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# Notes on two species of *Arisarum* in south-west Spain

BETTY MOLESWORTH ALLEN\*

The Mouse Plant, *Arisarum proboscideum* (L.) Savi (*Araceae*), which is commonly cultivated in England, is thought to be native solely to Italy. It also occurs, however, as an indigenous plant in the Cadiz Province of Andalusia, but this fact does not seem to be known, or rather it has been overlooked, for it was recorded, as early as 1762, by José Quer in his 'Flora Española' 3: 87, where it is said to have been found 'en la Andalucía, en el termino de Ayamonte, Calañas, y en Teva [Teba]: assimissimo en Galicia, en el territorio de Pontevedra, y en otras partes de España.' Quer also records that it is popularly named 'Mata-Candiles' in Andalusia. Colmerio (*Enumeración y Revisión de las Plantas de la Peninsula Hispano-Lusitana* 5: 192 (1889)) questions the identification of the Spanish material of *Arisarum proboscideum*, citing, nonetheless, Quer's original records, together with others made later in the 18th century and early in the succeeding century by Juan de Dios Ayuda, Antonio Palau, Luis Née and José Lopez Alonso, from Ferrol, Baños de Graena in Guadix, Algeciras and Campo de Gibraltar. Surprisingly, all these records are ignored in Willkomm & Lange's authoritative 'Prodromus Florae Hispanicae' (1861-1880) and in its Supplement (1893). In consequence, *Arisarum proboscideum* disappeared for almost a century from the Flora of Spain. Nor does the plant seem to have been encountered again over the intervening years.

It now appears that at least some of the records were correct, for *Arisarum proboscideum* is common in certain localities in the hills behind Algeciras and Los Barrios.

The plants grow mainly between 100 and 350 metres in altitude, in wet and deeply shaded places where the two species of oak (*Quercus suber* and *Q. faginea*) grow together, and under alder groves (*Alnus glutinosa*) which grow alongside rivers and streams. There is no doubt that it is native here.

The leaves are similar in general appearance to those of the common Friar's Cowl, *A. vulgare* Targ.-Tozz., and this, together with the later flowering time, which coincides with the very wet weather, may explain why *A. proboscideum* has remained undetected in Spain for so long. Even when in flower the long and distinctive spathe tends to be concealed amongst fallen leaves on the forest floor and only when my husband picked a flower did we realise that it was indeed distinct. The leaves do have more pointed lobes than *A. vulgare*, each with a deep central vein, and the petioles are never flecked with red. Thus it is possible to identify the species without flowers. There are two colour forms which seem to bear no relation to habitat. One is the normal reddish colour; the other has a greenish spathe lined with reddish dots.

It appears that the two species do not mix; I have never found them growing together, yet each species grows in abundance in its own area.

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\* Los Barrios, Algeciras, Spain.

*A. vulgare* is, of course, far more widespread and tolerates almost any situation here, except deep shade, whereas *A. proboscideum* requires both shade and moisture, probably during its resting season as well as when it is growing. So it is found under tall trees on steep hillsides in narrow valleys, in the shelter of rocky outcrops where nearby streams or a river give the required moisture or, more commonly, on flat riverine edges inundated during flooding. I have never found it in the open dry corkwoods. Typically *A. vulgare* ceases where the shade becomes dense, then *A. proboscideum* is encountered, commonly for a band of about 50 to 60 metres, or until the denser woods give way to the shorter and dryer covering of heathers, gorse and *Cistaceae*. No more is found and the former species takes over, continuing throughout the open hills and mountain ridges.

*Arisarum proboscideum* flowers during late January and February, continuing into March if the previous months have been dry; the leaves die back in July and August in the plants which are away from streamsides. *A. vulgare*, on the other hand, commences flowering in November and is practically finished by February, and the leaves are usually withered by June.

I do not know the full distributional range in Spain, nor whether this species of *Arisarum* still occurs beyond this province, but it is certainly common in most of the relatively undisturbed wooded valleys in this southwest corner, where some humidity is retained during the long dry summers. The absence of this small plant in France shows an interesting discontinuous distribution.

My husband Geoffrey Allen first found *A. proboscideum* here in 1967 and subsequent collections have been distributed to the herbaria of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the British Museum (Natural History), University of Sevilla, Botanic Gardens, Madrid and the University of Leicester.