

Chemical composition of *Homalomena occulta* essential oil and molecular docking-ADMET evaluation against antimicrobial targets

Nguyen Vinh Phu¹, Tran Hoang Ha², Nguyen Tran Thien Phu³, Nguyen Vu Bao Ngoc³,
Tran Quang Huy², Nguyen Dai Chau², Nguyen Thi Thanh Hai², Phan Tu Quy⁴, Tran Nhat Phong Dao⁵,
Nguyen Thi Ai Nhung^{2*}

¹ Faculty of Basic Sciences, University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Hue University, Hue City, Vietnam

² Department of Chemistry, University of Sciences, Hue University, Hue City, Vietnam

³ HUSC High School for Gifted Students, Hue City, Vietnam

⁴ Department of Natural Sciences & Technology, Tay Nguyen University, Buon Ma Thuot, Vietnam

⁵ Faculty of Traditional Medicine, Can Tho University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Can Tho City, Vietnam

* Correspondence to Nguyen Thi Ai Nhung <ntanhung@hueuni.edu.vn>

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Abstract. *Homalomena occulta* (*H. occulta*) essential oil was obtained via steam distillation, and its chemical composition was characterised using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) analysis. A total of 43 compounds, predominantly oxygenated monoterpenes with linalool (40.35%), terpinen-4-ol (8.54%), and α -terpineol (3.05%) as the most abundant components, were identified. These compounds were evaluated *in silico* through molecular docking simulations using MOE 2022.10 software against three antimicrobial-related targets associated with pathogenic strains, namely *Streptococcus pyogenes* (P0C0C7), *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Q8DQF8), and *Candida albicans* (4ESW). Several promising candidates with strong predicted inhibitory potentials were identified and ranked for each target as follows: P0C0C7: **40** (–11.2 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **27** (–11.0 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **4** (–10.9 kcal.mol^{–1}) $\approx$ **36** (–10.9 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **29** (–10.4 kcal.mol^{–1}); Q8DQF8: **27** (–9.6 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **29** (–9.4 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **25** (–9.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) $\approx$ **41** (–9.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **36** (–9.2 kcal.mol^{–1}); 4ESW **42** (–11.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **38** (–10.8 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **21** (–10.7 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **32** (–10.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) $\approx$ **41** (–10.3 kcal.mol^{–1}). A drug-likeness study based on Lipinski's rule of five was generally favourable (MW < 500 Da for 43/43 compounds; logP < 5 for 41/43 compounds). The ADMET prediction results suggested good absorption and permeability, along with a low risk of major transporter- and metabolism-related issues. Overall, these findings provide a strong *in silico* basis, supporting further experimental antimicrobial testing for *H. occulta* essential oil.

Keywords: *Homalomena occulta*, P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, 4ESW, molecular docking, ADMET

1 Introduction

Microbial diseases, particularly respiratory bacterial infections and superficial cutaneous mycoses, remain a significant public health burden worldwide [1, 2]. The prolonged and inappropriate use and misuse of antibiotics, antivirals, and antifungal drugs have contributed to the emergence and spread of drug-resistant strains, leading to reduced therapeutic efficacy, increasing healthcare costs, and a higher incidence of adverse

effects [3]. In addition, the indiscriminate use of antibacterial and antifungal agents increases selection pressure for resistant strains and can cause dose-limiting side effects, including disruption of the gut microbiota, hypersensitivity reactions, and hepatic and renal toxicity [4]. In the context of the continual emergence of new pathogens, the need for the identification of safe and sustainable antimicrobial agents has become increasingly urgent.

In recent years, natural compounds derived from medicinal plants, particularly plant essential oils, have received increasing attention as potential agents for controlling pathogenic microorganisms [5]. Owing to their rich content of many biologically active components, essential oils can inhibit microbial growth through various mechanisms, including membrane disruption of cell membrane structure and permeability [6], inhibition of key enzymatic activities, and interference with biofilm formation [7]. The diversity of their chemical composition, combined with their multi-target modes of action, makes plant essential oils promising sources of raw materials for the development of therapeutic products that support the treatment of bacterial and fungal infections while reducing the risk of antimicrobial resistance [8, 9].

H. occulta is a medicinal plant that has been traditionally used in Vietnamese folk medicine, particularly in central Vietnam, with reported effects such as pain relief, anti-inflammatory effects, improved blood circulation, and support for the treatment of certain skin diseases [10, 11]. Preliminary studies indicate that *H. occulta* contains bioactive compounds capable of inhibiting microbial growth, particularly pathogenic bacteria and fungi associated with skin infections and respiratory diseases [12]. Another study reported that the essential oil of *H. occulta* exhibits antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant activities [10], but comprehensive data regarding its mechanism of action, efficacy, formulation studies, and practical applications remain limited.

In terms of the increasing burden of respiratory and cutaneous infections [13, 14] and the concurrent challenge posed by antimicrobial resistance [2], investigating the pathogens implicated in these conditions is of critical importance. Among the organisms of particular interest, *Streptococcus pyogenes*, *Streptococcus*

pneumoniae, and *Candida albicans*, which are frequently selected in mechanistic studies to clarify pathogenic pathways and to inform effective control and therapeutic strategies, have been consistently recognised as high-priority targets.

S. pyogenes and *S. pneumoniae* are Gram-positive bacteria that commonly colonise the oropharyngeal region, where they can cause pharyngitis and pneumonia and, if not adequately controlled, lead to severe complications [15, 16]. For *S. pyogenes*, LuxS was selected as the target enzyme because it is responsible for AI-2 signal production, thereby contributing to quorum sensing and biofilm formation [17]; its experimentally determined structure is available in UniProtKB under accession P0C0C7 (LUXS_STRPY). *S. pneumoniae* possesses an ATP-binding protein of the ABC transporter system, which is involved in the efflux of toxic compounds and antibiotics, thereby contributing to bacterial adaptation and antimicrobial resistance [18]. The structure of this protein has been characterised and is available in the UniProtKB database under accession Q8DQF8 (Q8DQF8_STRR6).

C. albicans is a prevalent yeast responsible for a broad disease spectrum, ranging from mucosal candidiasis (e.g., vulvovaginitis and oral thrush) to skin-nail involvement and invasive infections such as pneumonia and urinary tract infections [19]. THI5p was selected as the target enzyme because it plays an essential role in thiamine biosynthesis, directly impacts fungal growth and viability, and therefore represents a promising target for developing inhibitory strategies against *C. albicans* [20]. The crystal structure of THI5p has been resolved and deposited in the Protein Data Bank under PDB ID 4ESW.

In this study, *H. occulta* essential oil was extracted, and its chemical composition was characterised via GC-MS analysis. The antibacterial and antifungal potential of the oil was then evaluated *in silico* against three protein targets,

namely, P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, and 4ESW, corresponding to *S. pyogenes*, *S. pneumoniae*, and *C. albicans*, respectively. The docking results were interpreted on the basis of binding energies as well as the principal chemical interactions observed within the docking processes. Moreover, drug likeness and safety were assessed via Lipinski-based descriptors and ADMET prediction tools to provide early insights into developability. Overall, these findings support the antimicrobial potential of *H. occulta* essential oil and provide a rationale for further experimental validation.

2 Methods

2.1 Experiment

Plant material

H. occulta was collected in 2024-2025 (Fig. 1) from Loc An commune, Hue City, Vietnam. The plant material was taxonomically identified by comparing with reference descriptions by Msc. Nguyen Dai Chau and stored at the Institute for Research and Application of Science and Technology, University of Sciences, Hue University.



Fig. 1. Morphological characteristics of *H. occulta* (whole plant showing leaves, rhizomes, and roots)

Essential oil extraction

The essential oils from the leaves of *H. occulta* were extracted with steam distillation. Briefly, 30 kg of coarsely ground raw material was subjected to distillation with approximately 50 L of water. The resulting crude essential oil, which remained partially saturated with water, was dried over anhydrous sodium sulfate to obtain the purified oil.

