

**AEONIUM ESCOBARII (CRASSULACEAE), A COMMON SPECIES IN
LA PALMA (CANARY ISLANDS)**

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ABSTRACT: The identity of *Aeonium escobarii* has long been confused with several species of the *Aeonium* sect. *Leuconium* from the island of La Palma. Recent phylogenetic studies confirmed it as an endemic from this island closely related to the monocaulous pubescent flowered species confined to the western islands including El Hierro and Tenerife. A revised description, illustration and a comparison with related species is provided.

KEYWORDS: Crassulaceae /
Aeonium / taxonomy / chorology /
Canary Islands.

RESUMEN: La identidad de *Aeonium escobarii* ha sido objeto de diversas confusiones con especies próximas de *Aeonium* secc. *Leuconium* en la isla de La Palma. Estudios filogenéticos recientes confirman su carácter endémico en esta isla y su relación con las especies monocaules de flores pubescentes relegadas a las islas occidentales incluyendo El Hierro y Tenerife. Se aporta una descripción, ilustración y comparación con las especies afines.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Crassulaceae /
Aeonium / taxonomía / corología
/ Islas Canarias.

INTRODUCTION

When Webb & Berthelot transferred *Sempervivum ciliatum* Willd. to the genus *Aeonium* they confound this Tenerife endemic (a branched plant with glabrous leaves and inflorescence) with similar but pubescent-flowered plants from La Palma (Bañares & León, 1997). Thus, subsequent authors, and notably Praeger (1932), followed the tradition of the authors of the *Phytographia Canariensis*, and assumed the presence of the Willdenow plant in La Palma. Praeger (1932: 184) stated “the Palma plants in some localities is often unbranched”, then recognising both ramified and single-stemmed plants for *A. ciliatum* in the island, being the former puberulent-leaved and the monocaulous plants, glabrous. Such plants unequivocally correspond to *A. davidbramwelii* Liu and *A. escobarii* Rebmman & Malkm.-Huss., respectively. Concerning unramified plants, Praeger suggested that might well be mistaken for small *urbicum*, and stated “the Palma form flowers a good deal earlier than in Tenerife...it is usually much more suffused with purple than in Teneriffe....the Palma form merits varietal rank”. Previously, this confusion was also produced by Bornmüller (1904: 430), Christ (1888: 111) and Kuntze (1891: 232), who reported the Tenerife endemic *A. urbicum* (Chr. Sm. ex Hornem.) Webb & Berth. as an abundant plant around Santa Cruz de La Palma, as it is *A. escobarii*, both monocaulous plants. By other side, Christ also quoted *A. ciliatum* to La Palma, obviously corresponding to ramified plants. This puberulent-leaved plant was described as *A. davidbramwelii* (Liu, 1989) and later as *A. ciliatum* ssp. *praegeri* (Bañares, 1990), conspecific to the former.

In addition, Chinese author resolved the incognita of the monocaulous glabrous-leaved plants of La Palma, including them in the endemic of El Hierro, *A. hierrense* (R.P. Murray) Pitard & Proust. He quoted such plants as widely distributed in La Palma, but scarcely known, and probably different by having narrower stem as well as shorter and thinner leaves than in El Hierro populations. Accordingly, N. Rebmman & B. Malkmus-Hussein described a new species, *A. escobarii*, based in some populations of such plants from cliffs of north-eastern laurel forest of La Palma from 550 to 1.300 m and provided its differences with plants from El Hierro. The reduced circumscription quoted for the species by the original authors as well as by Lode (2010), may be related with the short area where Liu (1989: 91) collected *A. hierrense* for herbarium specimen (OS, La Galga, Neve de Agua), regardless of its abundance on the island. The present study reveals the absence of *A. hierrense* in La Palma, belonging to the recently described *A. escobarii*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- *Aeonium escobarii* Rebmann & Malkm.-Huss., Cactus & Succulents 5(2): 36. 2013. Holotype: [Canary Islands, La Palma], "Ile Canarie, La Palma, Lomo de la Crucita, Barranco del Ayna", 20-05-2013, *Norbert Rebmann n° 25!* (BR) (erroneously dated 20-5-2004 in the original description).

