

A Troglodytic Succulent: *Sedum fragrans*

Almost all native succulents of the Alpes Maritime are commonplace and widespread but one in particular is extremely localised, very difficult to locate, and has an exacting habitat: *Sedum fragrans*. *Sedum fragrans* was not described until 1983 by Henk 't Hart, having previously been confused with the (mostly Italian)

annual/biennial *S. alsinefolium* Allioni. *Sedum fragrans* is stoloniferous, producing offsets, and is therefore perennial. Although these two species are clearly closely related, they are in nature disjunct and cannot produce viable seed when artificially pollinated. Parent *S. fragrans* plants usually flower themselves to death leaving independent rosettes and copious seed.

In cultivation, the perpetuation of *Sedum fragrans* is fraught with difficulties, as the species



1 The author examining *Sedum fragrans* within the walls of a cave in the Cayros Valley.



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2 Joyce Stephenson examining *Sedum fragrans* within the lip of a cave in the Cayros Valley. 3 *Sedum fragrans* on the floor of a cave entrance in the lower Cayros Valley. 4 *Sedum fragrans* on a vertical wall in a cave mouth. The white specks are natural debris from weathering of the limestone.

has evolved to demand precise requirements. Wild plants are denizens of cave mouths, under rock overhangs and in deep cliff clefts (Fig. 1, 2). I have only found plants on limestone with a north-facing aspect with ample protection from above. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that wild plants never feel the direct rays of sun

nor direct rain drops but rely upon moisture seeping through calcareous rocks in heavily shaded niches (Figs. 3-5).

The species seems most common in the tributary valleys of the River Roya (Roia) but its habitats are tiny and isolated. The type locality is the rocks of the town La Tende where it has spread



5 Very few plants were found in the Cayros valley that did not grow in cave entrances. A smaller number still grew on damp cliffs under overhangs. 6 *Sedum fragrans* at the type locality on the edge of the town of La Tende, on a man-made garden wall of local rock.

and can be found on town and garden walls (Fig. 6) but only ever in deep clefts sheltered from above and north facing. Klaus Schropp reported that plants were to be found in “Karies” (yes, like

dental caries) hollows under limestone outcrops in the upper Cayros valley (Fig. 7).

Such things make one wonder why some plants evolve in a way to demand such precise, specialist



7 The Cayros Valley.

niches while others are happy in a whole range of geological sites and aspects. Of the twelve or so taxa of succulents (ignoring the two high alpine species) of this region, only *S. fragrans* is so exacting. 🌱

REFERENCES

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