

New plants from Western Ghats

Sonerila lateritica, one of the latest discoveries from the Western Ghats.

In just four months, nine new plants have been discovered in the Western Ghats, according to papers published in journals. Apart from the discoveries of the world's smallest land fern and two shrubs of the rattlepod family reported in *The Hindu*, six species including two balsams, two shrubs belonging to the mint family (Lamiaceae), a herb of the coffee family (Rubiaceae) and 10-cm-tall *Sonerila*, a flowering plant commonly found in the tropics, have been discovered.

Their stunning pink blooms make some *Sonerilas* well known as ornamental plants. *Sonerila lateritica* however, is a rock-loving wild herb that researcher S. Resmi at the University of Calicut and her colleagues discovered in the laterite hills of Ponkunnu in Kerala's Kozhikkode district. Only two populations of the plant were found in the area, write the researchers in their study in the journal *Phytotaxa*.

Rare balsam

Kozhikkode is also home to a new balsam species, *Impatiens sauliereae*, which the researchers discovered from wet, rocky surfaces in Kakkayam's evergreen forests. Its occurrence in only a small area could make it an endangered species, write researcher Bince Mani of St. Thomas College, Kottayam, and colleagues, in their study published in *Phytotaxa*. Another balsam described in the same study, *Impatiens josephia*, is found in Kerala's Idukki district where it grows on wet slopes of evergreen forests.

In Idukki district's Kulamavu evergreen forests, V.S. Hareesh and Mamiyil Sabu from the University of Calicut and their colleagues collected *Ophiorrhiza jacobii*, a herb that belongs to the coffee family. Clearing of roadsides – where the plant predominantly grows – could be a threat here, write the authors of the study published in *The Nordic Journal of Botany*.

It was again in Idukki district – on wet slopes near the popular tourist location of Munnar's Lockhart Gap – that the University of Calicut scientist P. Sunojkumar and his colleague found the 60-cm-tall herb *Plectranthus sahyadricus* (mint family) flowering. It is near this area that the Kochi–Danushkodi National Highway – which passes through the Lockhart Gap – is currently being widened. "Road expansions could definitely be a threat," says Sunojkumar. The results were published in the journal *Phytotaxa*.

In another study published in *Phytotaxa*, the scientist also describes a new shrub *Anisochilus kanyakumariensis* from Maruthwamala in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district.

Scientists used morphological features to tell each plant apart from similar-looking species. All new plants are currently known only from the localities they have been collected from.

"More field surveys in the Western Ghats would surely lead to more such discoveries," said Sabu.

Receive the best of The Hindu delivered to your inbox everyday!

Please enter a valid email address.

Here are some the most interesting research works published in the top science journals last week

END

crackIAS.com