- **Description (Fig. 1):** Monocarpic subshrub, unbranched, up to 120 cm tall. Stem up to 5 cm in diameter, bark grey, smooth, slightly rough to base, leaf scars transversely elliptical, 13-15 mm wide and 4-5 mm tall. Leaf rosettes up to 45 cm in diameter. Leaves oblanceolate to subobovate, 19-25 x 5-6 cm, lamina 3-5,5 mm thick, glabrous, greenish, glaucous, mature plants sometimes suffused with red, margin ciliate with conical unicellular trichomes 0,3-0,6 mm long, apex attenuate, apiculate and mucronate. Inflorescence dome-shaped, 40-55 cm tall and wide, pubescent; main branches 5-35 cm with oblanceolate, acuminate and mucronate, pubescent and strongly ciliate bracts, higher up decreasing in size to lanceolate, 4 x 1 mm; secondary branches 3-10 cm with 20-25 flowers; pedicels 2-4 mm long, pubescent. Flowers 9(-10) merous, 1,5 cm in diameter; calyx 6 mm wide, pubescent, divided to ½ into deltate segments 3-3,2 x 1,5 mm; petals lanceolate, 8-9 x 2-2,5 mm, white, median portion green variegated, sometimes suffused with pink, scarcely puberulent abaxially, margin crenulate. Stamens with white, glabrescent filaments and yellow anthers, the antipetalous ones 6-6,5 mm and the antisepalous ones 7,5 mm. Carpels adaxially puberulent; ovaries 2,5-3 mm long and 1,5-2 mm wide; styles 3,5-4 mm long; nectaries square, 0,8-1 mm, slightly crenulate at apex. Flowers in March-April.

- **Distribution (Fig. 2):** Eastern and western La Palma, abundant from the sea level to 1300 m. It commonly co-occurs and hybridizes with *A. davidbramwelii* (*A. x proliferum* Bañares var. *proliferum* and var. *glabrifolium* Bañares), also, *A. escobarii* eventually hybridizes with *A. nobile* (Praeger) Praeger in several southern and western locations (*A. x splendens* Bramwell & G.D. Rowley ex P.V. Heath) and with *A. canariense* (L.) Webb & Berthel. ssp. *christii* (Burchard) Bañares (*A. x grandipetalum* Bañares) (ver Heath, 1992; Bañares, 2007, 2015, 2021).

