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Cover: Parts of *Vachellia nilotica*, medium - watercolours. © P Kritika



Notes on the occurrence of southeastern Asian taxon *Scopellaria marginata* (Blume) W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes (Cucurbitaceae) in the Nicobar Islands: a new distribution record in the Indian part of Sundaland

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Abbreviations: NHCP—National Herbarium of Cultivated Plants |
NBPGR—National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources.

The genus *Scopellaria* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, belonging to tribe Benincaseae Ser., is an Old-World genus comprising two species distributed from southern China through Indo-China to west Malesia (Schaefer & Renner 2011). Until two decades back, it was a part of *Zehneria* Endl., and it was de Wilde & Duyfjes (2006a), based on extensive field work and herbarium studies, who had recognised four new genera, namely, *Indomelothria* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, *Neosachmandra* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, *Scopella* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, and *Urceodiscus* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, all from Old-World, citing differences in the type of male inflorescence, the place of insertion of the stamens in corolla lobes, the shape of the anthers, the number of anther thecae, the presence or absence of disc and staminodes, and the shape of the stigma-lobes. Immediately after its publication, the name of the genus *Scopella* was understood as being the illegitimate later homonym of *Scopella* Mains (1939); therefore, a new name, *Scopellaria* W.J. de Wilde & Duyfjes, was validly

published (de Wilde & Duyfjes 2006b).

As part of the Sundaland biodiversity hotspot, the flora of the Nicobar Islands closely resembles that of Malesia, and several plant families found in the Nicobar Islands are notably absent from the Andaman Islands (which fall under the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot and are primarily characterised by Indochinese elements). The richness of the Sundaland hotspot is witnessed by the presence of over 15,000, 115, and 138 endemic species of plants, mammals, and birds, respectively (Brooks et al. 2002). During the survey and field collection of plant genetic resources on Teresa Island of the Nancowrie group of Islands in the Nicobar Islands, the authors encountered a population of *Zehneria*-like herbaceous creeper-climber, characterised by the absence of probracts, yellow flowers, a long fruiting pedicel, and pitted seeds. After a critical study, and consulting relevant literature and matching digital images of herbarium specimens of Leiden Herbarium (L) and Kew Herbarium (K), the taxon is identified as *Scopellaria marginata* (Blume) W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes. This genus has not been reported from India to date (vide Chakravarty 1982; Renner & Pandey 2013).

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***Scopellaria marginata* (Blume) W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes** in Blumea 51: 297. 2006; Fl. Thailand 9(4): 493. 2008; Fl. Malesiana 19: 215. 2010; — *Bryonia marginata* Blume, Bijdr. Fl. Ned. Ind. 15: 924. 1826; — *Melothria marginata* (Blume) Cogn. in A.D.C. & C.D.C., Monogr. Phan. 3: 593. 1881; — *Zehneria marginata* (Blume) Keraudren in Aubrév. & J.-F.Leroy, Fl. Cambodge, Laos

& Vietnam 15: 55. 1975, pl. 9: 4; — *Scopella marginata* (Blume) W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes, Blumea 51: 35. 2006, f. 9, nom. illeg. — Type: Blume 920 (holo L), Java.

Melothria affinis King, J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal, Pt. 2, Nat. Hist. 67: 38. 1898.

Melothria gracilipes Merr., Pap. Michigan Acad. Sci. 19: 199. 1934.

