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26 April 2021 | Vol. 13 | No. 5 | Pages: 18406–18410
DOI: 10.11609/jott.6578.13.5.18406-18410

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The Malay Cardamom *Meistera aculeata* (Roxb.) Škorničk. & M.F. Newman (Zingiberaceae: Alpinioideae) from the Palghat gap: a new record to Kerala, India

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Zingiberaceae, the ginger family, comprises 53 genera and more than 1,375 species widely distributed throughout tropical Africa, Asia, and America (Kress et al. 2002; Kong et al. 2010). *Amomum* Roxb s.l. is the second largest genus in the family Zingiberaceae with about 150–180 species (Xia et al. 2004). The distribution of the genus in India is concentrated in northeastern India, peninsular India, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands with 22 species (Thomas & Sabu 2012). *Amomum* is reported to have 48 species in the Flora of British India (Hooker 1894), while five species were reported by Fischer (1928) in the Flora of Presidency of Madras. Recent taxonomic studies have resulted in the discovery of 12 taxa under the genus *Amomum* (Thomas et al. 2010, 2012a,b, 2014, 2015, 2016; Thomas & Sabu 2012; Harrees & Sabu 2018).

Presently *Amomum* is circumscribed to a monophyletic genus based on multi-marker phylogenetic framework using matK and nrITS as markers. The targeted sampling combined with the molecular data, phylogenetic analysis and morphological characters allowed the re-circumscription of 10 clades of the genus *Amomum* as separate genera (De Boer et al. 2018). Accordingly, certain species in the genus *Amomum* are either resurrected or transferred to the genus *Meistera* Giseke.

*Meistera* is characterized by semi-lunar anther crest, echinate fruit and solitary flower in each fertile bract (Thomas & Sabu 2018). The genus comprises 42 species and three varieties, and is distributed from Sri Lanka and India, throughout the Indo-Chinese region to Sundaland (De Boer et al. 2018).

During the exploratory studies on the floristic diversity in the Malayal forest range of the southern Western Ghats, the authors collected specimens belonging to the genus *Meistera* growing on the foothills of Jamanthimala coming under Pudussery North Section (10.863’N & 76.789’E) near the Palakkad Gap region in June 2019. The specimens were preserved as herbarium using standard herbarium procedures. The specimen was identified as *Meistera aculeata* (Roxb.) Škorničk. & M.F. Newman after consulting relevant taxonomic

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**Editor:** V. Sampath Kumar, Botanical Survey of India, Coimbatore, India.  
**Date of publication:** 26 April 2021 (online & print)


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**Funding:** 1.Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE), Govt. of Kerala [No. KSCSTE/769/2018 - FSHP LS]; 2. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) [08/675(0001)/2017-EMR-1]

**Competing interests:** The authors declare no competing interests.

**Acknowledgements:** First author sincerely acknowledges the financial support received under the research fellowship programme by Kerala State Council for Science Technology and Environment (KSCSTE), Govt. of Kerala. Jabeena, M.K. thank the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) for the financial assistance. Authors like to extend sincere thanks to Director of Collegiate Education, Govt. of Kerala, and Principal, Govt. Victoria College, Palakkad for the facilities provided for carrying out research. First author wish to thank Dr. M. Sabu and Dr. Thomas V.P. for their valuable comments in confirming the identity of the taxa. The authors sincerely acknowledge the support from Department of Forests, Govt. of Kerala for necessary permissions and assistance in exploring the forests of Palakkad District.
Meistera aculeata - new record to Kerala

Aswani et al.

...literature and the type specimen housed at the Natural History Museum (BM).

Balakrishnan & Nair (1979) reported this species from the Andaman & Nicobar islands and recently, this was reported from Kodagu in Karnataka (Patil & Lakshminarasimhan 2018) as a new addition to its distribution in mainland India. Our collection from the foothills of Jamanthimala forms a new record to the flora of Kerala as this taxon has not been included in any of the literature pertaining to the flowering plants of Kerala (Vajravelu 1990; Sasidharan 2002, 2011; Nayar et al. 2006, 2014) as well as the revisionary studies on Amomum s.l. (Sabu 2006; Thomas 2011). A detailed description of the taxon along with photographs and distribution map is provided. The specimens are deposited at Madras Herbarium (MH), Calicut University Herbarium (CALI), and Government Victoria College Herbarium (GVCH).


