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Research Article

Rediscovery of *Strobilanthes panichanga* and discovery of *Strobilanthes parryorum* (Acanthaceae): two endangered species from the hills of Dima Hasao, Assam, India

Kapil Kumar Kemprai^{ORCID} and Souravjyoti Borah^{ORCID}✉

Department of Botany, Gauhati University, Gopinath Bordoloi Nagar, Jalukbari, Assam, India

Correspondence: Souravjyoti Borah (souravjyotiborah@gmail.com)

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We report on two species of *Strobilanthes* Blume. *Strobilanthes panichanga* (Nees) T.Anderson has been rediscovered in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, India, after a very long gap of 150 years, and *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C.Fisch has been discovered for the first time in Assam, India. This study presents full morphological descriptions of the two species along with the photographic documentation of both from living specimens in their natural habitats. The photographic details provided here will serve as a valuable resource for accurate field identification and support future taxonomic and conservation related research.

Keywords: conservation assessment, nomenclature, palynology, rediscovery, taxonomy



Introduction

Strobilanthes Blume is the second largest genus in the family Acanthaceae after *Justicia* (Wood and Scotland 2009, Hu et al. 2011, Mabberley 2017, Wood et al. 2021, Chowlu et al. 2025). The genus is represented by approximately 450 species, distributed predominantly across South to Southeast Asia, extending to Melanesia (Chen et al. 2020, Basumatary et al. 2022, Chowlu et al. 2025, POWO 2025). In India, the genus is represented by 168 species, occurring mainly in the Himalayan region and Peninsular India – the two regions separated by the Gangetic plains, which has resulted in distinct species composition in each area (Wood 1994, Arisdason et al. 2020, Chowlu et al. 2025). The Himalayan region alone has approximately 88 species and is considered one of the centres of diversity for the genus (Deng 2020, Wood et al. 2021, Chowlu et al. 2025). In the state of Assam, 50 species of *Strobilanthes* were documented in the Flora of Assam (Kanjilal et al. 1939). However, based on present political boundaries, only 30 species are currently recorded from Assam (Basumatary et al. 2022, Albertson and Venu 2023, Roy et al. 2023).



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During recent botanical exploration in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, two species of *Strobilanthes* were collected. After careful consultation of relevant literature (especially Clarke 1884, Bremekamp 1944, Wood 1994, 2001, Hu et al. 2011, Adhikari 2018, Chen et al. 2020, Deng 2020, Wood et al. 2021, Basumatary et al. 2022, Arisdason et al. 2023, Chowlu et al. 2025, Lalawmpuii et al. 2025) and comparison with digital herbarium specimens available through the Indian Virtual Herbarium (IVH), Plants of the World Online (POWO) and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the specimens were identified as *Strobilanthes panichanga* (Nees) T. Anderson and *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C. Fisch. These two species represent significant rediscoveries, with *S. panichanga* being collected after almost 150 years and *S. parryorum* being collected in Assam, thus extending its known habitat range in northeast India.

The floral morphology is a key diagnostic feature in the identification of *Strobilanthes* species (Chowlu et al. 2025). However, species-level identification remains challenging due to the monocarpic nature and infrequent flowering found among many members of the genus. These constraints have led to frequent taxonomic ambiguities, especially in lesser-explored regions, such as northeast India and the Indian Himalayan Region, which remain rich reservoirs of undocumented diversity, and continue to yield novel taxa and new distributional records (Chowlu et al. 2025). The present study contributes two such significant discoveries, confirming their continued existence in the wild. These findings contribute valuable data for future taxonomic research, biodiversity inventories, and conservation strategies focused on the genus *Strobilanthes* in this biogeographically important region.

Material and methods

Fieldwork was conducted in the Dima Hasao district of Assam in November 2024 when the two species were discovered. Notes on the characteristics of the plants were recorded and measurements were taken directly from living material. Photographs were also taken in the field to capture key diagnostic features. Herbarium specimens were prepared following standard procedures outlined by Jain and Rao (1977) and subsequently deposited in the herbarium of the Gauhati University (GUBH).