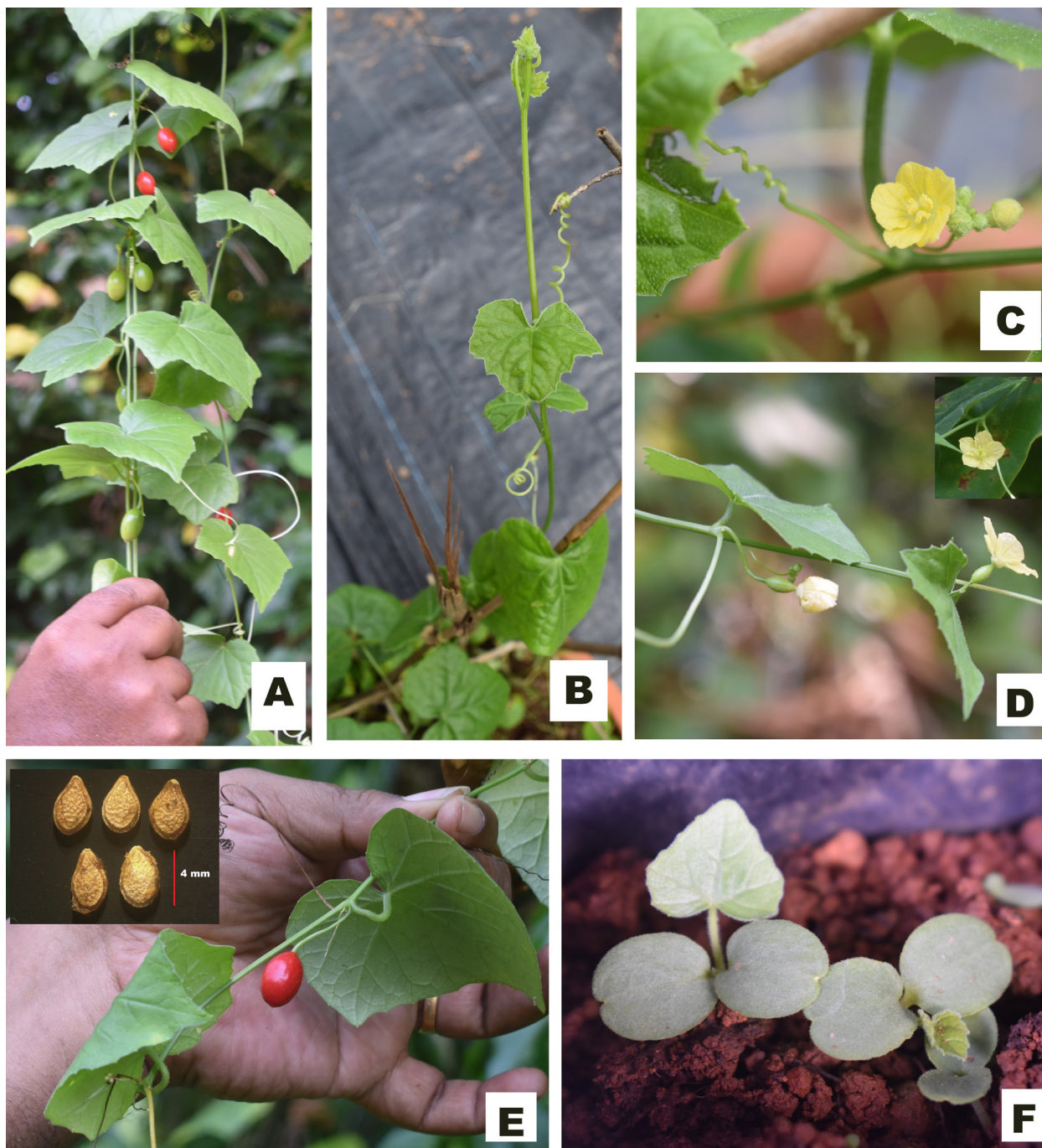


Image 1. *Scopellaria marginata* (Blume) W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes: A—Habit – A portion of the plant with fruits | B—Young shoot | C—Male inflorescence showing opened flower | D—Solitary female flowers after and during anthesis (from left to right; inset: opened flower in top angle) | E—Fruit with long peduncle (inset: seeds) | F—Seedlings with cotyledonary leaves showing emarginate apex. © K. Pradheep.

