

NEW SPECIES OF AFRICAN VIOLETS FOUND IN MIZORAM

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The newly-described species *Didymocarpus vickifunkiae* (Gesneriaceae) | Photo Credit: [Special Arrangement](#)

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An 'African' flowering plant has been recorded scientifically for the first time in India.

Scientists from the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Bhopal found the variant of the African violets in Mizoram.

The newly-described species, *Didymocarpus vickifunkiae* is currently known from only three locations near the north-eastern State's border with Myanmar and is considered an endangered species. It is an epiphyte — a plant that grows on trees — and produces light pink flowers during the monsoons.

The species has been named after Vicki Ann Funk, a noted botanist who worked at the Smithsonian Institute in the U.S.

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The finding [has been published](#) in *Systematic Botany*, a peer reviewed journal published by American Society for Plant Taxonomists, in a paper co-authored by research scholar Prasanna N.S. and Vinita Gowda, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences at IISER Bhopal.

"Commonly known as African violets, *Didymocarpus* is a genus belonging to the plant family Gesneriaceae whose members are distributed in Asia from Western Himalayas to Sumatra," Dr. Gowda said.

"Most of these species are narrow endemics and require specialised habitats to survive, thus acting as an indicator of pristine habitats. There are 106 currently known species of this genus, of which 26 are in the northeast," she told *The Hindu*.

Botanists spot new bryophyte species in Kerala

African violets, native to Tanzania and Kenya have been popular in the horticultural world, often used indoors in European countries.

"The Mizoram plant is new to science which could be restricted to those areas because of reasons to be studied or it could be more widespread in areas where they remain to be spotted. But its discovery has underscored the floral diversity of the northeast that has a unique biogeographic placement as a part of two biodiversity hotspots — the Indo-Burma and the Eastern Himalayas," Dr. Gowda said.

The new species is an outcome of Mr. Prasanna's evolutionary study on the *Didymocarpus* group of plants found across India and the neighbouring countries, including China. The

concentration of this genus is in the northeast.

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