (Nordenstam 2007) with cosmopolitan distribution and the primary centre of diversity in South Africa and South America (Pelser et al. 2007, Milton 2009). Molecular and phylogenetic investigations clearly showed that this genus is highly complex, listing several critic groups (see e.g. Pelser et al. 2010, Iamónico 2017).

According to Calvo & Aedo (2015) the *S. doria* group is represented in Europe by the following species: *S. altissimus* Mill. (Spain, France, Italy, and Morocco), *S. bithynicus* J. Calvo (Turkey), *S. doria* L. (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine; see also Iamónico 2013, Calvo et al. 2014) *S. fontanicola* Grulich & Hodálová (northern Italy, north-western Slovenia and Austria), *S. legionensis* Lange (endemic to north-western of the Iberian Peninsula), *S. morisii* J. Calvo & Bacch. (Sardinia), and *S. umbrosus* Waldst. & Kit. (Central-Eastern Europe and Ukraine).

Senecio fontanicola is an endemic species distributed along north-eastern Italy, Carinthia (Austria) and north-western Slovenia, whose taxonomic position was proposed by Grulich & Hodálová (1994) on the basis of morphological data. Ecologically, *S. fontanicola* is strictly linked to black-bog-rush fens between elevations of 20–850 m, recorded in: i) *Primulo farinosae-Schoenetum ferruginei* Oberd. (1957) 1962 in Carinthia, Austria (Grulich & Hodálová 1994); ii) *Erucastro-Schoenetum nigricantis* Poldini 1973 emend. Sburlino e Ghirelli 1994, in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy (Poldini & Oriolo 2002); iii) *Carici paniculatae-Salicetum myrsinifoliae* Dakskobler 2012, in the Zelenci area in Slovenia (Vreš et al. 2012).

The occurrence of *S. fontanicola* in Italy (erroneously identified as *S. doria*) date back to 1855 when Pirona (1855) highlighted the morphological variability of a population occurring in Virco fens (Friuli Venezia Giulia, north-east Italy), although there is no formal publication of a name (the annotation “*S. doria* v. *angustifolium*” occurs in a label of a specimen preserved at FI). About one century later, Zenari (1947: 3–4) described two new varieties for the Friulan populations, i.e. *S. doria* var. *subdecurrens* and *S. doria* var. *golae*. For the *S. doria* var. *subdecurrens*, two subvarieties were described, i.e. the sv. *Typicus* and the sv. *Intermedius*, distinguished each other by leaf shape and insertion to the stem, while for the *S. doria* var. *golae* only the sv. *Forojuliensis* was recorded by Zenari (1947: 3–4) in Italy. These taxa are currently considered heterotypic synonyms of *S. doria* (Poldini et al. 2001) and were recently lectotypified (Calvo & Aedo 2015).

The recent revision of Calvo & Aedo (2015) clarified nomenclature, diagnostic characters, and distribution of the species belonging to *S. doria* group, *S. fontanicola* included. Before this contribution, the distribution of *S. fontanicola* in Italy was rather uncertain because the checklist of the Italian vascular flora (Conti et al. 2005; Scoppola & Spampinato 2005) also wrongly recorded *S. doria*. The lack of solid information entailed that the conservation status of *S. fontanicola* was inaccurate. While the Austrian Red List considered *S. fontanicola* as an endangered (EN) species from 1999 (Niklfeld & Schratt-Ehrendorfer 1999), Pignatti et al. (2001), which resume risk categories of the Italian National Red Lists (Conti et al. 1992; 1997), reported only *S. doria* as vulnerable species (VU). Moreover, *S. fontanicola* still missed in the following updating of the Italian National Red List edited by Rossi et al. (2013).

