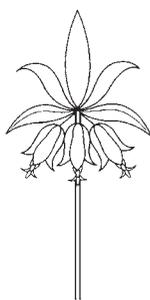


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Polifolia revisited and explained

E. Charles Nelson and P. H. Oswald

Abstract

The derivation of the Latin word *Polifolia*, familiar within *Andromeda polifolia* L. (Ericaceae; bog-rosemary), is discussed. It was first published in Bauhin's *Historia Plantarum Universalis* (1650) and subsequently was adopted by Buxbaum (1727) as the (pre-Linnaean) generic name for bog-rosemary, and by Linnaeus (1753) as its specific epithet within *Andromeda*. Bauhin spelled the word as *Polifolia*, with *-ii-*, because he had derived the name from *Polium* and *folia*. It is argued that Bauhin was alluding to the foliage of mountain germander, *Teucrium montanum* L., native in the Swiss Alps, and not, as generally suggested, to the leaves of *T. polium* L., native in the Mediterranean periphery.

Introduction

The Latin word *Polifolia* is most familiar to us as the specific epithet within the botanical name for bog-rosemary, *Andromeda polifolia* L. (Ericaceae). It was used as a noun and hence was capitalized by Linnaeus (1753) and other early botanists. It also occurs within Ericaceae, but less familiarly, in *Kalmia* and was formerly included in two now invalid names (*Menziesia polifolia* Juss., *Daboecia polifolia* (Juss.) D. Don) for *Daboecia cantabrica* (Huds.) K. Koch, St Dabeoc's heath. As a specific epithet, in all genders, it has been employed, since *Species Plantarum* (Linnaeus 1753), in combination with no fewer than 37 generic names (see Table 1).

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There is no evidence that the different botanists who originally used this epithet applied it for *identical* reasons within these genera. It is possible that some of the epithets were coined from different roots, with different meanings intended. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the history and derivation of the epithet in its original, Linnaean application in *Andromeda polifolia*.

An extended discussion of the epithet *polifolia*, written by Major-General P. G. Turpin, late President of The Heather Society, with the encouragement of David McClintock and the "blessing" of Prof. William Stearn, an acknowledged authority on botanical nomenclature, was published in 1982, but it is noteworthy that Stearn (1996) did not adopt Turpin's (1982) conclusion, which was:

A study of the leaves of the three species of *Andromeda*, *Daboecia* and *Kalmia*, all of which have a glabrous upper surface, in comparison with the crenate, grey hairy leaves of *Teucrium polium*, convinces me that "smooth-leaved," from the Latin *polio*, to polish, and *folium*, a leaf, is the correct meaning of "*polifolia*."

In this paper, we shall show that this explanation is erroneous.

Interpretations of *Polifolia*

Various people have attempted to explain the meaning of the word, and glossaries give various explanations (see e.g., Turpin 1982; Mackay 2001).

Polifolia is a compound word. The second element, *folia*, does not present any problem or any disagreement, being simply the feminine form of the Latin word for leaved. The first element is the source of the difficulties. Yet, there really is little difficulty when the original source of the name is consulted, something we are obliged to conclude no one has ever done. The various interpretations of this first element are as follows.

Polion — Πόλιον is an ancient Greek name (rendered in Latin as *Polium*) for a plant, most probably a species of *Teucrium* (Lamiaceae). Thus *Polifolia* is interpreted as meaning possessing “*Teucrium*-like foliage” (e.g., Chittenden and Syngé 1956) or, more precisely, leaves like those of *Teucrium polium* L. (e.g., Gilbert-Carter 1964). In such instances, usually no further interpretation is given.

polios — Greek, πολίος, meaning grey or hoary, and thus *Polifolia* is interpreted as “grey-leaved

like *Teucrium polium*” (e.g., Stearn 1996; Boerner 1989).

polio — Latin verb, meaning I polish, and thus *Polifolia* is said to mean “with polished leaves”—with foliage that is shiny or glossy. This was suggested by Alcock (1876) and repeated by Turpin (1982), but is not generally accepted. If the name was derived from *polio*, the past participle passive *politus*, *-a*, *-um* should have been used, giving *Politifolia*.

poly- — Greek prefix, from πολύς, meaning many, giving the interpretation many-leaved, but this is generally rejected as incorrect (see Turpin 1982). Greek-Latin compounds, while frowned upon, are not rare among botanical names. The more correct compound, derived entirely from Greek and meaning “with many leaves,” transliterated into the Roman alphabet, is *polyphyllus*, *-a*, *-um*. The Latin equivalent is *multifolius*, *-a*, *-um*. It should be noted that, when Jussieu (1802) published the binomial *Menziesia polifolia* (a

Table 1. Listing of binomials containing the epithet *polifolius*, *-a*, *-um*; extracted from the International Plant Names Index (www.ipni.org, accessed 7 June 2002).

