

Does *Pandanus thwaitesii* Mart. occur in India?

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Abstract

Pandanus thwaitesii Mart. does not appear to occur in India and specimens identified and reported as *P. thwaitesii* from South India belong to *P. foetidus* Roxb.

INTRODUCTION

While investigating the screw-pines of South India, the author noticed a rather common, shrubby *Pandanus* species in Western Ghats which he identified as *P. foetidus* Roxb. On examining the author's two specimens in 1990, Benjamin C. Stone wrote "I feel fairly certain that both specimens represent *Pandanus foetidus* Roxb., agreeing in the glaucous leaf undersurfaces, the rather large, long, and widely spaced spines on the leaf margins and midrib dorsally near the leaf base, the presence of small prickles on the two upper pleats of the leaf apex; the inflorescence; the form of the pistillate head; the form of the drupes and their size." Since *P. foetidus* has not been recorded from South India, the author (Bhat, 1992) reported its occurrence in Peninsular India for the first time, although Hooker (1893) doubtfully mentioned about its occurrence in Konkan.

P. foetidus is closely related to *P. thwaitesii* Mart. and *P. pseudofoitidus* Mart. All these species belong to sect. *Acrostigma* of the subgenus *Acrostigma*. Of these species, there is no report of *P. pseudofoitidus* from South India; it is confined to Malaya, Cambodia and Thailand. *P. thwaitesii*, a species originally described from Sri Lanka, however, has been reported from Western Ghats in several regional floras. It differs from *P. foetidus* in having several fruit heads on a pendulous peduncle (Stone, 1981). In *P. foetidus*, there are 1-3 fruit heads on an erect peduncle. The staminate characters seem almost identical in both species. In all the specimens collected by the author from Western Ghats and in the specimens deposited and labelled as *P. thwaitesii* in MH, BSI and CALI fruit heads are solitary on an erect peduncle. They, therefore, cannot be assigned to *P. thwaitesii*. The report of *P. thwaitesii* in Gamble's Flora of Madras Presidency (Fischer, 1931) based on specimens collected by Hohenacker and Bourdillon needs to be verified. The author feels that *P. thwaitesii* does not occur in India and it is confined only to Sri Lanka. The specimens identified and reported as *P. thwaitesii* from South India belong to *P. foetidus*.

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