Identification of *H. occulta* essential oil

The chemical composition of *H. occulta* essential oil was analysed by using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) on an Agilent 7890B system interfaced with a 5975C mass-selective detector. The separation employed an HP-5MS fused silica capillary column (30 m × 250 μm × 0.25 μm). Chromatographic and mass spectral data were acquired and processed via software integrated with the GC-MS system. Individual components of the essential oil were identified on the basis of their retention times (RTs) and by comparing their mass spectra with those in a standard reference library (NIST14) with a similarity threshold set at ≥85%.

2.2 Computation

Computational input preparation

The crystal structures of the selected bacterial target proteins from *S. pyogenes* (P0C0C7) and *S. pneumoniae* (Q8DQF8), together with the reference antibacterial drug penicillin G (**D1**), are shown in Fig. 2. Similarly, the crystal structure of the target protein from *C. albicans* (4ESW), along with the reference antifungal agent clotrimazole (**D2**), is presented in Fig. 3.

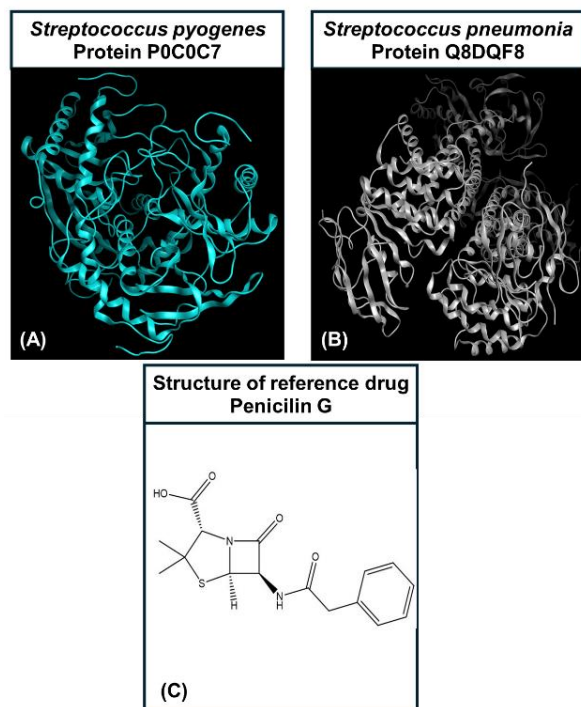


Fig. 2. Structures of the target proteins (A) P0C0C7 and (B) Q8DQF8; (C) structure of the reference drug penicillin G

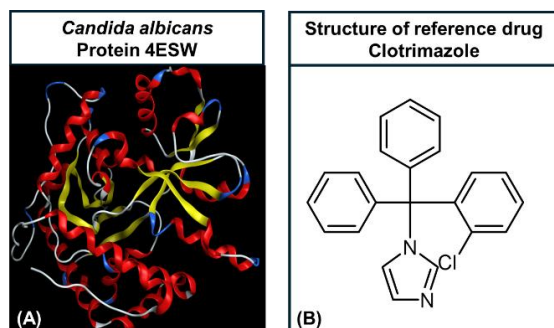


Fig. 3. Structures of the target proteins (A) 4ESW and (B) the reference drug clotrimazole

Molecular docking simulation

Molecular docking was utilised to predict the binding energies and interaction modes between the investigated natural compounds and target proteins and to evaluate their potential antibacterial activity using MOE 2022.10 software. The molecular docking workflow was conducted following a five-step procedure, as reported previously [21–23].

Step 1. Protein preparation: Target proteins were selected from appropriate protein libraries or databases. The protein structure was prepared by removing water molecules and unnecessary polymer chains. The binding site was defined on the basis of the position of the cocrystallised ligand.

Step 2. Ligand preparation: For ligand preparation, the 2D chemical structures of the investigated compounds were first drawn and automatically converted into 3D conformations via ChemBioOffice 2018, after which the resulting 3D geometries were energy-minimised in SYBYL-X 1.1. This process was automatically repeated five times to generate multiple conformations, followed by final energy minimisation to obtain optimised molecular structures suitable for subsequent docking studies.

Step 3. Molecular docking: Molecular docking simulations were performed via MOE 2022.10, which uses the triangle matching placement method to position ligand fragments within the binding pocket, with a maximum of 1000 poses generated per iteration and up to 200 poses retained per ligand fragment. The most favourable ligand binding poses were identified by the minimum docking score (DS, kcal.mol⁻¹).

Step 4. Redocking: The reliability of the docking parameters was validated through a redocking procedure via three distinct workflows: (i) extraction of the ligand from the cocrystalline protein-ligand complex; (ii) re-preparation of the ligand according to Step 1; and (iii) redocking of the ligand. The docking simulation was considered reliable when the root-mean-square deviation (RMSD) was less than 2.0 Å, which reflects the deviation between the original crystallographic backbone conformation (after Step 3) and the redocked pose (after Step 4).

Step 5. Analysis results: The inhibitory potential of the investigated compounds toward the target proteins was evaluated on the basis of

the docking score and the RMSD values. In addition, ligand-target interactions were analysed and visualised in both 2D and 3D representations, including hydrogen bonds, π - π interactions, ionic interactions, and cation- π interactions, whereas van der Waals surface contacts were identified through hydrophobic and steric surface complementarity between the compounds and the amino acids of the target proteins.

Physicochemical property analysis

The drug-likeness properties of the candidates were evaluated *in silico* according to Lipinski's Rule of Five [24]. Key physicochemical descriptors, including molecular weight (MW), molecular volume, and lipophilicity/solubility indices ($\log P$ and $\log S$), were computed via ADMETlab 3.0, whereas molecular polarisability was derived via ChemDoodle Web. The compounds were prioritised if they exhibited favourable membrane permeability profiles adhering to the established

thresholds: $MW \leq 500$ Da; $\log P \leq 5$; $HBA \leq 10$; $HBD \leq 5$.

ADMET prediction

The pharmacokinetic-toxicity properties of the investigated compounds, encompassing absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion, and toxicity (ADMET), were predicted via the SwissADME platform developed and maintained by the Swiss Institute of Bioinformatics, whereas the theoretical assessment was conducted in accordance with the framework (<http://biosig.unimelb.edu.au/pkcsn/theory>) proposed by Pires and coworkers [25] and supported through collaboration between the University of Melbourne and the University of Cambridge. These pharmacokinetic-toxicity parameters serve as decisive criteria for assessing drug-likeness and developability, thereby supporting the prioritisation of candidates for further therapeutic investigation.