<i>Acacia polifolia</i> L. Pedley (Fabaceae: Mimosoideae)	<i>Kalmia polifolia</i> Wangenheim (Ericaceae)
<i>Andromeda polifolia</i> L. (Ericaceae)	<i>Leucadendron polifolium</i> Burm. f. (Proteaceae)
<i>Arctostaphylos polifolia</i> Kunth (Ericaceae)	<i>Leysera polifolia</i> Thunberg (Asteraceae)
<i>Aster polifolius</i> L. (Asteraceae)	<i>Menziesia polifolia</i> Jussieu (Ericaceae)
<i>Bacharis polifolia</i> Griseb. (Asteraceae)	<i>Phyllica polifolia</i> (Vahl) Pillans (Rhamnaceae)
<i>Calceolaria polifolia</i> Hooker (Scrophulariaceae)	<i>Plecostachys polifolia</i> (Thunberg) O. M. Hilliard & B. L. Burt (Asteraceae)
<i>Cistus polifolius</i> L. (Cistaceae)	<i>Polygala polifolia</i> Presl (Polygalaceae)
<i>Cluytia polifolia</i> Jacquin (Euphorbiaceae)	<i>Pomaderris polifolia</i> Reissek (Rhamnaceae)
<i>Comarostaphylis polifolia</i> Zucc. ex Klotzsch (Ericaceae)	<i>Printzia polifolia</i> (L.) Hutchinson (Asteraceae)
<i>Daboecia polifolia</i> (Jussieu) D. Don (Ericaceae)	<i>Pultenaea polifolia</i> A. Cunningham (Fabaceae: Faboideae)
<i>Desmia polifolia</i> Salisbury ex D. Don (Ericaceae)	<i>Racosperma polifolium</i> (L. Pedley) L. Pedley (Fabaceae: Mimosoideae)
<i>Erica polifolia</i> Salisbury ex Bentham (Ericaceae)	<i>Rhamnus polifolia</i> Vahl (Rhamnaceae)
<i>Ericodes polifolium</i> Kuntze (Ericaceae)	<i>Rhododendron polifolium</i> Franchet (Ericaceae)
<i>Eriogonum polifolium</i> Bentham (Polygonaceae)	<i>Senecio polifolius</i> L. (Asteraceae)
<i>Escallonia polifolia</i> Hooker (Escalloniaceae)	<i>Solidago polifolia</i> Loudon (Asteraceae)
<i>Fagelia polifolia</i> Kuntze (Fabaceae)	<i>Uva-ursi polifolia</i> A. Heller (Ericaceae)
<i>Fumana polifolia</i> Rafinesque (Cistaceae)	<i>Veronica polifolia</i> Bentham (Scrophulariaceae)
<i>Gnaphalium polifolium</i> Thunb. (Asteraceae)	
<i>Heteromeris polifolia</i> Spach (Cistaceae)	
<i>Helianthemum polifolium</i> Miller (Cistaceae)	

synonym for *Daboecia cantabrica*), the specific epithet was printed *polyfolia*, suggesting that he intended a name signifying “with many leaves.” However, despite Turpin’s (1982) incorrect assertion that Jussieu was “silent when he gave the name to St Dabeoc’s heath,” Jussieu clearly glossed the name in French “à feuilles de polium” (Jussieu 1802; Nelson and Small 2000, p. 145).

Linnaeus’ *Species Plantarum*

Turpin (1982) stated that the botanists “who first used this epithet in naming these [*sic*] species gave no reason for using it or any explanation of what they meant by it,” and also noted that when Linnaeus (1753) named *Andromeda polyfolia* he “gave no indication” of the meaning of the epithet (Turpin 1982). Neither of those assertions is justified.