For field emission scanning electron microscopy (FESEM) observation of the pollen, samples were acetolysed following the technique of Erdtman (1960). The prepared pollen samples were dehydrated in an ethanol series, and mounted on glass coverslips, then air dried from 95% ethanol; the coverslips were then attached to aluminium stubs and sputter coated (Quorum- Q150R ES) with gold. Observations were made using a Zeiss Sigma 300 scanning electron microscope. Descriptive terminology follows Punt et al. (1994), Carine and Scotland (1998), Wang and Blackmore (2003), and Halbritter et al. (2018).

IUCN assessment and preparation of a map with inferred area of occurrence (AOO) was done following Bachman et al.

(2011) and by using GeoCAT, a geospatial conservation assessment tool.

Taxonomic treatment

Strobilanthes panichanga (Nees) T. Anderson, J. Linn. Soc., Bot. 9:478 (1867); C.B. Clarke in Hook.f., Fl. Brit. India 4:473 (1884); Kanjilal et al., Fl. Assam 3:433 (1939); Wood & Scotland, Kew Bull. 58(3): 682 (2003a, b). (Fig. 1).

***Asystasia panichanga* Nees in Wall., Pl. Asiat. Rar.3:90 (1832)**

Type (Lectotype designated by Wood and Scotland 2003a): India, Meghalaya, ‘Silhet’, Buchanan-Hamilton in Wallich 2387a (K-W; K001115831!).

Description

Shrub 1.0–1.5 m; stems quadrangular, pubescent. Leaves in more or less isophyllous opposite pairs, elliptic-lanceolate to ovate-lanceolate, 15–21 × 10–13 cm, cuneate at base, serrate on the margins, acuminate at apex, pubescent on both surfaces; secondary veins 9–11 pairs; petioles 2–3 cm long, pubescent. Inflorescence formed of lax axillary panicles, pubescent, repeatedly trichotomously branched (not spicate or racemose); peduncles 2.5–5.0 cm long; flowers, alternate, pendulous; bracts linear, 2–4 mm long, hairy, persistent; bracteoles linear, up to 3 mm long, hairy. Calyx deeply 5-lobed, densely hairy, 4–6 mm; lobes sub-equal, linear-lanceolate, accrescent in fruit. Corolla tubular-campanulate, 4.5–5.5 cm long, straight, densely hairy, white with purple blotches inside in the upper portion of the tube; tube cylindrical, 1.5–2.0 × 0.2–0.3 cm, campanulate portion 3.0–3.5 cm long, widened above, 1.7–2.0 cm wide at mouth; lobes 5–7 mm, rounded with undulate margin. Stamens 4, included, didynamous, the longer pair of filaments white, densely hairy, up to 4 cm long, shorter pair minutely hairy, up to 3.4 cm long. Style filiform, white, 4.0–4.5 cm, minute hairs present below. Capsules 1.5–2.0 cm long, 4-seeded; seeds pubescent, sparsely hairy.

Pollen morphology

Prolate in equatorial view, circular in polar view, endoapertures are circular, exine are divided into longitudinal ribs, each rib with a coarse ladder-like reticulum, the lumina of which is perforated. The pollen morphology is comparable to the pollens of *Strobilanthes pulcherrima* in the Type III section (Carine and Scotland 1998, Halbritter et al. 2018, Fig. 2).

Phenology

Strobilanthes panichanga was observed flowering and fruiting in the month of November.

Distribution and habitat

Strobilanthes panichanga was observed growing along the edge of a small stream near Duiring village in Dima Hasao district, Assam at 500–600 m a.s.l. The species grows in a

