

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the description of a taxon new to the Flora of India and found along the Coromandel Coast, Tamilnadu, Southern India:

Premna alstoni var. *alstoni* of the family Verbenaceae.

Collections of this species were made in various sacred groves and Reserved Forests around Cuddalore and Pondicherry.

KEY WORDS

Flora of India, new species, Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest, *Premna*.

INTRODUCTION

Remnants of the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF) are scattered all along the Coromandel Coast of Southern India, from Ramanathapuram in Tamilnadu to Vishakapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. Most of these remnants are to be found in sacred groves which for a long time have been protected and preserved by the local people who worshipped and feared the deity to whom the respective temple-cum-forests were dedicated. They range anywhere from 0.1 ha to over 100 ha.

Apart from these sacred groves there are large tracts of land controlled by the Depts. of Forest and Wildlife. Those also are covered with a flora belonging to the TDEF but here mostly in the form of scrub jungles and thickets.

During the course of field surveys in this type of vegetation the authors came across the taxon mentioned above:

Premna alstoni Moldenke var. *alstoni*, Verbenaceae.

The nomenclature follows the Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon, Dassayanake and Fosberg, 1983.

VERBENACEAE

Premna alstoni Moldenke, Phytologia 28: 101.1974

var. *alstoni* Trimen, Handb. Fl. Ceylon 3: 351, 352. 1895; Dassayanake and Fosberg, Rev. Handb. Fl Ceylon 4: 311. 1983.

Schrub, depressed or scandent, with numerous, slender shoots up to 5 m long, younger parts green, older ones reddish-brown, pubescent; leaves small, decussate – opposite, with a typical smell when bruised, drying olive coloured; petiole very slender, 1.2 – 2.5 cm long, nearly glabrous; lamina membranous, nerves impressed above, prominent beneath, finely reticulate, ovate to sub-deltoid, from 4 to almost 9 cm long, 2 to 4 cm wide, apex acuminate, base rounded or cordate, margin entire, ciliate, from pubescent to almost glabrous above, from slightly pubescent along the nerves to pubescent all over beneath; inflorescence terminal, cymes several, small, 1.5 – 4 cm long and wide, to about 25 flowered; calyx glabrous, oblong – ovoid, clearly bilabiate, the upper lip rounded, entire, the lower lip occasionally faintly 3-lobed, accrescent in fruit; corolla small, hypocrateriform, ivory, maroon or pale purple, closed by many ivory-coloured hairs at the mouth of the tube, upper lip hooded, entire, lower lip 3-lobed, lobes rounded, the 2 lateral ones reflexed, from almost horizontal to completely pointing downwards, the middle one cupped, projecting beyond the others, the 3 lobes of the lower lip with a darker, peach coloured patch in the centre, more pronounced in the lateral ones; fruit a drupe, sub-globose, irregular, ripening from green to purplish-black, shiny when mature, up to 6 mm long, 1 – 4 celled, 1 – 4 seeded.

Phenology: flowering and fruiting from August to March.

Ecology: growing in the area of the TDEF, mostly in dry conditions on sandy soil but also found on gravelly soil and on steep rocky slopes.

Distribution: reported as being endemic to the dry and intermediate regions of Sri Lanka, by H.N.Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, in Rev. Handb. Fl. Ceylon, IV, 312. 1983.

Specimens examined: Cuddalore district: Pudur, WFG & NB 3865 (AURO); Konjikuppam, WFG & NB 4416 (AURO); Kulanthaikuppam, WFG F6936 (AURO). Villupuram district, Kurumbaram R.F., WFG F5201 (AURO), JdH, PB & WFG F02877, 10083 (AURO), Puthupet, WFG & CDR F5451, F5479, F5480, F5481, F5482 (AURO), Oorani, JdH, WFG & NB 5525 (AURO), Komutichavadi, JdH, WFG & NB 5543 (AURO). Chinglepet district: Gudalur R.F., GB, JdH & WFG F6348 (AURO), Muppanthal Malai AP, JdH & PB F6476 (AURO), Pasumbur, JdH & WFG F6395 (AURO), Kollattanallur WFG 3739 (AURO).

REFERENCES

M.D. Dassanayake and F.R. Fosberg, 1983, Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon, Vol. IV.