In *Species Plantarum*, Linnaeus (1753, p. 393) did not explicitly give a meaning for *Polifolia* because he provided references to previous authors and their publications, as follows below (in facsimile and transcribed):

5. ANDROMEDA pedunculis aggregatis, corollis ova- *Polifolia*.
tis, foliis alternis lanceolatis revolutis.
Andromeda foliis alternis lanceolatis margine reflexis.
Fl. lapp. 163. *t.* 1. *f.* 3. *Fl. suec.* 335. *Hort. cliff.*
163. *Roy. lugdb.* 440. *Hall. helv.* 416.
Polifolia, *Buxb. act.* 2. *p.* 345. *cent.* 5. *p.* 28. *t.* 49. *f.* 1.
Erica humilis, rosmarini foliis, unedonis flore, capsula
cistocide. *Pluk. alm.* 136. *t.* 175. *f.* 3.
Habitat in Europæ frigidioris paludibus turfosis. h

5. ANDROMEDA pedunculis aggregatis, corollis ova- *Polifolia*.
tis, foliis alternis lanceolatis revolutis.

Andromeda foliis alternis lanceolatis margine reflexis.

Fl. lapp. 163. *t.* 1. *f.* 3. *Fl. suec.* 335. *Hort. cliff.*

163. *Roy. lugdb.* 440. *Hall. helv.* 416.

Polifolia, *Buxb. act.* 2. *p.* 345. *cent.* 5. *p.* 28. *t.* 49. *f.* 1.

Erica humilis, rosmarini foliis, unedonis flore, capsula

cistocide. *Pluk. alm.* 136. *t.* 175. *f.* 3.

Habitat in Europæ frigidioris paludibus turfosis. h [symbol meaning woody]

Pre-Linnaean authors: Buxbaum and Bauhin

Linnaeus’ citations (see below) clearly indicate that he did not coin the epithet *Polifolia* himself, but obtained it from works by Johann Christian Buxbaum (1693–1730). For the purposes of this discussion, none of the other sources is relevant. Interpretation of Linnaeus’ bibliographic contractions is greatly aided by reference to Heller (1959), who indicated that “*Buxb. act.* 2. *p.* 345. *cent.* 5. *p.* 28. *t.* 49. *f.* 1.” signals two sources:

“*Buxb. act.* 2. *p.* 345” refers to Buxbaum’s paper entitled “Nova plantarum genera,” published in 1727 in volume 2 of *Academia Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitana. Commentarii*, page 345 (see Heller 1959, p. 51). [*Academia Scientiarum Imperialis Petropolitana. Commentarii* is a rare periodical, but there is a copy in the General Library, The Natural History Museum, London, which was the one that ECN consulted.]

“*Buxb. ... cent.* 5. *p.* 28. *t.* 49. *f.* 1” refers to the fifth “century” (i.e., part), issued in 1740, of Buxbaum’s own publication entitled *Plantarum Minus Cognitarum*, page 28, plate 49, figure 1 (Heller 1959, p. 17). [ECN consulted the copy in The Linnean Society, London.]

The second of these references (Buxbaum 1740) is not enlightening about the etymology of *Poliifolia*, but it should be noted that despite what later authors (e.g., Linnaeus 1753; Endlicher 1839, p. 755) state, Buxbaum was consistent in both his publications, always using *-ii-* preceding *-folia*. The earlier reference (Buxbaum 1727), however, is significant for the etymology of this word.

Buxbaum (1727, p. 345) described and commented upon a plant that he named *Poliifolia* (the modern name being *Andromeda polifolia*). The following are the significant points: Buxbaum did not spell the name as *Polifolia* but as *Poliifolia*, with *-ii-* preceding *-folia*; like Linnaeus, he did not explain the meaning of *Poliifolia*; and, again like Linnaeus, Buxbaum carefully credited the name to another author:

Mutuati sumus Poliifoliae nomen ex I. Bauhino, a quo haec planta vocatur *Viti Ideae affinis Poliifolia montana*.

We have borrowed the name of *Poliifolia* from J. Bauhin, by whom this plant is called *Viti Ideae affinis Poliifolia montana*.

The Latin polynomial may be translated as “Mountain *Poliifolia* related to the Vine of Mount Ida.” *Vitis Idaea* (sometimes spelled *Idea*) is an ancient name used by pre-Linnaean botanists for members of the genus *Vaccinium*. It was adopted by Linnaeus for cowberry (*V. vitis-idaea* L.) but perhaps originally applied to bilberry, now called *V. myrtillus* L.