The present work aimed to characterize *S. fontanicola* from a molecular point of view, using the barcoding technique and including species erroneously attributed to *S. doria* s.l. (in particular to *S. doria*) or recently retrieved (i.e. *S. altissimus*). The amplified loci were *trnH-psbA*, *rbcL* and ITS, which are included in the loci recommended in the Consortium for Barcode of Life (CBOL) Plant Working Group (CBOL Plant Working Group 2009). The loci selection took into account i) the high discrimination power of *trnH-psbA* (Kang et al. 2017); ii) the great amount of data available in Genbank (Hollingsworth et al. 2016) on both *rbcL* and ITS sequences; and iii) the common use of *trnH-psbA* and ITS markers for the genus *Senecio* (Khan et al. 2013). Moreover, the distribution of *S. fontanicola* is updated, especially regarding the Italian populations, and a conservation status proposed using the IUCN criteria (IUCN 2012).

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Plant material

Field sampling was carried out in summer 2009. Three populations of *S. fontanicola* were sampled in Italy and other three in Austria, while *S. doria* samples were provided by prof. Hodálová (Institute of Botany, Bratislava, Slovak Republic) and referred to 2 populations coming from Hungary and 1 population from Slovakia (Table 1). A fresh leaf was collected from at least five individuals for each population. Leaf samples of *S. fontanicola* were frozen in liquid nitrogen within few hours after their collection and stored at -80 °C. Leaf specimens of *S. doria* were dried after sampling and stored in sealed plastic bags with silica gel.

Table 1: Sampling localities, geographic coordinates, and GenBank accession numbers for the three loci sequenced.

Tabela 1: Lokacije vzorčenja, geografske koordinate in pristopne številke iz sekvenčne podatkovne baze (GenBank) za tri sekvencirane lokuse.

Locality	Geographic coordinates (WGS84)	GenBank accession numbers		
		<i>trnH-psbA</i>	<i>rbcL</i>	ITS
<i>Senecio fontanicola</i>				
Virco, Bertolo, Udine (Italy)	45° 55' 43"N 13° 03' 30"E	KU319493		KU307474
		KU319494	KU308436	KU307475
		KU319495	KU308437	KU307476
		KU319496	KU308438	KU307477
		KU319497	KU308439	KU307478
Gonars, Udine (Italy)	45° 52' 57"N 13° 13' 25"E			KU307479
		KU319498		KU307480
		KU319499		KU307481
		KU319500	KU308440	KU307482
		KU319501	KU308441	KU307483
Vinchiaruzzo, Cordenons, Pordenone (Italy)	45° 58' 43"N 12° 43' 42"E	KU319502		KU307484
		KU319503		KU307485
		KU319504		
		KU319505	KU308442	KU307486
		KU319506	KU308443	KU307487
Techelweg, Klagenfurt (Austria)	46° 35' 43"N 14° 06' 42"E	KU319507	KU308444	KU307488
		KU319508	KU308445	KU307489
		KU319509		
		KU319510	KU308446	KU307490
		KU319511	KU308447	KU307491
Trabesing, Klagenfurt (Austria)	46° 33' 05"N 14° 15' 00"E	KU319512	KU308448	KU307492
		KU319513	KU308449	KU307493
		KU319514	KU308450	KU307494
		KU319515	KU308451	KU307495
		KU319516		
Obershütt, Klagenfurt (Austria)	46° 34' 24"N 13° 45' 12"E	KU319517	KU308452	KU307496
		KU319518	KU308453	KU307497
		KU319519	KU308454	KU307498
		KU319520	KU308455	KU307499
		KU319521		KU307500
Podunajská nížina Lowland, Ňárád (Topoľovec, Slovakia)	47° 50' 08"N 17° 35' 16"E	KU319522		
		KU319523		KU307501
		KU319524		KU307502
		KU319525	KU308456	KU307503
		KU319526		KU307504
South of Komárom (Újpuszta, Hungary)	47° 40' 18"N 18° 08' 00"E	KU319527		KU307505
		KU319528		KU307506
		KU319474	KU308416	
		KU319475	KU308417	KU307457
		KU319476	KU308418	KU307458
Slovak Karst, between Turňa nad village (Slovakia) and Tornanádaska (Hungary)	48° 35' 22"N 20° 51' 29"E	KU319477	KU308419	KU307459
		KU319478	KU308420	KU307460
		KU319479	KU308421	KU307461
		KU319480	KU308422	KU307462
		KU319481	KU308423	
		KU319482	KU308424	KU307463
		KU319483	KU308425	KU307464
		KU319484	KU308426	KU307465
		KU319485	KU308427	KU307466
		KU319486	KU308428	KU307467
		KU319487	KU308429	KU307468
		KU319488	KU308430	KU307469

