

***Exapion corniculatum* vs. *Exapion canescens* - do both species actually occur in Cyprus?**

I was very surprised when, after molecularly analyzing the specimen of *Exapion canescens* (Desbrochers des Loges, 1889) that I had brought back from Cyprus (near Kelefos Bridge) in 2023, I cast an initially incredulous glance at the mtCO1 *Exapion*-tree. This specimen, knocked down from *Calycotome villosa*, was placed next to a specimen of *Exapion corniculatum* (Germar, 1817) collected by Robert Stejskal 12 years earlier in the Czech Republic (north of Litoměřice). The two species were separated by just 0.076%! In addition to *Lembotropis nigricans* (black broom), *Chamaecytisus albus*, *Ch. hirsutus*, *Ch. ruthenicus* and *Ch. supinus* are also mentioned as host plants. (Sprick 2019)

This case is unique and we initially thought it was a case of confusion. However, since we have always placed the sequenced specimens of all almost 5000 Western Palearctic weevil specimens in approx. 1300 species in a specially created comparative collection, the direct morphological comparison was easy. Both species are indeed very similar, but the widespread European-continental species *E. corniculatum* has completely black meso- and metafemora black (and almost always longer elytra; length width ratio 1.45x), while the meso- and metafemora of *E. canescens*, a species from the eastern Mediterranean region, always have reddish-brown parts and the stockier elytra (only 1.33x longer than wide). However, aedeagi and tegma do not differ in any way (see illustrations in this catalog).

Even more confusing is the mention of *E. corniculatum* by G. Alziar, also from Cyprus in 2023, without it being clear where this information comes from or even where the specimens were found. Is this just a misidentification (I only know specimens with partly reddish-brown meso- and metafemora and short elytra from Cyprus), i.e. in reality *E. canescens*, or is this a first (hidden) indication that despite the different colouring of the femora (and perhaps the different elytra lengths) *Exapion corniculatum* has considerable ectoskeletal variation potential - the further you extend the cline from the northernmost location (Poland) via the Balkans to Asia Minor or the Middle East; i.e. ultimately, is it just the morphological range of variation of a single species - in this case of *E. corniculatum* (Germar, 1817)?

This case is indeed quite rare, if not unique, among the Apioninae. Further molecular material from Cyprus as well as from the mentioned distribution areas of both species is still missing to shed more light on this tricky case.

Peter E. Stüben, September 2024

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