

Petrosedum rupestre subsp. *erectum* in habitat

Follow up to the introduction to this subject in *Newsletter 97* by Ray Stephenson.

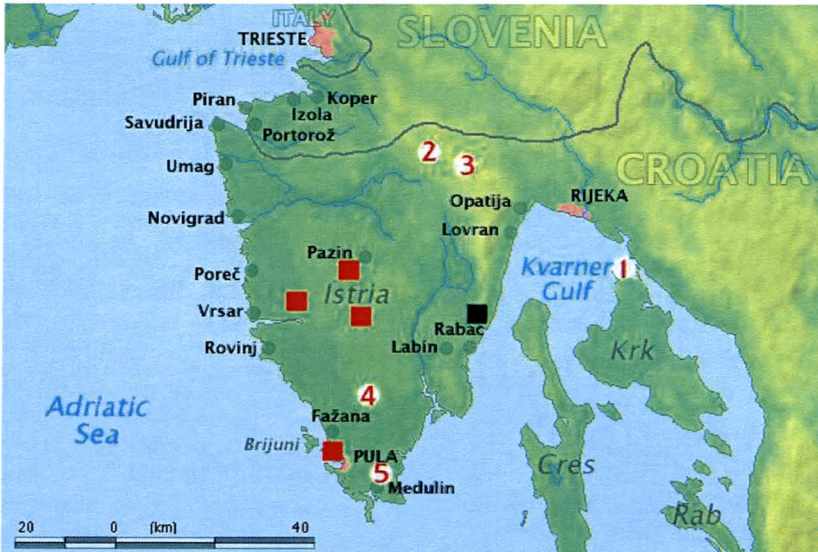


Figure 1. Type locality of this taxon is to the N of Trieste. I found plants growing: 1 N tip of Krk in almost certainly a natural site; 2 Buzet* — possibly planted; 3 Hum* — probably planted; 4 S of Bale* — on bedrock and dry stone walls not near habitation; 5 Medulin* — definitely planted and for sale at Pula market. ■ = 't Hart's known locations of *P. montanum* subsp. *orientale*. ■ = 't Hart's known location of *P. ochroleucum*. * = unproven identity

Istria is mostly a featureless plain jutting into the Adriatic. Any limestone breaking the surface is meagre and much of it has been used as a building material for centuries. Many low, broken dry-stone walls show the importance of agricultural enclosures in the past. Dry stone huts built in the vernacular style are springing up all over the peninsula to add to the perceived history, displaying the ease with which the bedrock breaks into suitable brick-sized blocks without much effort.

The E coast has more obvious limestone outcrops especially in the N but the only common stonecrop here is *Sedum sexangulare* which grows at all altitudes.

Petrosedum rupestre subsp. *erectum* has absolutely no horticultural value whatsoever — after all, its hybrid look-alike offspring subsp. *rupestre* is a stronger, more-hardy taxon. Nevertheless, subsp. *erectum* is scientifically a most important relict, the knowledge of which is essential to the understanding of the evolution of this species.

Petrosedum rupestre subsp. *erectum* may grow on low limestone outcrops and farmer's old dry-stone walls in C Istria. It could be natural to the hill towns of the N such as Hum and Buzet but is just as likely to have been planted there (or = *P. montanum* subsp. *orientale*). We did see purposeful planting in Medulin and plants for sale in Pula market but our main aim was to find the apparent wild site discovered by Pauline Topham and described in the previous *Newsletter*.

Staying in Medulin, we drove to Rijeka and on, to a bridge which connects Krk to the mainland. After 2 km, a car park has been built on the N tip of the island just above the second most northerly promontory. On crumbling N facing karst sea cliffs here we found large quantities of subsp. *erectum* growing alongside *Sedum sexangulare*. Fortunately to help verify that this was indeed the right plant, several late inflorescences (see front cover) were displayed showing a perfectly erect nature with yellow, buds and glabrous sepals. Most inflorescences were spent but still



Figure 2. *Petrosedum rupestre* subsp. *erectum* on N coast of Krk about 8 metres above sea level, displaying spent inflorescences.

contained seed (see Figure 2). I collected a fair quantity for the *Free Seed Distribution Scheme* - hopefully by now some germination may have occurred.

There was no way of identifying this taxon confidently without the new inflorescences, but the near sea-level location is anomalous to look-alike relatives. *Petrosedum montanum* subsp. *orientale* does grow as far S as this. *Petrosedum ochroleucum* certainly grows in the Balkans and is said to grow in Croatia, but again this species is rarely found much below 600 m and presumably only common in the E. To be honest, the differences between *P. montanum* and *P. rupestre* subsp. *erectum* are minimal, for as far as the eye can see, the only difference is the glabrous nature of the sepals of subsp. *erectum*. I would imagine that this taxon, if ever encountered in cultivation, would not be recognised, or would be almost impossible to separate from inter-specific hybrids.

Here in the wild, plants are far more robust than they have been for me at home over the years. This should not have been a surprise as Krk and the type locality S of Auresina would rarely, if ever, experience frost. We did visit Auresina in Italy but failed to find any coastal karst reachable by road. It certainly was not obvious on karst coastline in areas N of the town.

Pauline Topham's find at Krk and my verification of the identity of the taxon certainly extends its range. I will need to check carefully that other collections from Istria are indeed subsp. *erectum* and not *P. montanum* subsp. *orientale* or *P. ochroleucum*.