Annual, herbaceous, monoecious climber or creeper, up to 5 m long; stems angular-sulcate, glabrescent, 1.5–2 mm diam.; probracts absent; tendrils simple, slender, white-hairy throughout. Leaves petioles 3–5 cm long, hairs soft, short, white; blades unlobed, initially broad cordiform, later subangulate, 3-angled, green above and pale green below, 5.5–9.0 x 3.5–6.0 cm, adaxially short-hairy, scabrous (due to cystoliths), abaxially coarsely short-hairy on the veins, base rounded or deeply cordate, margins coarsely dentate. Male inflorescences occasionally coxillary with earlier developed female flower, 5–8 flowered in a 3–5 cm long raceme, glabrescent; bracts absent; peduncle c. 2 cm long; flowers crowded at the apex. Staminate flowers pedicel 5–6 mm long; receptacle tube campanulate, c. 1.5 mm diam., coarsely hairy outside; sepals ovate-triangular, patent, c. 1 mm long; petals imbricate, yellow, obovate, apex rounded, c. 3 x 2.5 mm, papillose; stamens 3,

inserted in the throat of receptacle, filaments c. 1 mm long, slender, anthers ellipsoid, exserted, 2-theous, anther thecae lateral, straight, c. 1 mm long; disc subglobose. Pistillate flowers solitary, pedicel 2–2.5 cm long; ovary ellipsoid, with sparse hairs, subglabrescent; receptacle tubes shallow; sepals as in male flower; petals obovate, apex rounded or subobtus, 3–4 cm long, papillose; styles short, stigmas enlarged, constitute 3 feather-like arms, each 2-lobed, fringed on margin; staminodes linear, c. 1 mm long; disc rudimentary. Fruits pedicels 2.3–3 cm long; pepos ellipsoid, glabrous, 1–1.5 x 0.6–0.7 cm, red upon ripening, exocarp leathery, ripe fruits juicy. Seeds 15–23 per fruit, pale yellow to whitish, ovate, compressed, 4–4.2 x 2.6–2.7 x c. 1 mm, distinctly square-margined, faces coarsely scrobiculate. Seedlings cotyledonary leaves subrotund, short-hairy, emarginate at apex (Image 1 & 3).

Flowering & Fruiting: July–February & August–April.

