Nyungwea, a new genus of lichen with goniocyst-producing stipes from Rwanda and Uganda (East Africa)

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Abstract: The new genus and species Nyungwea pallida is characterized by a thin thallus lichenized with Trentepohlia and pale stipes producing goniocysts. Its taxonomic position is uncertain. It is named after the large pristine montane forest of Nyungwe in Rwanda (East Africa) where it was first found; it is also known from the Mabira forest in Uganda.

Key words: consoredia, goniocystangia, Mabira forest, Nyungwe forest

Introduction

Investigations of the lichen collections gathered during recent field trips to the Nyungwe forest in Rwanda and to the Mabira forest in Uganda yielded fascinating specimens with a thin, pale to deep green thallus with Trentepohlia and pale stipes producing goniocysts. The combination of such features is so far unknown in lichenized fungi and we have decided to erect a new genus for it. It is formally described in this paper.

Materials and Methods

The material was examined in tap-water or in lactophenol cotton-blue (LCB). The measurements always refer to water mounts. Air-dried herbarium material for study by SEM was mounted on polished aluminium stubs using a transparent two-component epoxy glue, gold-coated in a Balzers Union SCD 040 sputter and examined in a Cambridge Stereoscan S 200 scanning electron microscope.

Results

Nyungwea pallida Sérus., Eb. Fischer & Killmann gen. et sp. nov.

Ab omnibus speciebus generum cum Trentepohlia stipitis pallidis goniocystophoris differt.

Typus: Rwanda, prov. Cyangugu, Nyungwe National Park, Uwinka, trail to the waterfall, 02°28′29″S 29°11′42″E, 2390 m, on trunk of Ocotea michelioides, 7 October 2003, D. Killmann & E. Fischer s. n. (LG—holotypus; B, KOBL.—isotypi).

(Figs 1 & 2)

Thallus corticicolous, crustose, very thin and partly endophloeoal and intermingled with dead cells of the bark on which it grows, continuous or not, pale to deep green (especially when wet), sometimes with a tinge of blue or almost white, without prothallus. Photobiont: Trentepohlia.

Stipes numerous, up to 0.8–1.0 mm long and 0.1–0.15(–0.2) mm thick when fully developed but already producing goniocysts at a much shorter length, pale yellow to orange, or sometimes white when dry but more vivid yellow or orange to somewhat pinkish when moistened, brush-like with a typically frayed upper part and long white filaments with extremely tiny greenish granules attached along their length (best observed under the dissecting microscope). Young stipes first seen as a tiny, somewhat translucent dot in the centre of small
Fig. 1. *Nyungwea pallida* (type). A, general habit; B, lateral view of the goniocysts-producing stipes; C, lateral view of a single stipe with individual goniocysts visible; D, goniocysts in LCB. Scales: A=10 mm; B=1 mm; C=1 mm; D=10 μm.
Fig. 2. *Nyungwea pallida* (type), SEM photographs. A, lateral view of a goniocysts-producing stipe with numerous goniocysts; B & C, detail of chains of goniocysts. Scales: A = 20 μm; B–C = 10 μm.

(c. 0·2 mm diam), hemispherical or irregular, pale yellow or orange to whitish thallus verrucae which contain colourless crystals. Hyphae forming the stipes simple or rarely branched, ± regularly anastomosed along their length, 1–1·5 μm, septate, with each cell being c. 5–15 μm long, longitudinally arranged and mixed with long chains of *Trentepohlia* cells ± strongly constricted at septa. *Goniocysts* numerous on the upper parts of the stipes, formed of a single algal cell (or rarely a couple of them) which has been isolated from a *Trentepohlia* chain and has become tightly embedded in a branched network of short hyphae, 7–12 μm in diam.; these hyphae do not form any structure that could be described as paraplectenchymatous or a cortex of isodiametric cells. In ‘mature’
stipes, the goniocysts are easily detached from their ‘carrying hyphae’ and act as diaspores, and thus ‘overmature’ stipes typically appear as a brush of long, discrete filaments.

Chemistry. K - , C+ red, Pd -. Lecanoric acid detected by TLC and HPLC (analysis made by Prof. J. A. Elix)

Notes. On examining the plentiful collections of this species, it was initially thought to be a species similar to Caloplaca caliciooides P. M. Jørg. (Jørgensen 1986), or to Dicyoctenepohlia alba Finley & E. F. Morris, a poorly known genus recently recognized as lichenized (Seifert et al. 1987; Lendemer & Harris 2004). The latter is known from a single collection in the high mountains of Venezuela and produces granular soredia at the tips of c. 1 mm tall stipes; the former is more widespread (Eastern North America, Cuba, Panama, India and Japan) and has 0.1-1.5 mm tall stipes covered with a con- idigenous layer at their tips and a terminal, hemispherical to globose conidial mass. Both species, however, have a chlorococcoid photobiont and thus differ markedly from the present material. Indeed, its characteristic features are a thallus lichenized with Trentepohlia with stipes producing very tiny granules acting as complete diaspores (the mycobiont and the photobiont being dispersed in a single entity) which we suggest to name goniocysts.