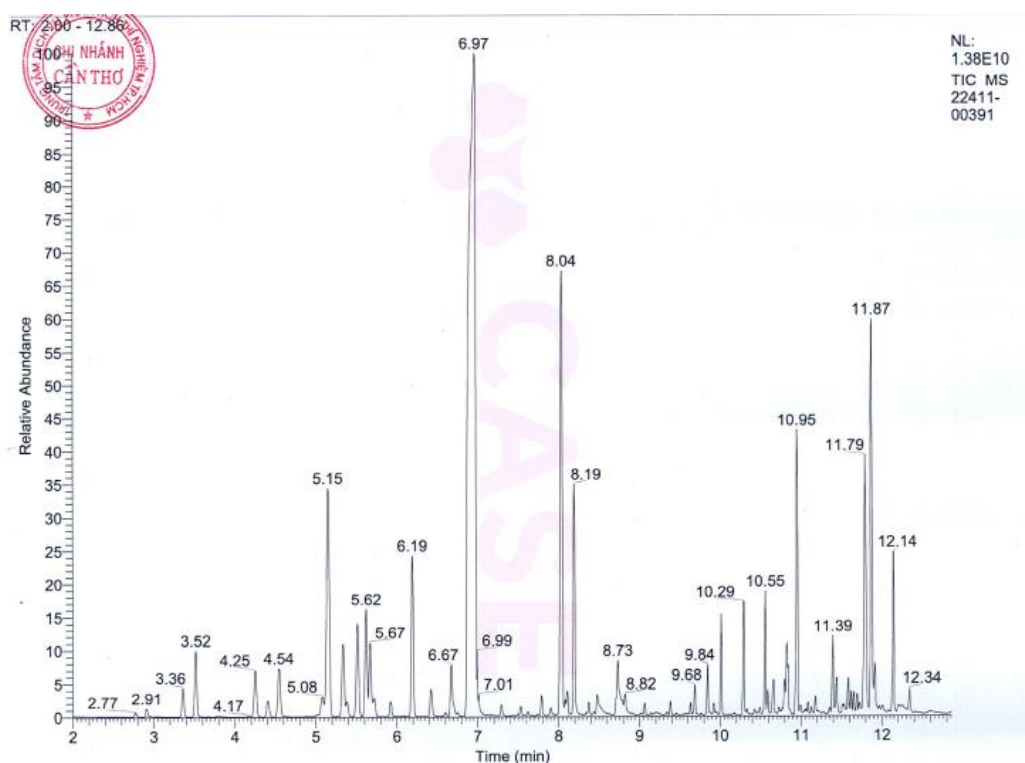


Fig. 4. Gas chromatography spectrum of *H. occulta* essential oil

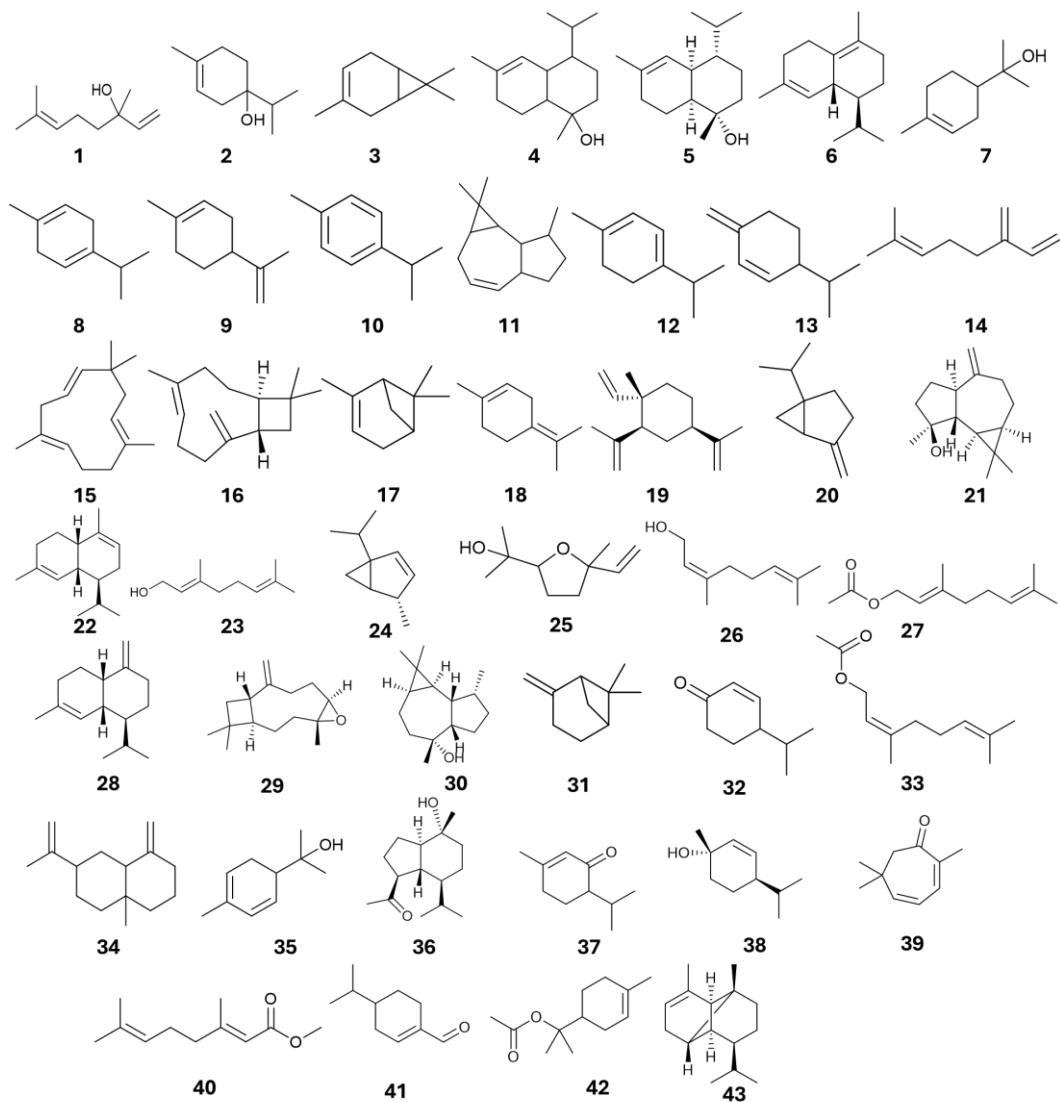


Fig. 5. Chemical structures of the investigated compounds (1-43) from *H. occulta* essential oil

Table 1. Identification of major bioactive compounds in *H. occulta* essential oil

Compound	Formula	Retention time (min)	Percentage (%)	Notation
Linalool	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	6.97	40.35	1
Terpinen-4-ol	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	8.04	8.54	2
3-Carene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	5.15	6.29	3
α -Cadinol	C ₁₅ H ₂₆ O	11.87	5.30	4
α -epi-Muurolol	C ₁₅ H ₂₆ O	11.79	4.43	5
Cadina-1(10),4-diene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.95	3.60	6
α -Terpineol	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	8.19	3.05	7
γ -Terpinene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	6.19	2.80	8
D-Limonene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	5.62	2.07	9
p-Cymene	C ₁₀ H ₁₄	5.51	1.90	10

Compound	Formula	Retention time (min)	Percentage (%)	Notation
Isoaromadendrene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	12.14	1.81	11
α-Terpinene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	5.34	1.58	12
β-Phellandrene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	5.67	1.53	13
β-Myrcene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	4.54	1.28	14
Humulene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.55	1.28	15
Caryophyllene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.29	1.24	16
α-Pinene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	3.52	1.22	17
Terpinolene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	6.67	1.06	18
β-Elemene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.01	1.04	19
Sabinene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	4.25	1.03	20
Spathulenol	C ₁₅ H ₂₆ O	11.39	0.90	21
α-Muurolene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.82	0.83	22
Geraniol	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	8.73	0.60	23
2-Thujene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	3.36	0.53	24
cis-Linalool oxide	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O ₂	6.42	0.53	25
Nerol	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	8.48	0.53	26
Geranyl acetate	C ₁₂ H ₂₀ O ₂	9.84	0.51	27
γ-Muurolene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.66	0.50	28
Caryophyllene oxide	C ₁₅ H ₂₄ O	11.44	0.38	29
Ledol	C ₁₅ H ₂₆ O	11.58	0.37	30
β-Pinene	C ₁₀ H ₁₆	4.41	0.36	31
Cryptone	C ₉ H ₁₄ O	8.11	0.30	32
Nerol acetate	C ₁₂ H ₂₀ O ₂	9.68	0.29	33
Eudesma-4(14).11-diene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	10.8	0.29	34
α-Phellandrene-8-ol	C ₁₀ H ₁₆ O	7.79	0.28	35
Oplopanone	C ₁₅ H ₂₄ O ₂	12.34	0.28	36
p-Menth-1-en-3-one	C ₁₀ H ₁₆ O	8.82	0.27	37
p-Menth-2-en-1-ol	C ₁₀ H ₁₈ O	7.29	0.17	38
Eucarvone	C ₁₀ H ₁₄ O	8.37	0.17	39
Methyl geranate	C ₁₁ H ₁₈ O ₂	9.38	0.16	40
Phellandral	C ₁₀ H ₁₆ O	9.06	0.14	41
α-Terpinyl acetate	C ₁₂ H ₂₀ O ₂	9.63	0.12	42
Copaene	C ₁₅ H ₂₄	9.92	0.12	43

