

Short Communication

Taxonomic Status of *Cinnamomum alexei* (Lauraceae)

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Abstract

Cinnamomum alexei Kosterm. has been reinstated to its original status as a distinct species from *C. verum* J.S. Presl, provided with a short taxonomic diagnosis.

Keywords: Taxonomic note; *Cinnamomum Alexei*; *C. verum*, Lauraceae; India.

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Cinnamomum alexei was described by Kostermans in 1969 [1], based on the collection of Buwalda (Buwalda, 3618 L!) from Tjiharum, G Karang near Tjidadap in Mount Karanag in Java. He cited two more collections, one each from Mount Buleud near Tjidadap, south of Tjibeber and the other from Tjadasmalang near Tjidadap at western Java in Indonesia. All these collections are deposited at Herbarium Bogoriense, Bogor, Indonesia (BO). According to Kostermans [1], its distributional areas in Java were undergone various developmental activities that led the species extinct forever from its distributional localities.

Santhosh *et al.* [2] reported this species for India from the Ponmudi hills of Thiruvananthapuram district in Kerala. This is the one and only locality for this rare plant in India. In the present locality, only one tree was located in the evergreen forests at altitude of 700 m and a few saplings were successfully raised and conserving at the field gene bank of Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI).

On his recent treatment on Bornean species of *Cinnamomum*, Soh [3] treated *C. alexei* under *C. verum* J.S. Presl, without sufficient taxonomic justification. Perusal of these two species in details showed remarkable differences between these two taxa convinced to declare that *C. alexei* is distinct from *C. verum* (Table 1) and worthy of recognition to its original status.

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Cinnamomum alexei Kosterm., Reinwardtia 7: 454. 1969, - Type: Buwalda 3618 (holo BO; iso L), Java, Tjampaka near Tjidadap, Mt Karang; Kumar *et al.* [2]

Cinnamomum alexei is a beautiful tree worth introducing as an avenue plant. Its flowers seldom open widely. The flowers at anthesis seem to be an unopened flower and the number of fruits per infructescence also counted very low. Wijesekera *et al.* [4] reported that the main constituent of leaf oil in *C. verum* is eugenol, whereas in *C. alexei* it is represented by saffrol as the major component. This species cannot be used as the substitute for cinnamon, but may be an alternative source of saffrol. Moreover, *C. alexei* is characteristically distinct from rest of the species from the Indian subcontinent by its betel smelled leaves and 2-loculed anthers in all the three stamen whorls.

Table 1. Comparison of selected morphological characters of *Cinnamomum alexei* and *C. verum*.

Characters	<i>Cinnamomum alexei</i>	<i>C. verum</i>
Habit	Small trees, 3-5 m high	Trees, 6-18 m high
Bark	Strong scented with betel smell	Strong scented with cinnamon smell
Twigs	Slender, subterete-quadrangular	Stout, terete
Lamina	Ovate to lanceolate	Ovate
Leaf apex	Long acuminate to caudate	Acute with blunt tip
Lateral veins	Reach below the acumen or rarely almost to the blade tip	Reach 2/3 -3/4 length of the blade
Inflorescences	Axillary or extra-axillary, to 7 cm long	Axillary and or terminal, 8-12 cm long
Flowers	Dark maroon in colour	Pale yellow or greenish-yellow in colour
Tepals	Broadly ovate, to 1.5 mm long	Lanceolate to elliptic, 3-4 mm long
Stamens	2-locular	4-locular
Staminodes	0.5 mm long	1.5-2 mm long
Ovary	Ellipsoid	Globose
Stigma	Peltate	Tri-lobed

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