

## Miscellaneous note

***Piper hapnium* : A rare *Piper* species from Peruvannamuzhi, Kerala – A new report.**

K V Saji, B Sasikumar, K Johnson George & S Biju, Indian Institute of Spices Research, Calicut – 673 012, Kerala, India.

*Piper hapnium* is considered to be an endangered species of *Piper*. Occurrence of this species is reported mainly from the low-lying hills of Western Ghats. Though, scientists of Indian Institute of Spices Research conducted extensive surveys for collection of *Piper* species from the Western Ghats, *P. hapnium* (female plants) could be collected only once from the low land hills of Courtallum, Tamil Nadu. Earlier surveys conducted in the Silent Valley forests of Western Ghats (Ravindran *et al.* 1990) revealed the non-occurrence of *P. hapnium* in this area, though this sanctuary is identified as one of the rich centers for *Piper* diversity.

Hooker (1886) described *P. hapnium* under the section *Chavica*, and stated that the specimens examined for description were insufficient.

Gamble (1925) reported 13 *Piper* species including *P. hapnium* from South India. However his

description of this plant is too meagre to understand the plant.

Recently a small population of *P. hapnium* (both male and female) trailing on *Ailantus* sp., *Aporosa lindleyana* and other trees was located in the Peruvannamuzhi forest (10 m to 60 m MSL) in Calicut District, Kerala alongwith other species of *Piper* such as *P. nigrum*, *P. attenuatum* etc. Male plants were observed for the first time, which were rare compared to female plants. The characters of *P. hapnium* are described in Table 1.

Spikes are erect, long, robust and fused laterally. Young female spikes are light yellow. Male spike is coffee coloured and slightly sickle shaped. Stamens two and dithecus. Bracts peltate orbicular. Ovary is monocarpellary and trilobular. Berries partly projecting out from the rachis. *P. hapnium* (both male and female) has a distinct aroma different from that of *P. longum*.

Sample specimens were collected and conserved in the National Conservatory of Black Pepper at Indian Institute of Spices Research, Peruvannamuzhi.

Table 1. Characters of *Piper hapnium*

**Habit:** A slender climbing shrub. Runner shoots creep and spread on the ground.

**Leaves:** Petiolate with prominent ribs from the base. Nerves on the lower side of young leaves are pubescent with minute deciduous hairs. Mature leaves glabrous, lanceolate and unequally cordate with incurved auricles at the base, seven nerved and bullate. Leaf tip acute to acuminate.

### Female plant

Fruiting branch leaf length: 8.5 to 8.8 cm.

Main shoot leaf length: 6.7 to 6.9 cm

Leaf petiole length (main shoot): 6.3 to 6.5 cm

Spike length: 5 to 5.5 cm

### Male plant

Spiking branch leaf length: 7.7 to 8.00 cm.

Main shoot leaf length: 5.2 to 5.5 cm

Leaf petiole length (main shoot): 6.5 cm

Spike length: 4.5 to 5.0 cm

Fruiting branch leaf breadth: 4.0 to 4.1 cm

Main shoot leaf breadth: 4.7 to 5 cm

Leaf petiole length (fruiting branch) 2.0 to 2.2

Peduncle length: 2.1 to 2.2 cm

Spiking branch leaf breadth: 4.3 to 4.5 cm

Main shoot leaf breadth: 4.3 to 4.5 cm

Leaf petiole length (fruiting branch) 2.0 to 2.2

Peduncle length: 2.0 to 2.2 cm

**References**

Gamble J S 1925 Flora of Presidency of Madras. Vol.2. Botanical Survey of India, Calcutta.

Hooker J D 1886 The Flora of British India. Vol.V (Rep.1973). Reprinted by M/s. Bishen Singh Mahendra Pal Singh, New Connaught Place,

Derhradun & M/s. Periodical Experts 42-D Vivek Vihar, Delhi - 110 032.

Ravindran P N, Asokan Nair R, Nirmal Babu K, Chandran K & Nair M K 1990 Ecological and morphological notes on *Piper* spp from Silent Valley forests of Kerala. J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Society. 87 (3) : 421-426.