3 Results

3.1 Chemical composition

The GC-MS analysis of *H. occulta* essential oil (Fig. 4) provided detailed information on its chemical composition, leading to the identification of 43 compounds. The GC-MS results are summarised in Table 1, listing the identified compounds in descending order of their percentage. In addition, the corresponding chemical structures of the major constituents are presented in Fig. 5. The results revealed that *H. occulta* essential oil has multiple classes of compounds, predominantly monoterpenes (hydrocarbon and oxygenated) and sesquiterpenes (hydrocarbon and oxygenated), with varying contents among individual constituents. Oxygenated monoterpenes were the most abundant group, with linalool (**1**; 40.35%) being the major compound, followed by terpinen-4-ol (**2**; 8.54%) and α -terpineol (**7**; 3.05%). Other compounds found in smaller amounts included geraniol (**23**; 0.60%), nerol (**26**; 0.53%), cis-linalool oxide (**25**; 0.53%), and geranyl acetate (**27**; 0.51%). In the monoterpene hydrocarbon group, the main components were 3-carene (**3**; 6.29%), γ -terpinene (**8**; 2.80%), D-limonene (**9**; 2.07%), and p-cymene (**10**; 1.90%). This group also contained α -terpinene (**12**; 1.58%), β -phellandrene (**13**; 1.53%), β -myrcene (**14**; 1.28%), α -pinene (**17**; 1.22%), terpinolene (**18**; 1.06%), and sabinene (**20**; 1.03%). For sesquiterpene hydrocarbons, the profile was characterised by cadin-1(10),4-diene (**6**; 3.60%), isoaromadendrene (**11**; 1.81%), humulene (**15**; 1.28%), caryophyllene (**16**; 1.24%), and β -elemene (**19**; 1.04%), along with smaller amounts of α -muurolene (**22**; 0.83%) and γ -muurolene (**28**; 0.50%). Finally, the oxygenated sesquiterpenes included α -cadinol (**4**; 5.30%) and α -epi-muurolol (**5**; 4.43%), as well as spathulenol (**21**; 0.90%), caryophyllene oxide (**29**; 0.38%), and ledol (**30**; 0.37%).

3.2 Computational results

Protein inhibitability

Molecular docking was employed to simulate and predict interactions between the 43 compounds identified in *H. occulta* essential oil and the reference drugs with three target proteins, namely, P0C0C7 (*S. pyogenes*), Q8DQF8 (*S. pneumoniae*), and 4ESW (*C. albicans*). Through these simulations, the inhibitory potential of the compounds was evaluated on the basis of key parameters such as the docking score (DS) and root-mean-square deviation (RMSD). In addition, other important interactions, including hydrogen bonding and van der Waals interactions between the investigated compounds and the target proteins, were analysed in detail. The inhibitory ability of the compounds was evaluated on the basis of two main criteria: the docking score and the number of interactions formed with the target protein with a more negative DS and a higher interaction count generally indicating stronger inhibition. The detailed bonding parameters, including DS, RMSD, hydrogen bonding (HB), and van der Waals interactions (VdW), are summarised in Tables S1–S3 for the ligand-P0C0C7, ligand-Q8DQF8, and ligand-4ESW complexes, respectively, and the corresponding poses/interaction maps are shown in Figs S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, and S6 (Supporting Information).

Accordingly, this section discusses the predicted inhibitory binding of the investigated compounds and the reference drug penicillin G to the *S. pyogenes* P0C0C7 target protein. An overall comparison of DS and the numbers of hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions is presented in Fig. 6. The docking results revealed a broad range of docking scores (–11.2 to –6.2 kcal.mol^{–1}), involving 1–4 hydrogen bonds and 9–16 van der Waals interactions. Several promising candidates with the strongest inhibitory ability were identified and can be ranked as **40–P0C0C7** (–11.2 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **27–P0C0C7** (–11.0 kcal.mol^{–1}) >

4-P0C0C7 (−10.9 kcal.mol^{−1}) ≈ **36-P0C0C7** (−10.9 kcal.mol^{−1}) > **29-P0C0C7** (−10.4 kcal.mol^{−1}) (highlight in bold). The corresponding docking details are summarised in Table 2, and visualisations of the docking process are presented in Fig. 7. Compared with the reference drug **D1** (DS = −10.8 kcal.mol^{−1}; HB = 3; VdW = 10), four of the top five compounds (**40**, **27**, **4**, and **36**) had more favourable DS values than **D1** did. In contrast, compound **3** was the weakest predicted inhibitor of P0C0C7 (DS = −6.2 kcal.mol^{−1}), showing the lowest predicted binding strength among all the

screened ligands under the current docking conditions. In addition, the other compounds had a DS range of approximately from −6.9 to 9.5 kcal.mol^{−1}, which was characterised by the formation of 1–2 hydrogen bonds and 9–16 van der Waals interactions. Although their DS values were lower than those of the top-ranked ligands, several compounds, such as **41-P0C0C7** (−10.3 kcal.mol^{−1}) and **37-P0C0C7** (−10.1 kcal.mol^{−1}), still exhibited relatively strong inhibitory abilities toward protein P0C0C7.

Table 2. Molecular docking simulation results of the ligand-P0C0C7 complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

Ligand–protein			Hydrogen bond						van der Waals interaction
Name	DS		Name	L	P	T	D	E	
4-P0C0C7	−10.9	0.82		O	O	Glu 60	H–donor	3.17	−0.5
				O	N	His 57	H–acceptor	3.09	−1.8
				O	N	His 61	H–acceptor	2.99	−3.2
27-P0C0C7	−11.0	1.07		O	N	His 57	H–acceptor	3.36	−1.4
				O	N	His 61	H–acceptor	3.38	−0.5
				O	N	Gly 128	H–acceptor	3.25	−0.9
				C	6-ring	Phe 80	H–π	3.70	−0.5
29-P0C0C7	−10.4	1.50		O	N	His 57	H–acceptor	3.23	−1.7
				O	N	Gly 128	H–acceptor	3.29	−1.4
36-P0C0C7	−10.9	1.44		O	N	His 57	H–acceptor	3.20	−0.9
				O	N	His 61	H–acceptor	2.85	−1.5
				O	N	Gly 128	H–acceptor	3.08	−1.9
40-P0C0C7	−11.2	1.18		O	N	His 61	H–acceptor	2.99	−1.1
				O	N	Gly 128	H–acceptor	3.07	−1.4
				C	5-ring	His 61	H–π	4.31	−0.9
D1-P0C0C7	−10.8	1.13		S	C	Ser 99	H–acceptor	3.51	−0.7
				S	N	Lys 100	H–acceptor	4.34	−1.3
				6-ring	N	Arg 17	π–H	4.19	−0.7

DS: Docking score energy (kcal.mol^{−1}); RMSD: Root-mean-square deviation (Å); L: Ligand; P: Protein; T: Type; D: Distance (Å); E: Energy (kcal.mol^{−1})

