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Preliminary studies on *Allium* Section *Allium* Subsection *Scordoprason* in the Maltese Islands

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The wild leeks of the Maltese Islands, which are taxonomically grouped under *Allium* sect. *Allium* subsect. *Scordoprason* are represented by *Allium ampeloprasum* s.l. L., *A. commutatum* s.l. Gussone and the presumed endemic *A. melitense* (Sommier & Caruana Gatto, ex Borg.) Ciferri & Giacomini. Another large wild leek of unknown taxonomic status is reported from few coastal areas, namely Filfla and Dwejra (Gozo). According to most floristic accounts, the endemic entity is distinct by being smaller than *A. commutatum*, although it was originally a variety of *A. ampeloprasum*. On the other hand, the taxon *A. ampeloprasum* had eroded with the passages of floristic accounts and gradually it was replaced by *A. commutatum* about thirty years ago. These confusing and unstable treatments, already noted in the Red Data Book for the Maltese Islands, led to a preliminary but critical phytotaxonomical investigation of Maltese wild leeks, which was carried out during a three year period. The assessment incorporated the study of 32 morphological characteristics out of which ten were found to be highly diagnostic for taxonomic delimitation, some of which incorporated microscopic examinations. The results supported four distinct taxonomic entities which brought about a major reassessment of the current taxonomic status and distribution of the subsection *Scordoprason* in the Maltese Islands. This includes the exclusion of taxa from the current flora of Malta, new species for the Maltese Islands, synonymisation of taxa and new species concepts defining *A. commutatum* in Malta. Moreover, discussion on few local populations which appears to be of hybridogenous origin is also provided. These preliminary studies confirm that the wild leeks of Malta require a fresh taxonomic assessment.

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