

A SURPRISING CONCENTRATION OF ALIEN PLANT SPECIES IN A SINGLE LOCALITY IN ARMENIA

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During planned surveys of the territory of Armenia aimed at studying the distribution of invasive plant species, we encountered an unusual phenomenon in Northern Armenia, near the town of Alaverdi. Seven alien species were found co-occurring within a single habitat: *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Amorpha fruticosa*, *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*, *Nicandra physalodes*, *Phytolacca acinosa* and *Symphytotrichum novi-belgii*. This article aims to identify the vectors responsible for the introduction of these species into Armenia and the study area, as well as to present the results of their risk assessment. Four of these species are invasive in Armenia, one is naturalized, and two are casual. It has to be noticed that risk assessment scores are very high for all these species (from 14 to 24). According to the Australian Weed Risk Assessment (WRA) method, a score exceeding 6 indicates a high risk (suggesting the species is not recommended for cultivation for any purpose and requires close monitoring if found in natural populations). Despite receiving high scores, the last three species have not yet demonstrated invasive traits. In fact, our discovery marks the first time they have been found not in culture but in a semi-natural ecosystem. They require further monitoring in the wild.

Keywords: Armenia, invasive plant species, vectors, risk assessment

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