

New species discovered along China-Myanmar border

Chinese scientists have discovered a new endangered species of flowering plant from the Annonaceae family, and the finding has been published in an international botanical journal.



Polyalthia yingjiangensis flower and its fruits.

Polyalthia yingjiangensis, known in Chinese as Yingjiang An Luo, was named after Yingjiang County in southwest China's Yunnan Province where it was discovered. It belongs to the same botanical family as the custard apple and ylang-ylang, a tree whose fragrant greenish-yellow flowers are used to distill perfume.

"The discovery enriches the diversity of the area," said Tan Yunhong, a botanist from Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

Tan and other scientists from Southeast Asian Biodiversity Research Center and South China Botanical Garden discovered the plant during a field survey in Hongbenghe close to the China-Myanmar border. They believe the new species could also be found in Myanmar.

The Chinese scientists only found 10 plants during the survey conducted in April, 2016. A paper on the finding co-authored by Tan was published in the latest issue of Nordic Journal of Botany.

The plant was originally seen in 1980, but not confirmed as a new species at that time and this was the first time it has been seen again in 36 years, according to Tan.

Polyalthia yingjiangensis has been designated an endangered species, according to classification by the World Conservation Union. Currently there are only four samples available and the trees are known to grow in three localities, all in Yunnan.

Knowledge about the species is limited, however, scientists hope more field surveys can be done in areas that have not been studied, to help better understand the newly discovered plant.

Tan suggested conservation areas be set up to help preserve the rare species and public awareness be raised to save the plant from extinction.

Yingjiang, located in the transitional zone between India-Myanmar and East Himalayan flora, is rich in biodiversity. A large number of new species have been discovered in the region in recent years.