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Researchers discover new Kurinji species in Karnataka

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The flowering happens between November and December

The species have derived their names from Mullayanagiri in Chikkamagaluru and Bisle Ghat in Hassan

A team of researchers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu has discovered two new species of Kurinji [scientifically known as Strobilanthes mullayanagiriensis and S bislei] from the Western Ghats of Karnataka.

The team consists of Sinjumol Thomas, from the Department of Botany, Carmel College Mala, Thrissur, Bince Mani, Department of Botany, St. Thomas College Palai, Kottayam, S John Britto, Rapinat Herbarium and Centre for Molecular Systematics, St Joseph's College (Autonomous), Tiruchirappalli and A K Pradeep from WWI Innovative Solutions, Kottayam.

The Western Ghats, one of the hotspots in the country, is known for its biological diversity and endemism. It is home to a large number of threatened taxa, including several species of Strobilanthes. About 150 species of Strobilanthes have been reported from India and among them, 61 species are recorded for the Western Ghats. During explorations by the authors in Karnataka, these interesting species were collected from Chikkamagaluru and Hassan districts. Presently, both plants were collected from their type locality only. Therefore, two more endemic species were found in the Wesren Ghats, the authors said.

The authors, in a research paper published in Plant Science Today, have described Strobilanthes mullayanagiriensis gets its name from Mullayanagiri peak which is the highest peak in Bababudan Giri Hill ranges. It flowers during November– December and grows in the open rocky cliffs in the Baba Budan Giri Hills. The other new species — Strobilanthes bislei — has been found at Bisle Ghat which houses rich biodiversity and is part of the central Western Ghats and grows on the exposed rocks in the Bisle Ghat forest reserves in Hassan District. The flowering observed during the months of October and November. The flowering periodicity of the species is uncertain, therefore further study on these plants is also relevant, they suggested.