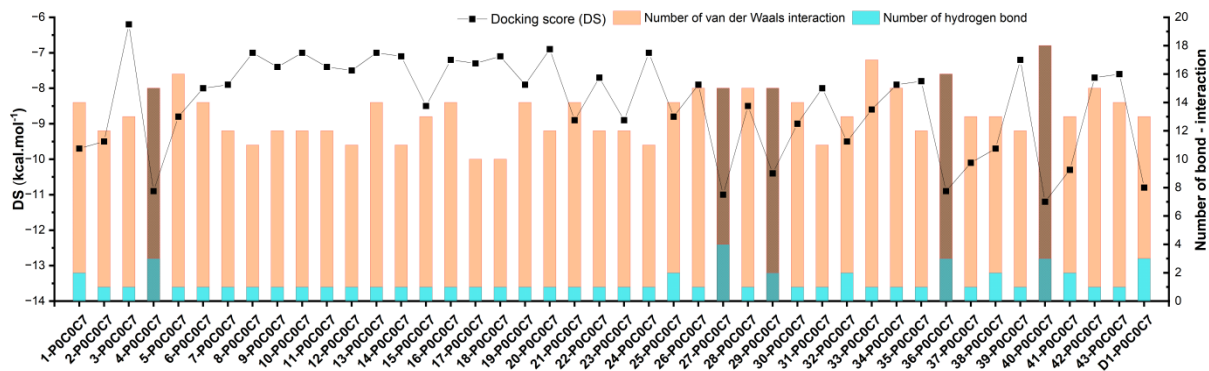


Fig. 6. Comparative analysis of the inhibitory docking score (DS) and the numbers of hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions for compounds 1–43 and the reference drug D1 with protein P0C0C7

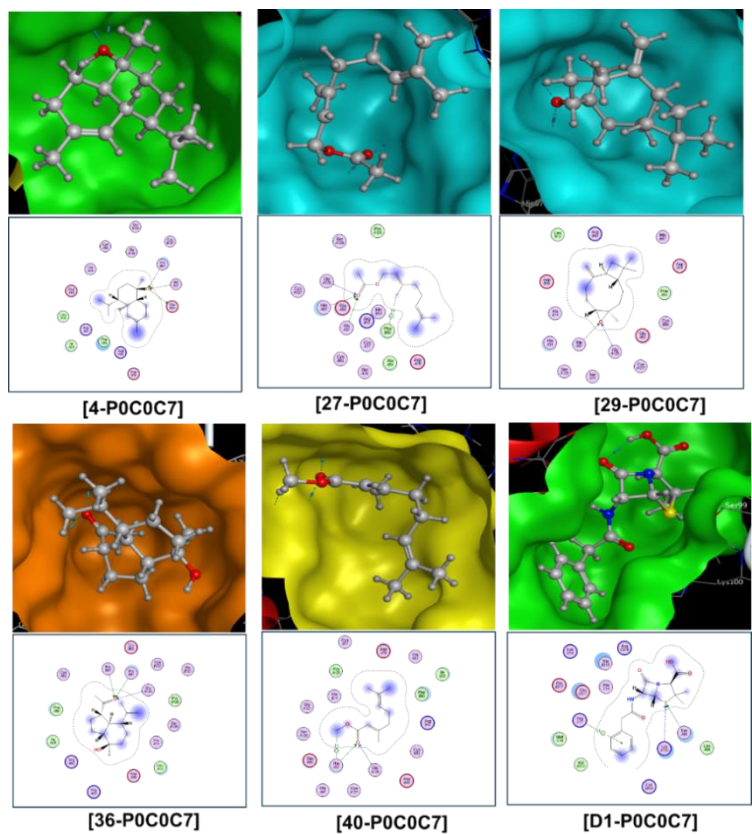


Fig. 7. Visual representations and binding pose interaction maps of the ligand–P0C0C7 complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

For the Q8DQF8 target, the docking results illustrated the inhibitory binding of the essential oil constituents and the reference drug (**D1**). The DS values, together with the associated hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions, account for the inhibition of protein Q8DQF8 (Fig. 6). The docking results revealed a broad distribution of

binding affinities, with DS values ranging from –11.6 to –5.7 kcal.mol^{–1}, accompanied by 0–4 hydrogen bonds and 7–18 van der Waals interactions. Among the essential oil constituents (excluding **D1**), the most promising candidates were identified and ranked as **27–Q8DQF8** (–9.6 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **29–Q8DQF8** (–9.4 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **25–**

Q8DQF8 (–9.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) ≈ **41–Q8DQF8** (–9.3 kcal.mol^{–1}) > **36–Q8DQF8** (–9.2 kcal.mol^{–1}), which are highlighted in Fig. 8. The docking details and visualisations of the docking process for these compounds are shown in Table 3 and Fig. 9. In contrast, compound **14** was the weakest predicted inhibitor of Q8DQF8, with the least favourable docking score (DS = –5.7 kcal.mol^{–1}) and thus the lowest predicted binding strength among the screened ligands. The remaining compounds presented intermediate DS values (–6.0 to –9.1 kcal.mol^{–1}) associated with 0–1 hydrogen bonds

and 7–12 van der Waals interactions, indicating that most compounds in this group do not bind to Q8DQF8 through hydrogen bonding. Instead, their binding is driven mainly by van der Waals interactions, which are generally weaker and less specific than hydrogen bonds are, resulting in less stable complexes and a reduced inhibitory potential. In addition, among the remaining compounds, **39** also presented a comparatively strong profile (DS = –9.2 kcal.mol^{–1}) and can be considered an additional candidate.

Table 3. Molecular docking simulation results of the ligand–Q8DQF8 complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

Ligand–protein			Hydrogen bond						van der Waals interaction
Name	DS	RMSD	L		P	T	D	E	
25–Q8DQF8	−9.3	1.0	O	O	Ser 48	H–donor	3.23	−0.6	Lys 47, Asp 169, Asn 52, Phe 96, Met 51, Pro 412, Leu 416, Ile 413, Phe 92, Phe 90
27–Q8DQF8	−9.6	1.27	O	N	Gln 94	H–acceptor	3.06	−1.5	Asn 52, Met 51, Asp 176, Ile 413, Ser 48, Asp 169, Phe 92, Ala 174, Pro 412, Leu 175, Gln 93
29–Q8DQF8	−9.4	1.46	O	N	Asn 52	H–acceptor	2.99	−2.6	Phe 90, Asp 169, Phe 92, Gln 94, Phe 96, Met 51, Ser 48, Pro 412, Leu 416, Ile 413
36–Q8DQF8	−9.2	1.56	O	O	Asp 49	H–donor	2.93	−2.7	Arg 208, Ser 53, Phe 278, Glu 205, Leu 217, Lys 52, Tyr 140, Ser 58, Tyr 112, Val 238, Thr 114
41–Q8DQF8	−9.3	0.75	O	N	Gln 94	H–acceptor	2.90	−3.7	Phe 90, Phe 96, Asn 52, Gln 93, Met 51, Ser 48, Phe 92, Asp 169
D1– Q8DQF8	−11.6	0.98	O	O	Asp 76	H–donor	2.80	−4.5	Ser 126, Cys 127, His 57, Gly 128, His 87, His 81, Ile 25, Cys 82, Arg 42, Arg 23, Phe 80, Leu 12, Asp 40, Cys 77, Glu 60, Ala 64, Ile 75, Ser 78
			O	N	Arg 68	H–acceptor	3.01	−3.5	
			O	N	Arg 68	H–acceptor	3.29	−0.8	
			6-ring	N	His 14	π–H	3.0	−0.6	

DS: Docking score energy (kcal.mol^{–1}); RMSD: Root-mean-square deviation (Å); L: Ligand; P: Protein; T: Type; D: Distance (Å); E: Energy (kcal.mol^{–1})

