

Leaflet No.

**The Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation
Forest Department**



**Study on the Occurrence of Charophytes Species in Selected Freshwater
Systems of Myanmar**



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February 2025

Contents

List of Tables	ii
List of Figures	ii
Abstract	iii
စာတမ်းအကျဉ်းချုပ်	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Objectives	2
3. Materials and methods	2
3.1 Studied lakes with Chara vegetation	2
3.2 Sample collection	3
3.3 Morphological analysis	4
3.4 Phylogenetic analyses	4
4. Results	5
4.1 Morphological determination	5
4.2 Phylogenetic analyses	6
4.3 Ecological notes	8
5. Discussions	9
6. References	11

List of Tables

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Lakes, including characteristic physico-chemical data and coverage of <i>Chara</i> spp.	3
Table 2. <i>Chara</i> samples, origin, sampling date and NCBI accession numbers	5
Table 3. Comments to the collected <i>Chara</i> specimens from Myanmar.	5

List of Figures

Figure 1. Maximum likelihood tree of the <i>matk</i> gene of <i>Chara</i> spp. Bootstrap values (ML/MP/NJ) above 50 are included.	7
Figure 2. Maximum likelihood tree of the <i>rbcl</i> gene of <i>Chara</i> spp. Bootstrap values (ML/MP/NJ) above 50 are included.	8

Study on the Occurrence of Charophytes Species in Selected Freshwater Systems of Myanmar

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Abstract

Information related to the distribution and species composition of charophytes in Myanmar is scarce. Only a few studies on charophytes in ponds, paddy fields and mashes were conducted in Myanmar at the end of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, in which 12 *Chara* species were recorded. Lake habitats were not included in these studies. Therefore, to increase the knowledge, the distribution of *Chara* species and their ecological requirements were investigated in seven freshwater bodies: two natural lakes and five man-made reservoirs. In a polyphasic approach using morphological traits and DNA barcoding the specimens found were classified as *Chara zeylanica* and *Chara fibrosa*. *Chara zeylanica* is the most common of the two species found in Myanmar and was observed in five water bodies, while *Chara fibrosa* was only found in three areas. *Chara zeylanica* seems to prefer calcareous lakes while *C. fibrosa* was found in both highly and moderate alkaline water bodies. Both species were recorded in low-impacted lakes only, with total phosphorous (TP) concentrations below 20 $\mu\text{g L}^{-1}$. The occurrence of cyanobacteria due to the eutrophication in some water bodies were observed. Increased human impact on freshwater habitats must therefore be considered as a factor reducing *Chara* biodiversity in Myanmar.

Key Words: Charophytes, *Chara zeylanica*, *Chara fibrosa*, lakes, reservoirs, total phosphorous, lake ecology

မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရှိ ရေချိုကန်အချို့အတွင်း Charophytes မျိုးစိတ်များ ပေါက်ရောက်မှု အခြေအနေအား လေ့လာခြင်း

