

Camelthorn (*Alhagi maurorum*; Fabaceae) in Oklahoma
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Camelthorn or *Alhagi maurorum* (synonyms: *A. camelorum*; *A. pseudalhagi*) is a member of the pea family (Fabaceae) native to the Middle East and Eurasia. Introduced as a contaminant of alfalfa seed in the early 1900s, this species has become naturalized in parts of Australia and the southwestern United States. Camelthorn is a shrubby, branched perennial with pink flowers and a massive rhizomatous root system. Adapted to harsh, arid environments, it can tolerate a wide range of soil types. It can quickly out-compete native species.

At the time the OkIPC created its Watch List, the Oklahoma Vascular Plants Database (OVPD) included camelthorn specimens from Southeastern Oklahoma State University collected in south-central and southeastern Oklahoma. This was surprising to me; I had botanized these areas for over a decade and had never seen the plant. Because errors do occur during the data entry process, I thought it was important to verify the identifications of these specimens. In March of 2016 I visited the herbarium at Southeastern, and as I suspected, there were data entry errors. The OVPD uses symbols generated by the USDA to represent species names, and the USDA symbol for the synonym *Alhagi camelorum* is ALCA. The very common meadow garlic (*Allium canadense*) is ALCA3. The alleged camelthorn specimens were actually meadow garlic.

There is now only a single record for camelthorn in the OVPD. The collection is from Cotton County, “2+ miles east of Temple”. It was collected in November of 1947 from what was described as a “native buffalo grass pasture”. The identification of this collection has been verified by Dr. Mark Fishbein, Curator of the herbarium at Oklahoma State University. The Biota of North America Program (BONAP) still includes the erroneous distribution data for Oklahoma; it uses an old version of the OVPD for its Oklahoma data. USDA PLANTS reports no instances from Oklahoma, but their Oklahoma data are also out-of-date. The current known distribution of camelthorn is correctly cited at EDDMapS.

Other states reporting camelthorn include Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Washington, with the greatest number of collections from northern Arizona. The closest occurrences to Oklahoma are in Guadalupe County in east-central New Mexico. With only one report since 1947, camelthorn is probably not a significant threat to Oklahoma at the current time. Warmer temperatures and decreased precipitation associated with global climate change could, however, provide favorable conditions for its establishment in the future. Continued botanical exploration is needed in all parts of Oklahoma to monitor for it and other potential invaders.