

A NEW SPECIES OF *CHIRITA* FROM NE INDIA

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ABSTRACT. A new species of *Chirita*, *C. dibangensis* Burtt, Srivastava & Mehrotra, (Gesneriaceae) is described from the Mishmi Hills, Arunachal Pradesh, NE India. It belongs to sect. *Chirita* and is allied to *C. calva* C. B. Clarke.

Chirita dibangensis Burtt, Srivastava & Mehrotra, **species nova** *C. calvae* C. B. Clarke proxime affinis sed foliis minoribus, brevius petiolatis, marginibus glabris (nec ciliatis), floribus solitariis axillaribus majoribus, calycis lobis valde acuminatis (nec acutis tantum) facile distinguitur.

Erect herb, c.45-60cm high; stems quadrangular and deeply furrowed (*fide* collector), c.4mm diam., glabrous. *Leaves* simple, opposite, those of a pair somewhat unequal; lamina ovate or ovate-elliptic, 5.5-10 × 1.8-4.2cm, glabrous on both sides except for a few hairs when very young, chartaceous, apex shortly acuminate, base obtuse and unequal-sided; margin with rather sparse small blunt teeth, midrib slightly raised below, lateral veins 5-7 pairs obscure above slightly raised below; petiole 0.5-1.5cm long, minutely pubescent, joined to the one opposite by a raised ridge which is hairy when young. *Flowers* axillary, solitary; pedicels 3.5-4.5cm long, glabrous, expanded below the apex, with linear bract 6mm long below the middle. *Calyx* glabrous, 2-2.5cm long; tube 1cm, with 5 ribs continuing as midveins of lobes which are lanceolate-acuminate 1-1.5cm long. *Corolla* pinkish-white outside, with 2 yellow lines on the lower part of the palate and in the throat; tube 4.5cm long and 8mm wide at middle, with a few short glandular hairs on the roof near the mouth and some longer ones near the base; upper lip bilobed, c.1cm long; lower lip c.2cm long, 3-lobed; all lobes rounded at tips. *Fertile stamens* the lower pair; filaments arising 2.2cm above the base of the corolla, c.14mm long, geniculate and thickened below the middle. *Anthers* cohering face to face, 5mm across; thecae widely divergent, bearded on the back. *Staminodes* 2, well-developed, 5mm long, hooked with abortive bearded anthers at the apex, pilose throughout; staminode 3, very small, membranous, glabrous, 1mm long. *Disc* annular. *Gynoeceium* c.4cm long; ovary c.2cm, cylindric, glabrous, gradually passing into 2cm long style; stigma with upper lobe forming a small rim; lower lobe widespreading, 8mm diam., bilobed, membranous. Fruit unknown.

Type. India: Arunachal Pradesh, Mishmi Hills, Dibang Valley, Hunli, c.1250m, 9 iv 1987, S. K. Srivastava 16730 (holo. CDRI, iso. E).

Chirita dibangensis was collected by one of the authors (SKS) on a botanical expedition to the Mishmi Hills in Arunachal Pradesh in 1987. It was growing on moist grassy slopes at Hunli, in the Dibang Valley, where it thrives in the frequent rains; the large, 6cm long, trumpet-shaped flowers with pinkish white corolla tube were produced in April.

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Chirita D. Don is now one of the largest genera of Gesneriaceae. D. Wood (1974) accepted some 77 species, with c.18 from present-day India, and c.27 from China. But China has since proved to contain many species then unknown in western herbaria and W. T. Wang (1985) now records no less than 80 for that country alone. It seems likely that the total for the whole genus at present stands at about 130 species. The genus ranges from Himachal Pradesh (Simla) in the west, south to Sri Lanka, east to Taiwan and southeast to Borneo and Java.

The only group classification below the level of section is that worked out for the Chinese species by W. T. Wang (1985). In this *C. dibangensis* is to be placed in sect. *Chirita*, subsect. *Urticifoliae*, series *Urticifoliae*, which is represented in China by seven species. Six of these occur in India, where at least an additional six species are found; there are others in Upper Burma. It is clear, then, that NE India, SW China and Upper Burma are the present geographical centre for series *Urticifoliae*; indeed this area may well be the distributional centre for sect. *Chirita* as a whole. By contrast sect. *Gibbosaccus* C. B. Clarke is centred on S China (and is absent from India), whereas the centre for sect. *Microchirita* C. B. Clarke is on the limestone of Thailand (with one species only in India).

Chirita dibangensis is almost glabrous (hairs are only found on the youngest leaves and leaf-bases) and therefore naturally finds a place next to *C. calva* C.B. Cl. which, however, has the leaves distinctly ciliate on the margins. Other allied species, such as *C. dimidiata* C.B. Cl. and *C. anachoreta* Hance, have the upper leaf-surface distinctly and persistently hairy.

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