ဒေါက်တာသီတာဆွေ၊ လက်ထောက်သုတေသနအရာရှိ
သစ်တောသုတေသနဌာန

စာတမ်းအကျဉ်း

၁၉ ရာစု အဆုံးနှင့် ၂၀ ရာစု အလယ်ပိုင်းတို့တွင် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရှိ ရေကန်ငယ်များ၊ စပါးကွင်းများ၊ ရေအိုင်များအတွင်း Charophytes မျိုးစိတ်ပေါက်ရောက်မှုနှင့် ပတ်သက်သည့် လေ့လာမှု အနည်းငယ် သာ ပြုလုပ်နိုင်ခဲ့ပြီး အဆိုပါ သုတေသနမှ Chara မျိုးစိတ် (၁၂) ခု ကို မှတ်တမ်း တင်ခဲ့ပါသည်။ သို့သော် အဆိုပါလေ့လာမှုတွင် ရေကန်များ ပါဝင်ခဲ့ခြင်းမရှိခဲ့ပါ။ ထို့ကြောင့် Charophytes မျိုးစိတ် များ ပျံ့နှံ့ပေါက်ရောက်မှုဆိုင်ရာ သတင်းအချက် အလက် များ ပိုမိုရရှိစေရန်အတွက် Charophytes မျိုးစိတ်များ ပေါက်ရောက်မှု အခြေအနေနှင့် ၎င်းတို့၏ဂေဟစနစ်ဆိုင်ရာ သုတေသနလုပ်ငန်းအား မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ သဘာဝရေကန်၊ ဆည်နှင့် ရေလှောင်တံခံအချို့တို့တွင် ရွေးချယ်ဆောင်ရွက်ခဲ့ပါသည်။ Charophytes မျိုးစိတ်များ၏ သွင်ပြင် လက္ခဏာနှင့် မျိုးရိုးဗီဇဆိုင်ရာ အချက်အလက်များအရ ကွင်းဆင်းလေ့လာခဲ့သည့် ရေကန်များအနက် သဘာဝ ရေကန် (၂) ခုနှင့် ရေလှောင်တံခံ (၅)ခုတို့ အတွင်း Chara zeylanica နှင့် Chara fibrosa မျိုးစိတ်(၂) မျိုး ပေါက်ရောက်လျက် ရှိကြောင်း မှတ်တမ်း တင်နိုင်ခဲ့ပါသည်။ Chara fibrosa ကို ရေကန်(၃)ခုတွင် တွင်လည်းကောင်း၊ Chara zeylanica ကို ရေကန် (၅) ခုတွင် လည်းကောင်း ပေါက်ရောက်လျက် ရှိကြောင်း တွေ့ရှိရပြီး Chara zeylanica သည် မျိုးစိတ်(၂)မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ ရေကန်များတွင် အများဆုံး ပေါက်ရောက်နေသော မျိုးစိတ်ဖြစ်သည်ဟု သတ်မှတ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ Chara zeylanica သည် ကယ်လ်စီယမ်ဓာတ်များ သော ရေကန်ကို ကြိုက်နှစ်သက်ပြီး C. fibrosa သည် အသင့်အတင့်ငန်မှ အလွန်ငန်သော ရေကန်မျိုးတွင် ပေါက်ရောက်ကြောင်း လေ့လာတွေ့ရှိရပါသည်။ အဆိုပါ Chara မျိုးစိတ်နှစ်ခု လုံးသည် စုစုပေါင်း ဖော့စဖရပ်(TP) ပမာဏ ၂၀ μg L-1အောက်နည်းသည့် ရေကန်မျိုးတွင် ပေါက်ရောက်ကြောင်း တွေ့ရှိရပါသည်။ သုတေသနပြု လေ့လာခဲ့သည့် ရေကန်များအတွင်း အာဟာရညစ်ညမ်းမှုများခြင်းနှင့် ဆက်စပ်သည့် လူနှင့် ပတ်ဝန်းကျင်ကို ထိခိုက်စေသော စိမ်းပြာရေညှိ မျိုးစိတ်များ ပေါက်ဖွား နေကြောင်း ဆန်းစစ်တွေ့ရှိရပါသည်။ ထို့ကြောင့် လွန်ခဲ့သော နှစ်ပေါင်း ၉၀ ကျော်ခန့်က မှတ်တမ်း တင်ခဲ့သည့် Chara မျိုးစိတ် အရေအတွက်အောက် လျော့နည်းရခြင်းသည် မြန်မာနိုင်ငံရှိ Chara မျိုးစိတ်များ ပေါက်ရောက်ရာ ရေချိုရေကန်များကို ထိခိုက်ပျက်ဆီးစေသည့် လူတို့၏ လုပ်ဆောင်မှု ကြောင့်ဟု ကောက်ချက်ချ ပါသည်။

Study on the Occurrence of Charophytes Species in Selected Freshwater Systems of Myanmar

1. Introduction

Charophytes (Charales, Charophyceae) are macroscopic green algae, included among the submerged macrophyte vegetation in fresh and brackish waters. They have a world-wide distribution and comprise six genera (Wood 1965), of which *Chara* and *Nitella* are the richest species. In total, 678 charophyte species are identified (Guiry and Guiry 2020).

Most *Chara* species utilize bicarbonates (HCO_3) as a carbon source for photosynthesis and are limited to calcareous water bodies. They seem to have higher light demands than the vascular plants (Blindow 1992) and are vulnerable to eutrophication (e.g. Penning *et al.* 2008). Hence, the preferable habitat for the *Chara* species are oligotrophic-slightly mesotrophic calcareous lakes or ponds. Moreover, charophytes can be indicators of water properties such as pH and salinity. They are species sensitive to organic pollution and the presence of calcium.

In the Water Framework Directive (WFD 2000) charophytes are recognized as sensitive species and the occurrence of *Chara* in a lake is considered as indicative of low trophy and high ecological status (e.g. Penning *et al.* 2008). However, due to anthropogenic stressors, e.g. water abstraction and eutrophication, freshwater habitats with charophyte vegetation are decreasing and hence, red listed in Asia as well as in Europe (Allen *et al.* 2012; Janssen *et al.* 2016). Correspondingly, the distribution of many *Chara* taxa is decreasing, and they are considered as threatened in several countries (Blaženčić *et al.* 2006; Henriksen and Hilmo 2015). Several taxonomy studies concerning charophytes have been conducted, with most of the recent studies including molecular analyses (Borges and Necchi 2017).

