Tillandsia deppeana (Bromeliaceae), an endangered species in Cuba

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*Tillandsia deppeana* Steud. (Fig.1), although recently reported as endemic to Mexico (Espejo et al 2004), is the single species, among currently known Cuban bromeliads (11 genera and 58 spp.), found only in Mexico and Cuba (Till 1999).  [editor’s note: for a recent review of *Tillandsia* species known from Cuba, see Lucía Hechavarría-Schwesinger. *Tillandsia L. (Bromeliaceae) in Cuba: an overview.* Journal of the Bromeliad Society 56(6): 246-252. 2006.]

The first Cuban collection of *Tillandsia deppeana* dates from 1929, when J. G. Jack (1861-1949), a Canadian Botanist and Dendrologist at Arnold Arboretum (Stafleu & Cowan1979) collected the specimen Jack 7293 in Buenos Aires, Trinidad Hills, Central Cuba, when he was visiting the Atkins Tropical Botanic Garden in Cienfuegos. Since then, the specimen has been subject to a long list of misidentifications. In 1931, when revising the Cuban specimens of La Salle Herbarium, L. B. Smith (1904-1997) (Stafleu & Cowan 1985) determined it as an uncertain variety of *Tillandsia rubra* Ruiz & Pav. Carabia, with his revision of Bromeliaceae for Cuba, disagreed with the application of the name *T. rubra* to the specimen, consequently he identified the specimen as a new species and named it *T. smithiana* Carabia (1941), to honor the world specialist of the family (Bromeliaceae) Lyman B. Smith. Nevertheless, Smith (1956) not convinced with Carabia’s determination, checked again the specimen and compared it with the Mexican *T. paniculata* Schltdl. & Cham., a species that was renamed by Steudel as *T. deppeana* and reduced to synonymy of *T. rubra* by Mez (1896, 1935). Smith, in his revision of *Tillandsia* for his monumental monographic work on the family Bromeliaceae (Smith & Downs 1977), follows the authority of Mez and erroneously places *T. smithiana* in the synonymy of *T. fendleri*, something very understandable if we keep in mind that for him *T. paniculata* Schltdl. & Cham., and *T. smithiana* Carabia were synonymous with *T. rubra* Ruiz & Pav., a species considered synonymous with *T. fendleri* at the time. The mystery of *T. smithiana* was solved by Till (1999) who compared the lectotype of *T. paniculata* (= *T. deppeana* Steud.; Schiede & Deppe 1008, LE), and the holotype of *T. smithiana* and noticed the great resemblance of both species placing *T. smithiana* consequently under the synonymy of *T. deppeana* Steud.

In Cuba, flowering *T. deppeana* plants can reach 60 cm tall. The species is characterized by a water-holding, funnelform rosette, of several dark green membranaceous leaves, with purple or brown dots of variable size and randomly distributed on blades; sheaths ovate-lanceolate, inflated (15 X 5 cm); blades ligulate, flat with acute apex (30-40 cm


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long), covered by a waxy layer with scattered trichomes embedded. The inflorescence is erect, green-reddish, once-branched, subdigitate, with 6-16 spikes arranged in a spiral around the main axis. Spikes linear, complanate, 15-35 x 0.8-1.4cm with 15-25 flowers per spike. Scape erect, short and stout, completely concealed by leaves, with triangu-
lar, foliose, imbricate bracts (20-30 cm long). Primary bracts membranaceous, reduced to widely ovate sheaths with filiform blades and apex acute, 10 cm long, shorter than spikes, green. Floral bracts are lanceolate (2 cm long), papyraceous, nerved and carinate, apiculate, partially imbricate, shorter than the sepals. Flowers sub-sessile, 6.5 cm long. Corolla lilac. Stigma and stamens exerted (Fig. 2). The fruit is capsular, 4 cm long. The species grows in rainforest habitats and blooms from February to June.

All Cuban *T. deppeana* herbaria specimens have been collected from Pico Potrerillo (863 m altitude) and the Pico San Juan region (1140 m altitude), the highest mountains of Guamuhaya, the mountainous massif of Central Cuba (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, recent expeditions looking for populations of the species in Guamuhaya carried out by the authors from 2006 through 2014, recorded its present day occurrence only in the Pico San Juan region growing on trees and limestone of the cliffs.

The population growing in the crests of Pico Potrerillo could have been extirpated when hurricane Dennis devastated the forests in 2005. In the Pico San Juan region, the species has a small population at Pico Mandulo (989 m a.s.l.), SW of Pico San Juan. In this population, no more than 20 individuals, all juveniles, occupy just 50 m², growing on limestone.

The species also has an epiphytic population, with mature plants, on the northern crest of Pico San Juan (1113 m a.s.l.; Fig. 4). Here, fewer than 10 individuals are found, growing on *Cinnamomum montanum* (Sw.) J. Presl. (Lauraceae) trees.

Due to its local distribution in the highest mountains of Central Cuba, reduced to a small surface and its scarcity (total less
than 50 individuals) and fragmented populations it is considered a critically endangered species in Cuba (CR [C2a(i);D]; IUCN 2010). The known population status of the species is a reason to consider Tillandsia deppeana as a conservation target in the flora conservation program in the operative management plan of the Ecological Reserve Pico San Juan. In order to protect the species a monitoring protocol to update current population structure, as well as the study of the related fauna and flora, and environmental educational activities involving local communities are some of the tasks are now being carried out in the area.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the Rufford Small Grant Foundation for providing funds for studying the species under the framework of the projects “The vascular epiphytes of Guamuhaya Mountainous Massif, Central Cuba: management strategies for its conservation in natural and agro-ecosystems” and “Implementing conservation action plan for vascular epiphytes of Guamuhaya range, Central Cuba: current local knowledge diagnosis and environmental education”. A special thanks to: the staff of National Park Topes de Collantes and the Ecological Reserve Pico San Juan for lodging support and guidance. We are also very grateful to reviewers of the manuscript: Pam Koide-Hyatt and Alan Herndon, for suggestions to improve the paper.
Literature cited