The origin and use of the term ‘goniocyst’ were summarized by Sérusiaux (1985: 2–13). He quoted the modern definition of Vézda (1980: 82) who characterized a goniocyst by its origin (a single algal cell) and its anatomical structure (a paraplectenchymatous envelope completely surrounding the algal colony). In the species dealt with in that paper (Bacidina mirabilis), which is lichenized with a chlorococcoid photobiont, the goniocysts form the thallus and moreover are arranged in cup-shaped structures (goniocystangia) to promote their dispersal. However, already in 1985, the use of the term ‘goniocyst’ was quite unsatisfactory as it was also widely applied to the tiny glomerules with different anatomical structures forming the thallus and further acting as diaspores in several unrelated genera (Bacidina, Lichenophallia, Micarea, Placynthielia, Vezdaea, etc.). To avoid any confusion in his paper, Sérusiaux (1985) has suggested restricting ad interim the term goniocyst to the diaspores produced in the cup-shaped structures (goniocystangia) of several folicolous species of Opegrapha. He also produced a short comparison between a soredium and a goniocyst.

While the differences between a soredium and a goniocyst have not meanwhile been clarified and without discussing the matter, Tønsberg (1992:34) introduced the term consoredia for “more or less compact, rounded, elongate to somewhat irregular aggregations of soredia encrustied with crystals of lichen substances”. The term applies to the structures of several, unrelated species and is illustrated by convincing photographs of soredial masses of Buellia arborea, Megallaria pulvacea and Pertusaria hemisphaerica; it is indeed clear that the term goniocysts has never been applied to such characteristic structures. However, in the same paper, “simple soredia with a cortex of isodiometric cells” are illustrated for Caloplaca sorocarpa and Rimularia fuscosora (Tønsberg 1992:32). Such structures are strikingly similar to goniocysts in the sense of Vézda (1980) but are only genuine diaspores and do not form the thallus.

In his monograph of the corticolous and lichenicolous species of Bacida and Bacidina in North America, Ekman (1996: 11–12) provides a further detailed discussion of the problem and supports the original use of Ozenda (1963: 32) and subsequent authors, e.g. using the term goniocyst for the tiny thallus granules of many different genera (incl. Bacidina). He suggests a functional difference between a soredium and a goniocyst, that is a soredium is only a diasporo and a goniocyst is the main basic unit of a thallus, although it can also be dispersed and thus acts as a diasporo. This option is now widely used in modern treatments of species whose thallus are made of tiny clusters of algal cells surrounded by fungal cells. Two
examples can illustrate that statement: the new genus *Elisyella* Lumbsch (Lumbsch 1997: 62) is, among other characters, distinguished by its thallus made of “goniocysts with a cortex of isodiametric cells”; and the new genus *Pseudocalopodia* Lücking (Lücking 1999: 142) is also characterized by “Thallus mehlig-granulös, aus Goniocysten; […]”.

Two cases however require further comments. The first concerns the genus *Gyalidea*, as two recently described species (*G. kawanae* and *G. pacifica*) have been shown to produce small but otherwise typical goniocystangia (Harada & Vězda 1999); these authors maintain the original definition of Vězda (1980). The second concerns the rare foliicolous species *Mazosia sorediifera* (Lücking & Matzer 1996: 129–133), whose pycnidia are surrounded by a rim of soredia; their ontogenesis is remarkably similar to that of the goniocysts of the foliicolous species of the *Opegrapha lambinonii* group (compare fig. 28 in Sérusiaux 1985: 12 to Abb. 11, G in Lücking & Matzer 1996: 131). Indeed, individual cells of the photobiont *Phycopeltis* become isolated and detached from the regular rows of rectangular cells forming the plates which form the typical thallus of that genus, and are wrapped up by hyphae without forming a cortex of isodiametric cells or a paraplectenchymatous tissue. It is interesting to note that the same ontogenesis is observed in the new taxon dealt with in this paper: the long chains of *Trentepohlia* present in the stipes produced by the thallus break up to form single or groups of two cells; these cells are eventually wrapped up by hyphae and dispersed as single diaspores.

