



**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

## The Orchids of Crete (Part 15): European Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*)



So far we introduced **56 Orchid types** of Crete with our leaflet series “**The Orchids of Crete**”; therefore see at [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/NLUK\\_en.htm](http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/NLUK_en.htm) [Navigator rubric **Botanical**]. Here we continue with 1 more species (from the genus *Listera*) with pictures and short descriptions.

The genus *Listera* was placed 1813 by the British botanist Robert Brown (1773-1858) and named after the English physician and naturalist Martin Lister (1638-1712).

The more than 30 known species of this genus are spread across the entire northern hemisphere. The occurrence stretches from North Alaska up to 4000 m altitude in the Central-Asian Mountains. 2 Types are located in Europe: European Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*) und Lesser Twayblade (*Listera cordata*). These very similar, inconspicuous species of this genus differ primarily by the size and proportions of flowers and leaves. The plants are persistently growing rhizome geophytes with numerous, unbranched, horizontally creeping roots. The stems usually have two opposite leaves. The spur loose flowers are campanulate shaped and form a tongue-shaped, dichotomous labium which is twice as long as the perigone leaves. The heyday of European species extends according to altitude from early May to early August.



Above three (3) pictures of the **European Common Twayblade**. The plant (with a growth height between 20 and 50 cm) is marked by two big, oval, opposite leaves, sitting on a short, strong stem (a view centimetres above the ground), which are around 5 to 15 cm long and 3 to 8 cm wide.

In the middle between these arises a terminal, everywhere flexible spike (inflorescence) from numerous (about 20 to 40) small, in all parts green, spur loose flowers. The flower husks are yellow-green. The nec-

tar creation takes place at the labium base from where it flows down, thereby forming a glossy stripe in the middle of the labium. Pollination happens by insects (wasps). Seed-capsules are formed. On Crete, the European Common Twayblade occurs mainly in the West of the island; hear and there also in the South-East.

**Flowering season:** early to end of May. **Habitat:** on Crete in particular at creeks in canyons, at water-bearing gutters, on sour and basic soil between 400 and 1200 m high. **Plant find spot:** Agia Irni (05/17/1991), Pictures: © G. Blaich; fig right: Wikipedia. **Protection and endangerment:** Appendix B of EG-VO 338/97.

The European Common Twayblade is essentially more often in Central-Europe as on Crete; it is also very common in Germany (more than 32.000 references). Within the food network, the European Common Twayblade serves the large yellow underwing moth (Noctuidae) as caterpillar- and fodder plant.

For the sake of completeness we introduce, even if it not occur on Crete, the second in Europe occurring species of *Listera* (**Lesser Twayblade, *Listera cordata***) with pictures and short descriptions.

Plant is very gentle / leaves are heart-shaped, 1 to 3 cm long and wide / stem is very thin (1 mm diameter)/ inflorescence loosely, 4 to 20 flowers / fertilized ovary is ball-shaped / flower husks very small (6 to 7 mm), greenish to reddish-brown / sepals and paired petals are radially spreading / labium on the ground with 2 horn-formed tooth, lateral lobate of labium are acuminate / hight: 5-20 (25) cm / heyday: V / VI – VIII / Moist, mossy, strongly acid soil conifer forests, also in moor, often with Blueberry and Coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*) / montane to subalpine / **very rare !**

Pictures: © G. Blaich(Black Forest, 06/08/2008); fig. right: Fuessen (06/08/1989)



Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

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*Listera ovata*

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