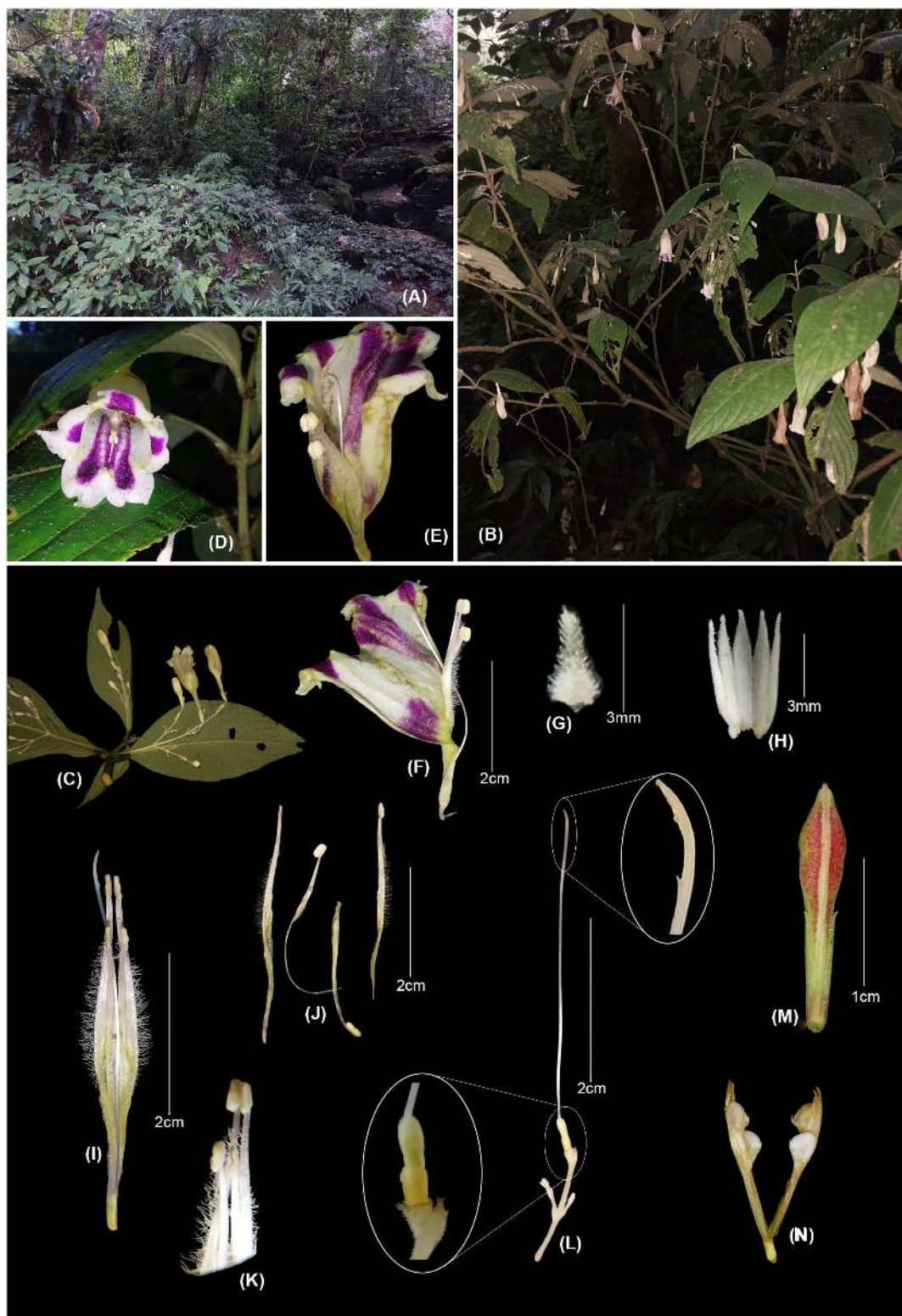


Figure 1. *Strobilanthes panichanga* (Nees) T.Anderson. (A) Habitat, (B) habit, (C) a flowering twig, showing the panicle inflorescence with pendulous flower, (D) front view of the flower, (E) inner portion of the corolla, (F) open corolla with the male and female parts, (G) bracteoles, (H) calyx, (I) arrangement of androecium and gynoecium, (J) stamens, (K) anther lobes enlarged, (L) gynoecium (M) capsule, (N) open capsule with seeds.

