



# A new *Rhododendron* species from India

KENNETH COX describes  
a new *Rhododendron* species  
with handsome foliage

Ashiho Mao

**I**N OCTOBER 2001 I encountered a dense forest of *Rhododendron* trees above the village of Kugging in the Yang Sang valley, Upper Siang, in Arunachal Pradesh, India. The trees were 10m or more in height with no sign of having flowered the previous spring. I immediately suspected that these plants, with their distinctive rugose leaves and thick cinnamon indumentum, were a new *Rhododendron* species.

In 2005 myself, Steve Hootman and colleagues found it again on the south side of the Yang Sang valley near the village of Singa at around 2,300m. It has subsequently been found by Michael Bloomen and Ashiho Mao in flower. The species appears to be locally common in the Upper Siang (the region's Indian name, the Chinese name is Yarlóng Tsangpo) in association with other temperate plant species. In some areas the population of this

*Rhododendron* is diminishing rapidly due to firewood extraction and road construction.

### Virgin territory

The upper Siang valley had not previously been botanized by western collectors when I went there in 2001. Many of the plants here also grow further north in the Tsangpo Gorges, an area I explored in 1995–97 (Cox 2008). However, other taxa link the flora to that of Burma to the east and Bhutan to the west. I also discovered other, as yet unnamed, *Rhododendron* species in this area and introduced *R. populare* from there for the first time.

This new species, *R. titapuriense*, is a very handsome foliage plant with

attractive indumentum and appears to have no close relatives. Dr David Chamberlain of Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh sees some affinity with *R. rex* from Yunnan and Sichuan and the species is best included in subsection *Falconera*.

We have named it after Titapuri, a series of sacred lakes lying on the Tibet–Arunachal border, part of the Tibetan pilgrimage region of Pemako. It was discovered en route to this pilgrimage site. The species was introduced to cultivation in 2003–04.

### Cultivation

In cultivation it comes into growth early. This means it is most suited

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### REFERENCES

Cox, K (ed.) (2008) *Frank Kingdon Ward's Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges*. 2nd, revised edn. Antique Collectors' Club, Suffolk



Ashish Mao



*Rhododendron titapuriense* can form a substantial tree (above). The white flowers (above left) contrast effectively with the dark green leaves with cinnamon-coloured undersides (below)

Kenneth Cox

## DESCRIPTION

***Rhododendron titapuriense***

A.A. Mao, K.N. E. Cox & D.F. Chamb., sp. nov.

Type: near Hanumum Camp, Yang Sang valley, Arunachal Pradesh, India, 2,350m, 11 May 2011.

*A.A. Mao 20340* (holotype CAL; isotypes ARUN, BSI).

A tree, 5–20m tall, bark rough. Leaves broadly elliptic-ovate, 5–20 × 3.5–12cm, base cuneate to rounded, apex acute to rounded, upper surface very rugose with nerves sunken, lower surface with a cinnamon thick rusty brown woolly indumentum composed of cup-shaped, scarcely fimbriate hairs; petiole 1–3cm long, esetose, rusty tomentose.

Inflorescence with up to 16 flowers, raceme umbellate; peduncle short, stiff hairy; perulae linear, 0.8–1 cm long, white tomentose; calyx saucer shaped, lobes indistinct, c. 1mm long. Corolla white, campanulate, 2.5cm long; pedicel terete, 1–2.2cm long, white pubescent; tube c. 2cm long; lobes imbricate, c. 0.6 × 1.6cm, emarginate at apex. Stamens 18, 1.4–2.1cm long; filaments 1.1–2cm long, glabrous, anther lobes 1.5–2mm long, brownish. Ovary oblong, 0.5 × 0.3cm, rounded, tomentose; style c. 2cm long, glabrous; stigma capitate, yellow.

Flowering in April–May in the wild, probably March–April in cultivation. Known from the Siang valley and valleys of its tributary rivers in Arunachal Pradesh, India. Habitat is broad-leaved, evergreen, temperate forest at 2,300–2,500m where it is common.

to relatively mild gardens where species such as *R. falconeri*, *R. macabeanum* and *R. sinogrande* can be grown. However, small plants survived the hard winter of 2011–12 with temperatures as low as -15°C.

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