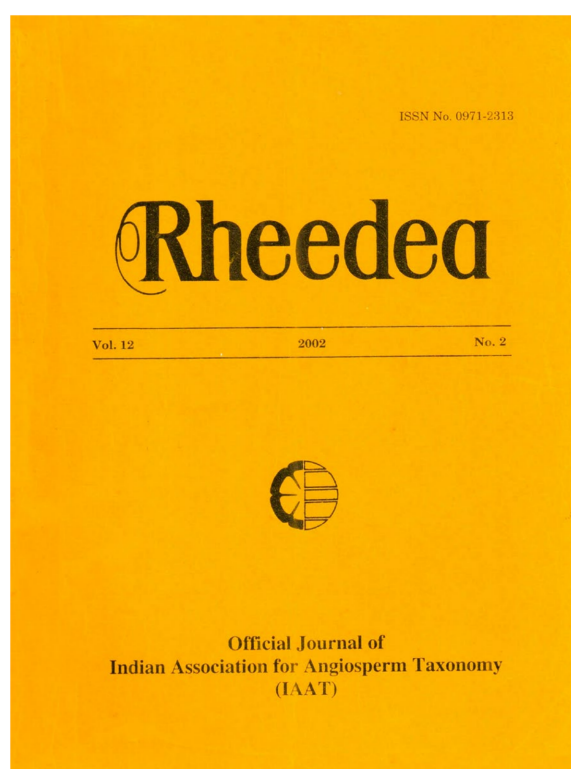




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Rediscovery of *Begonia aliciae* C.E.C. Fisch. (Begoniaceae) from the Western Ghats of Kerala

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Abstract

Begonia aliciae C.E.C. Fisch., an endangered species of the Western Ghats, is rediscovered from its type locality after a lapse of 64 years of its first collection. A detailed description and illustrations are provided based on recent collection.

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Begonia* L. has about 900 species distributed in the tropical region, particularly in New World (Mabberley, 1987). In India, the genus is represented by 45 species (Santapau & Henry, 1972), of which 12 are represented in Kerala (Gamble, 1919).

Begonia aliciae was described by C.E.C. Fischer in 1939, based on specimens collected by Edward Barnes from Kadalar Valley in Idukki district and by J.S. Gamble from Devala Shola in Nilgiris. Since then it has not been collected, although its distributional localities are well botanized (Kumar & Bhattacharya, 1990). Further, Shetty and Vivekananthan (1991), thoroughly explored the above areas, but could not locate the species, and hence considered this as 'possibly extinct'.

During a floristic exploration to Kadalar Valley, the second author collected a beautiful species of *Begonia*. On critical studies, it was identified as *B. aliciae* C.E.C. Fisch. This narrow endemic species is described here in details, with illustrations, to facilitate its easy identification.

***Begonia aliciae* C.E.C. Fisch.**, Kew Bull. 1939: 247. 1939; Kumar & Bhattacharya in Nayar & Sastry (Eds.), Red Data Book Indian Plants 3: 66. 1990; Shetty & Vivekananthan in Karunakaran (Ed.), Proc. Symp. Rare Endang. Endem. Pl. Western Ghats 147. 1991. (Fig. 1).

Scapigerous herbs. Rhizome short, fleshy with numerous fibrous roots. Leaves 3.5-12 x 2-6 cm, ovate to rotund-ovate, rounded or truncate at base, acute or acuminate at apex, apiculately crenate at margins, upper surface with scattered, short, stout hairs, glabrous below; basal nerves 5, the two lateral nerves next to midrib nearly vertical for a short distance and then