For good measure, Buxbaum also referred to another synonym:

A Raio in Synops. dicitur *Ledum palustre nostras flore Arbuti* ...

It is called by Ray in his *Synopsis Ledum palustre nostras flore Arbuti* ...

This last polynomial, which may be translated literally as “Our native Marsh *Ledum* with the flower of strawberry-tree,” attributed to the renowned English botanist, the Revd John Ray (1627–1705), provided the next, crucial link. The third edition of Ray’s *Synopsis Methodica*

Stirpium Britannicarum, which was edited by Jacob Dillenius (1684–1747), was most probably the one that Buxbaum used, and it contains another list of synonyms, four in all, under *Ledum palustre nostras Arbuti flore* (Ray 1724, p. 472), including:

Viti Idææ affinis polifolia montana J. B. T. I. L. 5. C. 10.

Deciphering the series of letters and numbers leads to Jean Bauhin’s (1541–1613) posthumously issued *Historia Plantarum*, volume 1 (= *T. I.*, i.e., *tomus* 1), book 5 (= *L. 5*, i.e., *liber* 5), chapter 10 (= *C. 10*, i.e., *caput* X), published in 1650. On page 525 (the actual number printed is 227, but that is certainly a printer’s error), there is a detailed description of the plant named *Viti Idææ Affinis Poliifolia montana*:

Ortu & facie est Polii nostratis, virgultis crebris, dodrante longioribus, lignosis, ex nigro rubentibus, magna ramorum sobole foecundis. Folia Polii nostratis, acutiora, neruosa, vncialia, angusta, superius viridantia, pronâ parte cinerea vel glauca, neruo elatiore per longum curr[e]n]te. Extremis ramulorum petiolis calyculi haerent perexigui, foliosi, rubentes, unde angulosa pyramis exilit Conchylata, baccae alicuius rudimentum promittens. Pro radicibus passim ex ramis nascuntur capilli instar tenues fibrae terram morsu comprehendentes. ...

Hanc plantam reperimus uliginosis, muscosis, & frigidis locis cum alijs Vitis Idææ speciebus, ...

Mountain *Poliifolia* related to the Vine of Mount Ida

It has the growth and general appearance of our native *Polium*, with numerous stems, more than nine inches long, woody, turning reddish from black, abounding in a great sprouting of branches. The leaves of our native *Polium* are somewhat acute, veined, an inch long, narrow, green on the upper side, grey or glaucous on the under part, with a longer vein running along their length. At the ends of the twigs are attached tiny whorls of bracts which are leafy and reddish, from which springs an angled purple pyramid, sending forth the rudiment of some sort of berry. For roots there grow everywhere from the branches hairs like slender fibres anchored to the ground.

We find this plant in marshy, mossy, cold places with other species of *Vaccinium*, ...

Bauhin (1650) did not give any synonyms, so he should be regarded as the person who devised the compound *Poliifolia*, and indeed the description makes clear that the plant he was describing and naming had foliage similar to that of a plant that he knew as *Polium*—he used the phrase “Polii nostratis” (of our native *Polium*) twice. He made this most explicit by spelling the name *Poliifolia* (in the index it is printed as “polij-folia”), with *-ii-* preceding *-folia*.

Bauhin (1650) and Buxbaum (1727), but not Linnaeus (1753), spelled the epithet *Poliifolia*. Why? Bauhin was making a compound from the plant (generic) name *Polium*, the stem of which ends in the vowel *i* (*poli-*). In botanical Latin, to quote Stearn (1992, p. 279), when the stem ends in *i*, “as in *Artemisia* and *Nerium*, this is ... retained together with the connecting vowel *-i-*, as in *artemisiifolius* and *neriifolius*.” Had Bauhin derived the name from the verb *polio*, he would perhaps have used *Polifolia*, although, as noted above, *Politifolia* would have been better Latin.

Several other matters seem certain. Bauhin was not creating a Greek-Latin hybrid derived from *πολύς* (*polys* = many), and, equally surely, he did not have the Greek word *πολιός*, meaning grey or hoary, in mind. That he employed the plant name *Polium* for the compound signals only that he regarded this particular plant as having a similar leaf to “our native *Polium*.” It does not matter, in this instance, what the derivation of *Polium* itself is. There is the nub of the problem of interpreting the allusion. What did Bauhin call *Polium*?