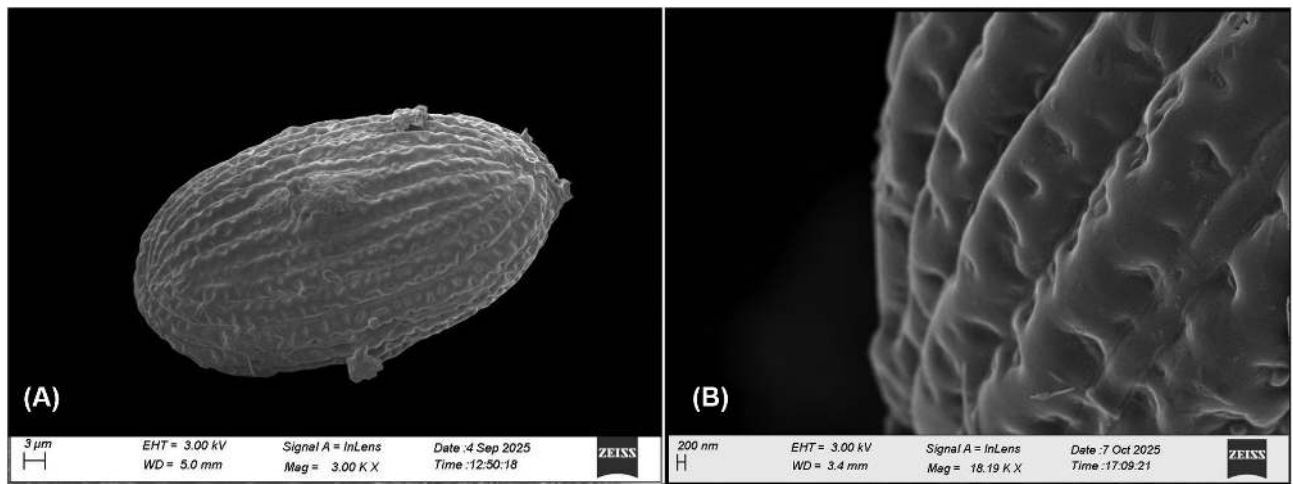


Figure 2. *Strobilanthes panichanga* (Nees) T.Anderson. (A) Pollen, (B) magnified view of lumen in the exine surface.

damp and shady area covered by the tree canopy for most part of the year. Its distribution appears to be highly localised.

Conservation status

Strobilanthes panichanga was previously considered possibly extinct in the type locality in the Khasi Hills as no collection(s) were made from the area since the 19th century. It was also presumed to be vulnerable in the Kachin Hill region of Upper Burma (Wood and Scotland 2003a). The present rediscovery, nearly 150 years later, represents a significant range extension and confirmation of its continued existence. Information from the herbarium sheet labels were accessed from GBIF (2025) and their co-ordinates were interpreted, along with the co-ordinate of the present collection site in Assam. The population at the new site is restricted to a narrow stretch

of approximately 0.7–1 km along the stream with approximately 50 mature individuals. The area of occupancy (AOO) was calculated as 20 km² by using GeoCAT (Bachman et al. 2011) based on a cell width of 2 km. (Fig. 3). Thus, IUCN Criteria B is applied and *S. panichanga* may be assessed as 'Endangered' (EN) [B2ab(iii + v)] (IUCN 2024).

Specimen examined

India, Assam, Dima Hasao district, 25°08'18"N, 92°58'19"E, 560 m a.s.l., 12 Nov. 2024, KKK–300(GUBH).

Taxonomic notes

S. panichanga was originally described based on the pre-1832 collections of Buchanan-Hamilton in Wallich 2387a and 2387b from the Khasi Hills, above Sylhet (present day Silhet),



Figure 3. *Strobilanthes panichanga* (Nees) T.Anderson. Map 1, showing recorded localities in India and Myanmar and inferred area of occupancy (AOO) using GeoCAT.

which lie in Meghalaya, India (Wood and Scotland 2003a). The only other reported collection from India was made by R.L. Keenan in June 1874 (K005280764), from the district of Cachar in Assam, India. There are several collections from Myanmar, the most recent by Kingdon Ward in 1953 (Wood and Scotland 2003a). The present rediscovery thus marks a significant find, being the first record from India after 150 years, and from a new location. Roy et al. (2023) reported the species as occurring in Bangladesh but no relevant material for the species was cited. In this context, an herbarium sheet from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (E00273489) was located, with a sheet label that states 'Habitat in Srihata'. This is an attribution to the ancient name (Srihatta) of present-day Sylhet in Bangladesh and cannot be considered as a collection from Bangladesh as well.

