Identification of Invasive Alien Species using DNA barcodes

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General introduction to this factsheet

The Barcoding Facility for Organisms and Tissues of Policy Concern (BopCo) provides an expertise forum to facilitate the identification of biological samples of policy concern in Belgium and Europe. BopCo is funded by the Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo), and it represented part of the Belgian federal contribution to the European Research Infrastructure Consortium LifeWatch (November 2015 – February 2022).

Non-native species which are being introduced into Europe, whether by accident or deliberately, can be of policy concern since some of them can reproduce and disperse rapidly in a new territory, establish viable populations and even outcompete native species. As a consequence of their presence, natural and managed ecosystems can be disrupted, crops and livestock affected, and vector-borne diseases or parasites might be introduced, impacting human health and socio-economic activities. Non-native species causing such adverse effects are called Invasive Alien Species (IAS). In order to protect native biodiversity and ecosystems, and to mitigate the potential impact on human health and socio-economic activities, the issue of IAS is tackled in Europe by EU Regulation 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and Council. The IAS Regulation provides for a set of measures to be taken across all member states. The list of *Invasive Alien Species of Union Concern* is regularly updated. However, to implement the proposed actions, methods for accurate species identification are required when suspicious biological material is encountered.

Because morphology-based species identifications are not always possible (e.g. cryptic species, trace material, early life-stages), the purpose of the present work is to investigate and evaluate the usefulness of DNA sequence data to identify each of the IAS included in the EU Regulation. The results are presented as factsheets (one per IAS) compiled using publicly available DNA sequence data and information aggregated from various sources. Each factsheet consists of two major parts: (i) a short introduction to the specific IAS, with information on its taxonomy and current occurrence/distribution in Europe, (ii) an investigation with respect to the usefulness of publicly available DNA sequences to identify this IAS using DNA barcoding to the taxonomic level stated in the EU list. For further information about the reasoning behind the applied approach and details on the materials and methods utilised, please see below and Smitz *et al.* [1].

More info about BopCo on https://bopco.be or contact us via bopco@naturalsciences.be.
More info on the EU Regulation on http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/invasivealien/index_en.htm.

Baccharis halimifolia

L., 1753

Common names:
English: eastern baccharis, groundsel baccharis, groundsel bush, seepwillow, silverling, sea myrtle, manglier, consumption weed, saltbush
French: baccharide à feuilles d'halime, séneçon en arbre
German: gewöhnlicher Kreuzstrauch
Dutch: struikaster, kruisstruik

Last update: August 2018

General information on *Baccharis halimifolia*

Classification

Kingdom	Phylum	Clade	Order	Family	Genus
Plantae	Magnoliophyta	Eudicots	Asterales	Asteraceae	*Baccharis*

Species in the same genus: N = 354-400 [2–4]
Note: *Baccharis halimifolia* and some 28 species, depending on the author, are placed in the subgenus *Baccharis*.

Infra-species level: N = 0
Note: To our knowledge, no subspecies or varieties have been described.

Native range: [5–7]
North America (Canada and United States of America) to Central America (Caribbean and Mexico).

Invasive range: [7, 8]
Europe (geographical):
Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom.

For more detailed locality information and the most recent distribution updates, please visit:
www.gbif.org/species/3129663
https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/BACHA/distribution
https://easin.jrc.ec.europa.eu/spexplorer/species/factsheet/R01830

Outside Europe (geographical):
Australia, Georgia, New Zealand.

Morphology, biology, invasion, negative effects and remedies
For more information on *Baccharis halimifolia* please see the references and online information listed at the end of this document.

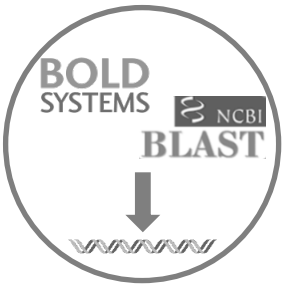
Species identification based on DNA barcodes

Introduction

DNA barcoding is a species identification method that uses a short genetic sequence (DNA barcode) to compare an unknown sample to a database of reference sequences with known species affiliations. The underlying rationale is that the divergence of nucleotide sequences among different species is larger than the nucleotide divergence between sequences within a species. DNA barcoding can facilitate the identification of IAS samples, especially when morphological characteristics are absent or useless. However, to assure correct species identifications, reference libraries need to include a sufficiently large number of sequences of (i) the IAS under investigation to assess the intraspecific genetic divergence, (ii) the closely related species to evaluate the interspecific genetic divergence, and (iii) the different geographical areas covering the distribution range (native and invasive) of the IAS to detect potential population structure or local hybrids.

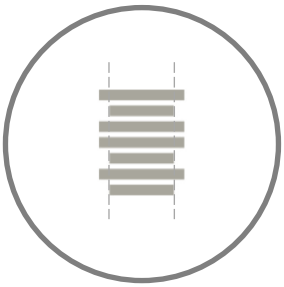
In this context, BopCo evaluated the inclusion of the IAS and their close relatives in both publicly available reference libraries BOLD (www.boldsystems.org/) and GenBank (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nuccore/) to estimate the reliability with which a species identification can be obtained using DNA barcoding.

