

Rediscovery of *Henckelia lachenensis* (Gesneriaceae) in the Sikkim Himalaya after 176 Years

Lepcha D.¹, Lepcha P.T.³, Ganesan R.² & S. Tangjang^{1*}

¹Department of Botany, Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hill, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh–791 112, India

²Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore, Karnataka –560 064, India

³Department of Botany, Sikkim University, Sikkim– 737 102, India

*E-mail: sumpam.tangjang@rgu.ac.in

Abstract: *Henckelia lachenensis* (C.B. Clarke) D.J. Middleton & Mich. Möller, a species last collected in 1849 by J.D. Hooker from Lachen, Sikkim, has been rediscovered after 176 years during recent botanical explorations in Namchi district, Sikkim, Himalaya, India. This rediscovery confirms the species continued presence in its native habitat and provides updated locality, morphological details, and photographic documentation.

Keywords: Rediscovery, *Henckelia*, Sikkim Himalaya.

Introduction

The genus *Henckelia* Spreng., comprising 79 species (<https://padme.rbge.org.uk/grc/welcome>), is distributed across Sri Lanka, South and Northeast India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, South China, Taiwan, Northern Vietnam, Northern Laos, and Northern Thailand (Taram *et al.*, 2024). In India, 45 species of *Henckelia* have been reported, falling into two groups: *Chirita* sect. *Chirita* (Weber *et al.*, 2020), predominantly found in Northeast India with 25 species (Sinha & Dutta, 2016; Krishna & Lakshminarasimhan, 2018; Borah *et al.*, 2019; Kanthraj *et al.*, 2020; Taram *et al.*, 2020 & 2024), and *Henckelia* sect. *Henckelia*, which occurs in South India and includes 16 species (Janeesha & Nampy, 2020; Mathew *et al.*, 2022; Taram *et al.*, 2024).

During a recent botanical exploration, the authors collected an interesting specimen of *Henckelia* from Chitray, Rabong, Namchi, Sikkim (27.363703° N, 88.360756° E) at an elevation of 1820 m. After thorough examination of the relevant literature (Wood, 1974; Wang *et al.*, 1998), the specimen was identified as *Henckelia lachenensis* (C.B. Clarke) D.J. Middleton & Mich. Möller. This species was first collected by Sir J.D. Hooker during his expedition to Sikkim Himalaya on 8th August 1849 from Lachen, Sikkim which was later described by C.B. Clarke in 1883 as *Chirita lachenensis* C.B. Clarke and published in A.L.P. DE Candolle, Monogr. Pham. 5:188 (1883) as valid and legitimate name. Later, J.D. Hooker describe the same species as *Chirita clarkei* Hook.f. in 1884, published in Flora of British India. It was a superfluous and illegitimate name, as it was mistakenly published and later both the names listed under synonyms for *H. lachenensis* by Middleton and Möller in 2011 (Weber *et al.*, 2011).

Since its original description, *H. lachenensis* has not been collected again from Sikkim. This study presents a rediscovery of the species from its type locality, accompanied by digital photographic illustrations for easy identification. A herbarium specimen has been deposited at the Botanical Survey of India, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim (BSHC) and herbarium of Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hill, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh (HAU).

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Taxonomic treatment

Henckelia lachenensis (C.B.Clarke) D.J. Middleton & Mich.Möller Taxon 60: 776 . 2011. *Chirita lachenensis* C.B.Clarke, A.DC. & C.DC., Monogr. Phan. 5: 118. 1883; *C. clarkei* Hook.f, Fl. Brit. India 4: 359. 1884; *Roettlera lachenensis* (C.B.Clarke) Kuntze Revis. Gen. Pl. 2: 476. 1891; *C. umbricola* W.W.Sm.. Notes Roy. Bot. Gard. Edinburgh 10:172. 1918; *C. stolonifera* C.E.C.Fisch. & Kaul Bull. Misc. Inform. Kew 1940: 196. 1940.

Type: INDIA, **Sikkim**, Lachen, 08.08.1849, *J.D. Hooker s.n.* (K [K000858387 digital image!]). **Fig. 1**

Perennial rhizomatous herb, up to 8 cm tall. Stem procumbent, rooting, internode, 3–4 cm long with red-brown hairs. Leaves alternate, leaf blade ovate, 4.5–12 × 3.5–7.5 cm, acute at apex, oblique to cordate at base, serrate to dentate along the margin, reticulate venation, sparsely yellow brown hair on adaxial surfaces, abaxial surface sparsely hairs more prominently distributed along the veins; petiole densely red-brown hair, 1.7–13.5 cm long. Inflorescence axillary or terminal; cymes or sometime flower solitary, 1–3-flowered; peduncles densely hairy, 3–8.5 cm long; bracts linear–oblong 3–6 × 0.5–1.5 mm; pedicels with redbrown eglandular hairs, 0.7–1.8 cm long. Calyx deeply divided, c. 1–1.6 cm long, lobes 5, triangular, c. 0.5–1.2 cm, acute to acuminate apex, hairy outside and glabrous inside. Corolla broadly funnel-shaped, 2.5–4.5 cm long, tube, 2–3 cm wide at the mouth, straight, very slightly pouched, very sparsely hairy outside, glabrous inside, lobes pale violet to deep mauve, tube paler, to white or greenish at the base, 2 distinct flaps c. 6 mm long, 1 mm deep from the roof of the tube. Stamens 2, inserted, filament glandular or eglandular hairy, c. 1.5 cm long; Anther-thecae divergent, 3–4 mm long, slightly hairy from the lower surface. Staminodes 2, glabrous, up to 0.5 cm long. Ovary and style densely glandular to puberulous; ovary 1.5–2 mm long, brownish green; style 1.7–2 cm long, greenish brown, hairy; stigma c. 3 × c. 6 mm. Capsule c. 0.2 × c. 8 cm. Seeds ovoid to ellipsoid.