Charophytes are widespread in the temperate zone, but are also known in several countries in West and South Asia, including India (Groves 1924; Pal *et al.* 1962; Subramanian 2002), Pakistan (Faridi 1955; Langangen and Leghari 2001), Bangladesh (Naz *et al.* 2011; Naz and Diba 2012), Saudi Arabia (Khoja and Hussain 1990; Hussain *et al.* 1996), Iran (Ahmadi *et al.* 2012; Ghaemmaghani *et al.* 2012) and China (Ling *et al.* 2000). From Afghanistan, only old, scattered information is available (Braun and Nordstedt 1882; Vilhelm 1928; Corillion 1957).

Studies of charophytes in Myanmar are very scarce, including the comprehensive study published in 1932 by B.P. Pal: “Burmese Charophyta”. In that study, 24 charophyte species were reported from Myanmar including twelve *Chara*-species. In our study the species are updated to be in accordance with Guiry and Guiry (2020) and the number of species are reduced to nine. In case of changed status, the names given by Pal (1932) are in brackets. *Chara wallichii* A. Braun, *C. corallina* Klein ex Willdenow, *C. nuda* B.S. Pal, *C. hydropithus* Reichenbach, *C. fibrosa* f. *erythrogyna* (Griffith) R.D. Wood. (*C. erythrogyna* (Griffith) R.D. Wood, *C. fibrosa* var. *burmanica* (Pal) van Raam. (*C. burmanica* Pal), *C. fibrosa* Agardh ex

Bruzelius (*C. faccida* A.Br., *C. gymnopitus* A.Br.), *C. grovesii* Pal, *C. handae* Pal, *C. setosa* Klein ex Willdenow (*C. brachypus* A. Br.), *C. zeylandica* Klein ex Willdenow.

The distribution areas included paddy-fields, ponds, drains and marshy areas, and similar habitats, but no lakes were mentioned in the study by Pal (1932). Little attention has been paid to charophyte studies in Myanmar after that study, and no molecular analyses have been conducted on charophytes from Myanmar. As in the rest of the world, freshwater habitats in Myanmar are increasingly impacted by anthropogenic stressors, and today the status of species richness and diversity of *Chara* in Myanmar is therefore highly uncertain.

2. Objectives

The goals of this study are (1) to contribute to the knowledge about *Chara* species distribution in lakes in Myanmar, (2) to identify *Chara* species, using a polyphasic approach including both traditional morphological methods and DNA barcoding, and (3) to indicate some ecological demands for the detected *Chara* species. As far as we know, our study is the first study concerning charophytes in the lakes of Myanmar.

3. Materials and methods

To improve the knowledge on the biological parameters, including charophytes, as a basis for the development of a biological monitoring system in Myanmar, the biological investigations were conducted in 17 water bodies where *Chara* species are recorded in seven of these waterbodies such as Inlay Lake, Meiktila Lakes (north and south), Yezin Dam, Ngalaik Dam, Kyet Mauk Taung, and Wethigan Lake.

3.1 Studied lakes with *Chara* vegetation

Inlay Lake is a shallow lake (average depth around 3–3.5 m) located in Nyaung Shwe township, Taunggyi district, Southern Shan State. It is the second-largest natural lake in Myanmar (lake surface ca. 116 km², however with decreasing open areas) and located 884 m above sea level. It is a clear, very calcareous lake (Table 1) (Ballot *et al.* 2018). Most of the lake area is covered by a luxurious and diverse community of submerged macrophytes. *Chara* is a common taxon in the macrophyte community, especially in the northern part of the lake.

Meiktila Lake is a shallow reservoir, divided into two separate basins, and located close to Meiktila city in the Mandalay region in central Myanmar. The lake basins are located at an altitude of 230 m and cover an area of around 9 km² with a maximum water depth of 10 m. The lake water is moderate alkaline and slightly turbid (Table 1), with the southern basin more turbid than the northern basin. *Chara* vegetation was common in both basins, whilst the northern basin had in addition extensive stands of the floating leaved *Nelumbo nucifera*.

Yezin Dam is a reservoir used for irrigation and drinking water. It is located in the Zeyar Thiri township, Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay region at 128 m above sea level and covers an area of

around 6.5 km² maximum water depth is more than 10 m. The reservoir is a low-moderate alkaline and turbid lake (Table 1) with large water level fluctuations. At the time of investigation, the coverage of aquatic macrophytes was very low, and only a few specimens of *Chara* were found.

Ngalaik Dam is a medium-large irrigation reservoir, located in a boreal area in Ottara Thiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay region. The reservoir has a surface area of around 5.5 km², is situated 163 m above sea level, and is a calcareous, clear water lake. The aquatic vegetation consists of a moderate coverage of a few submerged species, including charophytes.

Kyet Mauk Taung is a medium-large reservoir and is mainly used for irrigation (Pa 1983). It is located in a boreal area in the Kyaukpadaung Township, Mandalay region. The reservoir is situated 279 m above sea level, close to Popa National Park, and covers an area of about 7.3 km². The reservoir is a calcareous and slightly humic water body.

