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Author: Teresa Nowak

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Centaurea nigra L. in Poland – the occurrence and status

Teresa Nowak

Department of Plant Systematics, Faculty of Biology and Environmental Protection, University of Silesia, Jagiellońska 28, 40-032 Katowice, Poland, e-mail: teresa.nowak@us.edu.pl

Centaurea nigra is a perennial herb with rough shoots, growing up to 20-70 cm in height. Typically, its anthodia are formed individually, at the ends of shoots. Involucres of capitula have a nearly spherical shape. Appendages of involucre bracts are of round shape, black or blackish-brown, and regularly pectinate-fimbriate. The florets are all tubular, which is its fairly distinguishing feature. Typically, achenes have short pappus, about 1 mm.

Taxonomic studies emphasize its internal variability and its ability to hybridize with related species. The native range of this species covers mainly Western Europe. However, it is also recorded beyond this range. In many other parts of Europe and even North America it is an element of adventive floras. Beyond its native range, it is recognized as an established species and even considered to be invasive.

In Poland, according to the “*Flowering Plants and Pteridophytes of Poland*”, it is classified as a non-established alien plant species (an ephemero-phyte). In our country, its localities were recorded as early as in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially

in Pomerania and Silesia. It was probably brought to Pomerania by sea as a ballast plant, which was evidenced by herbarium materials deposited in the Herbarium of the Institute of Biology and Environmental Protection of the University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Toruń. At the same time, it colonized mainly ruderal habitats, where it was recorded. There is no contemporary data on the occurrence of this species in Poland. One of the reasons for this might be a decline of localities; however, it may also stem from misidentifications of the species. During the field studies in Pomerania in 2012, a massive occurrence of species of the *Centaurea* genus was recorded. Following comparative analysis, it was finally determined as *Centaurea nigra*. This locality, situated near the village of Karwieńskie Błota, south of Karwia, is relatively far from the localities recorded in Gdańsk in the nineteenth century. *Centaurea nigra* occurs there in the area of partially used hay meadows, at peripheries of dirt roads and on the slopes of draining canals. It is a dominant element in the meadow communities in which it grows. Most typically, it is accompanied by the following species:

Lysimachia vulgaris, *Molinia caerulea*, *Holcus lanatus*, *Vicia cracca*, *Lythrum salicaria*, *Angelica sylvestris*, *Heracleum sphondylium* and *Potentilla erecta*. However, this locality is endangered due to changes in the tendencies of spatial planning, from agricultural to residential area. Lowering groundwater level and abandon-

ing the meadows result in evident negative changes in the composition of these communities. Therefore, an urgent need for detailed studies of the recorded population exists as well as for further field exploration aimed at confirming other localities reported in Pomerania.