Note: the panicles arise near the petiole bases and are partially concealed under the leaf surface. The flowers appear to utilize the broad leaves as natural shade, offering protection from direct sunlight and rain. Additionally, a small pointed projection was observed at the apical portion of the style. However, its consistent presence needs to be verified from more flowers to be confirmed as a diagnostic, morphological character.

***Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C. Fisch., Bull. Misc. Inform., Kew 1928: 142 (1928); Kanjilal et al., Fl. Assam 3:435 (1939); Wood & Scotland, Kew Bull. 58(1): 107 (2003a, b) (Fig. 4)**

Type: India, Mizoram, N.E. Parry 155 (holotype K; K000883147!).

Pteracanthus parryorum (C.E.C. Fisch.) Bremek., Verh. Kon. Ned. Akad. Wetensch., Afd. Natuurk., Tweede Sect. 41(1): 199 & 282 (1944).

Description

Shrub, up to 2 m high; stems terete, upper branches brownish-tomentose, glabrescent below. Leaves unequal in each pair, broadly ovate-elliptic, 10–25 × 3.0–11.0 cm, cuneate or attenuate at base, dentate to denticulate at margins, acuminate or caudate at apex, minutely hispid on the veins beneath, the upper surface sparsely hispid, glabrescent when old; secondary veins 8–10 pairs; petioles 2–8 cm long, glabrous. Inflorescence spike, 10–25 cm long, terminal or axillary, sometimes branched, tomentose, flowers in opposite pairs; peduncles 2–3 cm long; bracts oblong or spatulate, 1.5–2.5 cm long, rounded or sub-acute at apex, densely brown/yellowish-brown hairy, margins with glandular hairs; bracteoles 1 per flower, linear-oblongate, 1.0–1.5 cm long, glandular-ciliate at margins, obtuse at apex, densely brown/deeply-pink tomentose. Calyx 2-lipped, deeply clefted almost to the base, 1.0–1.5 cm long; middle lobe deeply 3-partite, lateral lobes linear, lobes connate at base, green but deep pink at the apex. Corolla funnel-shaped, 3.0–5.5 cm long, pale yellow or slightly brownish in colour outside, the basal cylindrical portion narrow, 1.0–1.5 cm long, gently curved; funnel-shaped portion wider, up to 3 cm long, 5-lobed, lobes

oblong, 3–5 mm long, obtuse or acute at apex, hairy outside, glabrous inside except the portion where the two lines of hairs retain the styles in their position; corolla lobes pale pink in colour, almost white in appearance, funnel portion yellow inside with lines of deep pink colour originating from the tubular portion, forming web-like striations at the apical region in the funnel just below the corolla lobes. Stamens 4, didynamous, all included, longer pair with hairy filaments, up to 4 cm long, shorter pair sparsely hairy, minutely ciliate; anthers linear, 4–5 mm long. Gynoecium with filiform style, up to 4 cm long, slightly exerted, sparsely hairy below, upper portion glabrous. Ovary glabrous. Capsules narrowly clavate, 1.5–2.5 cm long, pointed at apex, glabrous; 4-seeded, seeds sub-orbicular, 3–4 mm, hairy.

Pollen morphology

Prolate in equatorial view, circular in polar view, endoapertures are circular/lanceolate, exine are divided into longitudinal ribs, each rib with a coarse ladder-like reticulum, the lumina of which is perforated. It has a comparable morphology to the pollen of *Strobilanthes callosa* in the Type III section (Carine and Scotland 1998, Halbritter et al. 2018, Fig. 5).