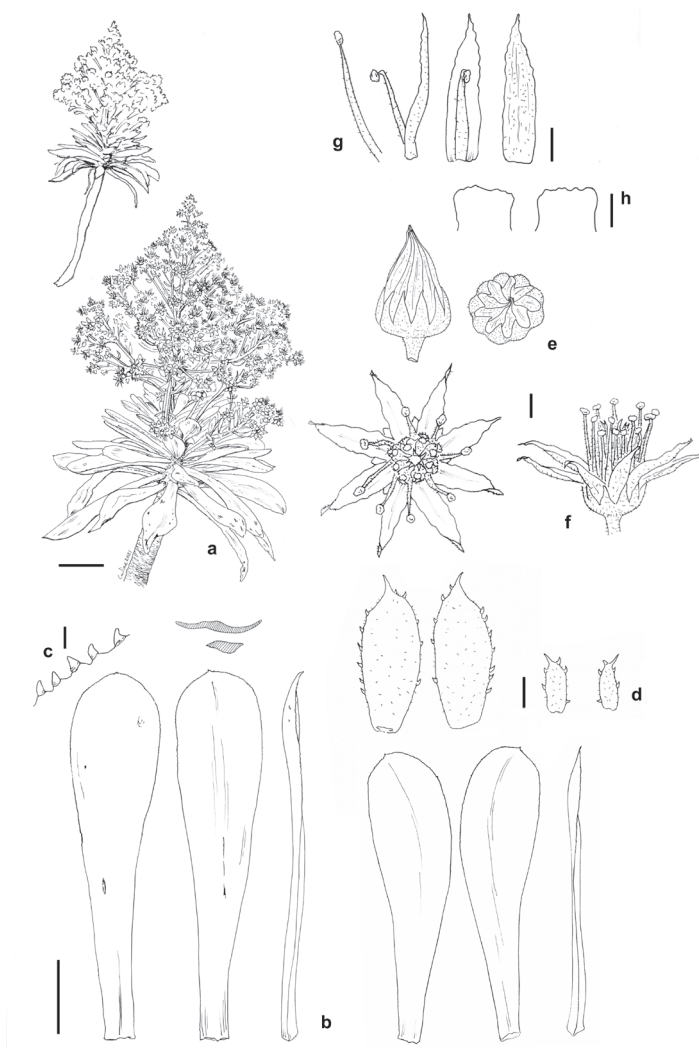


Fig. 1. *Aeonium escobarii*. a) flowering plant, b) leaves, c) leaf margin, d) bracts of the inflorescence, e) flower buds, f) flowers, g) stamens and petals, h) nectaries. Scale bars: a = 12 cm; b = 5 cm; c = 1 mm; d-g = 2 mm; h = 0,5 mm. Drawings after TFC 53758.

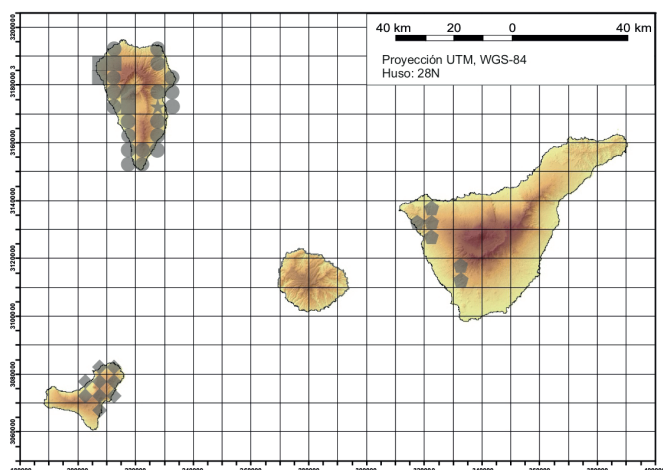


Fig. 2. Distribution of *Aeonium davidbramwelii* ■, *A. escobarii* ★, *A. davidbramwelii* ●, *A. escobarii* ●, *A. hierrense* ◆, and *A. pseudurubicum* ⬠

- **Representative specimens:** *Aeonium escobarii*: LA PALMA: near Fuencaliente (mun. Fuencaliente), 4. 1999, Á. Bañares & O. Bermúdez 42116 (TFC); near Las Mimbreras, ca. 600 m (mun. Barlovento), 5.2017, Á. Bañares 53758 (TFC); La Galga (mun. Puntallana), *Ho Yih Liu* 2651 (OS) (as *Aeonium hierrense*); Neve de Agua (j), *Ho Yih Liu* 3261A (OS) (as *Aeonium hierrense*). *Aeonium hierrense*: EL HIERRO: near Tiñor (mun. Valverde), 12.2019, Á. Bañares 53760 (TFC); see Liu (1989: 91) for other representative specimens of *A. hierrense* in El Hierro.

- **Relationships:** Monocaulous species of *Aeonium* sect. *Leuconium* A. Berger are mainly differentiated by the inflorescence and flowers, being glandular-pubescent in *A. hierrense*, *A. escobarii*, *A. pseudurubicum* and *A. nobile*, but glabrous in *A. urbicum* and *A. appendiculatum* (see Bañares, 1999, for a single-stemmed species of this section). Recent molecular studies (Messerschmidt *et al.*, 2023) revealed a clade for the three former species to which is added the branched *A. davidbramwelii*, also a pubescent-flowered plant. These closely related plants are basically distinguished by the leaves and some details of the inflorescence and petals (Fig. 3, 4, Tab. I). *A. hierrense* is easily differentiated by its thick obovate leaves with long cilia on the margin, and rose variegated flowers. Despite the molecular differences observed, *A. escobarii* present great morphological similarity with *A. pseudurubicum*, differing the former only by its more robust habit, broader, sometimes subobovate leaves, crenulate petals and the pubescent-ciliate upper bracts of the inflorescence.

