Isachne veldkampii var. malabarica (Poaceae) - a new wetland variety from Northern Kerala, India

Punchiri Anil Kumar Dhanya Lekshmi, Punnakkot Biju & Venugopalan Nair Saradhamma Anil Kumar

1Plant Systematics Laboratory, Department of Botany, University College, Thiruvananthapuram-695 034, India
2Department of Botany, Govt. College Kasaragod-671 123, India

*Email: vsanilbotany@gmail.com

Abstract

Isachne veldkampii var. malabarica, a new variety is described from the wetlands of Kasaragod, Kerala. It can be distinguished from Isachne veldkampii Bhat & Nagendran by the presence of two types of leaves - ligulate and non-ligulate, 1–4 spikelets in each panicle branch and 2 florets which are either both pistillate, both bisexual or upper pistillate and lower bisexual. Description along with figures, illustrations and distribution map are provided.

Keywords

Amplexicaul, caryopsis, glandular, heteromorphic floret, Isachnea, ligulate, Micrairoideae

Introduction

Isachne R.Br. is the most widespread genus of the subfamily Micrairoideae, comprising of about 110 species worldwide (1). Historically, the genus is placed in the tribe Panicoidae, but recently included in the tribe Isachneae (2). The genus is classified into two sections - plants with homomorphic florets (lower and upper florets almost similar in shape, size and texture) were placed under sect. Albentes and those with heteromorphic florets (lower and upper florets dissimilar in shape, size and texture) were placed under sect. Isachne (3–4). The systematic status of Isachne in the subfamily is highly dynamic since the beginning of its classification, rendering its position still unresolved.

As per the records, in India, the genus is represented by 34 species and Kerala accounts for 13 taxa including the recently published Isachne manilaliana Sunil, K.M.P. Kumar & V.P. Thomas (5). The high risk of habitat destruction of these grass taxa along with the endemism shown by species like I. bhatii P.Biju, Josekutty & Augustine demands conservatory attention (6).

During a floristic exploration associated with the ongoing research in the lateritic plateaus and wetlands of Kasaragod district of Kerala, the authors collected a specimen of Isachne from an isolated area of Seethangoli. Critical examination of the specimen revealed that it shows traits that are mostly similar to I. veldkampii K.G. Bhat & Nagendran while exhibiting some distinctly different traits from its allied taxa and hence proposed here as a variety of I. veldkampii.
Materials and Methods

The present work was carried out through field surveys in various geographical locations of Kerala. Analysis of relevant literatures (5–9) and examination of specimens preserved at various herbaria like TBGT, UCBD, MH, K, CMPR, KFRI (Acronyms after Thiers (10).

Taxonomic Treatment

*Isachne veldkampii*


Type

India, Kerala, Kasaragod distr., Seethangoli, on the way to Perla 23 m, Sept. 2021, Dhanya & Anil Kumar 350 (holotype UCBD!; isotypes TBGT!, KFRI!)

Diagnosis

The new taxon is distinguishable from *I. veldkampii* Bhat & Nagendran in having both ligulate and non-ligulate leaves, trichome in leaves (pubescent adaxially and glabrous abaxially), presence of both bisexual and unisexual florets and ovate palea.

Creeping decumbent annual. Culms glabrous, 4–9 cm long, spongy, ribbed; nodes glabrous; internodes ribbed, 1–3 cm long, slightly expanded at base, fistular. Leaves of 2 types: ligulate and non-ligulate, broadly ovate or ovate lanceolate, membranous with sparsely dispersed hairs on adaxial side, glabrous abaxially, 1–4 mm × 0.5–1.2 cm, midrib obscure, cordate at base, acuminate at apex, amplexicaul, hairs in leaf margins varying in both types of leaves, longer towards base and shorter towards apex in ligulate leaves, more or less of equal length in non-ligulate leaves; ligule a fringe of long hairs; leaf sheath glabrous, prominently ribbed, 0.5–1 cm long, slightly detached from base. Panicles exerted from uppermost sheath, 1.5–3.5 cm long; branches 8–13, glandular, 0.3–0.6 cm long; peduncle smooth. Spikelets 1–4 in each branch, secund, ovoid-elliptic, 1.5 × 0.3–0.5 mm; pedicel eglandular, 0.4–0.9 mm long, glabrous. Glumes 2; lower glume chartaceous, narrowly elliptic, 0.5–1 mm × 0.1–0.2 mm, greenish with hyaline incurved margins, 3-nerved, minutely pilose; upper glume chartaceous, broadly elliptic, 0.7–1 mm × 0.2–0.3 mm, greenish with hyaline incurved margins, 5-nerved, minutely pilose.

