

SHORT NOTES

I. NOTE ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF *PUERARIA MIRIFICA*

Thirty-six years ago, attention was drawn for the first time in this journal to an interesting plant whose roots had long been reputed to be of some medicinal value,¹ and which was eventually, in 1952, identified as a new species of *Pueraria*, being named *Pueraria mirifica*².

As this plant was first known from the Chiangmai area and later only recorded from Tak and Mae Sariang³, its habitat was believed to be limited to Northern Thailand. The object of the present note is to report its occurrence also from the Lam Narai (Chai Badan) area in Central Thailand. This area, therefore, would mark at present the southernmost extension of the distribution of *Pueraria mirifica*.

At the occasion of prehistoric excavations, carried out by the Thai-British Archaeological Expedition during the last three years, at a site known as Khok Charoen, ca. 13.5 km north of the town of Chai Badan and ca. 100 to 100m west of the road to Phetchabun, a plant was indeed found in large quantities which was recognized by the director of the Forest Herbarium, Khun TEM SMITINAND as *Pueraria mirifica*, according to specimens and photographs⁴. It grows in large patches on the ground on the upper parts of shallow mounds of which the region is full, in fields amidst corn (maize) and millet, and its tubers were observed to a depth of ca. 70 cm below surface. As these fields are newly established ones (the first settlers moved into the area only about ten years ago to grow maize, millet and castor-oil trees, mainly), nearly all trees have been felled, and it was

1) A.F.G. KERR, "The Reputed Rejuvenator", *Journal of the Siam Society, Nat. Hist. Supplement*, 4: 336-8 (1932).

2) M.C. LAKSHNAKARA KASHEMSANTA, KASIN SUVATABANDHU, and H.K. AIRY SHAW, "A New Species of *Pueraria* (Leguminosae) from Thailand, Yielding an Oestrogenic Principle", *Kew Bulletin*, 4: 549-52 (1952).

3) TEM SMITINAND, personal communication, 1968.

4) TEM SMITINAND, *op. cit.*

not possible to ascertain whether the plant was a climbing one or not.

The mounds consist of two major soil formations: an upper black soil which seems to have developed under conditions of repeated flooding, and a lower limestone soil overlying limestone bedrock and being derived from the latter by normal weathering. The lower parts of this area are also now often flooded during the rainy season. The observation that *Pueraria mirifica* requires "well drained sandy loam on top of the limestone rock"⁵ is therefore confirmed, with the possible additional specification that the upper soil need not be very sandy.

The occurrence of *Pueraria mirifica* was also reported from other mounds in the neighbourhood. The local inhabitants, being newcomers in this region, do not seem to be aware of the medicinal value of the tubers, although they do occasionally eat from them if they are dug up at the excavation. The local name, *Khruea Tong*, is somewhat different from that under which *Pueraria mirifica* is known normally, *Kwao Keur* or *Khruea*⁶, but this difference may also be due to the fact that the present local population is not very familiar with this plant.

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- 5) KASIN SUVATABANDHU, letter to H.L. HYLAND, 1958 (Archives of the *Siam Society*).
- 6) M.C. LAKSHNAKARA KASHEMSANTA, KASIN SUVATABANDHU, and H.K. AIRY SHAW, *op. cit.* and TEM SMITINAND, *op. cit.*