Phenology

Strobilanthes parryorum was found flowering and fruiting in November.

Distribution and habitat

Strobilanthes parryorum was found growing along the rocky margins of a small stream which arises in the deep, dense forest areas near the Jinam Valley area in Dima Hasao district, Assam, India. The species was growing in a damp, cold habitat at an elevation of approximately 500–600 m a.s.l. It is endemic to the northeast region of India.

Conservation status

Strobilanthes parryorum was regarded as a vulnerable plant by Wood and Scotland (2003b). In the present study, the species has been rediscovered near its type locality in Mizoram (Lalawmpui et al. 2025) and also in Dima Hasao district of Assam for the first time, following the last known collection by Parry in 1928 from Lushai Hills, Mizoram in India (Wood and Scotland 2003b). A small population was found in a single location in this study, confined to a narrow stretch of rocky stream banks extending approximately 0.5–1.0 km near the Jinam Valley area. An estimated 50–100 mature individuals were recorded in flowering and fruiting stages. Information was gathered from the herbarium sheet labels which were accessed from GBIF (2025) and their co-ordinates were interpreted, along with the co-ordinates from Ailawng in Mizoram (Lalawmpui et al. 2025) and also the present collection site in Assam. The area of occupancy (AOO) was calculated as 28 km² by using GeoCAT (Bachman et al. 2011) based on a cell width of 2 km (Fig. 6). Thus, IUCN Criteria B is applied and *S. parryorum* may qualify as 'Endangered' (EN) [B2ab(iii + v)] (IUCN 2024). The habitat is under severe threat from anthropogenic activities, particularly ongoing excavation for road