Material and Methods [1]

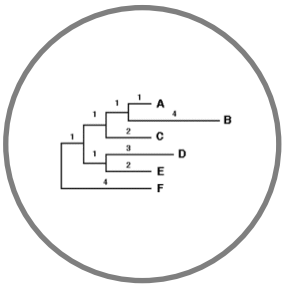


Download all sequence data available for the genus

Filtering the data and selecting 'promising' markers



Aligning and trimming of the sequences



Building Neighbour-Joining tree with Bootstrap support

Conclusion:

Based on the present evaluation of the available sequence data, no DNA marker can be used to identify *Baccharis halimifolia*. However, a 2014 study indicates that (a combination of) markers ETS, ITS, psbA-trnH and trnL seem promising to further investigate once the sequence data becomes available.

Discussion

DNA markers for which *Baccharis* sequences were available, were downloaded from GenBank and BOLD for all represented species of the genus *Baccharis.* Three DNA markers were evaluated (Table 1). The *Baccharis* congeners are poorly represented online (Table 2); of the over 350 accepted species only 14 have sequence data available in the repositories.

None of the DNA markers evaluated (**matK, rbcL** and **ITS2**) recovered *B. halimifolia* as a supported cluster. The markers show little genetic variation for genus *Baccharis* and are ineffective in differentiating *B. halimifolia* from the other species. In the current state of the online reference libraries it is not advisable to apply these markers for species identification.

For the **psbA-trnH** intergenic spacer very few sequences are available. For the **trnL** gene with **trnL-trnF** intergenic spacer little genetic variation is shown among the different species, which often have only one sequence available. Therefore it is currently impossible to assess the ability of these markers to identify *B. halimifolia*.

In 2014, Heiden [9] published a phylogenetic hypothesis for the classification of subgenus lineages within *Baccharis* by including 248 species and concatenating the sequences of four DNA markers (**ETS**, **ITS**, **trnH-psbA**, **trnL-trnF**). The results indicate that a combination of the four markers looks promising for differentiation among taxa, at least at the subgenus level. This dataset would add immensely to the number of species represented, but is not publicly available yet. Consequently the DNA markers could not be evaluated here and it is impossible to assess the ability of these DNA markers, individually or in combination, to identify *B. halimifolia*.

Table 1: Overview of the encountered issues concerning the DNA-based identification of the IAS [1]: (1) Insufficient publicly available DNA sequences of the IAS to capture the intra-species divergence; (2) Poor geographical coverage of the IAS sequences (native or invasive range missing); (3) The IAS sequences do not form supported clusters; (4) Potential misidentification of a specimen which influences the clustering of the IAS sequences; and (5) Not all congeneric species are represented in the final NJ-tree. An 'X' indicates that the issue was encountered, a '1' indicates only one *B. halimifolia* sequence was available.

Markers analysed	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
rbcL		X	X		X
matK	X	X	X		X
ITS2	X	X	1		X

Table 2: Publicly available sequences downloaded (July 2018) from BOLD and GenBank (including sequences extracted from plastid genomes) which were withheld as reliable and informative in the final alignment that was used for building the NJ-trees. The species names follow [4]. An 'X' indicates that at least one sequence was used in the final alignment.

Species in genus	**rbcL**	**matK**	**ITS2**
Baccharis angustifolia	X	X	
Baccharis boliviensis			X
Baccharis brachyphylla	X	X	X
Baccharis dracunculifolia			X
Baccharis genistelloides	X	X	X
Baccharis glomeruliflora	X	X	
Baccharis halimifolia	**X**	**X**	**X**
Baccharis inamoena	X	X	X
Baccharis neglecta	X	X	X
Baccharis pedunculata	X	X	X
Baccharis pilularis	X	X	X
Baccharis salicina	X	X	X
Baccharis sarothroides	X	X	X
Baccharis sergiloides	X		X
Baccharis tricuneata	X	X	X
Baccharis vanessae	X	X	X
TOTAL species	**14 /354-400**	**13 /354-400**	**14 /354-400**

For a more elaborate discussion of the available databases, the sequence selection process, the outcome of the NJ-tree analyses, the usefulness of the investigated DNA sequences for species identification, as well as information on how to send samples for analyses please contact BopCo directly.

References and online information

Online information

http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=1&taxon_id=103317
http://www.q-bank.eu/Plants/Factsheets/Baccharis_halimifolia_EN.pdf
https://plants.usda.gov/factsheet/pdf/fs_baha.pdf
http://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/8164

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Page 2 (middle): Groundsel Bush By Paul Cooper [CC BY-NC 2.0]
Page 2 (right): *Baccharis_halimifolia*_1120477 By James H. Miller & Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, Bugwood.org [CC BY 3.0]

References

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