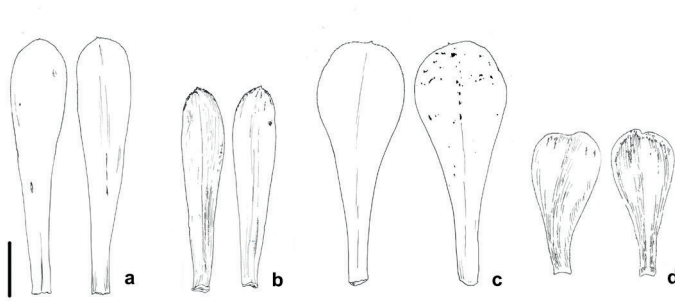


Fig. 3. Leaves. a) *Aeonium escobarii*, b) *A. pseudurbicum*, c) *A. hierrense*, d) *A. davidbramwelii*. Scale bar = 5 cm.



Fig. 4. Leaf rosettes of *A. hierrense* (Tiñor, El Hierro) and *Aeonium escobarii* (Las Mimbreras, La Palma).

	Stem	Leaves	Inflorescence inc. sepals, petals and carpels (up- per bracts)	Petals	Stamens	Distri- bution
<i>A. davidbram- welii</i>	Branched	Puberulent Obovate to oblan- ceolate, 4-12 x 2-5,5 cm, 2-6 mm thick Glaucous, greenish Cilia 0,5 mm	Pubescent	White, green (mainly) and pinkish variegated Entire	Puberulent	La Palma
<i>A. escobarii</i>	Un- branched	Glabrous Oblanceolate to sub-obovate, 19- 25 x 5-6 cm, 3-5 mm thick Greenish, glau- cous Cilia 0,3-0,6 mm	Pubescent (pubescent and ciliated)	White, green (mainly) and pinkish variegated Crenulate	Glabres- cent	La Palma
<i>A. hierrense</i>	Un- branched	Glabrous Obovate, 15-25 x 5-8 cm, 3-7,5 mm thick Glaucous Cilia 0,5-1,2 mm	Pubescent (pubescent and ciliated)	White, pink (mainly) and greenish variegated Crenulate	Puberulent	El Hierro
<i>A. pseudurbi- cum</i>	Un- branched	Glabrous Oblanceolate, 11- 20 x 3-4 (-5) cm, 3-6 mm thick Glaucous, greenish Cilia 0,2-0,5 mm	Pubescent	White, green and pinkish variegated Entire	Puberulent	Tenerife
<i>A. x grandipe- tatum</i>	Un- branched	Pubescent Spathulate, 12-18 x 4-5 cm Light green Cilia 0,4 mm	Pubescent	Light yellow, pinkish variegated Entire	Puberulent	La Palma
<i>A. x proliferum proliferum</i>	Un- branched	Puberulent Obovate, 7-9 (-10) x 3-4 cm, 3-4 mm thick Glaucous, pinkish variegated Cilia 0,5 mm	Pubescent	White, pinkish variegated Entire	Glabrous	La Palma

<i>A. x proliferum glabrifolium</i>	Branched	Glabrous Oblanceolate, 9-13,5 x 2,5-3,5 cm, 3 mm thick Glaucous Cilia 0,3-0,5 mm	Pubescent	White, pinkish variegated	Puberulent	La Palma
<i>A x splendens</i>	Un- branched	Glabrous to gla- brescent Spathulate, 15 x 7 cm, to 8 mm thick Glaucous green	Pubescent	White, reddish variegated		La Palma

Tab. I. Differential characters of *A. escobarii* (including its hybrids) and its closest species.

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