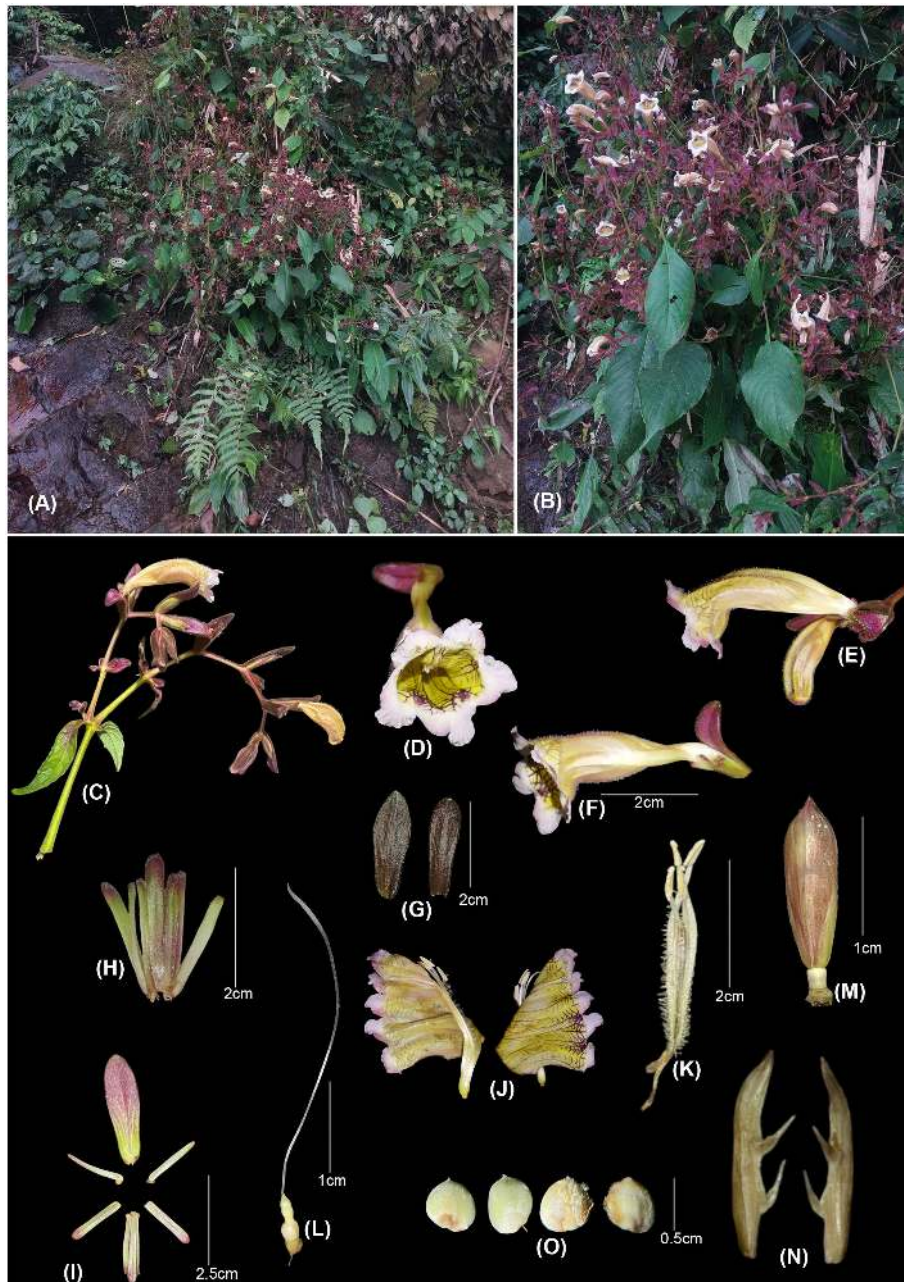


Figure 4. *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C.Fisch. (A) Habitat, (B) habit (C) flowering twig, (D) front view of the flower, (E) lateral view of the flower with bud, (F) lateral view of the flower with bracteole, (G) bract, (H) calyx, (I) calyx with bracteole (separated), (J) inner and outer surface of the corolla, (K) androecium, (L) gynoecium, (M) capsule, (N) open capsule showing retinaculum, (O) seeds.

construction and forest clearance for agriculture. The local communities should be urgently contacted about the threat.

Specimen examined

,India Assam, Dima Hasao district, Jinam valley, 25°08'07"N, 93°09'19'E, 580 m a.s.l., 28 Nov. 2024, KKK-224(GUBH).

Taxonomic notes

The seed surface was found to be distinctly rugulose in appearance, originating from the scar region formed at the

points of attachment with the retinacula and then extending outwards towards the edges of the seed. Roy et al. (2023) reports this species from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India, but does not cite any collections or make any literature reference. Moreover, we could not locate any specimens during our search that could support this statement. Herbarium sheets from Bangladesh (E00133377), Manipur (K005280111), and Mizoram were found and studied but none from Assam or Arunachal Pradesh (GBIF 2025).