The definition of a goniocyst by Vězda (1980) has thus been explicitly applied to several species producing this type of diaspore developing in cup-shaped structures: the group of species comprising *Bacidina mirabilis*, which now includes *Bacidina streimanni* and *B. simplex* (Farkas & Vězda 1993; Vězda 1994); the *Opegrapha lambinonii* aggregate; and two species of *Gyalidea*. These species are either lichenized with chlorococcoid algae or with *Phycopeltis*, a genus belonging to the *Trentepohliaceae*.

Although it imperfectly applies, we decided to use the term goniocyst in the sense of Vězda (1980) to describe the diaspores of the species studied here even though our material is not always consistent: the thallus is not made of the tiny granules that are produced in the upper parts of the stipes, each tiny granule originates in a single cell of *Trentepohlia* but the envelope organized by the mycobiont cannot be described as paraplectenchymatous, and the stipes can be described as a means to promote easily their dispersal.

The species studied here cannot be referred to any of the genera mentioned above because: (i) *Bacidina* and *Gyalidea* are lichenized with a chlorococcoid alga, (ii) the species of the *Opegrapha lambinonii* aggregate are lichenized with *Phycopeltis* and show no clear relationship with our material, and (iii) the genus *Mazosia*, lichenized with *Trentepohlia* and now including foliicolous species as well as at least a corticolous one (*M. ocellata*), is clearly circumscribed by its rounded asccarps, the structure of its exciple, its ascus and ascospore type, and its oblong to cylindrical macroconidia. Although one foliicolous species (*M. sorediifera*) produces soredia with an ontogeny quite similar to the goniocysts produced by the species studied here, we think it unwise to include it in that genus without more convincing evidence.

We thus erect a new genus for it, although we cannot make any sound suggestions on its taxonomic position with the data currently available. A position in the *Arthoniales* is likely. The genus is named after the very famous Nyungwe Forest, where it was first found and which is now protected under the status of National Park in Rwanda. It represents one of the most species-rich montane forests in Africa (Buchbender & Fischer 2004; Ewango 2002; Fischer 1996; Fischer et al. 2003).

Ecology and distribution. *Nyungwea pallida* is a corticolous species currently known from two forest sites: the montane Nyungwe
Forest in Rwanda and the submontane Mabira Forest in Uganda. In the Nyungwe Forest, it is found between 2100 and 2400 m a.s.l. and seems to be mostly restricted to the dry and protected side of large boles of Beilschmiedia rwandensis, Carapa grandiflora, Ocotia michelsoni, Psychotria mahoni and Syzygium guineense. At the type locality, the forest consists mainly of Carapa grandiflora, Pinarinia excelsa, Symphonia globulifera and Newtonia buchanani. In the Mabira Forest, it was found on the dry side of a single bole belonging to Chrysophyllum viridifolium at 1180 m a.s.l.; dominant tree species in this locality were Celtis mildbraedii, Entandrophragma angolense and Pterygota mildbraedii.


We thank the Institut de Recherche Scientifique et Technologique (IRST) in Butare, the Projet de Conservation de la Forêt de Nyungwe (PCFN) and the Bureau de Jumelage Rhénanie-Palatinat-Rwanda for logistical support during both field trips in October 2003 and April 2005. We are grateful to the Office Rwandais du Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux (ORTPN) for collection and export permits, and especially for their guidance and support in the Park of Nyungwe. The field trip to Uganda in October 2005 was sponsored by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) within the BIO-TA-East Africa, project E04. We would like to thank the National Forestry Authority (NFA) of Uganda for permission to collect in Mabira Forest Reserve. The chemical analysis of our material was been kindly made by Prof. J. A. Elix (Australian National University, Canberra, Australia) and we thank him very much for his help. Thanks are also due to Prof. Dr Wilhelm Barthlott for permission to use the SEM at the Neues Institute for Diversity of Plants (Bonn) and to H.J. Ensikat for technical assistance. Finally, we would like to thank our colleague and friend Mr Damien Ertz (Jardin Botanique National de Belgique), Mr Adelard and Mr Bonny Dumbo for their great companionship and support during field work in Rwanda. For our field work in Uganda, we could rely on the support and companionship of Mr Bonny Dumbo and Mr Kunnelachew Yeshtile (Forestry Research Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia & Department of Biology, University of Koblenz-Landau). Finally, we wish to thank very warmly both referees (Dr S. Ekman and T. Tønsberg) for their most valuable comments and suggestions.

References


*Accepted for publication 12 November 2005*