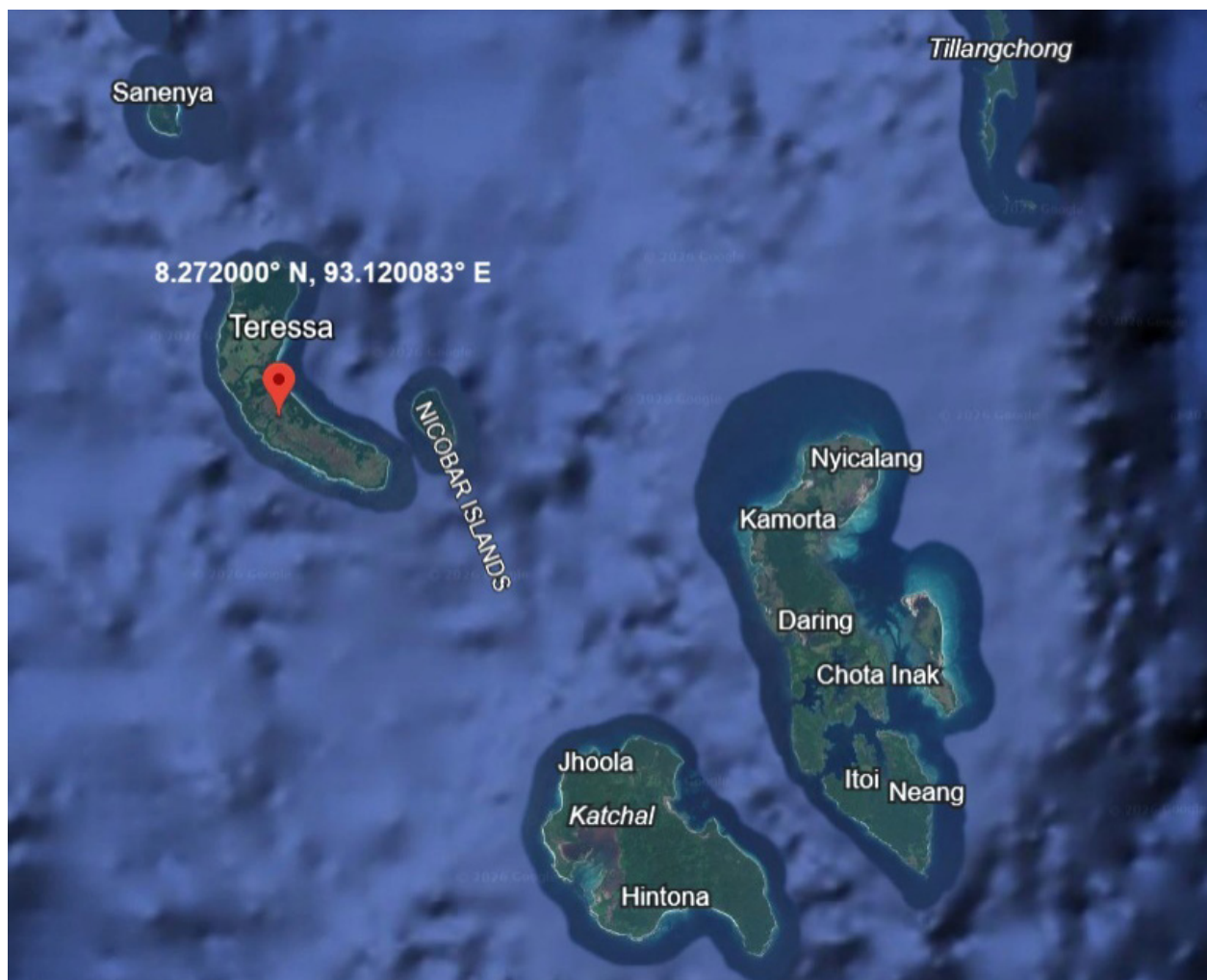


Image 2. Collection site (indicated by a red peg) of *Scopellaria marginata* in Teresa Island of the Nancowrie group of Islands in the Nicobar District, Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Source: Google Earth, <https://earth.google.com/web/>.

