

Cotula cinerea Del.
Compositae (Asteraceae)



Compiled by Dr. Salima Benhouhou

■ **Morphological description**

A small annual plant, usually between 10-20 cm. high, rarely reaching 40 cm. Whitish, woolly leaves dissected in their upper parts with flat lobes. The flowers are grouped in yellow discoid hemispherical heads 6-10 mm. in diameter. The fruits are small achenes no bigger than 5 mm.

It flowers in early spring in the northern Algerian Sahara, and any time after rain in the central Algerian Sahara.

■ **Geographical distribution**

Local: Very common in the Algerian Sahara.

Regional: North Africa.

Global: It is common throughout the Sahara, including the Red Sea region and Sinai.

■ **Ecology**

A small annual plant that thrives in desert conditions with an average 100 mm. rainfall a year and favours sand-loamy soils. The plant is usually found on non-saline wadi beds, on gravelly-sandy soils.

■ **Status**

According to the IUCN criteria this Saharo-sindian species falls into the "C" category. Although no problems are reported for this species, human collection near settlement may be a threat in the long term. In the wild, the best means of conservation is the remoteness of its sites as well as the seed bank that contains the plant during drought. The best way to conserve this annual is to collect the seeds and sow them in nurseries. So far no data has been reported regarding its propagation and conservation.

Cotula cinerea Del.

Brocchia cinerea (Del) Vis.

Cotula: from the Greek kotule, small cup, referring to the cupped area at the base of the leaves;
cinerea: ash coloured, like ashes

Arabic: gartoufa, robita, chiriya

Targui: takkél

English: Saharan camomile

French: camomille du Sahara

■ **Part used**

The whole plant, dried; the flower heads. These are collected in the spring when in flower, and sold in the market in several places in the south (Djanet, El Golea). The plant is prepared as a decoction, a powder of the entire plant, and mixed with other plants; it is taken internally as a decoction and used externally as a poultice.

■ **Constituents**

Flavonoids.

■ **Pharmacological action and toxicity**

Antibacterial activity. A search on its toxicity appears to be negative.

■ **Pharmacopeias**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Pharmaceutical products**

Not relevant for this species.

■ **Traditional medicine and local knowledge**

It is used for broncho-pulmonary conditions, coughs, digestive problems (including nausea, vomiting and stomach pain), sunstroke and rheumatism. It is applied as a poultice to the forehead for its febrifugal properties.

In the Sahara, it is much appreciated in green tea, and is also mixed with food to enhance the flavour. In the Dra region of Morocco, it is used as a febrifuge, either drunk as a decoction or as a poultice on the forehead and temples.

■ References

Relevant to the plant and its uses

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