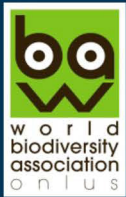


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Zelkova abelicea (Lam.) Boiss., 1879: Greece, Crete, Omalos Viannou (Iraklio)

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***Zelkova abelicea* (Lam.) Boiss., 1879 (Ulmaceae, Rosales).** It is a tree endemic to the mountainous areas (Levka Ori, Mt. Kedros, Mt. Psiloritis, Dikti Mts., Thripti Mts.) of the island of Crete, Greece. According to the IUCN Red List Assessment, *Z. abelicea* is classified as Endangered due to the strong fragmentation and isolation of its subpopulations and the decline of its habitat. The latter is mainly due to the presence and activity of caprine and ovine livestock which roam in the Cretan mountains from spring to autumn, oftentimes surpassing the carrying capacity of the local ecosystems. Frequent and regular (over)browsing keeps *Z. abelicea* individuals under a dwarfed, shrubby and non-reproducing morphology. Nonetheless, a high genetic diversity was found within and between subpopulations and each mountain, and in some cases each mountain side acts as separate genetic units. Mature, fruiting trees occur in strongly variable proportions within subpopulations which are in most cases dominated and sometimes composed entirely of dwarfed, non-reproducing individuals. Fruit sterility is known to be extremely fluctuant within and between subpopulations, with sterility proportions increasing from west to east and reaching 100% in some areas. Seedling survival is extremely low in the wild not only due to overbrowsing but also to drought stress, and vegetative propagation through root suckering is believed to currently be the main reproduction mode of the species. *Z. abelicea* has a strong local patrimonial value, being one of the prominent tree species in the Cretan mountains. Traditionally, it was well sought for its shade and branches were pollarded in summer for leaf fodder. However, its fame comes from the fact that its wood was considered the most suitable to make traditional shepherd sticks, the so-called *katsounes*. This practice is nowadays illegal as the species is protected by Greek law. On-going studies have shown a strong and still under-explored diversity (e.g., acarids, parasitic insects, epiphytic lichens and mosses) associated to both dwarfed non-reproducing individuals and mature *Z. abelicea* trees. A conservation and protection project for *Z. abelicea* was carried out locally between 2014 and 2021 (www.abelitsia.gr).

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