Research note

Distichamine, a chemotaxonomic marker for the genus Boophone Herb. (Amaryllidaceae)

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Received 10 May 2012; received in revised form 24 July 2012; accepted 27 July 2012
Available online 22 August 2012

Abstract

The plant family Amaryllidaceae is known for its ornamental and medicinal value, as well as its unique alkaloid constituents, including several molecules of high biological interest, such as galanthamine, pancratistatin and lycorine. These plants are also used in traditional medicinal practice systems across the globe, and the taxonomy of the family is relatively well-understood. The African genus Boophone Herb. comprises two species, B. disticha (L.f.) Herb. and B. haemanthoides F.M. Leight. Much is known about the ethnobotanical, phytochemical and pharmacological properties of the wide-ranging B. disticha. In contrast, B. haemanthoides is a threatened and territorially restricted species, and its ethnobotanical usage by Khoi-San of the Northern Cape has only recently been described. During our investigation, B. haemanthoides was shown to be a novel source of the known β-crinane alkaloids distichamine, buphanidrine, buphanisine, and crinine. Of note is the presence of distichamine in B. haemanthoides, previously identified only in B. disticha, and its significance as a distinctive chemotaxonomic marker for the genus Boophone.

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Keywords: Amaryllidaceae; Boophone haemanthoides; Chemotaxonomy; Distichamine
Africa has been known for several centuries (Watt and Breyer-Brandwijk, 1962). The chemicals likely responsible for many of these effects are alkaloids, structural variants of which occur exclusively within the family Amaryllidaceae (Viladomat et al., 1997). Previous phytochemical investigations of B. disticha led to the identification of a total of eleven alkaloids (Cheesman et al., 2012; Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandager et al., 2005), mainly of the crinane group of compounds. Of these, distichamine (Fig. 1) is structurally unique in possessing both vinyl methoxyl as well as α,β-unsaturated ketone C-ring functionalities, and has currently been isolated only from B. disticha (Cheesman et al., 2012; Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961; Neergaard et al., 2009). The ethnobotanical usage of B. haemanthoides by Khoi-San of the Northern Cape has recently been described by De Beer and Van Wyk (2011), but information pertaining to its phytochemical make-up is absent from the literature. During our study, the known alkaloids distichamine 1, buphanidrine 2, buphanisine 3 and crinine 4, previously shown to occur in B. disticha (Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961), were identified in bulbs of B. haemanthoides. The presence of the rare alkaloid distichamine in B. haemanthoides is significant, and highlights its utility as a distinctive chemotaxonomic marker for the genus Boophone Herb.

Bulbs of B. haemanthoides were collected during September 2011 in the Saldhana Bay area of the Western Cape and a voucher specimen (Cheesman_02_NU) was authenticated by Dr. Christina Cheesman in the Saldhana Bay area of the Western Cape and a voucher specimen (Cheesman_02_NU) was authenticated by Dr. Christina Cheesman in 2011. Previous phytochemical investigations of B. disticha led to the identification of a total of eleven alkaloids (Cheesman et al., 2012; Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandager et al., 2005), mainly of the crinane group of compounds. Of these, distichamine 1 (Fig. 1) is structurally unique in possessing both vinyl methoxyl as well as α,β-unsaturated ketone C-ring functionalities, and has currently been isolated only from B. disticha (Cheesman et al., 2012; Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961; Neergaard et al., 2009). The ethnobotanical usage of B. haemanthoides by Khoi-San of the Northern Cape has recently been described by De Beer and Van Wyk (2011), but information pertaining to its phytochemical make-up is absent from the literature. During our study, the known alkaloids distichamine 1, buphanidrine 2, buphanisine 3 and crinine 4, previously shown to occur in B. disticha (Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961), were identified in bulbs of B. haemanthoides. The presence of the rare alkaloid distichamine in B. haemanthoides is significant, and highlights its utility as a distinctive chemotaxonomic marker for the genus Boophone Herb.

Bulbs of B. haemanthoides were collected during September 2011 in the Saldhana Bay area of the Western Cape and a voucher specimen (Cheesman_02_NU) was authenticated by Dr. Christina Cheesman in the University of KwaZulu-Natal Herbarium. Distichamine 1 (21.9%), buphanidrine 2 (46.9%), buphanisine 3 (23.9%) and crinine 4 (7.3%) were isolated consecutively via column chromatography of the crude ethanolic extract and identified by a combination of physical and spectroscopic techniques, according to recently detailed procedures (Cheesman et al., 2012; Neergaard et al., 2009). The above percentage values (expressed as relative contribution to total alkaloids) are contrasted against levels of 5.4%, 19.4%, 16.9% and 7.2% for the four compounds, respectively, originally shown to be present in B. disticha (Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961). The remaining seven compounds reported by these authors, including undulatine (18.6%), buphanamine (14.1%), nerbowdine (11.1%), acetylnerbowdine (0.6%), crinamide (1.2%), lycorine (0.4%) and buphabetine (0.3%) were not detected during the course of our investigation. Thus, of the full complement of eleven alkaloids known in B. disticha (Cheesman et al., 2012; Hauth and Stauffacher, 1961; Neergaard et al., 2009; Sandager et al., 2005), distichamine 1 (Fig. 1) is unique in that it has never been found outside the genus Boophone. In relation to spectroscopic data for distichamine, EIMS of the pure compound revealed the [M]+ ion as the base peak at m/z 329, while HRMS analysis gave a mass of 329.1269 g/mol (calculated 329.1263 for C18H19NO5), in agreement with the structure of distichamine. Diagnostic 1H NMR signals were detected downfield at δ 7.62 (1H, s) and 5.85 (2H, 2d, each J=1.20 Hz), assignable to H-10 and the methylenedioxy group protons of ring-A, respectively. Also in this region of the spectrum, the trisubstituted ring-C double bond was indicated by a doublet resonance at δ 5.43 (J=1.28 Hz) for H-2. Furthermore, the α,β-unsaturated nature of the C-ring keto group was shown by carbon singlet resonances at δ 201.9 (C-1) and 177.1 (C-3), as well as a doublet at δ 103.6 (C-2). Aryl and vinyl methoxyl group protons were resonant at δ 3.97 and 3.77 (each 3H, s), respectively, in accordance with C-7 and C-3 substitutions in distichamine. The B-ring heterocycle was characterized by resonance signals for the diastereotopic protons H-6α (δ 4.14, J=17.3 Hz) and H-6β (δ 3.78, J=17.3 Hz), with H-6α shifted to lower field due to its syn proximity to the nitrogen lone pair. Similarly, the bridge protons H-12exo (δ 3.42, m) and H-12endo (δ 2.91, ddd, J=13.0, 9.1, 6.0 Hz) were distinguishable based on their positioning relative to the nitrogen lone pair. All other proton signals were assignable via COSY, HSQC and HMBC correlations, while eighteen carbon atoms were accounted for in the 13C NMR spectrum which resolved to 2 quartets, 5 triplets, 3 doublets and 8 singlets after DEPT refinement, in agreement with published data (Cheesman et al., 2012; Neergaard et al., 2009). In summary, B. haemanthoides is identified as a novel source of the β-crinane alkaloids distichamine, buphanidrine, buphanisine, and crinine. Furthermore, these findings show that distichamine, previously known only from B. disticha, is unique to and characteristic of the genus Boophone. To the best of our knowledge, no other phytochemical examples of such generic specificity are recorded for the Amaryllidaceae.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the University of KwaZulu-Natal for financial assistance.

References


