

**CEROPEGIA ANDAMANICA (ASCLEPIADACEAE)
A NEW 'FLY TRAP FLOWER' FROM THE
ANDAMAN ISLANDS, INDIA**

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SUMMARY

A new species, *Ceropegia andamanica*, allied to *C. metziana* Miq., from the Mount Harriet National Park in South Andaman is described and illustrated. It is the first record of the genus *Ceropegia* from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and it is currently known from a few scattered patches on just one island in areas which have been cleared of their native vegetation.

Key words: Asclepiadaceae, *Ceropegia andamanica*, South Andaman.

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Ceropegia* L. consists of over 200 species (Yadav, 1996), of which about 44 species occur in India (Ansari, 1984). It is a remarkable genus having horticultural significance, with curious modifications of the flowers that are adaptations for specific insect pollinators. To attract pollinators, the corolla of many species bear lantern tops with silky dangling hairs and funnel-shaped tubes with 'light windows'. The tip of the corolla is perforated like a lantern, with several glistening hairs, and the corolla tube is beset with translucent strips of tissue which allows light to penetrate and illuminate the essential organs. Insects trapped within the flowers are attracted to the light windows and make futile attempts to escape through them. In this process they effect pollination.

While inventorying the flora and fauna of the Mount Harriet National Park in South Andaman, we came across a climbing species of the genus, very closely allied to, but distinct from, *C. metziana* Miq. A detailed botanical description and illustrations follows here.

***Ceropegia andamanica* Sreek., Veenakumari & Prashanth, *spec. nov.* — Fig. 1**

Valde affinis *Ceropegia metziana* Miq. differt folia et pedunculi glabrae, corolla longior (ad 12 cm longer), corona inferior spatulata et trichoma annulus in portio inferioris et dilatatis ad fauce corollis nulla. — Typus: *Sreekumar & Veenakumari 15493* (CAL holo; PBL, L iso), India, South Andaman, Mount Harriet National Park, 14 Dec. 1995.

Perennial twining herbs with fleshy rootstocks and watery latex. Leaves lanceolate or elliptic-lanceolate, 5–15 by 1–5 cm, chartaceous, base rounded or shallowly cordate,

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Fig. 1. *Ceropogia andamanica* Sreek., Veenakumari & Prashanth. a. Habit; b. calyx; c. corolla; d. corona (all: Sreekumar & Veenakumari 15493). — Scale bar to a = 2 cm, to b & c = 1 cm, to d = 2 mm.

apex acuminate, glaucous beneath, glabrous. Petioles slender, 0.5–2 cm long. Inflorescence axillary, pedunculate, 3–8-flowered cymes; peduncles 1.5–2.5 cm long, glabrous. Flowers purplish-mottled, 5–12 cm long. Pedicels 0.5–2 cm long, glabrous. Calyx 5-partite; sepals subulate, 0.5–1 cm long, glabrous. Corolla inflated at the base, bent and dilated at the middle, narrow, twisted, whip-like and hairy towards the apex. Outer corona with 5 ovate-retuse, bifid lobes, ciliate; inner corona with 5 erect, spatulate lobes, c. 2 by 1 mm. Fruits and seeds not seen.

Distribution — India: Andaman Islands.

Habitat & Ecology — Primary evergreen forest; altitude c. 350 m. Fl. Nov.–Dec.

Notes — Field-notes: Occurring in a few concealed patches along the side of a road within an evergreen forest in association with *Mallotus resinusus* (Blanco) Merr. (Euphorbiaceae) and *Phaulopsis imbricata* (Forssk.) Sweet (Acanthaceae).

Authors' notes: This new species is related to *C. metziana* Miq. but differs markedly by the glabrous leaves and peduncles, longer corolla (up to 12 cm long), spatulate inner corona and absence of the ring of hairs at the throat of the dilated lower portion of the corolla tube.

Ceropegia curviflora Hassk. is the only representative of this genus known from the Sumatran and Peninsular Malaysian regions. In this species, however, the corolla is curved and short, measuring only up to 5 cm in length.

This remarkable species could be grown as an ornamental twiner for its curious flowers, pale pink corolla with purple mosaic markings and long whip-like tips which mimic small snakes. The zygomorphic corolla resembles that of some species of *Aristolochia*. Perhaps due to this, as well as its climbing habit, Srivastava and Mathew (1992) were misled into identifying this plant as *A. indica* L.

While working on the larval host plants of the butterflies native to these islands we observed females of *Parantica aglea melanoleuca* Moore (Lepidoptera : Nymphalidae : Danainae) seeking out and laying eggs on the leaves of this plant. Though members of the Asclepiadaceae are among the few families known to be preferred as larval food plants by the Danainae we would not have collected this plant but for the keen taxonomic sense of these butterflies.

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