2.2. DNA extraction, amplification and sequencing

DNA extraction was carried out using the CTAB method (Doyle & Doyle 1997). Primer sequences and amplification conditions of *trnH-psbA*, *rbcL*, and ITS were reported by Sang et al. (1997), Hollingsworth et al. (2009), and Stanford et al. (2000) respectively, with slight modifications (Table 2). Loci were amplified by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) on the thermocycler GeneAmp® PCR System 9700 (Applied Biosystem). The quality of the DNA extracted was checked on 0,8% agarose gel. The amplification products were purified and sequenced in both directions with the automatic sequencer Applied Biosystem 3730.

2.3. Data analysis

Forward and reverse sequences were edited, trimmed and assembled with the Staden package software (Staden 1996). The full-length sequences were aligned with Clustal W (Thompson et al. 1994). Sequences were deposited to GenBank (Table 1). A BLASTN search (Altschul et al. 1997) for the three loci was carried out to find homologies with other available sequences from GenBank. Considering the recent revision by Calvo & Aedo (2015), sequences of the so-called *S. doria* specimens of western Europe were labelled as *S. altissimus*. MEGA ver. 7 (Tamura et al. 2013) was used to obtain Kimura two parameter (K2p – Kimura 1980) pairwise distances among the analysed sequences, expressed as average in percentage (%).

Phylogram was inferred using the Bayesian statistics and by adopting the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) sampling technique in the BEAUti/BEAST v.1.10.0 software (Bouckaert et al. 2014). Tamura-Nei model was set as substitution model (Tamura and Nei 1993) and the

construction of the dendrogram was computed in FigTree v. 1.4.3 (<http://tree.bio.ed.ac.uk/software/figtree/>). The maximum clade credibility tree was generated with nodes based on mean heights, where branches were collapsed at the 50% threshold of posterior values.

2.4. Distribution and conservation status

In order to outline the current distribution of *S. fontanicola*, several data were considered: herbarium specimens (see Supplementary material S1), species distribution atlas of Austria (Fisher et al. 2008) and north-eastern Italy (Poldini & Oriolo 2002) verified with field surveys when possible, bibliography (in particular Calvo & Aedo 2015, Vreš et al. 2012, Frattini 2008, Grulich & Hodálová 1994), field observations, and personal communications. The conservation status was assessed following IUCN Red List Criteria version, 3.1 second edition (IUCN 2012). The criterion B was selected for the assessment. The area of occupancy (AOO index) was applied to 2 km² grid cells based on UTM grid.

3. Results

3.1. Molecular analysis

DNA were successfully extracted from all samples. DNA amplification rates differed among loci with the maximum (92%) for the *trnH-psbA* locus, 69% for *rbcL* and 85% for ITS, in agreement with literature (Kress et al. 2005, Hollingsworth et al. 2008). The total number of new sequences generated in this study was 145. ITS locus revealed the major variability among sequences, presenting 1 indel and 26 SNPs (18 transitions and 8 transversions) for a total of 27 variable sites. The aligned sequence

Table 2: Primers and reaction conditions used for PCR.

Tabela 2: Oligonukleotidni začetniki (prajmerji) in reakcijski pogoji za verižno reakcijo s polimerazo (PCR).

