

Distribution of *Gnetum montanum* Markgraf (Gnetaceae) in Terai and Duars of West Bengal, India

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Occurrence of wild gymnospermous plants in tropical Asiatic regions generally creates interest among the botanists. Different species of *Gnetum* Linnaeus are known to grow in the Indian sub-continent. However, Hooker (1888) recorded the occurrence of its six species in *The Flora of British India*. On the other hand, Prain (1903) recorded only two species in *Bengal Plants*. In comparatively recent survey, Grierson & Long (1983) recorded the occurrence of only *Gnetum montanum* Markgraf (*G. scandens sensu* Hoofer f; *non* Roxburgh) to grow in Bhutan and Sikkim. Prain (1903) recorded the occurrence of *G. scandens* Roxburgh only in Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) and Chotonagpur and Singbhum regions, presently in the state of Bihar. So, its distribution in West Bengal was not known.

Recent surveys in many parts of Terai and Duars of West Bengal recorded the occurrence of *Gnetum montanum* in different forests of the study area those are within the territorial jurisdiction of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri districts of the state. It is interesting to note that the species is quite often found in different forests throughout this range, starting from *Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary* in the east to *Buxa Tiger Reserve* on the west.

It is generally difficult to recognise the species in untrained eye especially when it is not in flowering stage. Its seeds are edible and local people collect its mature seeds during September – October. While in degraded forests it is forming compact bushes, in unaffected condition it becomes a huge liana and climbing over quite tall trees. During the present survey, so far, only one male and one female plant were recorded in flowering condition.

The survey was conducted in numerous forests, during 2009 – 2011, including Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, Sursuti Reserve Forests (Lataguri), Gorumara National Park, Raja Bhatkhawa Forests, Buxa Forests, etc.

Gnetum montanum Markgraf, Bull. Jard. Bot. Buitenz. ser. 3, 10: 466, tab. 8. 1930. Hara in Fl. E. Himal. 2: 13. 1971. Grierson & Long in Fl. Bhutan 1(1): 57. 1983. *Gnetum scandens sensu* Hooker f. [*non* Roxburgh], Fl. Brit. India 5. 643. 1888; Prain, Beng. Pl. 2: 744. 1903. [Plate I].

Local Name: *Pagrhi Lata*

Large liana, weakly twining up to the top of tall trees with numerous hanging branches; old nodes swollen; petiole short, 1 – 3 cm; lamina elliptic-ovate, upto 22 x 8 cm, sometimes larger in sterile plants; catkins from old nodes or terminal on new shoots; male catkins 3 – 5 x 0.4 – 0.55 cm, branches few, stalks upto 3 cm; female catkins much branched cymose panicles, upto 25 cm, branches upto 13 cm with stalks upto 3 cm, internodes upto 6 cm long; ovules \pm 7, upto 0.4 cm, green, glabrous, shiny; mature seeds not seen here.

Exsiccatae: North Sevoke, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, *A.P. Das et al 3876*, dated 26.06.2009 (sterile); NRVK-9, Buxa Tiger Reserve, *A.P. Das et al 0616*, dated 25.02.2010 (sterile); Sursuti,



PLATE I: *Gnetum montanum* Markgraf. A. Female plant climbing upon a tall tree; B. Foliage; C. Swollen internode; D. Male catkins old nodes; E. Female catkin; F. Branching pattern of female inflorescence; G. Young seed.

Lataguri Forests, *A.P. Das et al* 2724, dated 21.02.2010 (sterile); Murti Forest, Gorumara National Park, *S.R. Yadav & A.P. Das* 3692, dated 10.03.2011 (very young male catkins); Murti Forest, Gorumara National Park, *A.P. Das & Chandra* 3693, dated 07.05.2011 (mature male catkins); Barohati-2 Compartment, Gorumara National Park, *A.P. Das & Chandra* 3694, dated 08.05.2011 (mature female catkins).

Distribution: Eastern Himalaya (Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan), West Bengal, Assam, Myanmar, Thailand, China.

Note: Preferred fodder for elephants; local people use paste of inflorescence in skin diseases and seeds against fever.

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