Wethtigan (Whattae) Lake is included in the Wethtigan Wildlife Sanctuary, situated in Salin Township, Magway Region. The lake is situated 66 m above sea level and has a surface area of around 1.7 km². It is a clear, calcareous lake (Table 1) with luxurious growth of both floating leaved vegetation (mainly *Nelumbo nucifera*) and submerged vegetation, dominated by *Chara*.

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Lakes, including characteristic physico-chemical data and coverage of *Chara* spp.

Lake	State/Region/ Division	Latitude	Longitude	Altitude m	Lake area km ²	Calcium mg L ⁻¹	TOC mg L ⁻¹	Tot P µg L ⁻¹	Tot N µg L ⁻¹	Chara- coverage
Inlay Lake	Shan State	20,563,046	96,918,640	884	116*	45	5.0	15.4	448	3
Sakar Inn	Shan State	20,169,411	96,932,716	884	3	40	3.9	7	430	-
Peikon Lake	Shan State	19,879,100	97,032,623	884	134	45	5.5	9	440	-
Indawgyi Lake	Kachin State	25,116,667	96,316,667	170	123	10	2.3	20	532	-
Meiktila Lake, North	Mandalay Region	20,886,560	95,852,966	230	4.8	19	4.9	21	428	2
Meiktila Lake, South	Mandalay Region	20,863,464	95,854,511	230	4.3	14	4.1	15	415	3
Yezin Dam	Mandalay Region	19,855,852	96,276,798	128	6.4	8	5.1	15	402	1
Nga Laik Dam	Mandalay Region	19,861,665	96,005,058	163	5.5	22	-	20	510	2
Moeyingyi Reservoir	Bago Region	17,570,721	96,596,947	10	15	2	16.4	103	702	-
Taung Taman Lake, North	Mandalay Region	21,900,833	96,060,556	61	3	45	13	520	2900	-
Kantawgyi Lake, South	Mandalay Region	21,936,389	96,065,833	66	1.8	18	3.5	35	520	-
Pyu Kan Lake	Mandalay Region	21,768,056	95,891,111	102	2	18	2.2	45	500	-
Khu Le Inn	Mandalay Region	22,592,222	95,980,000	76	2.5	7	3.8	31	560	-
Sunye In Tank	Mandalay Region	21,679,722	96,230,000	91	4	21	6.1	26	490	-
Pauk In	Mandalay Region	21,326,944	95,048,056	55	0.15	24	10.3	190	2000	-
Kyetmauk Taung Dam	Mandalay Region	20,812,222	95,250,833	279	4.5	40	5.1	19	1900	2
Wethtigan Lake	Magwe Division	20,575,833	94,641,111	66	1.7	44	3.5	8	530	3

Chara coverage; 1=seldom, 2=common, 3=large stands. Lake area can vary considerably between wet and dry season. Lake areas measurements are based on Google Earth where satellite photo dates can vary from region to region.

3.2 Sample collection

Integrated water samples were taken (1 m steps up to max. 3 m water depth) for the analysis of chemical parameters (ammonium, nitrate, total nitrogen (TN), soluble reactive phosphorus, total phosphorus (TP), Ca, turbidity and total organic carbon (TOC). The *Chara*

specimens were collected from a boat, using an aqua-scope and a rake. In total, 11 *Chara* samples were analysed from 7 lakes. All specimens were preserved as herbarium samples directly after collection, for later morphological and molecular analysis.

3.3 Morphological analysis

The species were determined following the nomenclature in Wood (1965). DNA-barcoding Genomic DNA from *Chara* material was isolated after Schneider *et al.* (2016). PCR for the *matk* gene and the *rbcl* gene was performed on a Bio-Rad CFX96 Real Time PCR Detection System (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Oslo, Norway) using the iProof High-Fidelity PCR Kit (Bio-Rad Laboratories, Oslo, Norway). Amplification of the *matk* gene region was conducted using the primers F-*Chara* (agaatgagcttaacaaggat) and R-*Chara* (acgatttgaacatccactataata) and for the *rbcl* gene using the primer *rbclaf* (atgtcaccacaaacagagactaaagc) and *rbclar* (gtaaaatcaagtccaccrcg). The following cycling protocol was used for *matk* and *rbcl*: one cycle of 5 min at 94°C, and then 35 cycles each consisting of 10 s at 94°C, 20 s at 62°C, and 20 s at 72°C, followed by a final elongation step of 72°C for 5 min. PCR products were visualized by 1.5 % agarose gel electrophoresis with GelRed staining (GelRed Nucleic Acid Gel Stain, Biotium, Fremont, CA, USA) and UV illumination. For sequencing the same primers and for *matk* additionally the intermediate primers charaintF (gatggctattcaagcagga), charaintR (ctaccgataagttcgtcct), charaBt2F (datatggcaacaycaaaaagac) and charaBT2R (atacagaccatgcagcytt) were used. For each PCR product, both strands were sequenced on an ABI 3730 Avant genetic analyser using the BigDye terminator V.3.1 cycle sequencing kit (Applied Biosystems, Thermo Fisher Scientific Oslo, Norway) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The sequence data were deposited at the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) under the accession numbers given in Table 2.

