

## Rediscovery of an extinct plant (*Plectranthus bishopianus* Gamble) from Tamil Nadu, after a century

Tamil Nadu is considered to be luxuriant in floral diversity and has been recognized in two microendemic centres of India, such as a part of Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats<sup>1</sup>. During a recent floristic exploration of Sirumalai hills (Eastern Ghats) of Dindigul District, which is in very close vicinity of the Palni hills of Western Ghats, an interesting *Plectranthus* species (Figure 1) was collected. After a critical examination and comparison with the description, its identity has been confirmed as *Plectranthus bishopianus* Gamble<sup>2</sup> and the voucher specimen is deposited in the Herbarium, Department of Botany, The Madura College, Madurai. The plant was first collected by Bourne in 1899 and subsequently in 1901 near the Pillar rock in Kodaikanal of Palni hills. The illustration of the same specimen was drawn by Bishop<sup>3</sup>. In 1924, Gamble described the species based on the Bourne's type specimen. Since then, it has not been reported, nor is any specimen found in the major

Botanical Survey of India (BSI) herbaria. The species is treated under the possibly extinct category in the *Red Data Book of Indian Plants*<sup>4</sup>. Relocation of the habitat has been a necessary task for the protection of this extinct species.

*Plectranthus bishopianus* Gamble, Misc. Inform. Kew 265. 1924; Fl. Madras Pres. 2: 1122. 1927.

Erect undershrub, basal stem cylindrical, spreading, rooting at nodes, younger stem slightly quadrangular, semi-succulent, glabrous. Leaves simple, opposite, ovate, semi-succulent, 3.5–7.5 × 2.2–5.5 cm, base rounded or slightly cuneate, margin crenately dented, slightly wavy, nerves 5–6 pairs, apex obtuse, minutely puberulous; petiole up to 4 cm long. Inflorescence thyrsoid panicle, up to 20 cm long, racemes oppositely paired, distant, peduncle 5 cm long. Bracts ovate, acute at apex, caducous. Flowers large, distant, pedicel pendant, purplish coloured, hairy. Calyx 2-lipped, enlarged in fruit, purplish, lobes 5, upper one large, others unequal, densely puberulous. Corolla 2-lipped, tube decurved, throat obliquely swollen, upper lip short, slightly 3–4 lobed, lower lip boat-shaped, stipitate at the base, puberulous. Stamens 4, didynamous, declinate, slightly exerted; filaments free, anthers confluent. Ovary 4-partite, style slender, tip bifid. Nutlets ovoid or oblong, smooth.

Flowering and fruiting: December–February.

Specimen examined: Tamil Nadu, Dindigul District, Sirumalai hills, Vellimalai peak, S. Karuppusamy 24762, collected on 8.2.2009, at 1300 m msl.

Note: The species that was described by Gamble was based on Bourne's type with Bishop's drawings. Matthew<sup>5</sup> included the species based on the earlier reports.

Apart from the Palni hills, the plant has not been collected from any other area of the Western Ghats so far. The present report shows that the species is

still surviving in a few pockets of hilly areas in Dindigul District. It is found growing on rocky crevices of the Sirumalai hills in association with *Chionanthus mala-elangi*, *Schefflera stellata*, *Wendlandia thyrsoides*, *Rabdosia coesta*, *Pepromia dindigulensis*, etc. The species is endemic to Tamil Nadu and was possibly extinct in the wild already<sup>6</sup>.

The plant was collected and vegetative cuttings introduced in the botanical garden of The Madura College. However, adequate measures should be taken towards protection of the habitat for natural growth of the still surviving population of this species along with its *ex-situ* conservation. Mass propagation using modern techniques like tissue culture is also suggested.



**Figure 1.** *Plectranthus bishopianus* Gamble.

1. Nayar, M. P., *Biodiversity Hotspots of India, Nepal and Bhutan*, TBGRI, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996.
2. Gamble, J. S., *A New Lamiaceae Member in Madras Presidency*, Misc. Inform, Kew, 1924, 265.
3. Gamble, J. S., *Flora of Madras Presidency*, London, 1927, vol. 2, p. 1122.
4. Nair, M. P. and Shastry, A. R. K. (eds), *Red Data Book of Indian Plants*, 1990, vol. 3, p. 165.
5. Matthew, K. M., *Flora of Palni Hills*, Rapinat Herbarium, Tiruchirappalli, 1996, vol. 2.
6. [www.bsienviis.nic.in/embc.html](http://www.bsienviis.nic.in/embc.html)

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.** We thank the Joint Director, Botanical Survey India, Southern Circle, Coimbatore for providing necessary facilities to identify the specimens.

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