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Oberonia caulescens Lindl. (Orchidaceae) - A new report to Bay Islands from Mount Harriet National Park

P. K. SIKDAR[1], SUBHRA BISWAS[1]AND MADHULIKA SINGH[2]

[1]Dept. of Plant Science, JNRM, Port Blair-744104, India

[2]Department of Botany and Biotechnology, Sadhu Vaswani College, Bairagarh, Bhopal, India

ABSTRACT

Extended distribution of *Oberonia caulescens* Lindl, an indigenous wild orchid from Mount Harriet National Park, South Andaman is described here as new record to the Bay Island flora.

Key words: Andaman, distribution, flora, Mount Harriet National Park.

INTRODUCTION

Bay islands or Andaman and Nicobar Islands are a unique insular habitat in Bay of Bengal with warm and humid climatological features and ideal tropical ecological conditions. The flora of the Bay Islands has a unique status in phytogeography as an insular transitional zone between the Indo-Malaysian and the South East Asian floras (Rao, 1986). From taxonomic and economic points of view, the insular flora has a remarkable position in the floristic study of the Indian Subcontinent as it is the last stronghold of such kind of Malaysian and South East Asian floristic elements within the Indian Territory (Balakrishnan and Ellis, 1996).

According to current information, this Archipelago comprises over 572 islands, islets and coral reefs lie between 92°-94° E longitude and 6°-14° N latitude, which offer a total land area of 8,249 sq. km. known to host about 25000 botanical species, belong to 600 genera (Sathishkumar and Wood, 1992). It indicates high degree of plant diversity and strict competition within a limited geographical region with fragile state of ecological equilibrium. Various insular ecological niches ranging from aquatic mangroves to hilltop vegetation, of Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide ideal micro environmental conditions for the luxuriant growth of insular wild orchids (Mathew, 1998).

According to recent information, the insular orchid flora constitutes 139 wild indigenous orchids from 59 genera of which 30 species are endemic to Bay Islands (Sathishkumar and Wood, 1992). About 26 species were recognized under critically endangered category. About 17 Malesian and South East Asian orchid species found occurring among the islands of the Andaman and Nicobar, which do not occur in Indian subcontinent, are also on the verge of extinction (Balakrishnana and Rao, 1983; Sathishkumar and Wood, 1992).

During the course of research work on "Biodiversity and Distribution of Orchids of Andaman", the author has located an interesting species from Mount Harriet National Park. On detailed examination, the specimens were identified as the genus *Oberonia* Lindl. The genus *Oberonia* Lindl. is rather a poorly represented taxon of the Bay

Islands with only one species. Species of the insular *Oberonia* Lindl. are confined to the isolated pockets and are surviving under a severe threat of extinction.

Taxonomic Description

Synonyms: *Iridorchis caulescens* (Lindl.) Kuntze 1891; *Malaxis caulescens* (Lindl.) Rchb. f. 1861; *Oberonia auriculata* King & Pantl. 1898; *Oberonia bilobatolabella* Hayata 1914; *Oberonia longilabris* King & Pantl. 1895; *Oberonia pterorachis* C. L. Tso 1933; *Oberonia yunnanensis* Rolfe 1903. (Fig. 1).

Plant grow as an epiphyte or occasionally lithophytes, found at an elevation 240-255 m. Stem 2-3 cm long, winged stems carrying 4 to 5, linear-ensiform, slightly fleshy, sessile, jointed leaves. Leaves linear-equitant, acute to acuminate and not falcate, 10-12 cm long and 1-1.5 cm broad. Inflorescence raceme axillary, erect, subdense, verticulate towards the base, terete, winged, to 18-20 cm long, many flowered inflorescence. Flower minute, 2-3 mm, white to yellowish colour, floral bracts lanceolate, erose; lateral sepals spreading; dorsal sepals and the petals erect; petals narrow, oblong arose. Lip without lateral lobes; end lobe with a narrow truncate base.

Fig. 1: *Oberonia caulescens* Lindl.

Common Name: The Offshoot Forming Oberonia

Flowering Period: July to September

Ecology: Found growing epiphytically on *Tectona grandis* and *Mangifera andamanica* at an elevation of 240-255 m.

Distribution: Eastern Himalaya (Nepal, Sikkim), Western China, South East Tibet, Vietnam, Assam and Andaman (India).

Specimen Examined: India, South Andaman, Mount Harriet, P. K. Sikdar, ANI, 140.

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