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Caption: Lowland Tapir Tapirus terrestris (Medium-watercolours on watercolour paper) © Aakanksha Komanduri. _____

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New records of mass seeding *Cephalostachyum latifolium* Munro (Poaceae) along the mid-elevation broadleaved forest of Sarpang district, Bhutan

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Bamboo are plietesial plants which can typically grow as even-aged cohort for some time and in their final year of life, flower gregariously, set seed, and then die (Wright et al. 2014). According to Vorontsova et al. (2016), there are over 1,642 species of bamboo that belongs to about 88 genera of woody bamboos in the world. Out of that, Bhutan has recorded 15 genera and 31 species of bamboo (Noltie 2000), currently 32 species after the new record of Bambusa pallida by Dorjee et al. (2020). Among them, 17 species belonging to nine genera are found within the broadleaved forest of Sarpang district (Tenzin 2015). In fact, bamboo species flower once in their life and die after mass seeding (Wright et al. 2014). Flowering can be categorized into three major groups: annual, sporadic or irregular and gregarious flowering (Brandis 1899). This event appears in a cyclic pattern within the interval of 10 to 120 years (Ramanayake 2006) or 20 to 120 years (Thapliyal et al. 2015) depending on the species and genera.

According to Namgyel (2017), first oral account of

sub-tropical bamboo flowered in Bhutan was recorded around 1963 in Kerabari, Woma & Sama villages in Kalikhola under Dagana district by Mr. Chenkyab Dorji (Forest Ranger at that time), former Minister of Planning Commission in Bhutan. Later, Samtse district has recorded mass seeding of Dendrocalamus sikkimensis in 1985 to 1986 and Melocanna baccifera in 2007 (Wright et al. 2014). While, temperate bamboo species such as Sinarundinaria falcata, Thamnocalamus falconeri, and Thamnocalamus spathiflora were also seeded around 2001 & 2002 and 2004 & 2005 in western part of the Bhutan (Wright et al. 2014). In sub-alpine region, similar mass seeding has been reported for Borinda grossa at Sakteng under Trashigang district in 2005; Thamnocalamus spathiflorus along Pelela-Yotongla passes in 2008 and Yushania microphylla at Lawala under Wangdue districts in 2011 (Wangda et al. 2011; Namgyel 2017). Likewise, mast seeding of Melecanna beccifera were also been reported in the lowland forest of Bajali in Indo-Burma hotspot region in 2008 (Sarma et al. 2010)

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New records of Cephalostachyum latifolium in Sarpang district, Bhutan

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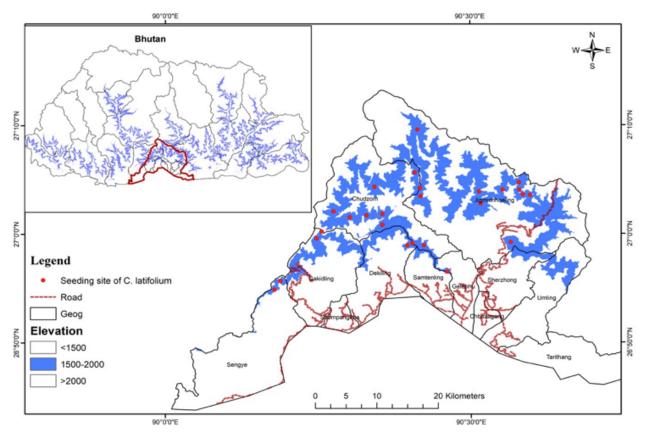


Figure 1. Mass seeding of Cephalostachyum latifolium under Sarpang District, Bhutan.

and neighboring northeastern India and Bangladesh in 2010 (Belmain et al. 2010; Wright et al. 2014). Till date, *Melecanna bambusoides* was the first bamboo species been recorded to be flowered in Mizoram under North east state, India in 1815 (Thapliyal et al. 2015). Perhaps this could be the first starting milestone ever tracked by the scientific literature till date within the range countries. Meanwhile, recent record of gregarious and mass seeding of *Cephalostachyum latifolium* bamboo species from the mid-elevation broadleaved forest of Sarpang district in Bhutan has added another new records to bamboo science in the February of 2017 (Image 1).