Locus	Primer name	Primer sequence	Reaction condition
trnH-psbA	psbA3'f	5'-GTTATGCATGAACGTAATGCTC	95°C 5 min
	trnHf	5'-CGCGCATGGTGGATTCAATCC	94°C 30 s, 58°C 30 s, 72°C 30 s, 38 cycles 72°C 10 min
rbcLa	rbcLa_f	5'-ATGTCACCACAAACAGAGACTAAAGC	95°C 5 min
	rbcLa_rev	5'-GTAATAATCAAGTCCACCRG	94°C 30 s, 55°C 1 min, 72°C 1 min, 5 cycles 94°C 30 s, 54°C 1 min, 72°C 1 min, 30 cycles 72°C 10 min
ITS	ITS4	5'-TCCTCCGCTTATTGATATGC	95°C 5 min
	ITS5a	5'-CCTTATCATTAGAGGAAGGAG	94°C 30 s, 63°C 30 s, 72°C 45 s, 8 cycles 94°C 30 s, 55°C 30 s, 72°C 45 s, 30 cycles 72°C 10 min

length was 642 bp including indel. For *rbcl* and *trnH-psbA* the aligned sequence matrix was 512 and 363 bp in length (no indel) respectively (Table 3).

The total variation among sequences was attributable to inter-specific divergence. No intra-specific variability was observed for *rbcl* and *trnH-psbA* loci and only one SNP was found in the ITS locus for 2 specimens of *S. fontanicola* ($K2p = 0.20\%$, Techelweg population, Austria). The range of variation extends from 0.40 to 4.21% of informative positions, with the major presence of SNPs in the nuclear ITS locus (Table 3). This locus clearly distinguished the two species analysed. *Senecio doria* presents 7 diagnostic positions (4 transitions and 3 transversions) and 1 indel, whereas *S. fontanicola* has 8 diagnostic positions (6 transitions and 2 transversions). Plastid loci were very conserved but sufficiently variable to distinguish *S. fontanicola* from *S. doria*, with 2 variable sites for *rbcl* ($K2p = 0.39\%$) and 3 for *trnH-psbA* ($K2p = 0.83\%$).

The homology search returned 13 ITS sequences attributed to *S. altissimus* (Calvo et al. 2013). No sequences were found for the other two loci. Table 4 lists species, localities, and GenBank accession numbers. Some variability was noticed within the *S. altissimus* ITS sequences retrieved from GenBank. This variability reflected 15 variable positions ($K2p = 1.27\%$). In any case there was no overlap with the interspecific variability.

S. fontanicola sequences were easily distinguished from *S. altissimus* ($K2p = 2.28\%$). A graphical representation of the relationship of the considered taxa is reported in Figure 1. Three monophyletic clades clearly distin-

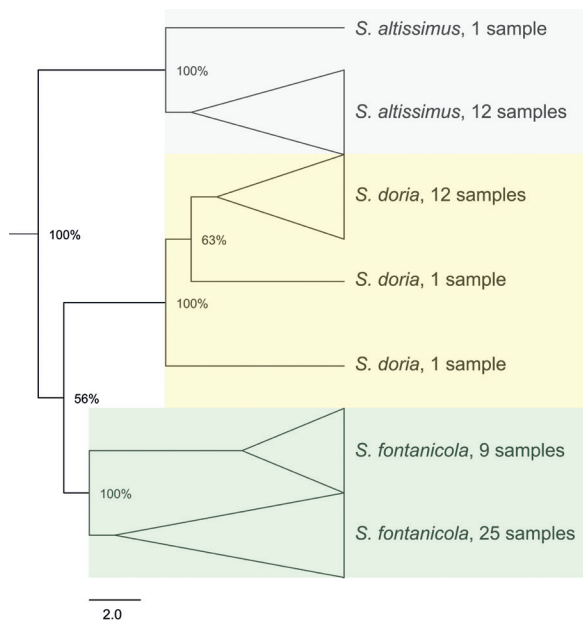


Figure 1: Cladogram obtained from FigTree software after Bayesian interference analysis computed in BEAST for the nuclear data set (ITS locus). Branches corresponding to partitions reproduced in less than 50% of posterior values were collapsed. The three clades corresponded to the three analysed species are highlighted with different colours.

Slika 1: Kladogram, rekonstruiran na osnovi jedrnega markerja (ITS) z uporabo Bayesovega principa v programu BEAST. Za prikaz smo uporabili programsko orodje FigTree. Razvejitev kladograma, ki so imele v pripadajočem kolenu nižjo podporo od 50%, smo strnili (kolapsirali). Trije kladi, označeni z različnimi barvami, pripadajo trem vrstam, vključenim v analizo.

