

INTERESTING PLANTS FROM EASTERN INDIA

I. *DIOSCOREA LAURIFOLIA* WALL. EX HOOK. F.

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ABSTRACT

This paper records for the first time the occurrence of *Dioscorea laurifolia* Wall. ex Hook. f. in India from Tirap Frontier Division of North East Frontier Agency. It further indicates the probability of its occurrence in Naga Hills, Tuensang Division and Burma.

INTRODUCTION

Dioscorea laurifolia Wall. ex Hook. f. (plate 1) is hitherto known to be a Malay Peninsular plant. It was originally named by Wallich on the basis of a specimen collected from Penang (Wall. Cat. 5111) and subsequently described by Hooker (Fl. Brit. Ind. 6:293, 1892). The plant has since been recorded from Singapore, Malacca and other parts of the western region of Malay Peninsula. According to Prain and Burkill (Ann. R. bot. Gdn. Calc. 14:222, 1938) the most northern locality definitely known is at 5°31' N. They, however, believed that the northern limits of this plant are not established. The present paper proves the authenticity of prediction on the distribution of the species by the great authorities on the genus.

The paper records the discovery of *Dioscorea laurifolia* Wall. ex Hook. f. from Pungchow, Tirap Frontier Division of North East Frontier Agency, India. The locality is situated at 27°30'N and 96°E.

DESCRIPTION

Dioscorea laurifolia Wall. (Cat. 5111, 1830, *nomen nud.*) ex Hook. f. Fl. Brit. Ind. 6:293, 1892; Prain & Burk. in J. Asiat. Soc. Beng. II., 10:39, 1914; Ridl. Fl. Mal. Pen. 4:319, 1924; Prain & Burk. in Ann. R. bot. Gdn. Calc. 14:222, t. 88, 1938; Burk. in Fl. Malesiana I. 4 (3):323, 1951. *D. oppositifolia* (non Linn.) Curtis in J. Str. Br. R. Asiat. Soc. 25:149, 1894.

A climber twining to the right, branching; stem wiry, slightly ridged, sparsely prickly; prickles small, thickened at the base, bent downwards. *Leaves* opposite, petiolate, petiole up to 3.2 cm. long, channelled, dilated at both ends; lamina lanceolate to ovate-lanceolate about 7.6-10.5 × 2.9-3.6 cm., glabrous; apex acuminate, slightly bent, base slightly cuneate, 5-nerved with one pair submarginal,

reticulate. *Spikes* about 3-4 cm. long, 1 or 2 together in the leaf axils or at the ends of branches. Flowers about 1.5 mm. in diam., sessile, buds slightly longer than globose; bracts deltoid acute, about 1.2 mm. long. *Tepals* 6, in two whorls of 3 each, the outer ones larger, about 2 × 2 mm., incurved, mid-vein prominent, apex rounded, margin entire; the inner ones narrower about 1.5 mm. long, incurved, apex blunt, margin entire. *Stamens* 6 attached to the prolonged torus; anthers 2-celled, basifixed, oblong, slightly longer than the filament, introrse; female flowers and fruits not seen.

Occurrence: North East Frontier Agency, Pungchow, Tirap Frontier Division, 7.7.1961, *Deb* 26589. This is a tripartite junction of N. E. F. A., Naga Hills and Tuensang Agency and Burma. It is likely to occur in the Naga Hills, Tuensang Division and Burma also.

DISTRIBUTION AND ECOLOGY

Malaysia, Malay Peninsula, western side excepting Kelantan, Pahang and Trengganu.

The specimen was collected from the plant growing at the slope of the hill in the outskirts of a patch of evergreen forest. It was found at two places at a short distance of about 1 km. According to Prain and Burkill, *Dioscorea laurifolia* Wall. ex Hook. f. in the Malay Peninsula is itself sometimes difficult to distinguish. They consider that it forms hybrids with associated species of the section *Enantiophyllum* and that the plants which present difficulties to the systematic botanists are hybrids of this kind. Probably, this accounts for the presence of short prickles on the branches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Grateful thanks are due to Shri J. Das, Artist, Eastern Circle, Shillong, for drawing the sketch.