Which *Polium*/*Teucrium*?

Returning to Linnaeus’ *Species Plantarum*, it is soon evident that the (pre-Linnaean) genus *Polium* was not composed of a single species for which the only modern botanical name is *Teucrium polium*. It is remarkable that this

fact has not been considered by those who previously have attempted to interpret the name *Polifolia*. Linnaeus’ synonymy under *Teucrium* is enlightening. It is easiest to understand when it is tabulated: Linnaeus’ names are in italics; the names he cited from Caspar (Jean’s younger brother; 1560–1624) Bauhin’s *Pinax* (1623) are given underneath.

<i>Teucrium montanum</i>	<i>Polium</i> , <i>lavendulae folio</i>
<i>Teucrium supinum</i>	<i>Polium montanum repens</i>
<i>Teucrium polium</i>	<i>Polium montanum luteum</i>
β	<i>Polium montanum album</i>
γ	<i>Polium montanum supinum alterum</i>
δ	<i>Polium maritimum supinum venetum</i>

Teucrium polium is a very variable species, as indicated by the several synonyms and by Linnaeus’ use of Greek letters to denote varieties. Indeed, in evident frustration, Linnaeus (1753, 2:566) added the following remark underneath the entry for *Teucrium polium*: “*Species Polii, a varietatibus distinctas, hodie confusas, inquirant solidi Botanici, in solo natali.* [As for the species of *Polium* (as distinct from their varieties), which are nowadays confused, let serious botanists investigate them on their own ground.]”

Which species or variant of the pre-Linnaean genus *Polium* was Bauhin (1650) alluding to when he coined for *Andromeda polifolia* the polynomial *Viti Idææ Affinis Poliifolia montana*? He provided this description—“The leaves of our native *Polium* are somewhat acute, veined, an inch long, narrow, green on the upper side, grey or glaucous on the under part, with a longer vein running along their length.” That description matches *Teucrium montanum* L., mountain germander, and its foliage is indeed similar to that of *Andromeda polifolia* (compare, for example, illustrations in Blamey and Grey-Wilson 1989).

In support of this proposition, it is noteworthy that Jean Bauhin (like his brother) was Swiss by birth and must have been familiar with the flora

of the Alps. To repeat, he referred to “*Polium nostras*,” our native *Polium*, surely implying a plant of the Swiss Alps rather than any species of the Mediterranean periphery.

Thus, as noted, the precise derivation of the name *Polium* itself is an irrelevance. Suffice it also to repeat that πόλιον (*polion*) was a name the ancient Greeks used for a plant the identity of which cannot now be determined beyond doubt. As with so many Greek plant names, it was taken into Latin and transliterated as *polium*. Although no longer used as a generic name, it survives, thanks to Linnaeus (1753), as the specific epithet for a single species now classified as a member of the genus that Linnaeus named *Teucrium*. Whether ancient Greek *rhizomatoi* would recognize *Teucrium polium* as πόλιον is something we will never know, although the chances are that they might. The modern Greek name for this botanical panacea, παναγιόχορτο (*panagiochorto* = All-holy Virgin’s herb) (Baumann et al. 1993), is manifestly a new one since pre-Christian times.

Conclusion

Has the mystery of the meaning of *polifolia* been solved? Yes, so we believe—at least in the case of the binomial *Andromeda polifolia*. It means *Polium*-leaved—in the sense of having leaves like those of the plant Bauhin (1650) referred to as “*Polium nostras*,” which we contend is *Teucrium montanum*.

Buxbaum (1727, 1740) explicitly borrowed *Poliifolia* from Bauhin (1650) and employed it as a “generic” name to the plant now called *Andromeda polifolia*. When Linnaeus (1753) retained the same word as a specific epithet within the genus *Andromeda*, he dropped one letter, apparently the connecting vowel *i* that is expected in a Latin compound formed from the stem of *Polium* and *folia*. Whether a deliberate emendation or an uncorrected typographic error, the missing vowel has caused confusion

and led to various spurious explanations of the meaning of Linnaeus’ *polifolius*, *-a*, *-um*.

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