

***Geissaspis cristata* Wight et Arnott – an addition to the state flora of West Bengal**

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Abstract

Geissaspis cristata Wight et Arnott has been reported as an addition to the flora for the Indian state of West Bengal.

Keywords: *Geissaspis cristata*, New record, West Bengal

While working on the plant resources of Darjiling Himalaya, West Bengal an interesting legume species has been collected by the authors from Sukna Army Cantonment area. The species is growing among small grasses in open area sharing and camouflaging an association with plants like *Desmodium triflorum* and *Desmodium heterophyllum*. After a critical study in the herbarium as well as the literature survey, the plant has been identified as *Geissaspis cristata* Wight et Arnott of the family Fabaceae (s.s.). A perusal of literature revealed that Das Das *et al* (1992) has wrongly reported this species as new for the Flora of West Bengal based on two herbarium specimens collected by John W. Helfer (Bengalia Circa Calcuttam, Annis 1836 – 38, Joh. W. Helfer 493 & 165) deposited at CAL.

These two specimens have printed labels of Jon. W. Helfer of the Herbarium Musei Regni Bohemiae deposited at CAL without any inscription. Sanjappa (1992) also shown the distribution of this species in West Bengal probably based on these two specimens.

However, Helfer's collection from Calcutta is not correct or acceptable as he never visited mainland India. This Austrian explorer along with his wife came to Tenasserim (Myanmar) to settle there in 1837. He collected a lot of plant specimens from Myanmar and was also appointed as an advisor to the East India Company for safeguarding the teak cultivation in that country. He was then sent to Andaman where he lost his life in an attack on his party by local Andamanese in 1840. His wife apparently returned to Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) along with all Helfer's collections. (Burkill, "Chapters on the History of Botany in India", Delhi 1965). So, these two specimens of *G. cristata* Wight & Arnott might have been collected either from Myanmar or from Andaman. There is also neither any record of occurrence of this species in literature nor any other collection from the state.

So, the present finding of this species forms a new record for the State of West Bengal collected from the district of Darjeeling. Full citation, brief description, distribution data, phenology etc. are provided for ready reference and easy identification.

Geissaspis cristata Wight et Arnott, Prodr. Fl. Ind. Or. 218.1834; Baker in Hook.f., Fl. Brit. India 2: 141.1876; Taub. in Engl. Prantl., Pflanzenfam. 3(3): 82, f. 45. B. 1891; Cooke, Fl. Pres. Bombay 1: 353.1958 (repr. ed.); Almeida, Fl. Maharashtra 2:82. 1998; Das Das *et al* in J. Econ. Tax. Bot. 16 (2): 319. 1992; Sanjappa, Legumes of India 181.1992; Kothari in Singh & Karthikeyan (ed.), Fl. Maharashtra State 1: 691. 2000. *Zornia disperma* Grah. in Wall. Cat. 5663. 1831-1832.

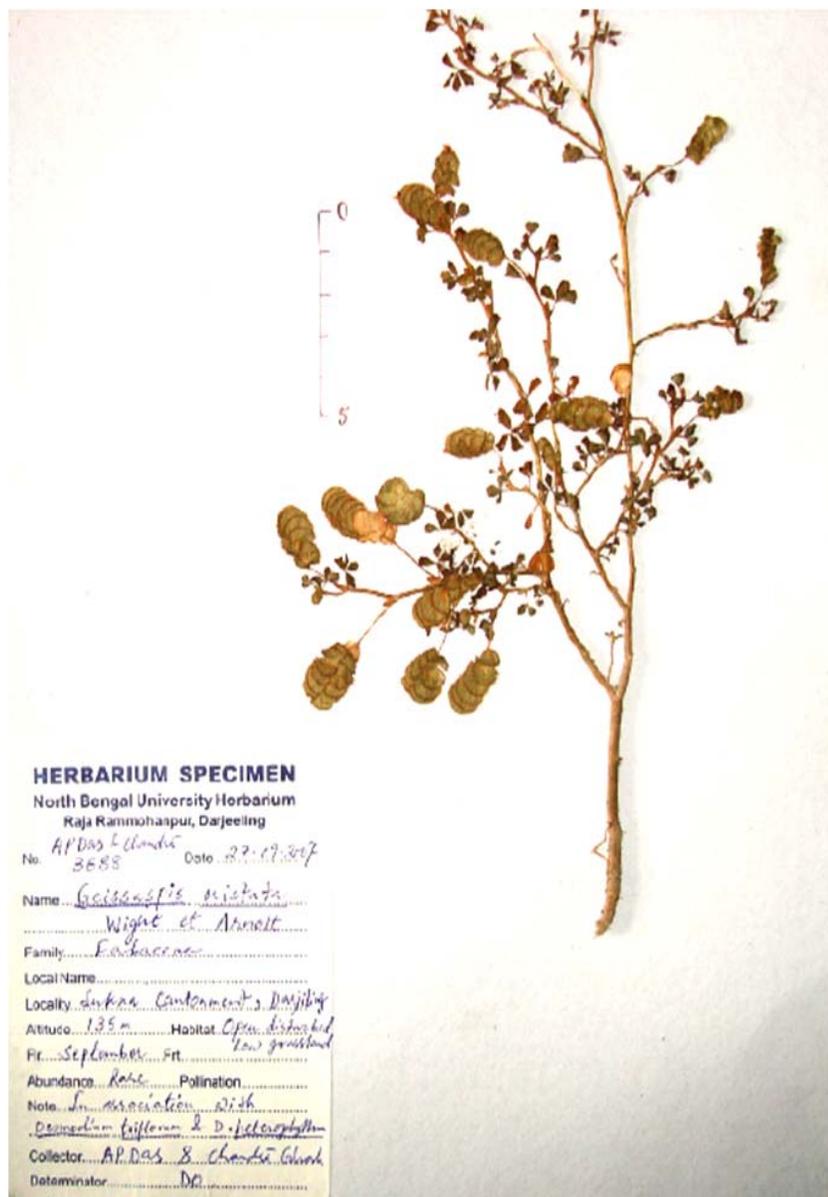


Fig. I: Photograph of the specimen deposited at the NBU Herbarium.

Annual, procumbent herbs. Stem sparsely hairy. Leaflets 3–4, obovate, 0.5–1 x 0.3–0.5 cm, slightly oblique, apex reflexe, cuneate at base, petiolule very short; petioles 1–1.5 cm long; stipules semi-sagittate, lanceolate, distinctly nerved, margin ciliate. Racemes axillary or terminal, on long peduncles. Bracts large, orbicular, obliquely cordate, reticulated with veins, glabrous, margin ciliated with large brownish patent bristles. Flowers solitary in each bract, yellow with reddish-purple streaks; purplish when dry, pedicelled. Calyx membranous, cleft almost to the very base into 2-lips. Corolla papilionaceous, vexillum large. Stamens of equal length, monadelphous, anthers roundish. Ovary 2-ovuled; style compressed; stigma simple. Pods moniliform, glabrous, reticulately veined, tumid in the middle, thin at both margins, 1–2 jointed. Seed solitary in each joint.

Flowers & Fruits: September – February

Distribution: India: Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Goa, West Bengal; Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, South China.

Ecology: Growing in undulating moist places, among grasses and other prostrate herbaceous plants including similar looking *Desmodium triflorum* and *Desmodium heterophyllum*.

Exsiccatu: Sukna Cantonment Area, Darjiling, *AP Das & Chandrâ* 3688, dated 27.09.2007.