

(III)

SAPRIA HIMALAYANA GRIFFITH, AN ENDANGERED SPECIES FROM THE MISHMI HILLS, DIBANG VALLEY, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Sapria himalayana, a total root parasite relative of the world famous *Rafflesia arnoldii* of Malaya (which has the largest flower known-50 to 90 cm across, weighing 9kg) (Lawrence, 1960; Sahni, 1981). It was first discovered by Griffith in the Mishmi Hills, (at present Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh) in 1836. Bor (1953) found this a century later in the Balipara tract. It is total root parasite of *Cissus elongata* and other species of family Vitaceae in *Pheobe*, *Beilschmiedia*-*Engelhardtia* association of trees. It's threatened with extinction because it has been sighted only for few times since its first discovery and was recently seen by D.B. Deb, J. Joseph and K. Haridasan (Rawat and Naithani, 2005). It has been mentioned in the Red Data Book (Naya & Shastri, 1987) and Datta (2008) in *Simplify* as present only in Namdapha with coloured photographs. According to Rawat and Naithani (2005) it has erroneously mentioned *Rafflesia* sp., with a colour photograph from Bhutan by Nakao and Nishioka (1984). Its present distribution is now Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya and Bhutan. It is proposed for conservation in Namdapha biosphere reserve. Other means of conservation are difficult because of its

parasitic habit (Nayar and Sastry, 1987).

The species is dioecious. Its flower is foetid, white or pink, measuring to 3.5 to 16 across and it flowers in December–February. Its distribution is from 3000 feet to 5000 feet amsl (Hooker, 1886).

The *Sapria himalayana* has been sighted and photographed in February on the way from Roing up to Mehao Lake in Dibang valley. This has been spotted under a conspicuous large tree on the steep hill which is near to the lake. One of the author (AH) had found quite a few flowers and buds of both the sexes. Since, the species is secretive in nature, there are apparently no effort was put to study this interesting species. It is even difficult to determine the present status of the species. It may also attract illegal collectors during the flowering period. Therefore, flora of rich Mishmi hills is required to be conserved by keeping *Sapria* as a flagship species along with species like Mishmi takin and Mishmi teeta (*Coptis teeta*). Introducing scientific exploration with the participation of local community can contribute to its conservation and thus rural economy would be benefited.



A) *Sapria himalayana* (female)



B. Male flower

Photo: Andreas Hohl

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