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Introduction

Some species of *Rotala* are extremely successful weeds in ricefields and irrigation ditches. In S. India it is quite common to find up to five different species in a single ricefield. The phenomenon of these closely related species growing intermingled and the difficulty of identifying the species were the stimuli for my interest in this genus. The only world-wide revision of *Rotala* was written by A. KOEHNE in a series of works (1880, 1883, 1903, 1907, 1908). By 1908 KOEHNE had recognised 41 species and since then 40 new species have been described (many of them by A. FERNANDES, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1974). Adding some nomenclatural recombinations there are today about 97 “paper” species.

Apart from accounts in Floras the following localized floristic accounts have been published: KOEHNE (1885), GRAHAM (1964) — USA; BLATTER & HALLBERG (1918) — colonial India; LOURTEIG (1954) — Argentina; RAYNAL (1967) — W. and C. Africa; LEEUWEN (1971) — Malesia; MITCHELL (1976) — N. Australia. Very little morphological or anatomical work has been carried out, the most detailed accounts are those of VOS (1974) and PANIGRAHI (1975). One individual in the whole genus has been cytologically examined (*R. ramosior*, $2n = 32$, STRIPLING & ROSS, 1962). I have found no works on the genetics, gametogenesis, population structure, ecology, floral biology or chemistry of *Rotala*.

I have had the opportunity to study and make mass gatherings of 11 different species in the field and have cultivated 10 species in the botanic gardens of the University of Zürich. These studies have given me a limited insight into local population variation, ecology, breeding systems and phenotypic plasticity. On the whole, however, my work has been mostly based on herbarium and literature studies. I have attempted to produce an “alpha” revision of the genus *Rotala* to the level of species on a world-wide basis. I have accepted 44 of the 97 “paper” species. Many species show considerable variation but I feel it is folly to attempt any infraspecific classification on a very widespread group of aquatic and amphibious plants without an experimental approach.