Florets 2, either both pistillate, both bisexual or upper floret pistillate and lower floret bisexual; rhachilla extension absent; lemma coriaceous, elliptic, plano-convex, 0.9–1.2 × 0.2–0.4 mm, pale green, margins incurved, nerves obscure, sparsely hairy towards apex, white cottony mass at the base; palea coriaceous, ovate, flat, 0.5–1 mm × 0.1–0.2 mm, pale green, margins incurved, glabrous. Lodicules 2, hyaline, 0.1–0.15 mm long; stamens 3; anther pale yellow, 0.2–0.5 × 0.1–0.2 mm, dorsi-fixed, bilobed; filament hyaline, 0.5–0.7 mm long. Ovary ellipsoid, 0.12–0.15 mm × 0.12–0.15 mm, green; style hyaline, 0.1–0.15 mm long; stigma plumose, 0.5–0.6 mm long, white. Caryopsis brownish, 0.4–0.8 mm × 0.3–0.5 mm, ovoid to ovoid-ellipsoid. (Figs. 1–3).
The new variety closely resembles the typical variety in nerve pattern of glumes (5-nerved upper glume and 3-nerved lower glume), glabrous nodes and leaf sheaths, glandular panicle branches, elliptic palea and lemma with woolly hairs (cottony mass) at the base. The description of \textit{I. veldkampii} reported from Kerala (7) does not match with the original description of the taxon provided (11). The original description has been considered here for comparative evaluation (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison between \textit{Isachne veldkampii} and \textit{I. veldkampii var. malabarica}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>\textit{I. veldkampii}</th>
<th>\textit{I. veldkampii var. malabarica}</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaf lamina</td>
<td>Broadly ovate</td>
<td>Broadly ovate to ovate-lanceolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaf trichomes</td>
<td>Glabrous on both surfaces or scabrous above on nerves</td>
<td>Pubescent adaxially, glabrous abaxially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of leaves</td>
<td>Only non-ligated leaves</td>
<td>Ligulated and non-ligated leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaf margin</td>
<td>Serrulate</td>
<td>Different in both types of leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ligules</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Ligulated leaf: long hairs from base to short hairs at apex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-ligated leaf: more or less equal length for hairs from base to apex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Isachne veldkampii var. malabarica} is a sparsely distributed wetland grass. It has a distribution along wetlands and survives in partially submerged conditions. It exhibits highly scattered distribution in small patches. Extensive rooting from the lower nodes may serve for trailing. Several representative plants were analysed from each of the observed population and the noted characters were found to be consistent.

\textbf{Etymology}

The varietal epithet corresponds to the Malabar region in the Northern Kerala from where the specimen has been collected.

\textbf{Phenology}

June to October.

\textbf{Habitat and Distribution}

\textit{Isachne veldkampii var. malabarica} is known only from the type locality, Seethangoli of Kasaragod district, Kerala at 23 m of elevation (Fig. 4.). It grows with scattered population in wetlands associated with small streams. Only a few populations have been observed, each scattered in a range of 5–20 m. It grows in association with \textit{Commelina} spp. The type locality, Seethangoli is on the way to Perla, towards the border of Karnataka state and is rich in lateritic plateaus having herbaceous vegetation.

\textbf{Conservation status}

There are scattered patches of four populations, each having 5–10 individuals, occupying an area of less than 1 km$^2$. The species is highly susceptible to grazing and stamping by cattle. Following the IUCN Red list criteria (12), \textit{Isachne veldkampii var. malabarica} is assessed as Critically Endangered (CR) in the category \([\text{B2a,b(v)}]\).
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Authors contributions
The authors contributed equally to the present work.

Compliance with ethical standards
Conflict of interest: Authors do not have any conflict of interests to declare.
Ethical issues: None

References

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