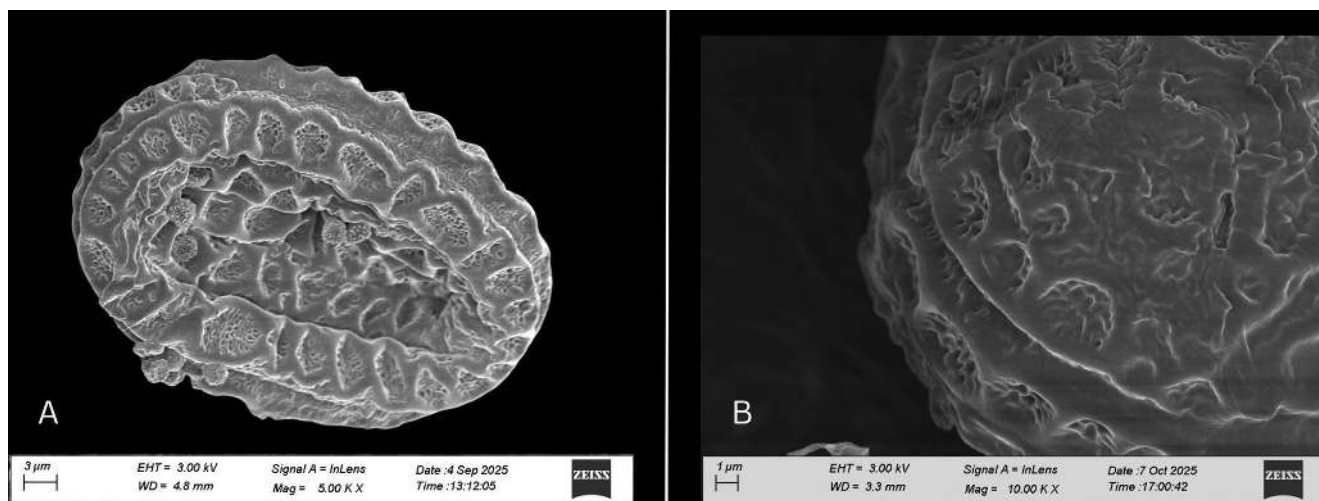


Figure 5. *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C.Fisch. (A) Pollen. (B) Magnified view of lumen in the exine surface.

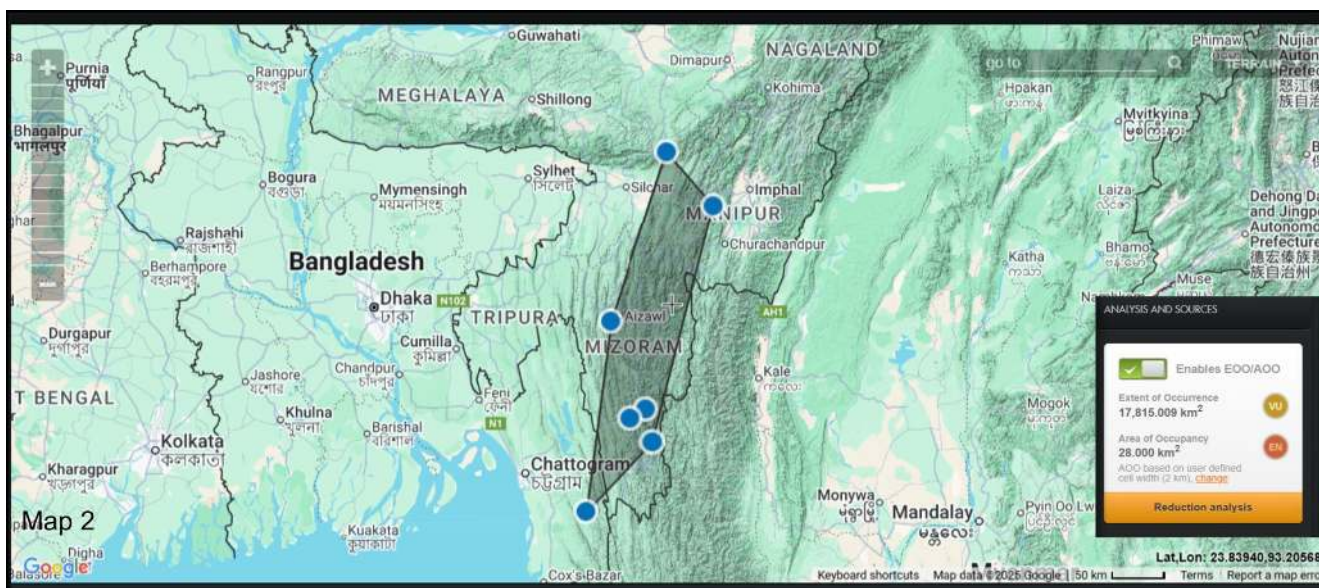


Figure 6. *Strobilanthes parryorum* C.E.C.Fisch. Map 2, showing recorded localities in India and Bangladesh and inferred area of occupancy (AOO) using GeoCAT.

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Conflict of interest – The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

Kapil Kumar Kemprai: Conceptualization (equal); Data curation (equal); Formal analysis (equal); Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal); Project administration (equal); Resources (equal); Writing – original draft (equal).
Souravjyoti Borah: Conceptualization (equal); Data curation (equal); Formal analysis (equal); Investigation (equal);

Methodology (equal); Software (equal); Supervision (lead), Writing – review and editing (equal).

Data availability statement

This article has no additional data.

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