Table 3: Amplification rates (expressed in percentage), number of sequenced specimens, alignment length, transition/transversion rate, informative indels, total number of variable positions compare to the respective loci length and total SNP percentage of the loci ITS, *rbcl* and *trnH-psbA*.

Table 3: Pomnožitivne stopnje (v odstotkih), število sekvenciranih primerkov, poravnava zaporedij, stopnja tranzicije/transverzije, informativne delecije ali duplikacije, skupno število spremenljivih pozicij v primerjavi z dolžino lokusov in skupen odstotek SNP lokusov ITS *rbcl* in *trnH-psbA*.

Locus	Amplification rates (%)	N. sequenced specimens	Alignment length (bp)	Transition/transversion rate	Informative indels	N. variable positions	SNPs % for total length
ITS	85	50	642	2,28	1	27/642	4,21
rbcl	69	41	512	2,00	0	2/512	0,40
trnH-psbA	92	54	363	0,33	0	3/363	0,83

Table 4: Sampling sites and GenBank accession numbers of BLASTN homology search for the ITS locus (Calvo et al. 2013).

Tabela 4: Vzorčne lokacije in pristopne številke iz sekvencne podatkovne baze (GenBank) za poizvedovanje BLAST nukleotid-nukleotid homologije za ITS lokus (Calvo et al. 2013).

Locality	GenBank accession
<i>Senecio altissimus</i>	
Close to the Arreo lake, margin of the road (Spain)	JX895272, JX895273, JX895277, JX895275, JX895276, JX895271, JX895270, JX895269, JX895268, JX895266, JX895265, JX895267

guished the three species, i.e., *S. altissimus*, *S. doria*, and *S. fontanicola*. Therefore, these results also confirm the morphological distinction stated by Calvo & Aedo (2015) between *S. doria* and *S. altissimus*; where a total of 3 transitions, 1 transversion and 2 informative indels unambiguously identify *S. altissimus* samples (K2p = 2.20%).

3.2. Distribution update

Senecio fontanicola distribution is about 15580 km², which extends throughout northern Italy, western Slovenia and southern Austria (Figure 2, Ehrendorfer and Hamman 1965).

The species shows a scattered distribution due to its ecological requirements, strictly linked to black-bog-rush fens. The major populations are located in low flats of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region (NE-Italy) and in the Gail valley of Carinthia Region (Austria). The species is also present in Lombardy and Veneto (N-Italy) and in the Gorenjska region (Slovenia). The Austrian populations, occurring from Bad Bleiburg up to Bleiburg (Hartl et al.

1992, Fisher et al. 2008), are the largest in terms of both surface area and number of individuals (more than 100 individuals per population). In Slovenia, only one record is reported for the alpine Zelenci wet area (Vreš et al. 2012), placed less than 5 km away from the easternmost Italian locality, in the Scichizza swamp (Fusine wet area, Friuli-Venezia Giulia).

Italian populations are smaller in surface area and number of individuals. In Friuli-Venezia Giulia, *S. fontanicola* is considered a rare taxon, occurring in several localities of lowland wetlands with populations of less than ten individuals (Pavan & Costalonga 2001, Martini & Pavan 2008). The species was also reported for an isolated site nearby Tolmezzo, but its presence there has not been recently confirmed. In the Veneto Region is recorded from the Onara wet area (Padua) and one isolated locality in Lombardy represents the western distribution limit of the species. This last locality is seriously threatened because of drainage activities carried out during the last decade (Frattini 2008). Some historical records e.g. Dimon and Amariana mountains in Friuli (Morassi herbarium, MFU), Euganei hills in Veneto (Ugolini herbarium, pri-