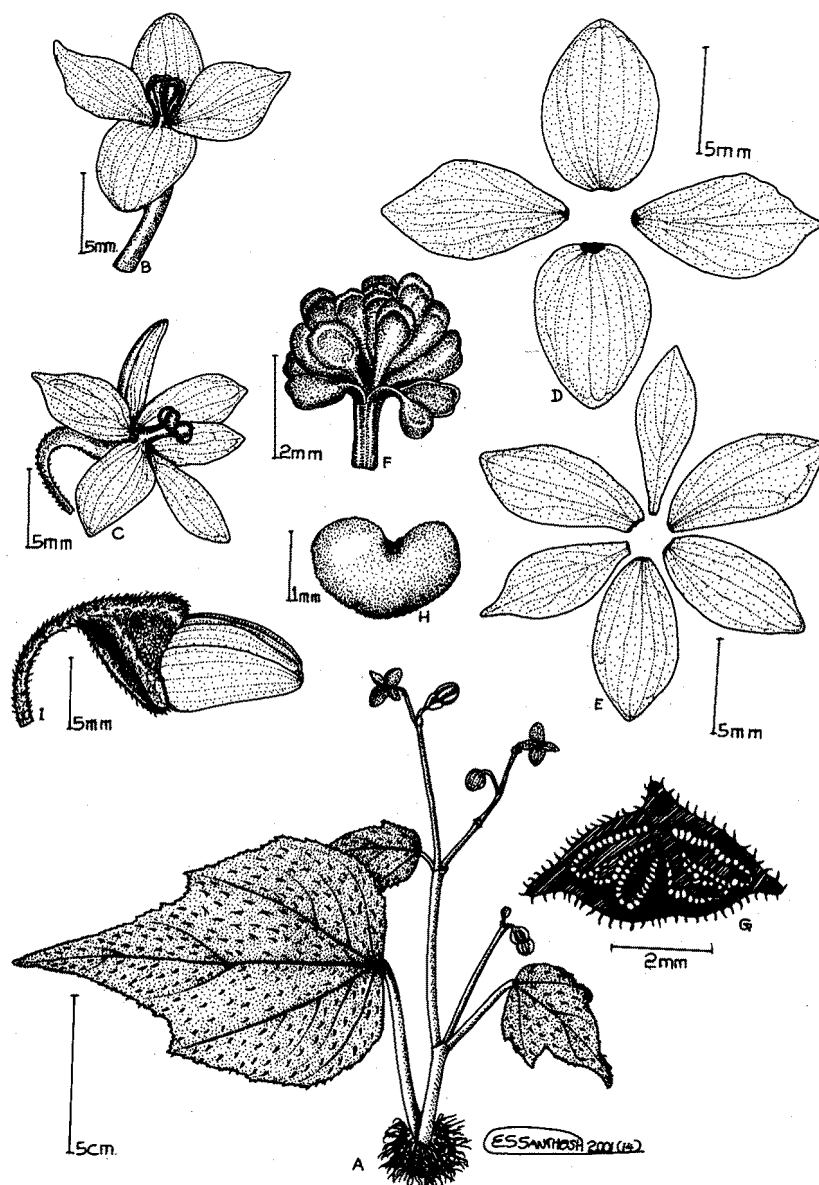
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Fig. 1. *Begonia aliciae* C.E.C. Fisch.: A. Habit; B. Male flower; C. Female flower; D. Perianth lobes of male flower; E. Perianth lobes of female flower; F. Androecium ; G. C.S. of ovary; H. Stigma; I. Capsule (immature) with perianth.

Rediscovery of *Begonia aliciae* C.E.C. Fisch.

bending outwards, all the nerves forking and running to the lobulate; petiole 2-5.5 cm long. Inflorescence 10-25 cm long, sometimes bearing a smaller simple leaf, similar to the radical; bracts to 5 mm long, narrowly ensiform, acuminate at apex; bracteoles similar, smaller. Flowers pink, monoecious, male flowers above the female; pedicels to 2.5 cm long. Male flowers: Perianth segments 4, subequal, 0.8-1 x 0.5-0.6 cm, broadly elliptic or elliptic-obovate, obtuse or acute at apex, 3-7-nerved from base. Stamens 14-17, monadelphous; column to 2.5 mm long; anthers to 1.2 mm long, oblanceolate, truncate or retuse at apex. Female flowers: Perianth segments 6, subequal, 0.9-1.1 x 0.3-0.5 cm, oblong or obovate, obtuse, acute or acuminate at apex, 1-5-nerved from the base. Styles 3, rather stout, to 2.6 mm long, glabrous; stigma broad, crenate at margins. Ovary subglobose, to 3.5 mm long, with semi-obovate wings on either sides, united below the ovary and tapering into the pedicel, abruptly apiculate at apex, one face furnished with a keel, decurrent along the united wings, minutely glandular hairy, 2-celled; placenta 2 in each cell. Capsule (immature) with the wings united and acute at the base.

Flowering & fruiting: August – November.

Distribution: Endemic to Southern Western Ghats (Kerala and Tamil Nadu).

Ecology: *Begonia aliciae* grow as a lithophyte in the evergreen and shola forests, especially along streams at altitudes 900-1700 m.

Specimens examined: INDIA, **Kerala**, Kadalar Valley, (date ?) *Barnes 1675* (MH); *Ibid.*, 17.10.2001, *Abdul Jabbar 45195* (TBGT).

Notes: Out of the four specimens collected by Barnes (1673, 1674, 1675) and Gamble (15549), only one specimen (*Barnes 1675*) is available in India, which is deposited in the Madras Herbarium (MH), Coimbatore.

B. aliciae is closely related to *B. crenata* Dryand., but can easily be distinguished by the leaves with rounded or truncate base, fewer basal nerves, female flowers with 6 perianth lobes and the lateral wings of the ovary cohering at the base.

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