Type: Ind. Orient., India, William Roxburgh s.n. (BM000958151, Image!)

Perennial herb, 2–3.5 m tall with distichous leaves. Root stock rhizomatous, branched and creamy brown within. Leafy shoots elongated, 2–3 cm thick, reddish brown towards base. Leaves sessile or shortly petiolate; lamina 30–60 cm long and 5–9 cm broad, oblong-lanceolate, acuminate at apex, cuneate at base, margins entire, glabrous on both surfaces, midrib yellowish-green, glabrous; petioles 0–3 mm long. Ligules bífid or subentire, longer than petiole, 1–1.5 cm long. Spikes many flowered borne directly from root stock, peduncles 10–15 cm long, 1–1.25 cm thick, glabrous. Bracts many, imbricate, very closely sheathing and spirally arranged, ovate, reddish-brown, cupulolate at apex, 4–6 cm long, 2.5–3.5 cm broad, glabrous inside and puberulous outside. Fertile bracts pinkish-red, ovate, cupulolate at apex, 4–5 cm long and 2–2.5 cm wide, puberulous towards base inside, glabrous towards apex on both surfaces. Each floral bract subtends a single flower. Bracteole tubular, abruptly 3 lobed, 1.4–1.6 cm long, membranous towards apex, glabrous on both surfaces. Flowers 1–4, open simultaneously in a head pattern with older flowers beneath which appears brown and slimy, 4–4.5 cm long. Calyx tubular, 2–2.5 cm long, 1.2–1.6 cm wide, 3 lobed from middle,
Meistera aculeata - new record to Kerala

As wani et al.
Meistera aculeata - new record to Kerala

axp mucronate, margins ciliate. Corolla tube 1.8–2.8 cm long, white, glabrous. Dorsal corolla lobe obovate, broader than lateral lobes, 2–2.8 cm long, rounded at apex, margins ciliate and slightly wavy. Lateral corolla lobes oblong, 1.2–1.5 x 1–1.5 cm long, rounded at apex, margins ciliate. Labellum obovate, trilobed, 3.5–3.6 cm wide, margins slightly undulate, glabrous. Median lobe truncate, clefted, white with yellow along with red streaks towards base and lateral lobes orbicular, lateral staminodes 2, subulate at base, red, 0.2–0.3 cm long, glabrous; anther one, oblong, 1.2–1.5 cm long, 0.3–0.4 cm broad furnished with a white petaloid anther crest; anther crest tri–lobed, middle lobe truncate or rounded and lateral lobes orbicular; thecae oblong, 1.2–1.5 cm long, white with irregular pink spots, apex rounded, base slightly acute, glabrous dehiscing throughout length. Gynoecium 4.8–5 cm, ovary 0.3–0.5 cm long, minutely pubescent, three celled with many ovules in each cell; style 3.8–4 cm long, glabrous except for ciliate hairs on one side half way long; stigma cup shaped, 0.1cm long and 0.15cm wide, creamy yellow with ciliate hairs in mouth region. Fruits 1.5–1.8 x 1.3 cm, echinate in clusters, glabrous, deep red when mature, many seeded.

Specimen examined: 177854 (MH) 23.vi.2019, INDIA: Kerala; Palakkad District, Malayar forest range, Pudussery North Section, Jamantimala, 10.863°N & 76.789°E, 559.2m, coll. Aswani & Maya; 7005 (CALI) 23.vi.2019, Palakkad District, Malayar forest range, Pudussery North Section, Jamantimala, 10.863°N & 76.789°E, 559.2m, coll. Aswani & Maya; 4078 (GVCH), 23.vi.2019, Palakkad District, Malayar forest range, Pudussery North Section, Jamantimala, 10.863°N & 76.789°E, 559.2m, coll. Aswani & Maya; 4153 (GVCH) 01.vii.2019, Palakkad District, Malayar range, Pudussery North Section, Jamantimala, 10.864°N & 76.788°E, 561.8m coll. Aswani; 4385 (GVCH) 19.vii.2019, Palakkad District, Malayar range, Kamalavaram section, Malampuzha (Moochikadavu), 10.880°N & 76.703°E, 500.5m, coll. Aswani & Maya.