3.4 Phylogenetic analyses

Sequences were analysed and aligned using Seqassem (version 04/2008) and Align (version 03/2007) MS Windows-based manual sequence alignment editor (SequentiX – DigitalDNA Processing, Klein Raden Germany) to obtain DNA sequence alignments, which were then corrected manually. A *matk* set containing 11 *Chara* samples from Myanmar (Table 2) and 24 other *Chara* sequences, and 953 nucleotide positions were used for the phylogenetic analysis. *Nitellopsis obtusa* (AY170447) was used as an outgroup taxon in the *matk* phylogenetic tree. For the *rbcl* phylogenetic tree, seven samples from Myanmar and 32 other *Chara* sequences were used and 567 Nucleotide positions. The datasets were analysed using maximum likelihood (ML), maximum parsimony (MP) and distance (neighbour-joining (NJ)) in MEGA version x (Kumar *et al.* 2018). GTR+G was selected as the best-fitting evolutionary model for the *matk* gene region and T92 + G for the *rbcl* region. ML, MP, and distance analyses were performed with 1000 bootstrap replicates in MEGA version X (Kumar *et al.* 2018).

Table 2. *Chara* samples, origin, sampling date and NCBI accession numbers

ID	Lake	Date	<i>matk</i>	<i>rbcL</i>
MMYA-1	Inlay Lake	05-11-2014	MT739758	MT739769
MMYA-2	Inlay Lake	05-11-2014	MT739759	MT739774
MY-32	Yezin Dam	23-05-2017	MT739768	-
MY-33	Yezin Dam	23-05-2017	MT739760	-
MY-45	Meiktila Lake North	16-11-2017	MT739767	-
MY-34	Meiktila Lake South	16-11-2017	MT739761	-
MY-35	Ngalaik Dam	17-11-2017	MT739762	MT739772
MY-58	Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir	05-11-2014	MT739765	MT739773
MY-59	Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir	05-11-2014	MT739763	MT739775
MY-60	Wethigan Lake	05-11-2014	MT739766	MT739771
MY-61	Wethigan Lake	05-11-2014	MT739764	MT739770

4. Results

4.1 Morphological determination

The collected specimens include two charophyte species: *Chara zeylanica* Klein ex Willdenow and *Chara fibrosa* Agardh ex Bruzelius. (*C. fibrosa* was first determined as *C. faccida* A. Braun, based on the yellow/brown colour of the oospore).

Chara zeylanica was found in Inlay Lake, Meiktila Lake south, Ngalaik Dam, Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir, and Weththigan Lake. *C. fibrosa* was found in Yezin Dam, Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir, and Weththigan Lake (Table 3).

Table 3. Comments to the collected *Chara* specimens from Myanmar.

No.	Lake	Comments	Specimens quality
<i>Chara Zeylanica</i>			
MMYA-1,2	Inlay Lake	-	Poorly develop and preserved.
MY-34	Meiktila North	Broken specimens but have been long. Special locality	Poorly developed
MY-35	Ngalaik Dam	Typical specimens. Richly fertile with ripe, black oospores.	Well developed
MY-45	Meiktila South	-	-
MY-59	Kyet Mauk Taung	Richly fertile with ripe, black oospores.	Well developed
MY-61	Veththigan Lake	With very long internodes. Sterile.	Well developed
<i>Chara fibrosa</i>			
MY-32, 33	Yezin	Small specimens. Fertile.	Poorly developed
MY-58	Kyet Mauk Taung	Richly fertile specimens	Well developed
MY-60	Weththigan Lake	Sterile specimens	Well developed

Description of *Chara zeylanica* collected in Myanmar

15–40 cm high. Axis 0.35–0.8 mm in diameter. Internodes up to 10 cm long, but most commonly less than 4 cm. Slightly encrusted with lime. Stem cortex regularly triplostichous, isostichous (The examined specimens, all collected in November have stems strongly overgrown with diatoms, and therefore difficult to see). Spine-cells papillous to short, acute, from papillous up to 0.4 mm long, solitary. Stipulodes in two rows (Diplostephanous), upper row with cells to 0.5 mm long and lower row to 0.4 mm long, acute. 8–12 branchlets in a whorl, 20–50 mm long, 0.5x to 1.0x times the length of the internodes. 8–11 segments on each branchlet, first segment ecorticate (Gymnopodous). End segments 2–4, ecorticate. End-cell acute.