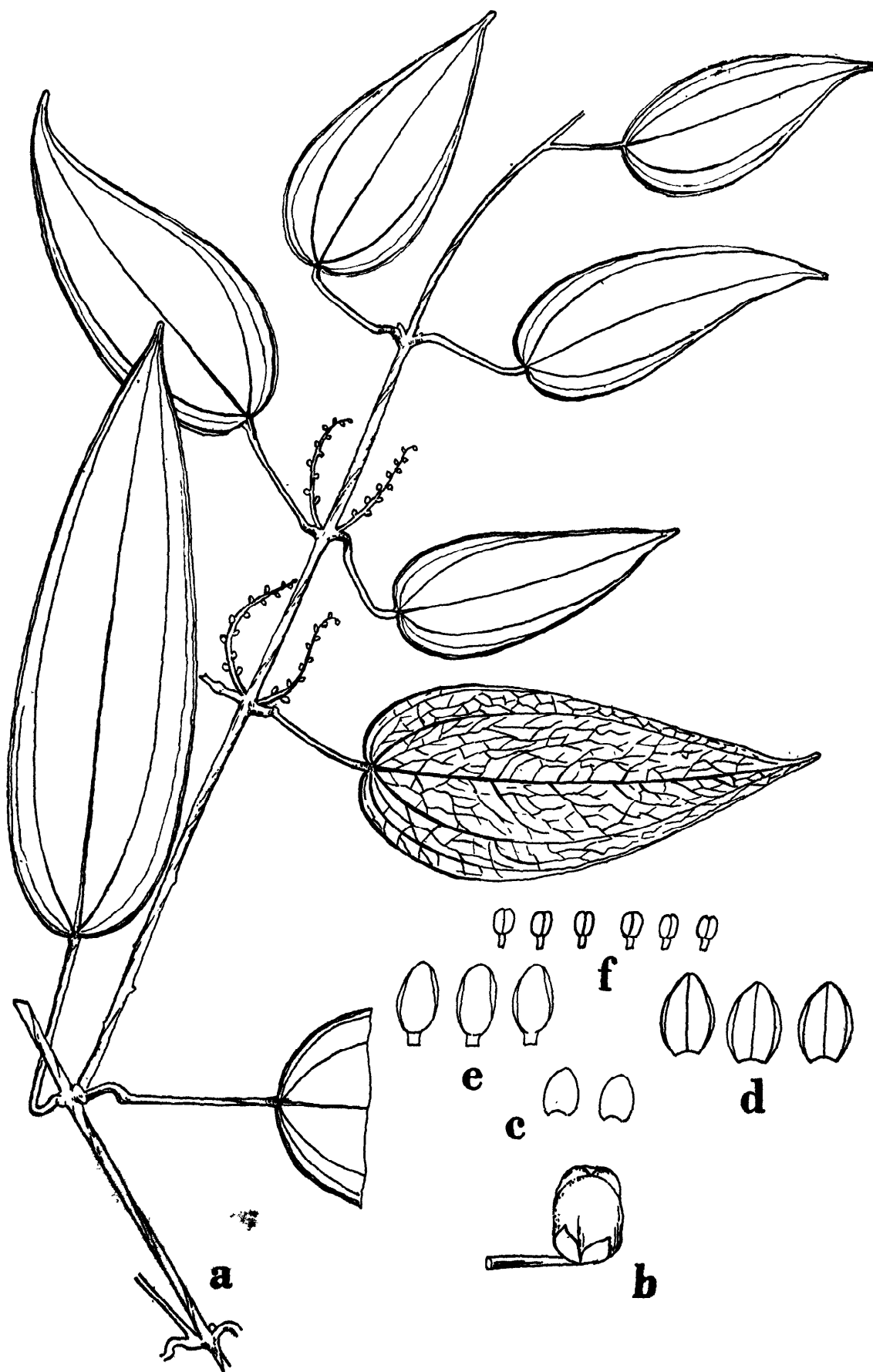


PLATE 1.

a. *Dioscorea laurifolia* Wall. ex Hook. f. ; b. A flower (x 10) ; c. Bracts (x 10) ;
 d. Outer tepals (x 10) ; e. Inner tepals (x 10) ; f. Stamens (x 10).