Flowering: May–July; Fruiting: July–August.

Distribution: India (Karnataka: Kodagu – Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary; Kerala: Palakkad, Malayar, Pudussery North, Jamantimala; Andaman Islands: Figure 1), Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malay Archipelago, Malaysia, also extending across Wallace’s Line to Sulawesi, New Guinea, and Australia.

Ecology: This plant grows at an elevation of 500–600m in humer-covered semi-evergreen forest floor. Small populations at an average of 20–30 mature plants were observed within a distance of 100m. The taxon was found growing in some restricted localities of Malayar forest range along with Ancistrocladus heyneanus Wall. ex J. Graham, Atlantia monophylla D.C., Dioscorea oppositifolia L., Cyclea peltata (Lam.) Hook.f. & Thomson and Anamirta cocculus (L.) Wight & Arn.

Discussion

In the Palghat Gap region, exhaustive surveys covering the nearby forest ranges could not locate this species. Recently, this species was reported from Pushpagiri Wildlife sanctuary, Kodagu, Karnataka (Patil & Lakshminarasimhan 2018) and earlier from Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Balakrishnan & Nair 1979). Further, the threat status of the taxon is designated as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (Olender 2020). As the population is discrete and discontinuous, the most appropriate causes for these disjunctions need to be studied and exhaustive explorations are required to fix the threat status of this taxon.

References


Meistera aculeata - new record to Kerala

As wani et al.


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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

April 2021 | Vol. 13 | No. 5 | Pages: 18099–18410
Date of Publication: 26 April 2021 (Online & Print)
DOI: 10.11609/jott.2021.13.5.18099-18410

Articles

Spatiotemporal movement pattern of Asian Elephants Elephas maximus Linnaeus, 1758 in Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra, India

Conservation ecology of birds in Mt. Hilong-hilong, a Key Biodiversity Area on Mindanao Island, the Philippines

Nesting and hunting behaviour of Olive Ridley Turtles Lepidochelys olivacea (Eschscholtz, 1829) (Reptilia: Cryptodira: Chelonidae) on Dr. Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha, India
– P. Poornima, Pp. 18122–18131

Feeding ecology of Walia ibex Capra walie (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Bovidae) in Simien Mountains National Park, Ethiopia

Assessment of crop and property damage caused by Semnopithecus vetulus nestor (Bennett, 1833) (Mammalia: Primates: Cercopithecidae) in Gampa District, Sri Lanka
– Sunil Wijethilaka, Lakshani S. Weerasekara, Saumya Bandara & Kithsin B. Ranawana, Pp. 18141–18147

Habitat preference of the Indian Pangolin Manis crassicaudata inhabiting Margalla Hills National Park, Islamabad, Pakistan

The endangered Himalayan Red Panda: first photographic evidence from its westernmost distribution range
– Saroj Shrestha, Sony Lama, Ang Phuri Sherpa, Sonam Tashi Lama & Dinesh Ghale, Pp. 18156–18163

Ecological niche modelling predicts significant impacts of future climate change on two endemic rodents in eastern Africa
– Aditya Srinivasulu, Alembhran Assea & Chelmala Srinivasulu, Pp. 18164–18176

Avian diversity in a fragmented landscape of central Indian forests (Bhopal Forest Circle) with emphasis on endemic and Near Threatened species
– Amit Kumar, Yogesh Dubey & Adwait Edganorkar, Pp. 18177–18188

Nest tree preference shown by Ring-necked Parakeet Psittacula krameri (Scopoli, 1769) in northern districts of Tamil Nadu, India
– M. Pandian, Pp. 18189–18199

Two new species of Euophora Selys, 1840 (Odonata: Zygoptera: Euphaeidae) from northern Western Ghats, India
– Shriram Dinkar Bhakare, Vinayan P Nair, Pratima Ashok Pawar, Sunil Hanmant Bhoite & Kailesh Sadasivan, Pp. 18200–18214