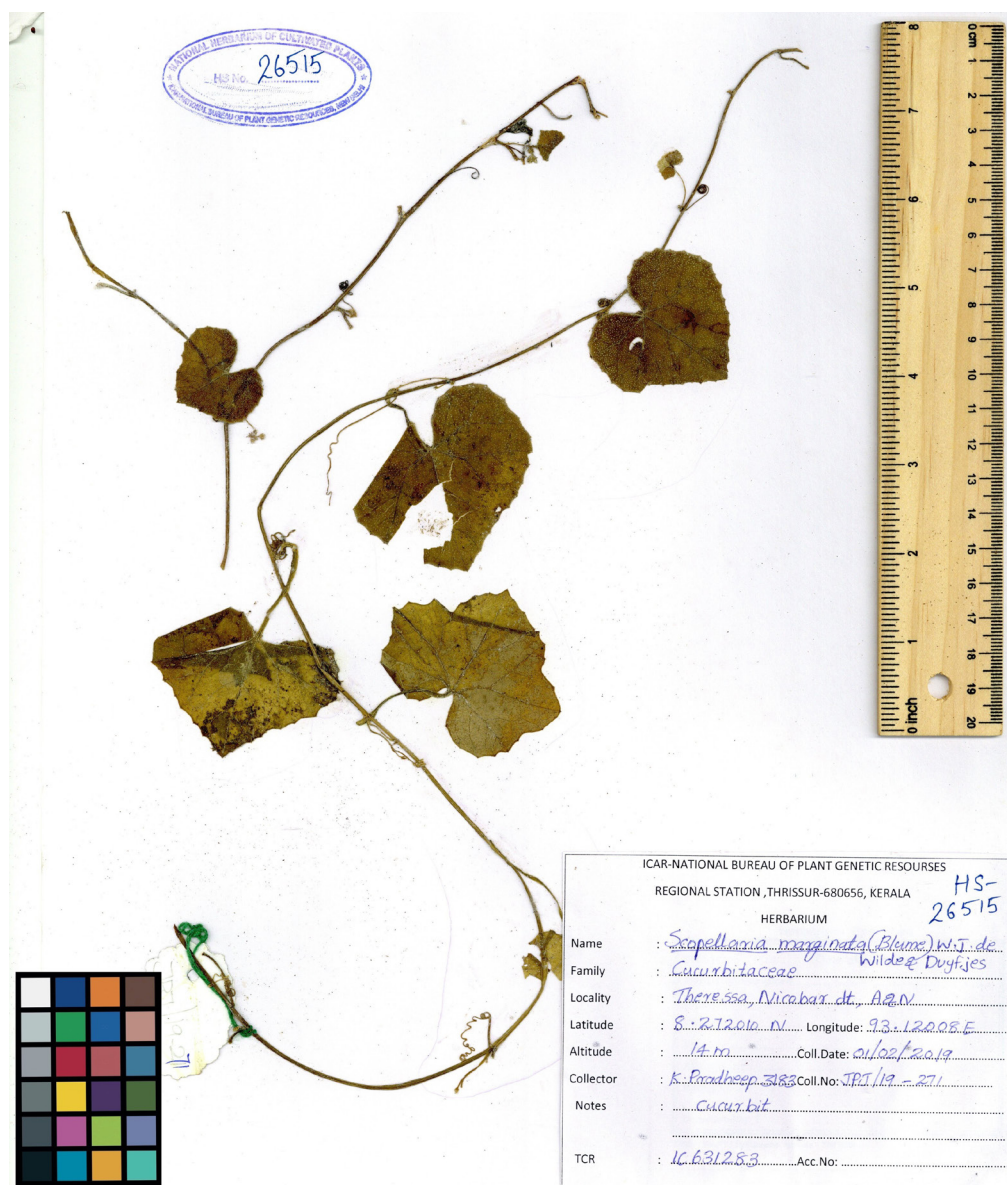


Image 3. Herbarium of *Scopellaria marginata* deposited in NHCP, New Delhi.

Ecology: In thickets along forest edges and roadsides, at altitudes of 14 m. Associated species are *Macaranga nicobarica* N.P.Balakr. & Chakr., *Stephanotis floribunda* (L.f.) S.Reuss, Liede & Meve, *Terminalia citrina* (Gaertn.) Roxb., *Cissus* sp., *Stephania* sp., and *Sterculia* sp.

Distribution: Myanmar (East), China (South-central), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, Sarawak), Indonesia (Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi), Philippines (POWO 2025; de Wilde & Duyfjes 2010), and India (Nicobar Islands).

Specimens collected: K Pradheep 3183 [NHCP26515], 02 February 2019, 8.2720° N, 93.1200° E, elevation at 14 m, 1 km before Minyak from Haonin, Theresa

Island, Nicobar District, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India (Image 2). The specimen was originally prepared from ICAR-NBPGR Regional Station, Thrissur, and was deposited in NHCP, NBPGR, New Delhi (Image 3). Seed material (JPJ/19-271; IC631283) has been conserved with the National Genebank, ICAR-NBPGR, New Delhi.

Population: The authors could observe only about 10 plants at the site. It remains unclear whether this disjunct distribution is the result of long-distance dispersal or historical vicariance. In general, the dispersal of small-fruited wild cucurbits with red skin is mediated by birds, which might have led to the spread of this species from neighbouring territories of Thailand

and Indonesia (Sumatra). Enquiry with villagers revealed their unawareness about this plant, indicating its rare nature or recent occurrence. Future molecular studies could help resolve these alternative explanations and provide insights into the biogeographic history of the species.

Notes: Reported to be highly variable with leaf lobing nature, fruit shape and length of fruiting pedicel; however, the population in Teresa Island has ellipsoid-shaped fruits and unlobed leaves with cordate outline. Cotyledonary leaf characters of this species are described for the first time. Jansen et al. (1991) mentioned that its fruits are edible and are employed as a remedy against coughs. Though reported (de Wilde & Duyfjes 2006a, 2008, 2010), we refrain from further classifying the variability within *S. marginata*; as the two varieties (var. *marginata* and var. *penangense* W.J.de Wilde & Duyfjes) have overlapping distribution patterns and no good characters to distinguish them. Nevertheless, our collection matches more closely with var. *penangense* due to its unlobed leaf blades, short ellipsoid fruits and seed length exceeding 4 mm.

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