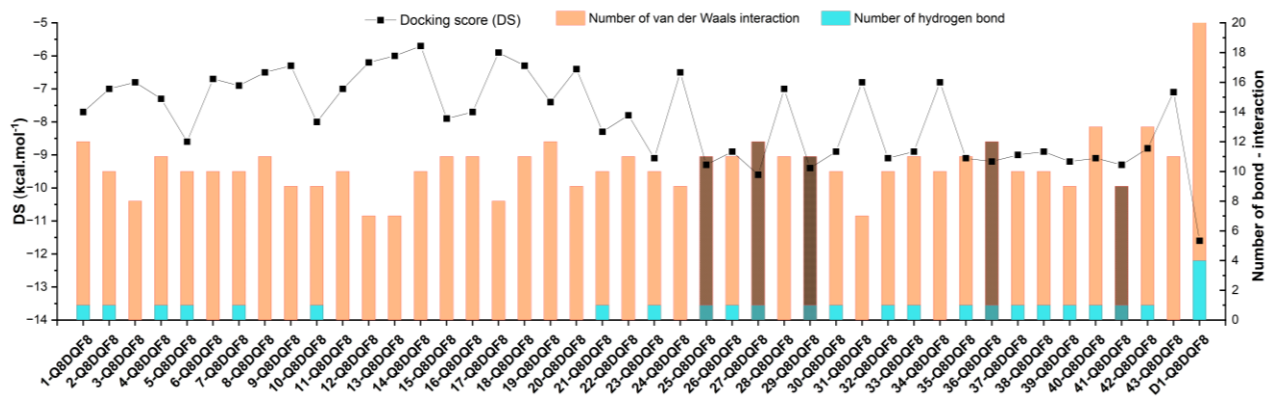


Fig. 8. Comparative analysis of the inhibitory docking score (DS) and the numbers of hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions for compounds 1–43 and the reference drug D1 with protein Q8DQF8

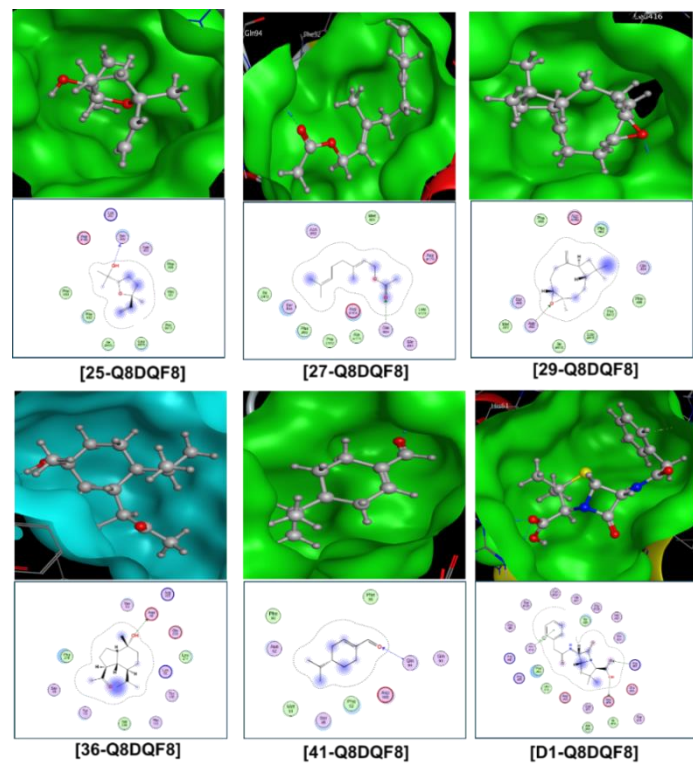


Fig. 9. Visual representations and binding pose interaction maps of the ligand–Q8DQF8 complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

Protein 4ESW was further examined to assess the binding of the reference drug clotrimazole. Fig. 10 summarises the docking scores (DSs) together with the numbers of hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions. Overall, the docking results revealed a wide range of binding affinities, with DS values from –11.3 to

–6.4 kcal.mol⁻¹, accompanied by 0–3 hydrogen bonds and 8–15 van der Waals interactions. A group of compounds with strong predicted inhibitory potential was identified and arranged in descending order of inhibitory activity, as follows: **42–4ESW** (–11.3 kcal.mol⁻¹) > **38–4ESW** (–10.8 kcal.mol⁻¹) > **21–4ESW** (–10.7 kcal.mol⁻¹) > **32–4ESW** (–10.3 kcal.mol⁻¹) ≈ **41–4ESW** (–10.3

kcal.mol⁻¹), while detailed docking parameters and visualisations of the docking protein 4ESW are presented in Table 4 and Fig. 11. Compared with the reference drug (**D2**), these compounds in this group presented greater inhibitory activity than **D2** did (DS = −8.1 kcal.mol⁻¹), suggesting a greater ability to inhibit the protein under the current

docking conditions. In contrast, compound **13** showed the weakest inhibitory ability, with DS being −6.4 kcal.mol⁻¹. The remaining groups presented intermediate DS values (approximately −7.0 to −9.4 kcal.mol⁻¹ with 0–1 hydrogen bonds and 8–13 van der Waals interactions).

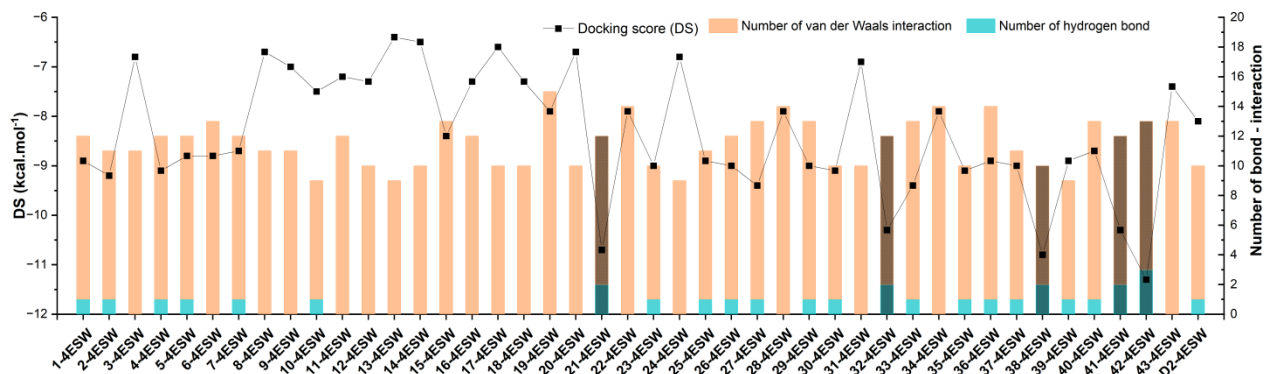


Fig. 10. Comparative analysis of the inhibitory docking score (DS) and the number of hydrogen bonds and van der Waals interactions for compounds **1–43** and the reference drug **D2** with protein 4ESW

