SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

A NOTE ON HELIOTROPION CORNUTUM JOHST.

During a plant exploration in South Kanara district, Mysore State in April 1964 a species of Heliotropium Linn. (Boraginaceae) was collected which differed from the rest in its fruit characters. This has been identified as Heliotropium cornutum Johnst., a species endemic to Kanara and little known in our floras. Since the identity of this plant is often confused and no illustration exists in the published literature, a descriptive and illustrated note is presented here to facilitate its identification.


Strigously hairy herb with well developed tap root; stems many, radiating from above the root, 15-25 cm long, prostrate or ascending, lax, sparsely hirsute; internodes 0.5-2 cm long. Leaves 3-8 x 1.5-2.5 mm, alternate, occasionally subopposite, ovate to oblong-lanceolate, appressed hairy, subacute at apex, attenuate to somewhat rounded at base; petioles 0.5-1 mm long. Flowers in extraaxillary, few-flowered cymes; pedicels up to 1.5 mm long, hirsute; calyx deeply 5-partite, each lobe ± 4 x 1.5 mm, ovate-lanceolate, acute; corolla pinkish white, infundibuliform, tube ± 3 mm long, lobes 5, each ± 1 mm long, ovate to ovate-oblong; sparsely hairy without, glabrous within; stamens 5, epipetalous, sub sessile, anthers ovate-oblong; ovary superior, ± 1.5 mm long, villous, 4-loculed, with a solitary ovule in each locule, style 0.5 mm long, stigmatic disc ± 0.5 mm in diameter. Fruit 3.5 x 2 mm, densely villous, quadrangular, of 4 closely appressed nutlets, conspicuously beaked above, with blunt cornute processes above the base on each of its four angles.

Heliotropium cornutum is the single representative of Sect. Orthostachys R. Br. Subsection Axillaria (Johnst. in Contr. Gray Herb. Harv. 81: 48, 1928) in India, a group which is mainly American in distribution with only a few members in the Old World. The species is very much confused with Heliotropium scabrum Retz. from which it differs mainly in its sulcate, not lobed fruit drawn up into a prominent beak.

While referring to this species Johnston (loc. cit. 1930) remarks, “This is a very interesting and very distinct member of the Subsect. Axillaria; the species is characterized by its very villous fruit which is not only drawn up into a very well developed beak but is also provided with evident blunt cornute processes that develop above the base on each of its four angles. These processes are duplex in structure being composed of prolongations of adjacent portions of the margins of the closely contiguous nutlets. I know of no other species in the entire genus that has similar outgrowths on the fruit”.

Distribution: Type Specimen: Hohenacker 82 (BM). Type Locality: Mangalore. Specimens examined: Udipi, S. Kanara, 24-4-1964, R. K. Arora 3115 (CAL); Mysore and Carnatic, C. Thompson s.n., Acc. No. 36666 (CAL); N. Kanara, May 1883, W. A. Talbot 470 (CAL).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Dr. H. Santapanu, Director, Botanical Survey of India for encouragement and to Dr. K. Subramanyam, Joint Director, Botanical Survey of India for going through the manuscript.

R. K. ARORA AND S. P. BANERJEE

Botanical Survey of India, Calcutta