



Scientific Name:

Crepis pusilla

Synonym :

Melitella pusilla

English:

Maltese Dwarf
Hawksbeard

Maltese:

il-melitella

The Maltese Dwarf Hawksbeard is a peculiar species, first described from Malta. It was considered as an endemic species, until discovered in other parts of the Mediterranean. This annual species is generally found in disturbed areas; for example, this includes the margins of countryside footpaths or country lanes, or cemeteries. However, in Malta it is now limited only to a single country lane.

Being a very small and stemless plant, the Maltese Dwarf Hawksbeard may easily go unnoticed in its habitat. Its yellow flowers rise slightly above the ground in clusters of 2-8 or more, and are found at the centre of each plant. Flowering takes place between February and April; and once pollinated by insects or other small animals, each flower produces a single seed that is dispersed by the wind. Unlike the plant, which dries up and dies in unfavourable conditions, the seeds are able to survive the hot summer months.

The Maltese Dwarf Hawksbeard is very important culturally. It is amongst one of the first set of plants to be studied in detail by Stefano Sommier, a florentine botanist who visited Malta in the early 20th century, and named this species '*Melitella*' after Malta. Despite the abundance of its habitat, this species is very rare. The introduction of invasive alien species and the loss of habitat pose a great threat to the survival of this species. The Maltese Dwarf Hawksbeard is not only strictly protected by national and European legislation, but the area where it is found also forms part of the Natura 2000 network.