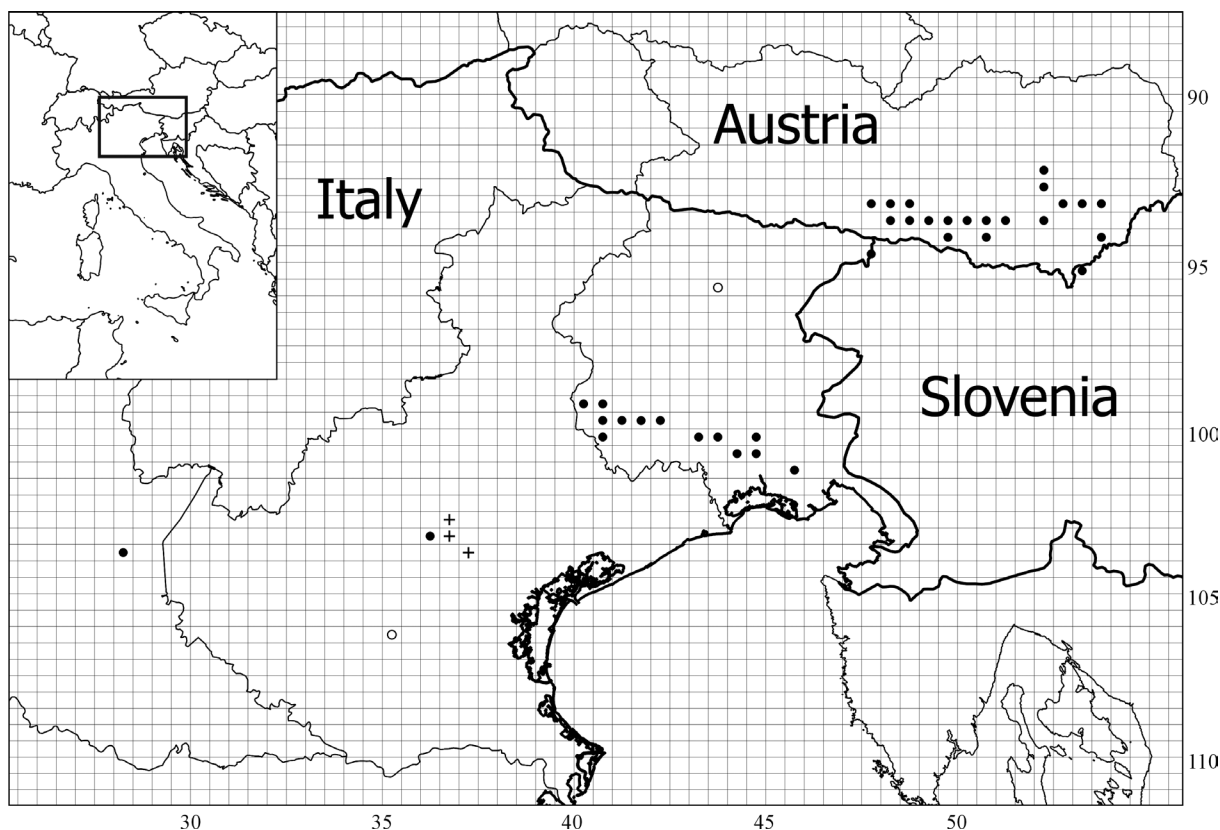


Figure 2: Distribution of *Senecio fontanicola* based on Ehrendorfer & Hamman grid (1965). Legend: ● present, ○ doubtful, + extinct.

Slika 2: Razširjenost vrste *Senecio fontanicola*, prikazana na srednjeverovski mreži (Ehrendorfer & Hamman 1965). Legenda: ● sedanja, ○ dvomljiva, + izumrla.

vate) are questionable because the specification of the locality is generic and the current lack of suitable ecological conditions for the species, but the existence of adequate environmental conditions in the past (at least in the Euganei hills) cannot be excluded.

3.3. IUCN assessment

More than 45% of sites where *S. fontanicola* falls inside protected areas (percentage obtained from the overlapping of *S. fontanicola* populations and areas subject to legal protection, online available at <http://irdat.regione.fvg.it/WebGIS/> and <https://www.data.gv.at/katalog/dataset?tags=Schutzgebiet>). However, the preferential habitat of *S. fontanicola* (7230 alkaline fens, Natura 2000) is considered “unfavourable-inadequate” for the whole continental and alpine bioregion and in particular “unfavourable-bad” for Austria and Italy (EEA 2013). Furthermore, *S. fontanicola* populations frequently have less than 10 plants, entailing the need of management programs for species preservation and the definition of a conservation status.

