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Cover: Freshly emerged Footman Moth *Nepita conferta* from the cocoon on a brightly painted wall in the Nilgiris. Digital art on Procreate. © Aakanksha Komanduri.



Monocarpic plietesimal behaviour in *Lepidagathis* Willd. (Acanthaceae)

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Lepidagathis clavata Dalzell is a Critically Endangered B1ab(iii) endemic species growing on exposed rocky surfaces of the lateritic plateaus in the northern Western Ghats (Dalzell 1850; Kolte & Prabhukhanolkar 2023). In January 2016, during our botanical exploration to the lateritic plateaus of Chaukul from the Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra, we noticed a small patch with few individuals of this species flowering. Based on these live specimens, we published an article with updated description, lectotypification, and colour photo plate (Kolte et al. 2016). Subsequently, at the end of May 2016, we observed that all those flowered individuals dried off after setting seeds and decayed entirely in the monsoon. This field observation kindled our interest to constantly monitor different populations of this species to uncover the probability of a monocarpic pattern of life-cycle. Afterwards, we regularly conducted field trips

to the lateritic plateaus (Chaukul from the Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra, Sada, and Chorla [type locality] from the Belgaum District of Karnataka) where this species was reported to be distributed earlier, primarily to understand its phenology.

The gregarious flowering of the entire Chaukul plateaus population was observed in November 2016 for a fortnight (Image 1A,B), followed by a mass setting of seeds and dried off by the end of May 2017 (Image 1C). Further, it was noticed that by the end of the southwest monsoon, all the old stumps had decayed (Image 1D) and seeds began to germinate. A critical observation of the germination of seeds revealed that this species adopts a vivipary mechanism, which is not hitherto reported in the genus (Image 1D). Whilst, at around the same time, the populations at Chorla and Sada plateaus were predominantly in a vegetative stage

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Image 1. (A to E) Different stages of *Lepidagathis clavata* during January 2016 to November 2024: A—Peak flowering in November 2016 | B—Flowering individual in peak flowering season, i.e. in November (inset: close-up of inflorescence) | C—Dried individual during April-May (inset: close-up of inflorescence) | D—Decaying individual during monsoon (inset: close-up of inflorescence) | E—During vegetative growth. © Rutuja R. Kolte.

with a sporadic flowering in some patches. However, we could observe a synchronized flowering of the Chorla and Sada populations in November 2020. Later, those populations died, decayed, and seeds germinated in the next monsoon in June 2021.

The flowering periodicity of *L. clavata* was not known until November 2024, when the entire Chaukul population flowered again gregariously after a gap of seven years, which germinated from mass seeding during the 2017 monsoon. Between two gregarious flowerings, every year individuals were growing vegetative in the prostrate form to support their growth on the rocky plateau (Image 1E). As years passed, branch tips started growing erect on the plateau floor. We could also notice the stray flowering in a few individuals. All the above observations about the phenology of this endemic species confirm that it is a plietesial monocarpic species. This is reported here for the first time in the genus *Lepidagathis* Willd. The next gregarious flowering of the Chorla and Sada populations is expected in November 2028.

Besides, in the protologues of some of the recently described species such as *Lepidagathis mahakassapae* S. More et al. and *L. ushae* Borude et al. found growing

on the rocky plateaus have been reported as monocarpic without detailed notes (Borude et al. 2020; More et al. 2022). However, a long-term monitoring of these species including all other *Lepidagathis* species growing on the lateritic plateaus is essential to understand their phenology as they are the most probable candidates exhibiting monocarpic plietesial behaviour.

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