Description of *Chara fibrosa* collected in Myanmar

Specimens 5–25 cm high, commonly lower to 15 cm. Axis diameter 0.4–0.6 mm. Internodes up to 3 cm long. Slightly to moderate encrusted with lime. Cortex diplostichous, tylacanthous to isostichous. Spine-cells scattered, solitary 0.2 mm to 0.6 mm long, acute. Stipulodes one row (Haplostephanous), 0.8 mm –2.0 mm long. Branchlets 8–10 in each whorl, up to 15 mm long and 0.25 to 1 time the length of internodes. All branchlets ecorticate and with 3–5 segments. Bract-cells verticillate up to 0.8 mm long. In two of three localities the plants were richly fertile. Oogonia 0.7 mm long, 0.3–0.5 mm wide. Oospore up to 0.5 mm long and 0.35 mm wide, yellow to brown. Antheridia up to 0.3 mm in diameter. The species are further described by Langangen and Leghari (2001) and Langangen (2015).

4.2 Phylogenetic analyses

In the *matk* phylogenetic tree, seven *Chara* samples, morphologically determined as *C. zeylanica*, from the Inlay Lake, Meiktila Lake, Nga Laik Dam, Kyat Mauk Taung Reservoir, and Weththigan Lake, formed a monophyletic cluster together with the Brazilian *Chara* species; *C. hydropithys*, *C. guairensis* R. Bicudo, *C. rusbyana* M. Howe, *C. haitensis* Turpin and *C. braunii* var. *schweinitzii* (A.Braun) Zaneveld (Figure 1). The whole cluster was supported by a bootstrap value of 100%. *C. hydropithys* was the closest related *Chara* species to *Chara zeylanica* from Myanmar, which was supported by a bootstrap value of 57 %. Although the *Chara* sample MY-45 was not investigated morphologically its *matk* sequence was 100% identical with those from the other *C. zeylanica* samples. It was therefore also assigned to *C. zeylanica*.

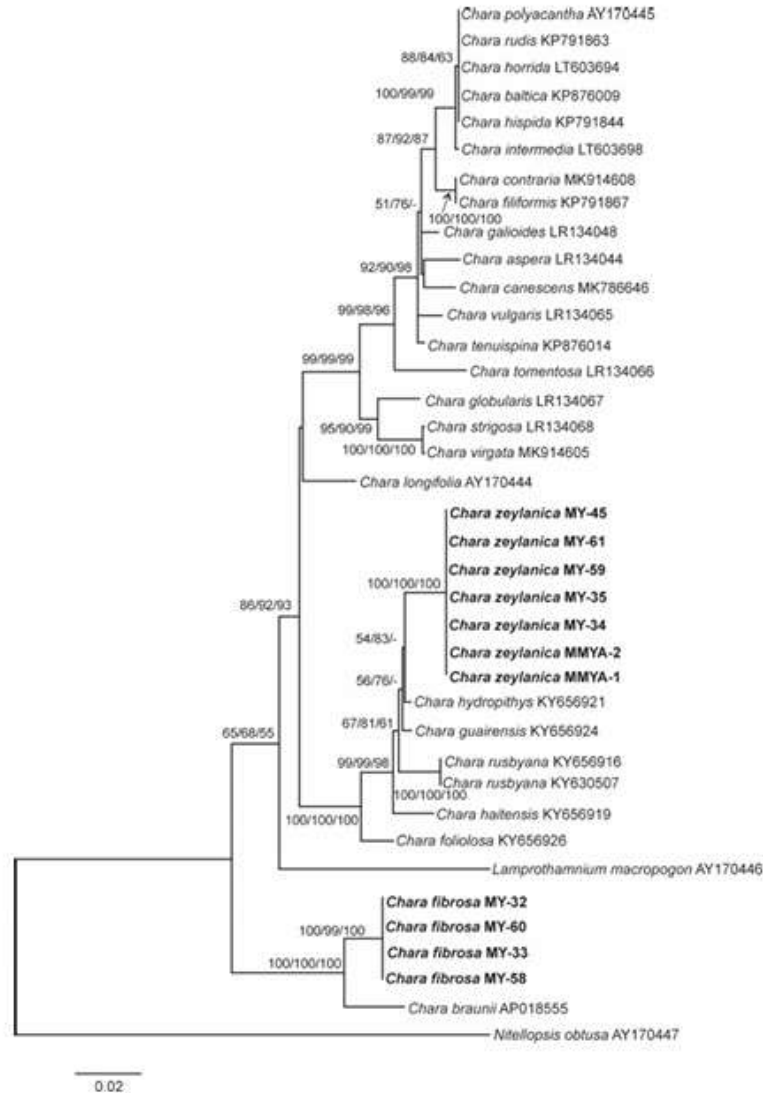


Figure 1. Maximum likelihood tree of the *matk* gene of *Chara* spp. Bootstrap values (ML/MP/NJ) above 50 are included.

