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A new species of *Diospyros* (Ebenaceae) from Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A rare new species of *Diospyros* (Ebenaceae), restricted to the Galle and Matara Districts of south-western Sri Lanka, is described. *Diospyros pemadasai* sp. nov. resembles *D. oblongifolia*, from which it is distinguished by several characters, including its puberulent to glabrescent branchlets (vs. hispid in *D. oblongifolia*); its glabrescent lower leaf surface (vs. pubescent, patently hispid on veins, rarely glabrescent); leaves with 14-18 pairs of lateral veins (vs. 8-10); and its ovoid to obovoid fruit (vs. globose to depressed globose).

Introduction

Diospyros, the genus of "Ebony" in Sri Lanka is represented by 31 natural species of which 19 are endemic. *Diospyros discolor* Willd. ("Velvet apple"), a native of the Philippines, is occasionally found cultivated in Sri Lanka (Kostermans, 1981). Although they are found in all climatic zones, the majority of them thrive in the lowland wet zone where most of the endemic species also occur. No species have been recorded from the upper montane zone and they seldom occur above 1200 m altitude.

Diospyros pemadasai Jayasuriya, sp. nov.

Figures 1 & 2

Type. Sri Lanka. Matara District, Oliyagankele Forest Reserve, 35 m alt., 06 August 1995. *Jayasuriya 9057* (holotype, PDA; isotypes K, US).

Paratypes. Same locality as type. 06 August 1995, Jayasuriya 9048 (PDA); Galle District, Kombala-Kottawa Proposed Forest reserve, 70 m alt., 11 November 1992, *Jayasuriya 6878* (PDA).

Diagnosis

Diospyros oblongifoliae similis sed ramulis puberulis vel glabrescentibus, foliis subtus glabriis, nervis lateralibus 14–18. Fructus pedicellis 4–6 mm longis puberulis vel glabrescentibus differt.

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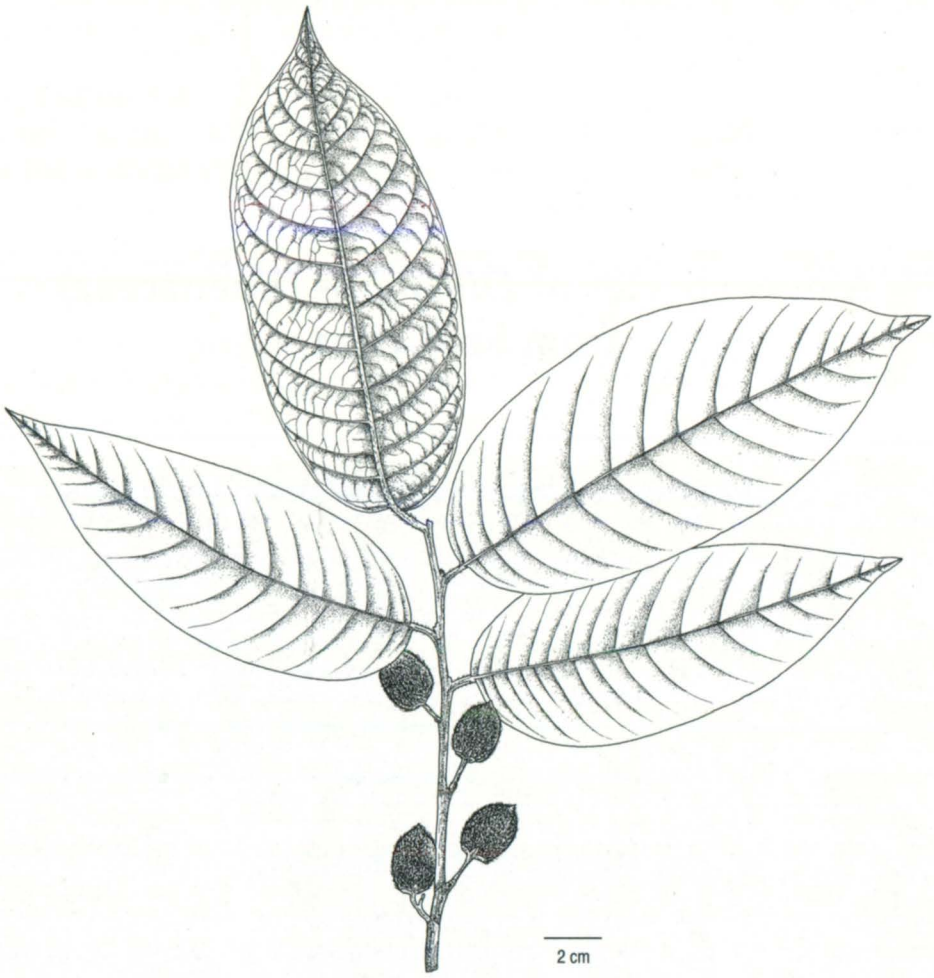

Figure 1. *Diospyros pemadasai* Jayasuriya. Habit, fruiting branch with leaves showing upper surfaces except distal leaf. which shows lower surface (drawn from *Jayasuriya 9057*).

Figure 2. A fruiting specimen of *Diospyros pemadasai* Jayasuriya.

