

The Case of the Curious "*Cannabis*"

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In a recent paper in Economic Botany, Quimby et al. (1973) described a peculiar variant of *Cannabis*, found on a herbarium sheet housed in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois (accession number 1628511). This specimen was identified on the herbarium label as *Cannabis indica* Lam., and Quimby et al. interpreted it as an unusual example of *Cannabis sativa* L., with pinnate leaves. Two photographs of this specimen were included in the paper (figs. 23, 24, p. 127; not fig. 22 as stated in text). The specimen has been cited several times in recent symposia, and I have received a number of inquiries concerning its nature. Dr. John McNeill of this institute and I have determined that the plant in question is in fact a male of *Datisca cannabina* L.

Male plants of *Datisca cannabina* L. are remarkable mimics of *Cannabis sativa* L. (females are less so). As noted by Stearn (1974): "In the *Hortus Cliffortianus*, Linnaeus provided a short diagnosis, *Cannabis foliis digitatis*, to distinguish the true hemp from a then imperfectly known plant diagnosed there as *Cannabis foliis pinnatis*, but named *Datisca cannabina* in the first edition of the *Species Plantarum*." On close examination, a wealth of characters distinguish the two species. Indeed, they are so distant that Cronquist (1968) assigns

the plants to different subclasses of the Dicotyledonae. As interpreted most recently (Siddiqi 1973) the Datisceae is composed of one genus with two species, *Datisca cannabina* L. in S. E. Europe and W. Asia, and *D. glomerata* (Presl) Baill. of W. North America. Both species could be superficially mistaken for *Cannabis*.

I have noted that some specimens of *Hibiscus cannabinus* L. and *Urtica cannabina* L. have also been misidentified as *Cannabis*. Such cases of convergent evolution make it clear that when a markedly unusual variant of a species is encountered, the possibility of its representing a quite unrelated species should be carefully considered.

LITERATURE CITED

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