C. latifolium is locally known as 'Jhi' (Dzongkha), 'Pishima' (Kengkha), and 'Ghopi bans' (Nepali) that belongs to *Cephalostachyum* genera (Image 1). Globally, it is distributed across Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar, and Nepal including Bhutan. However, Bhutan till date has recorded only two *Cephalostachyum* species (*C. latifolium & C. capitatum*) (Noltie 2000). *C. latifolium* is distributed along Phuntsholing and Gelephu under Chukha and Sarpang within the elevation range of 1,500 to 2,000 m (Noltie 2000). Taxonomically, Noltie (2000) reported that it is a broadleaved bamboo, which can grow up to 15 m height with the diameter of 5 cm. Culm sheaths has 50 cm with ridges, edges membranous, and raised shoulders. While, leaf sheath shoulder are raised, oral setae long, long ligules with glabrous and blade broad ranging 7 x 35 cm. Inflorescence are compounded with unilateral and becoming sub-globular with orange cylindrical shape spikelet.

In Bhutan, gregarious flowering of *C. latifolium* has been recorded from Dorokha in Samtse towards the extreme west, Gedu regions in Chukha and Narphung in Samdrup Jongkhar district including Sarpang (Sangay Dorjee, Samdrup Jongkhar Forest Division, DoFPS, pers. comm.) within the mid-elevation of 1,500– 2,000 m (Figure 1). While, in case of Sarpang district, gregarious flowering and seeding were recorded from the different areas under five gewogs (sub-district administration): Darachu and Pathiwara in Gakidling; Dawnidhap and ridges of Sherubling under Chudzom; Ranibagan top in Dekiling; Labarbotry top in Sengye; and Ashiney, Samkhara top, Ghopidara and Lampokhari in Jigmecholing gewog (Figure 1). Dorjee (2019) has also recorded gregarious and mass seeding of same bamboo



Image 1. A—Clump of Cephalostachyum latifolium species |B—Flowers | C—Seeds. © Jigme Tenzin.

species in 2017 from undulated patches of Lemtsorong and Shekpashing at 26.950°N & 91.546°E extending towards 26.952°N & 91.958°E in Narphung under Samdrup Jongkhar Forest Division (eastern Bhutan). This suggested that the entire *C. latifolium* species which were grown within these elevation ranges (1,500–2,000 m) might have flowered and seeded across Bhutan. With this bamboo species, Bhutan has recorded a total of eight bamboo species have flowered till date (until 2020), while, 35 bamboo species have been reported to be flowered till 2015 in India ever since the early 19th century (Thapliyal et al. 2015).

According to Wang et al. (2016), gregarious and mast seeding explodes rodent population and induces food scarcity. Exactly in these gregarious years, Bhutan Broadcasting Services (BBS) and Kuensel both reported the ravages of maize by rodents in Largyab gewog in Dagana & Patsaling in Tsirang district (16 October 2018 in BBS) and paddy in Chudzom and Gongduegang in Jigmecholing gewog under Sarpang district in Bhutan (10 November 2018 in Kuensel). Similar ecological havoc (famine and food security issues) has been widely reported aftermath of gregarious flowering in northeastern states of India in 1929 and 1959, particularly in Mizoram, India (Goraya et al. 2003; Namgyel 2017). Nonetheless, gregarious and mass seeding of bamboo plants means that local people lose their raw materials for building, fencing, and other economic uses (Wangda et al. 2011). Further, studies also report that mass seeding leads to the explosion of numerous bird species and rodents in cases of India (Wright et el. 2014), while wild pigs, rats, squirrel, and bears in case of Bhutan (Namgyel 2017)

that induced famine and human-wildlife interactions. Therefore, gregarious and mass seeding has immense social, economic, and ecological implications to the communities. Thus, research associated to ecology of gregarious flowered bamboo species, bamboo phenology, and socio-economic implication of gregarious flowering of bamboo species requires in-depth study in context to Bhutan by the research institute (UWICER) under Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS) in collaboration with Department of Agriculture (DoA) to manage and mitigate the future ecological havoc related gregarious flowering in Bhutan.

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