Description

Tree to 12 m tall and trunk to 30 cm diameter. Bark surface grey. Branchlets puberulent to glabrescent, rusty brown when dry. Leaves coriaceous, oblong-ovate, 9-19 x 4-8 cm (to 29 x 12.5 cm in saplings), rounded to oblique at base, abruptly acute to shortly acuminate at apex, shiny yellowish brown and glabrous on the upper surface, pale yellowish brown and glabrous (except for a few scattered hairs) on the lower surface; veins impressed above and strongly prominent beneath: lateral veins 14-18 (excluding a few intermediates), strongly divergent from midvein, arcuate at the margin, connected by subscalariform intercostals, areoles relatively large, petiole 8-12 mm long, glabrescent. Flowers unknown. Fruit ovoid to obovoid, fulvous-sericous, interspersed with patent hairs, pedicel 4-7 mm long, puberulent to glabrescent, calyx lobes reflexed, pubescent outside. Seeds (immature) 1.5 cm long.

Distribution

Diospyros pemadasai is confined to the lowland rain forests not very far from the coast, in the Galle and Matara Districts, and is rare. It prefers undisturbed habitats and sporadic trees and saplings of this species occupy the middle and lower strata of the forest profile. Insofar as observed, this species is not sympatric with its closest ally, *D. oblongifolia* (Fig. 3). They differ from each other in the characters shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Diagnostic characters of *Diospyros pemadasai* and *D. oblongifolia*.

Character	*D. pemadasai*	*D. oblongifolia*
Twig	puberulent to glabrescent	patently hispid
Leaf		
base	rounded to oblique	acute to rounded
apex	abruptly acute to shortly acuminate	Gradually tapering into an acuminate tip
lower surface	glabrescent	pubescent, patently hispid on veins, rarely glabrescent
colour when dry	yellowish brown	reddish brown
lateral veins (pairs)	14–18	8–10
Petiole	8–10 mm long, glabrescent	2–5 mm long, patently hispid
Fruit		
Shape	ovoid to obovoid	globose to depressed globose
pedicel	4–6 mm long, puberulent to glabrescent	2–3 mm long, patently hispid
calyx lobes	hispid	patently hispid
Occurrence		
altitudinal range (m)	50–180	90–500

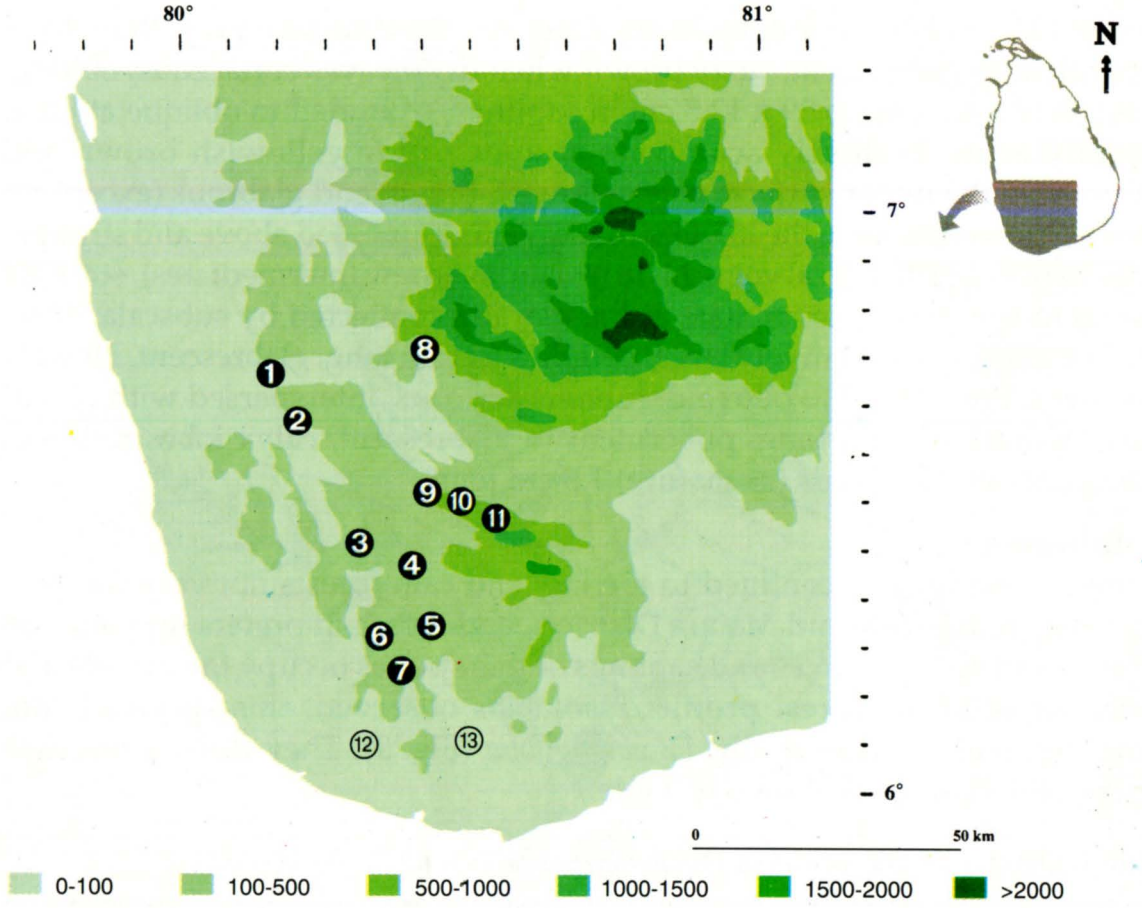

Figure 3. Distribution in Sri Lanka of *Diospyros oblongifolia* (1–11) and *D. pemadasai* (12–13).

Etymology

The new species is named in honour of Professor M. A. Pemadasa* of Ruhunu University, Matara, Sri Lanka.

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Literature cited

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* Professor M. A. Pemadasa died on 10 November, 1997, while this paper was in press.