

Genista canariensis: a Minor Psychedelic

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The recent work of ethnobotanists Richard Evans Schultes (1, 2) and Gordon Wasson (3) in uncovering the use in America of new psychedelic plants encourages one to further investigation of the herb lore of the American Indian.

A shaman of the Yaqui tribe of Northern Mexico was told in a psychedelic-induced vision to smoke the blossoms of a plant which he erroneously identified as Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*, *Genista scoparia*, *Spartium scoparium*).

Following the shaman's method of preparation, samples of these flowers as well as blossoms of two similar plants, Spanish Broom (*Spartium junceum*) and Canary Island Broom (*Genista canariensis*), were collected near Palo Alto, California. All samples were aged for ten days in sealed sterile glass jars. The blossoms of Scotch Broom and Spanish Broom turned dark brown during this period, while Canary Broom blossoms retained much of their characteristic yellow color. The blossoms were dried at low heat and prepared for smoking in hand-rolled cigarettes.

Of the three plants investigated, *Genista canariensis* proved to be the most pleasant and effective. Subsequently, it was learned that *Genista canariensis* was the plant used by the shaman informant.

Effects were dependent on the amount smoked. To maximize effects, subjects were told to inhale and to retain the smoke for about ten seconds to increase the amount of active principle absorbed. When less than a single cigarette was smoked, the subjects reported feeling more relaxed. They felt good about themselves and friendly toward the others in the room. These feelings lasted up to two hours. There was no subsequent letdown. Rather, they reported an imperceptible lessening of the effect until it could no longer be noticed.

When several cigarettes were smoked, the effects were longer lasting and more intense. In addition to the amiable relaxation mentioned at the lower dose, subjects reported increased intellectual clarity and flexibility. The first few hours were characterized by

physical ease followed by a period of psychological arousal and alertness.

A heightened awareness of color and contrast was often reported. Neither visual distortions nor hallucinations were reported. Some people experienced imagery with their eyes closed, and one subject reported extensive hypnogogic imagery before falling asleep. The effects lasted no more than five hours. No subject reported any effects the following day.

Since this initial work was completed, there have been reports of persons experiencing headaches after smoking these blossoms. It is possible that the headaches are a result of smoking improperly prepared blossoms (allowing mold to form, etc.) or it may be a side-effect of the active principles.

The reported effects class this plant among the mildest psychedelics known. The extreme mildness of the effects allowed a second set of experiments with potential economic import. Naïve subjects were given cigarettes or pipefuls of the prepared blossoms. They were told that this was a tobacco substitute used by some American Indians. They were then asked to compare it with what they usually smoked. There were no special instructions given.

Smokers found it to be as mild or milder than some commercial cigarettes and reported that it had a sweet aftertaste, in contrast to the slightly bitter aftertaste of tobacco.

These preliminary results indicate that *Genista canariensis* is a potential substitute or adjunct to tobacco. With the mounting pressure to find less carcinogenic alternatives to tobacco, *Genista canariensis* may be worth more critical chemical, pharmacological and medical investigation.

Acknowledgments

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Literature Cited

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