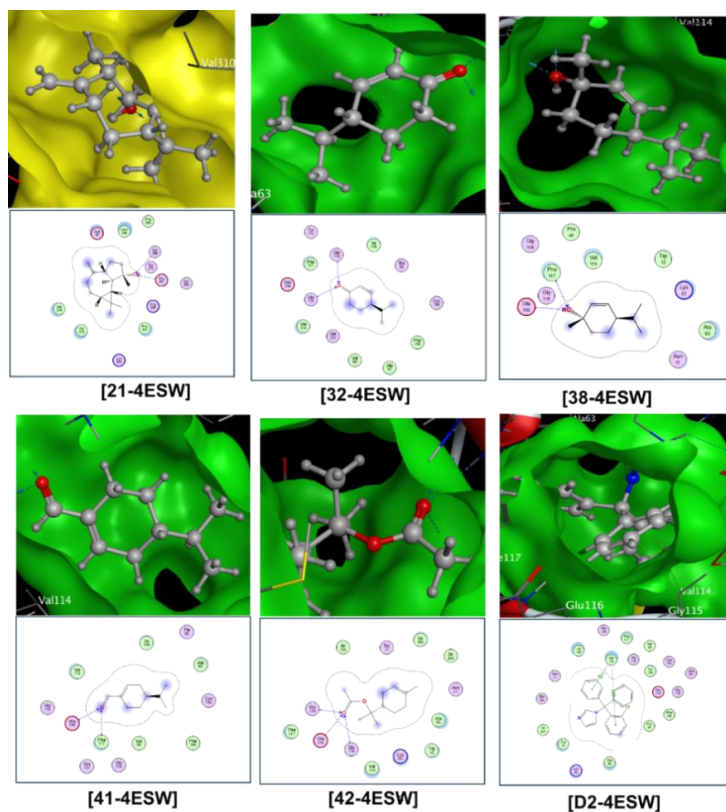


Fig. 11. Visual representations and binding pose interaction maps of the ligand–4ESW complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

Table 4. Molecular docking simulation results of the ligand–4ESW complexes for the strongest predicted inhibitors

Ligand–protein			Hydrogen bond						van der Waals interaction
Name	DS	RMSD	L	P	T	D	E		
21–4ESW	–10.7	1.68	O	N	Glu 267	H–acceptor	2.88	–1.6	Asp 85, Leu 338, Phe 265, Tyr 270, Ser 266, Arg 335, Pro 307, Lys 308, Val 272, Val 310
			O	N	Ser 268	H–acceptor	3.41	–0.8	
32–4ESW	–10.3	0.73	O	N	Gly 115	H–acceptor	3.03	–2.0	Tyr 113, Ile 158, Thr 89, Phe 198, Ala 63, Val 65, Gln 121, Val 114, Phe 117, Glu 116
			O	N	Gly 118	H–acceptor	2.97	–0.8	
38–4ESW	–10.8	1.01	O	N	Glu 116	H–acceptor	3.29	–0.8	Gly 118, Gly 115, Pro 45, Val 114, Trp 12, Lys 62, Ala 63, Asn 11
			O	N	Phe 117	H–acceptor	3.04	–2.2	
41–4ESW	–10.3	0.46	O	N	Glu 116	H–acceptor	3.01	–1.6	Gly 115, Val 114, Ile 158, Thr 89, Ala 63, Cys 199, Phe 198, Val 65, Gly 118, Gln 121
			O	N	Phe 117	H–acceptor	3.25	–0.7	
42–4ESW	–11.3	1.01	O	N	Gly 115	H–acceptor	3.36	–0.5	Phe 117, Ile 158, Tyr 17, Ile 160, Ile 201, Asn 11, Ala 63, Trp 12, Lys 62, Val 114
			O	N	Glu 116	H–acceptor	3.45	–1.3	
			O	N	Gly 118	H–acceptor	3.00	–2.3	
D2–4ESW	–8.1	0.46	5-ring	C	Arg 318	π –H	4.38	–0.6	Glu 317, Thr 316, Thr 319, Glu 317, Arg 320, Ser 98, Leu 98, Leu 97, His 14

DS: Docking score energy (kcal.mol^{–1}); RMSD: Root-mean-square deviation (Å); L: Ligand; P: Protein; T: Type; D: Distance (Å); E: Energy (kcal.mol^{–1})

Overall, the docking analysis results indicate that the most effective protein inhibitors among the identified constituents are oxygenated monoterpenes and oxygenated sesquiterpenes. These compounds typically contain functional groups such as hydroxyl, carbonyl, and epoxide groups, which enable the formation of hydrogen bonds while maintaining extensive van der Waals interactions through the nonpolar carbon backbone of terpenes. In contrast, other groups, including monoterpenes and sesquiterpene hydrocarbons, generally exhibited weaker binding affinities because of the absence of polar interactions between functional groups. Moreover, sesquiterpenoid structures with larger carbon backbones tended to exhibit enhanced inhibitory potential across P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, and 4ESW, suggesting that the size and the architecture of the carbon skeleton are important factors influencing inhibitory activity.

Moreover, because the essential oil of *H. occulta* is a complex multicomponent system, the DS values obtained for individual compounds are insufficient to describe the inhibitory performance of the essential oil; thus, the constituent content of each compound should be considered. In this study, the major constituents, namely, linalool (40.35%), terpinen-4-ol (8.54%), and α -terpineol (3.05%), exhibited predominantly moderate DS values against the target proteins P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, and 4ESW from –6.5 to –8.5 kcal.mol^{–1}. The DS reflects the potential for molecular-level interactions, whereas the constituent content indicates the extent to which each component contributes within the mixture. Accordingly, major constituents such as linalool, terpinen-4-ol, and α -terpineol still have the potential to contribute to the evaluation of the inhibitory activity of *H. occulta* essential oils.

Physicochemical properties

The physicochemical parameters, namely, the average docking score (DS_{avg} , kcal.mol⁻¹), molecular weight (amu), polarisability (Å³), molecular volume (Å³), and lipophilicity/solubility descriptors (logP and logS) of the investigated compounds (**1–43**), are presented in Table 5. The pharmacokinetic potential of these compounds was assessed according to Lipinski’s rule of five, a widely accepted criterion for predicting drug likeness.

The integration of physicochemical properties and the average docking score revealed that the investigated compounds exhibited excellent compliance with Lipinski’s rule of five while maintaining a promising protein inhibitory potential. Notably, all 43/43 compounds had molecular weights less than 500 amu, suggesting relatively small molecular sizes that are favourable for oral absorption. In addition, the number of hydrogen-bond donors and acceptors for these compounds was well below the rule-of-five thresholds, which may reduce excessive hydrogen bonding with the solvent and consequently support improved membrane permeability.

Regarding lipophilicity, the majority of the compounds had LogP values ranging

approximately from 2.5 to 4.8, demonstrating strong compliance with Lipinski’s criterion (LogP < 5); only two compounds (**15** and **43**) slightly exceeded this threshold, indicating that the vast majority (41/43) maintained a reasonable balance between hydrophobicity and hydrophilicity. When correlated with the docking results, these candidates presented highly favourable docking scores ($DS_{avg} \leq -9.0$ kcal.mol⁻¹); they also had moderate logP values, not excessively low logS values, and low hydrogen-bonding capacities, suggesting that Lipinski-compliant physicochemical profiles not only support drug-likeness but also facilitate stable interactions within the binding sites of the target proteins. When the docking data were compared, the subgroup displaying the most potent protein inhibition (lowest DS_{avg}) generally presented intermediate logP values and logS values within a suitable range and a low number of hydrogen bonds. This finding indicates that the physicochemical properties that aligned with Lipinski’s rules not only support “drug-likeness” but can also structurally facilitate stable binding interactions with the target protein. Consequently, these compounds are considered promising candidates for future drug development.