For the assessment based on IUCN Red List criteria (IUCN, 2012), the geographic criterion B was considered. The extent of occurrence (EOO) of *S. fontanicola* is 16173 km². The calculated area of occupancy (AOO), based on the 2 km² grid cells, is 220 km² (108 km² in Austria, 4 km² in Slovenia, and 108 km² in Italy). Populations are severely fragmented and the habitat suffers reduction and degradation, mainly due to human land-use changes (Bondesan, 1995). A regression is also observed in the number of sites where the species thrives, in the size of populations, and in the extent and quality of the habitat. For these reasons, the global risk category proposed for the conservation status of *S. fontanicola* is *Endangered-EN B2ab(i,ii,iii,iv)*.

4. Discussion

In this work, the molecular data supports the taxonomic treatment of *S. fontanicola* at the specific rank. *Senecio fontanicola* plastid sequences were very conserved and clearly separated from *S. doria*. Moreover, the molecular analysis of ITS sequences supported the recent taxonomic decision of recognizing *S. altissimus* as a species distinct from *S. doria* (Calvo & Aedo 2015). This data confirmed the usefulness of ITS as a DNA barcode for the *Asteraceae* family (Gao et al. 2010). Sheth & Thaker (2017) asserted that DNA barcoding not only integrates taxonomy and accomplishes species identification but also stands

as a tool for species conservation, especially dealing with endemism and threatened species. In fact, the distribution of *S. fontanicola* leads us to consider this species an endemism that probably underwent allopatric speciation during the Quaternary, driven by geographical isolation from the *S. doria*. In this period, the Austrian territory was covered by ice (Ehlers & Gibbard 2004) while the eastern zone of the North-Italian plain was covered by wet surfaces (Fontana et al. 2014), offering a putative refuge for these populations. The plant probably moved towards the Austrian wet areas, after the glaciation, following the Tagliamento and Fella rivers. This hypothesis is suggested considering the chorology and the speciation of other endemic taxa thriving in the same geographical area, such as *Erucastrum palustre* (Pirona) Vis. (Martini & Poldini 1986) and *Armeria helodes* F. Martini & Poldini (Martini & Poldini 1987). *Senecio fontanicola* appears seriously threatened showing a scattered distribution and small populations (some of them have less than ten individuals). The IUCN attribution as Endangered species leads us to recommend the application of urgent conservation measures for the preservation of this species and its habitat.

5. Conclusion

The genetic characterisation and the monitoring of species distribution are the basis for the conservation of the threatened species, such as *S. fontanicola*. Molecular analysis confirmed the different taxonomic position of *S. fontanicola* from *S. doria* s.s. and the need to extend further surveys on the neighbouring *S. altissimus*. Being *S. altissimus* distribution neighbouring to *S. fontanicola*, it could gather interesting information about species differentiation inside the *S. doria* group, e.g. reconstructing species speciation in time using specific genetic analysis like AFLP. Moreover, the current records of *S. altissimus* in Italy presented in Calvo and Aedo (2015), are highly unlikely, being based on old herbaria records. The genetic characterisation of the recently described species *S. morisii* (Sardinia – Calvo & Aedo 2015) should also be considered in future studies.

The updated distribution of *S. fontanicola* allowed to define correctly the conservation status for the species. While a risk category was already attributed to the Austrian populations (EN), any active measures for species conservation are being applied in Italy and Slovenia. The definition of the Endangered (EN) risk category points out the critical status of the species, highlighting the need of urgent and effective measures at both European and national level.

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Elisa Pellegrini , <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6972-9540>
Valentino Casolo , <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4398-5519>
Duilio Iamónico , <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5491-7568>
Massimo Vischi , <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6632-7749>

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