Four *Chara* specimens from Yezin Dam, Wethitigan Lake and Kyat Mauk Taung Reservoir were determined as *Chara fibrosa*. They clustered together with *C. braunii* Gmelin from Lake Kasumigaura (Japan), which was supported by a bootstrap value of 100%. In the phylogenetic tree based on partial *rbcl* gene of *Chara* spp. only five *Chara zeylanica* from Myanmar were included. They grouped in a separate subcluster but clearly clustered together with other *C. zeylanica* from Japan, USA (California), New Caledonia and New Zealand (Figure 2). The *rbcl* phylogenetic tree therefore confirmed the assignment of the *Chara* samples MMYA-1, MMYA-2, MY-34, MY-35, MY-45, MY-59, and MY-61 to *C. zeylanica*. Only two of the four *C. fibrosa* from Myanmar were analysed for the *rbcl* gene and grouped in a subcluster. They clustered together with *C. fibrosa* from Japan and *C. braunii* from Japan, Hawaii (USA) and New Zealand (Figure 2).

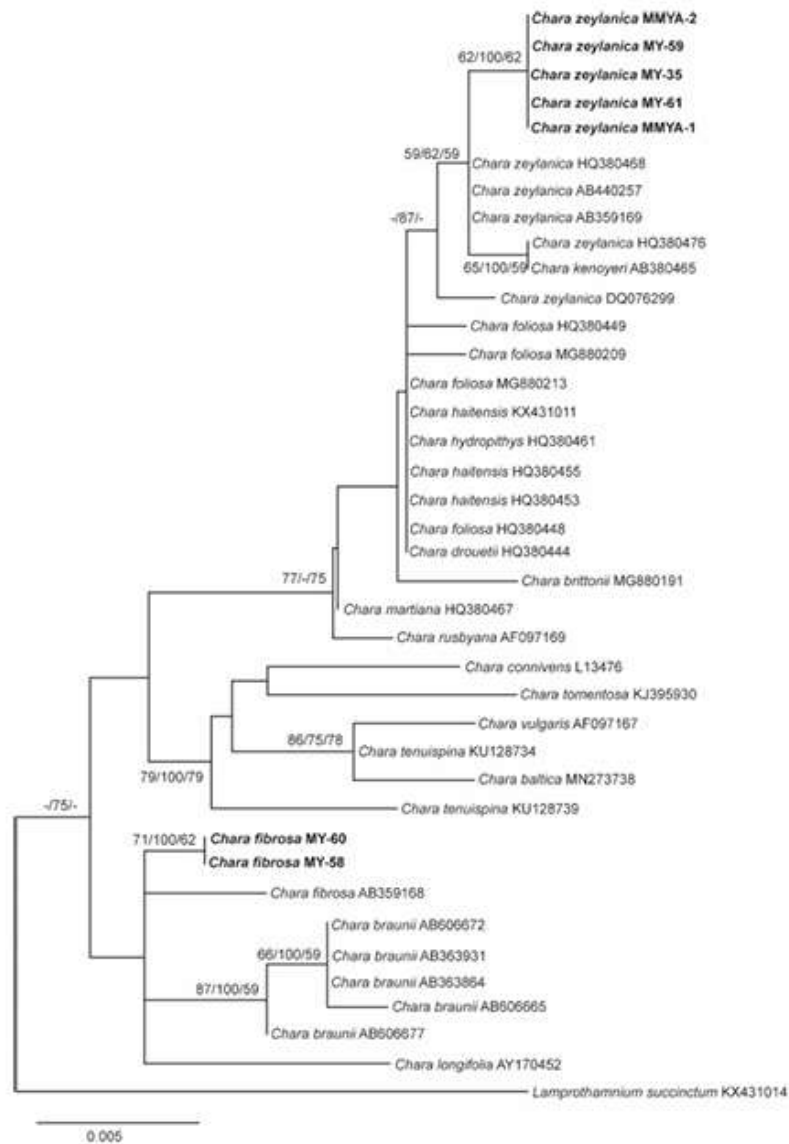


Figure 2. Maximum likelihood tree of the *rbcL* gene of *Chara* spp. Bootstrap values (ML/MP/NJ) above 50 are included.

4.3 Ecological notes

Chara zeylanica is the most common of the two species found in Myanmar and was observed in five lakes. It is present in different types of habitats; from the medium-altitude and calcium-rich natural Inlay Lake in Shan state to lowland lakes in the dry zone area close to Mandalay. The species is growing in Ngalaik Dam and Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir, but it was not recorded in the heavily regulated Yezin Dam. *Chara fibrosa* had a sparser distribution and was only found in three lakes in the dry zone. In Yezin Dam only a few small specimens were recorded, while it was more common in Kyet Mauk Taung reservoir and in the natural Wethtigan Lake, where it grew in between mass stands of *C. zeylanica*. Both Kyet Mauk Taung Reservoir and the natural Wethtigan Lake are calcareous lakes with calcium levels around 40 mg L⁻¹ while Yezin Dam is characterized by more moderate calcium concentrations of around

8 mg L⁻¹. Both species were recorded in low-impacted lakes only, with TP concentrations below 20 µg L⁻¹.

