

TWO NEW CASUAL GRASSES FROM MALTA

Edwin LANFRANCO

3, New Street, Sliema, MALTA.

ABSTRACT

The occurrence of two casual grasses, *Urochloa panicoides* P. Beauv. and *Echinochloa frumentacea* Link in the Maltese islands is recorded for the first time.

Early in October 1978, Mr. Michael Briffa found an unfamiliar panicoid grass in a neglected patch close to the Dragonara Casino (St. Julians, Malta). This was subsequently identified as *Urochloa panicoides* Palisot de Beauvois (fig. 1a), a native of South Africa, Tropical East Africa and India which occurs widely as a casual in various parts of the world.

The author subsequently visited the site together with Mr. Briffa. *Urochloa panicoides* was growing in company of several other ruderals and adventives including *Mirabilis jalapa* (L.)Juss., *Datura innoxia* Miller, *Ricinus communis* L., *Digitaria sanguinalis* (L.)Scop., *Cynodon dactylon* (L.) Pers., *Sorghum halepense* (L.)Pers., *Echinochloa colonum* (L.)Link and *Echinochloa frumentacea* Link. This last is also a new record for Malta (fig. 1b). In July 1979, Mr. Briffa found another small patch of *Echinochloa frumentacea* at the Exiles (Sliema/St. Julians, Malta).

Echinochloa frumentacea which is commonly cultivated for fodder in India, probably owes its presence in Malta to its occasional inclusion in bird-seed mixtures. The correct determination of this species is critical owing to the fact that various records of this plant from several parts of the world should be ascribed to *Echinochloa utilis* Ohwi et Yabuno, a forage grass of Chinese and Japanese origin the separate status of which has only recently been recognised (OHWI & YABUNO 1962). This species has also appeared as a casual in other parts of the world (DUVIGNEAUD 1976) and is also present in bird-seed mixtures (HUBBARD, personal communication). According to OHWI & YABUNO (1962) and DUVIGNEAUD (1976) *Echinochloa utilis* is derived from the wild *Echinochloa crus-galli* (L.) P. Beauv. while *Echinochloa frumentacea* is derived from the wild *Echinochloa colonum*.

According to HUBBARD (personal communication), *Echinochloa frumentacea* has obtuse spikelets about 3 mm long, the panicle pale in colour and with white grains while *Echinochloa utilis* has acute spikelets about 4 mm long, the panicle usually purplish and the grains brown. All the plants so far

encountered in Malta coincide well with *Echinochloa frumentacea*.

I am indebted to the late Dr. C.E. Hubbard and to Dr. A Hansen for the information which they provided and to Mr. Briffa for permission to report his finds.

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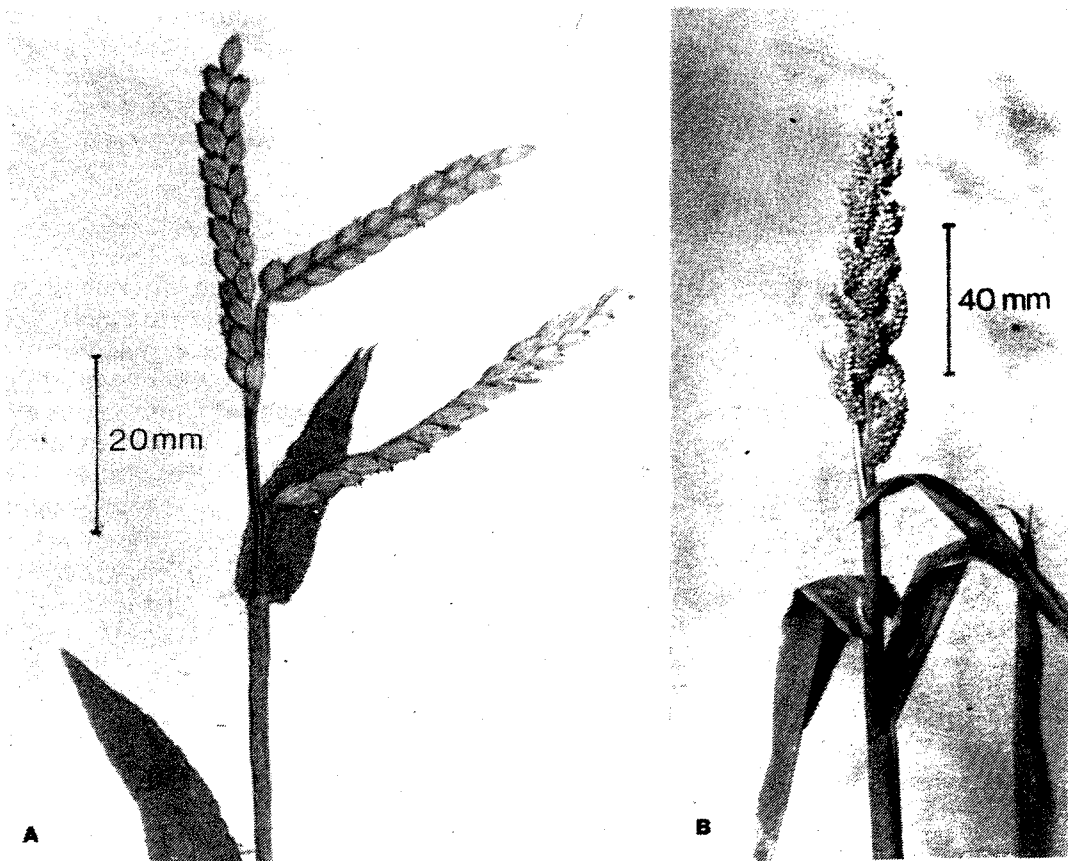


Fig. 1, a. *Urochloa panicoides*; b. *Echinochloa frumentacea* (nos. 6023, 6355 from author's herbarium).