Two new light attractedrove beetle species of Astenus Dejean, 1833 (Coleoptera: Staphylinidae: Paederinae) from Kerala, India

A new distribution record of wasp Pison punctifrons Shuckard, 1838 (Hymenoptera: Sphingidae: Larrinae) from Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Diversity of freshwater molluscs from the upper Brahmaputra Basin, Assam, India
– Pranati Gogoi & Namita Nath, Pp. 18297–18312

A checklist of fishes of Telangana State, India
– Kante Krishna Prasad & Chelmala Srinivasulu, Pp. 18324–18343

A new record of an endangered and endemic rare Rein Orchid Habenaria rariflora from Sindhudurg District, Maharashtra, India
– Mital R. Bhatt, Pp. 18385–18389

Glimpse of climber diversity in Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, India
– Lalita Saini, Archasvi Tyagi, Inam Mohammad & Vijai Malik, Pp. 18390–18397

First report of the fleshy mushroom Trichaleurina javanica (Rehm) M. Carbon et al. (Ascomycota: Pezizales: Chorioactidaceae) from southern India
– Munuswamy Kumar, Sekar NiThya & Antony Agnes Kayalvich, Pp. 18398–18402

Notes

Photographic record of Temminck’s Tragopan Tragopan temminckii (Gray, 1831) (Aves: Galliformes: Phasianidae) from eastern Bhutan: an evidence of its westward range expansion
– Thshering Dorji, Kinley Kinley, Letro Letro, Dawa Thshering & Prem Nanda Maidali, Pp. 18403–18405

The Malay Cardamom Meistero oculatum (Roscb.) Škorníčk. & M.F. Newman (Zingiberales: Alpinioideae) from the Palghat gap: a new record to Kerala, India
– Vadakkevedu Jagadesh Aswani, Manjakulam Khadhersha Jabeena & Maya Chandrashekar Nair, Pp. 18406–18410

Legume families of Kerala, India: a checklist
– Anoop P. Balan & S.V. Predeep, Pp. 18257–18282

Legumes (Angiosperms: Fabaceae) of Bagalkot District, Karnataka, India
– Jagdish Dalavi, Ramesh Pujar, Sharad Kambale, Varsha Jadhav-Rathod & Shrirang Yadav, Pp. 18283–18296

Indigenous knowledge of ethnomedicinal plants by the Assamese community in Dibrugarh District, Assam, India
– Pranati Gogoi & Namita Nath, Pp. 18297–18312

Conservation ecology of birds in Mt. Hilong-hilong, a Key Biodiversity Area on Mindanao Island, the Philippines
– Florfe M. Acma, Hannah P. Lumista, Riah Calising & Krizler Cejuela Tanalgo, Pp. 18110–18121

First distribution record of the Asiatic Toad Bufo gargarizans Cantor, 1842 from India — Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh

A new record of an endangered and endemic rare Rein Orchid Habenaria rariflora from Gujarat, India
– Mital R. Bhatt, Pp. 18385–18389

Glimpse of climber diversity in Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh, India
– Lalita Saini, Archasvi Tyagi, Inam Mohammad & Vijai Malik, Pp. 18390–18397

First report of the fleshy mushroom Trichaleurina javanica (Rehm) M. Carbon et al. (Ascomycota: Pezizales: Chorioactidaceae) from southern India
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Notes

Photographic record of Temminck’s Tragopan Tragopan temminckii (Gray, 1831) (Aves: Galliformes: Phasianidae) from eastern Bhutan: an evidence of its westward range expansion
– Thshering Dorji, Kinley Kinley, Letro Letro, Dawa Thshering & Prem Nanda Maidali, Pp. 18403–18405

The Malay Cardamom Meistero oculatum (Roscb.) Škorníčk. & M.F. Newman (Zingiberales: Alpinioideae) from the Palghat gap: a new record to Kerala, India
– Vadakkevedu Jagadesh Aswani, Manjakulam Khadhersha Jabeena & Maya Chandrashekar Nair, Pp. 18406–18410