

TREE OF COFFEE FAMILY DISCOVERED IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR

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Pyrostria laljii

A 15-metre-tall tree that belongs to the genus of the coffee family has recently been discovered from the Andaman Islands by a team of researchers from India and the Philippines. The new species, *Pyrostria laljii*, is also the first record of the genus *Pyrostria* in India, the researchers said.

Plants belonging to genus *Pyrostria* are usually found in Madagascar, but the recently discovered species is new to science.

The tree is distinguished by a long stem with a whitish coating on the trunk and oblong-obovate leaves with a cuneate base, and was first reported from the Wandoor forest in South Andaman.

The other places in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands where the tree could be located are the Tirur forest near the Jarawa Reserve Forest and the Chidia Tapu (Munda Pahar) forest.

Pyrostria laljii has been assessed as 'Critically Endangered' based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List criteria.

M.C. Naik from the Botanical Survey of India, M. Bheemalingappa from the Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Anantapuram, and Axel H. Arriola from University of the East, Manila, Philippines, published the details of the discovery a few months ago in an international, peer-reviewed journal *Annales Botanici Fennici*.

Mr. Naik pointed out that the discovery was unique as the species was a big tree and had not been recorded as a new species yet.

The species has been named *Pyrostria laljii* after Lal Ji Singh, Joint Director and Head of Office, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Botanical Survey of India. "While the genus *Pyrostria* is not found in India, there are several genera from the family Rubiaceae that are common in India. These plants, including cinchona, coffee, adina, hamelia, ixora, galium, gardenia, mussaenda, rubia, morinda, have high potential for economic value. More studies should be carried out to ascertain whether *Pyrostria laljii* could have some economic value," Dr. Singh said.

Other physical features that distinguish the tree from other species of the genus is its umbellate inflorescence with eight to 12 flowers.

Dr. Singh and Mr. Naik have also discovered a new species of pokeweed named *Rivina andamanensis*.

They said it was found growing under large trees, shaded and rocky areas, along with herbs and shrubby plants.

"This discovery of new species, representing the first record of the pokeweed family Petiveriaceae in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, adds one more family to the islands' flora," the researchers said.

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