Specimen examined: INDIA, **Sikkim**, Namchi district, Chitray Borong, 27.363703° N, 88.360756° E, 1820 m, 18.07.2025, *D. Lepcha* HAU/AN-3901 (BSHC, HAU).

Habitat & ecology: Plant growing on damp rock-faces and boulders, in temperate broad-leaved forest mixed with *Elatostema* spp., *Rhaphidophora decursiva* (Roxb.) Schott., *Polystichum lentum* (D.Don) T. Moore, *Smilax lanceifolia* Roxb., *Selaginella* spp., etc.

Distribution: India (Sikkim), Bhutan, China.

Conclusion

The rediscovery of *H. lachenensis* in the Sikkim Himalaya after a span of 176 years marks a significant botanical finding, reaffirming the species continued existence in its native habitat. This rediscovery not only highlights the floral richness of the region but also underscores the importance of continued field explorations and documentation. The updated record, with complete photographic evidence and herbarium deposition, provides valuable reference material for future taxonomic and conservation studies of the genus *Henckelia* in the Eastern Himalayas.

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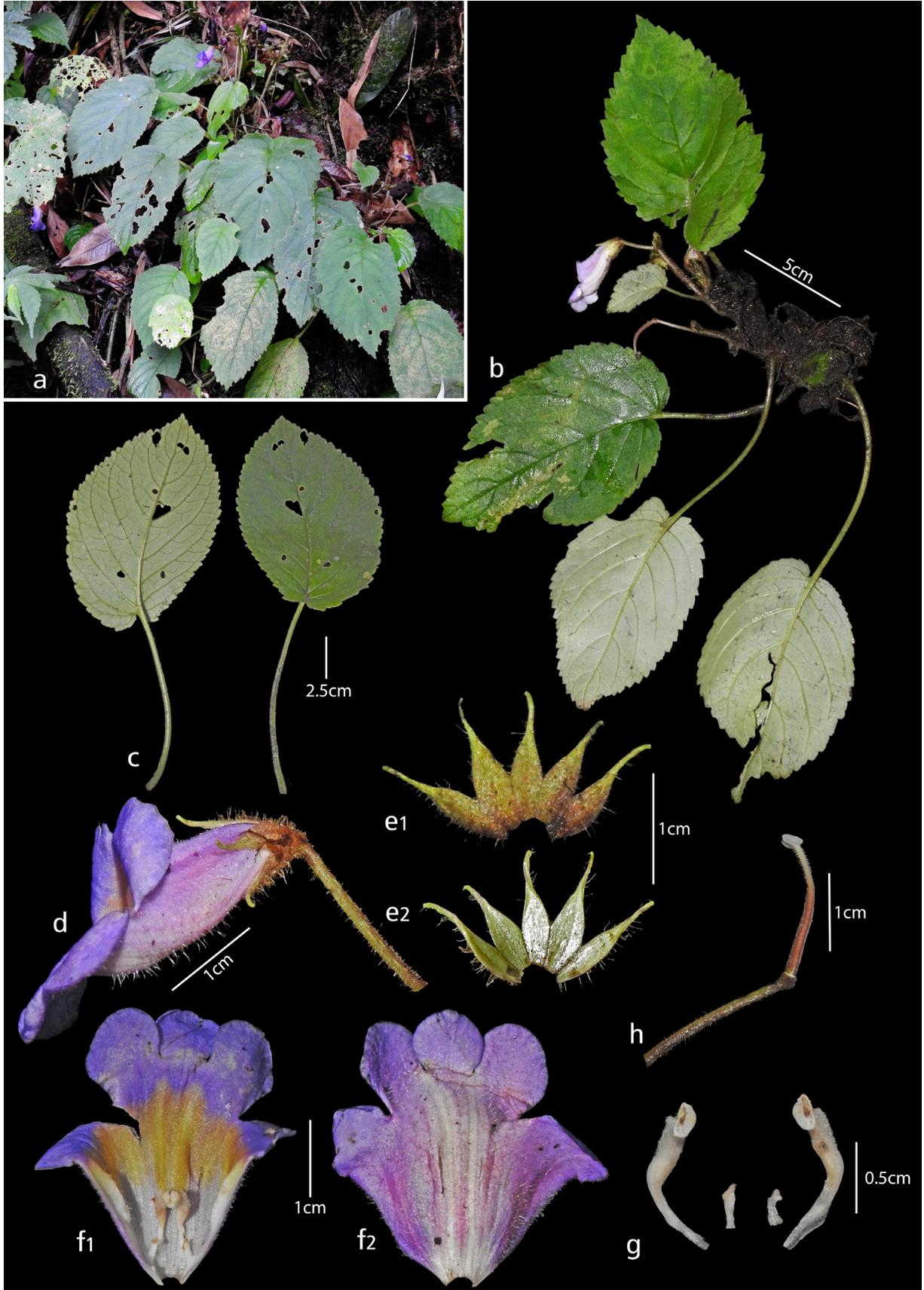


Fig. 1. *Henckelia lachenensis* (C.B.Clarke) D.J. Middleton & Mich.Möller: **a.** Plants in natural habitat; **b.** Plant habit; **c.** Leaf (Abaxial & Adaxial); **d.** flower; **e1 & e2.** Calyx (dorsal & ventral view); **f1 & f2.** Corolla (dorsal & ventral view); **g.** Stamen; **h.** Carpel.

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