Table 5. Physicochemical properties of the studied compounds (**1 – 43**)

Compound	DS_{avg} (kcal.mol ⁻¹)	Volume (Å ³)	Mass (amu)	Polarisability (Å ³)	Dispersion coefficients		Hydrogen-bond count P0C0C7/Q8DQF8/4 ESW
					LogP	LogS	
1	–8.8	185.0	154.1	19.40	2.512	–1.806	2/1/1
2	–8.6	179.1	154.1	18.79	2.508	–1.753	1/1/1
3	–6.6	161.8	136.1	17.48	4.623	–4.671	1/0/0
4	–9.1	257.0	222.2	27.27	3.736	–2.945	3/1/1
5	–8.7	257.0	222.2	27.27	4.151	–3.422	1/1/1
6	–7.8	245.6	204.2	26.49	4.473	–4.316	1/0/0
7	–7.8	179.1	154.1	18.79	2.968	–2.043	1/1/1
8	–6.7	167.7	136.1	18.02	4.173	–4.068	1/0/0

Compound	DS _{avg} (kcal.mol ⁻¹)	Volume (Å ³)	Mass (amu)	Polarisability (Å ³)	Dispersion coefficients		Hydrogen-bond count P0C0C7/Q8DQF8/4 ESW
					LogP	LogS	
9	-6.9	167.7	136.1	18.02	4.431	-4.033	1/0/0
10	-7.5	165.1	134.1	17.82	4.347	-3.916	1/1/1
11	-7.2	222.4	190.2	24.12	4.818	-5.151	1/0/0
12	-7.0	167.7	136.1	18.02	3.873	-3.673	1/0/0
13	-6.5	167.7	136.1	18.02	4.169	-3.932	1/0/0
14	-6.4	173.6	136.1	18.57	4.374	-4.152	1/0/0
15	-8.3	251.5	204.2	27.03	5.038	-5.215	1/0/0
16	-7.4	245.6	204.2	26.49	4.389	-4.286	1/0/0
17	-6.6	161.8	136.1	17.48	4.514	-4.408	1/0/0
18	-6.9	167.7	136.1	18.02	4.481	-4.259	1/0/0
19	-7.7	251.5	204.2	27.03	4.617	-4.474	1/0/0
20	-6.7	161.8	136.1	17.48	3.928	-3.816	1/0/0
21	-9.3	248.5	220.2	26.54	3.696	-3.700	1/1/2
22	-7.8	245.6	204.2	26.49	4.27	-4.300	1/0/0
23	-9.0	185.0	154.1	19.32	3.428	-2.954	1/1/1
24	-6.8	161.8	136.1	17.48	3.544	-3.730	1/0/0
25	-9.0	187.9	170.1	19.40	1.361	-0.710	2/1/1
26	-8.6	185.0	154.1	19.32	3.534	-3.075	1/1/1
27	-10.0	225.8	196.2	23.05	3.816	-3.329	4/1/1
28	-7.8	245.6	204.2	26.49	4.461	-4.279	1/0/0
29	-9.6	248.5	220.2	26.54	3.024	-2.915	2/1/1
30	-9.0	251.1	222.2	26.75	4.293	-3.902	1/1/1
31	-7.2	161.8	136.1	17.48	4.271	-4.163	1/0/0
32	-9.6	159.2	138.1	16.42	2.533	-2.070	2/1/2
33	-9.0	225.8	196.2	23.05	3.999	-3.510	1/1/1
34	-7.5	245.6	204.2	26.49	4.67	-4.761	1/0/0
35	-8.7	176.5	152.1	18.58	2.325	-1.620	1/1/1
36	-9.7	265.8	238.2	27.55	2.566	-2.306	3/1/1
37	-9.4	176.5	152.1	18.26	2.804	-2.374	1/1/1
38	-9.8	179.1	154.1	18.79	2.779	-1.864	2/1/2
39	-8.4	173.8	150.1	18.04	2.427	-2.135	1/1/1
40	-9.7	208.5	182.1	21.21	3.409	-3.168	3/1/1
41	-10.0	176.5	152.1	18.26	2.979	-2.373	2/1/2

Compound	DS _{avg} (kcal.mol ⁻¹)	Volume (Å ³)	Mass (amu)	Polarisability (Å ³)	Dispersion coefficients		Hydrogen-bond count P0C0C7/Q8DQF8/4 ESW
					LogP	LogS	
42	−9.3	219.9	196.2	22.54	3.341	−2.876	1/1/3
43	−7.4	239.7	204.2	25.96	5.438	−5.564	1/0/0

ADMET prediction

The pharmacokinetic-toxicity properties of the investigated compounds, namely, absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion, and toxicity, were predicted, and the results are shown in Tables S4–S7. Most *H. occulta* essential oil constituents showed favourable absorption, with high Caco-2 permeability (logPapp 1.3–1.6) and high predicted human intestinal absorption (>92%), outperforming the two reference drugs (**D1** and **D2**). However, the investigated compounds exhibited low aqueous solubilities, with the logS values ranging from approximately −2.0 to below −6.4, reflecting the lipophilic characteristics, typical of essential oils. For dermal delivery, most compounds displayed relatively favourable skin permeation (logKp from −1.0 to −2.4). In addition, most were not predicted to be P-glycoprotein substrates or inhibitors (P-gp I/II), suggesting a potentially lower risk of P-gp-mediated limitations on oral bioavailability or tissue penetration.

The investigated compounds exhibited logVDss values of 0.1–0.8, consistent with a moderate-to-high propensity for tissue distribution. Most constituents showed positive logBB values (approximately 0.3–0.8), indicating relatively good blood-brain barrier permeability, which is generally higher than that of **D1** (−0.864) and only slightly lower than that of **D2** (0.938). In addition, the predicted central nervous system (CNS) permeability showed the logPS values ranging from −1.4 to −2.8, which were lower than that of clotrimazole (−1.208) but higher than that of penicillin G (−2.943), suggesting a moderate-to-low tendency to penetrate the CNS, depending on the

individual compound. From a metabolic perspective, most of these compounds were not predicted to be CYP2D6 substrates, and only a few were predicted to be CYP3A4 substrates. Only a small number of compounds were predicted to inhibit major CYP enzymes (CYP1A2, CYP2C19, CYP2C9, CYP2D6, and CYP3A4). This suggests that the risk of metabolism-related drug-drug interactions is low.

On the excretion side, most compounds are predicted to be efficiently eliminated. They might not rely on OCT2-mediated renal transport, contributing to favourable pharmacokinetics. In addition, the lack of OCT2 inhibition suggests a low risk of drug-drug interactions and stable clearance. On the basis of the *in silico* toxicity assessment, most compounds in essential oils were Ames negative, showed no inhibition of hERG I/II channels, and were not predicted to be hepatotoxic. The estimated acute and chronic oral toxicity parameters (LD₅₀ and LOAEL) were generally within an acceptable range. However, a notable limitation of this compound set is the relatively high prediction rate of skin sensitisation, which should be considered when developing topical formulations, especially for long-term use.

4 Conclusion

In the present study, *Homalomena occulta* essential oil obtained via steam distillation was comprehensively profiled via GC-MS, resulting in the identification of 43 constituents. The oil composition was dominated by oxygenated monoterpenes, with linalool (40.35%), terpinen-4-ol (8.54%), and α-terpineol (3.05%) as the most

abundant components, highlighting oxygenated terpenoids as the key chemical class. The identified compounds were then evaluated *in silico* via molecular docking simulations against three antimicrobial-related targets (P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, and 4ESW). The highest-ranking ligands were **40/27/4/36/29** for P0C0C7, **27/29/25/41/36** for Q8DQF8, and **42/38/21/32/41** for 4ESW. Docking results highlighted compounds **40** (Methyl geranate), **27** (Geranyl acetate), and **42** (α -Terpinyl acetate) as the top-ranked ligands for P0C0C7, Q8DQF8, and 4ESW, respectively, with compound **27** standing out for its strong ranking across multiple targets. In addition, a drug-likeness assessment based on Lipinski's rule of five suggested that the screened constituents largely fall within drug-like properties, as all the compounds met the molecular weight requirement (MW < 500 Da) and most satisfied the lipophilicity criterion ($\log P < 5$; 41/43). ADMET profiling suggested generally good pharmacokinetic properties for the *H. occulta* essential oil compounds, with high predicted absorption and good permeability. The predictions also indicate a low risk of major transporter- and metabolism-related issues, supporting their suitability for further biological testing. Overall, these *in silico* findings provide a useful preliminary basis for prioritising promising constituents and guiding subsequent experimental studies to evaluate their antimicrobial potential.

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