5. Discussions

Two *Chara* species, *C. zeylanica* and *C. fibrosa* were recorded in our lake survey in 2014–2019. The morphological determination of both species has been supported by phylogenetic studies using *matk* and *rbcl* genes. Although the *Chara* sample MY-45 was not determined morphologically, the phylogenetic analysis confirms its assignment to *C. zeylanica*.

In the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s, 12 *Chara* species were recognized in Myanmar (Pal 1932). However, four of these species are today recognised as variants or synonyms to *C. fibrosa*, i.e. *C. erythrogyna*, *C. burmanica*, *C. faccida* and *C. gymnopitys* (Guiry and Guiry 2020).

Both *C. zeylanica* and *C. fibrosa* are commonly distributed species, especially *C. zeylanica*, which is common in tropical and sub-tropical areas in southern parts of Africa, Asia, Southern Australia, Oceania (Hawaii), and Central- and South-America, but also in North-America (Wood 1967). *Chara fibrosa* is common in Africa, South-Asia and Australia (Wood and Imahori 1959). Both species have a wide distribution and are not considered as red-listed *Chara*-species.

The study by Pal (1932) on charophytes was very comprehensive and included several localities in different regions and areas in Myanmar. These include the large delta area around Yangon, the dry zone area around Mandalay, the intermediate zone between Naypyitaw and Yangon, the large Shan Plateau in the east, and the extreme south-eastern part. The study focused on small freshwater habitats like paddy-fields, ponds, drains and marshy areas.

Our study is less comprehensive than the study conducted by Pal (1932). However, it includes only lakes, a habitat which was not investigated by Pal (1932). We have so far visited 17 lakes, situated in different regions, Mandalay region, Magwe region, Bago region, Shan State, and Kachin state, i.e. covering the same areas as in Pal (1932), except from the extreme southeast area. *Chara* species were recorded in seven of the lakes visited.

There could be several reasons why we have recognized so few species compared to the 1930s such as (1) different survey seasons, (2) different habitat preferences, (3) increased impacts on habitats and (4) taxonomic changes since the 1930s. Pal (1932) found that the best season for the charophyte flourishing in Myanmar was between the months of August and March. In our study all lakes were surveyed twice, February–March and November, which covers the best season for charophyte growth indicated by Pal (1932). In contrast to the study of Pal (1932) our study focuses on lakes only. Surveys conducted in different habitats can be a reason for the discrepancy between the two observations. His surveys were conducted in small habitats, like paddy-fields and ponds. It can be argued that these habitats are the preferable habitats for charophytes. In other countries, most *Chara* species, including *C. zeylanica* and *C. fibrosa*, inhabit different types of water bodies, including lakes (Siong and Asaeda 2006;

Penning *et al.* 2008). However, the existence of the *Chara* species with special preferences for ditches and ponds cannot be excluded.

In our study, *C. fibrosa* appears in both high and moderate alkaline lakes. In the high alkaline lakes, they grow with larger specimens and more vigorous stands. This agrees with Asaeda *et al.* (2014) who indicated 40–80 mg Ca L⁻¹, as the optimum range for this species, and is similar to the results from Vaidya (1967). The smaller *C. fibrosa* specimens observed in Yezin Dam can be the result of stress caused by water level regulations (Ellawala *et al.* 2011). *C. zeylanica* also seems to prefer calcareous lakes. All investigated lakes in our study except for one had calcium concentrations >19 mg L⁻¹, which is also in agreement with Vaidya (1967). We have recorded both species only in low-impacted lakes, with TP concentrations below 20 µg L⁻¹. This is supported by several studies (Blindow 1992), with *Chara* recognized as a species sensitive to eutrophication (Penning *et al.* 2008).

Increased human impact on freshwater habitats must be considered as a factor reducing *Chara* biodiversity in Myanmar as elsewhere. The destruction of small freshwater habitats, increased urbanization and enhanced agricultural activities, followed by increased eutrophication and reduced light conditions, are already mentioned by Pal (1932). These activities are today considered as the main impact on freshwater habitats and recognized as reasons for decreased occurrence of *Chara* vegetation in Asia as well as in Europe (Allen *et al.* 2012; Janssen *et al.* 2016).

The “taxonomic development” during the last 90 years has also caused a considerable change in the assignment of *Chara* species to certain taxa. In addition to “taxonomic development”, surveys in different habitats may be a reason for the discrepancy between the two surveys. However, we believe that increased human impact on freshwater habitats must be considered as a factor reducing *Chara* biodiversity, in Myanmar as elsewhere.

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