

A BRIEF ACCOUNT ON THE WILD *PIPER* (PIPERACEAE) OF THE CROCKER RANGE, SABAH

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ABSTRACT

Seven species of wild Piper namely Piper caninum Bl., P. erecticaule C.DC, P. aff. longamentum C.DC, P. magnibaccum C.DC, P. poryphyrophyllum N.E. Br., P. umbellatum Linn., P. aff. ridleyi C.DC were collected from various localities of the Crocker Range, Sabah during the expedition held on the 15-24 October 1999. Most of the species were climbers except P. erecticaule P. aff. longamentum and P. umbellate which were erect shrubby herbs. Two other Piper spp. represented by sterile specimens were also collected. Most of these species prefer shady, moist habitats with moderate light penetrating through the forest gaps. They are often seen creeping on the forest floors, fallen trunks, rocks and up on the living trees. However, the collection of the Piper species from these areas were still far from complete and extensive collection should be done in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The *Piper* species were mostly woody perennial climbers and rarely shrub with dilated or swollen nodes and stipule. The leaves of various *Piper* species were typically aromatic or had a pungent smell. The flowers were very small, arranged in spikes and had no perianth. The genus *Piper* could also be recognized by its pulpy fruit, 2-6 stamens, ovary one-celled with orthotropus ovule. The genus *Peperomia* differed from *Piper* by possessing minute fruits, two stamens, without stipule and normally erect herbs. *Piper* species preferred moist habitat and existed as climbers or erect herbs on the forest floors of the virgin or disturbed forest.

There was an estimated total of 1200 species of *Piper* distributed in the pantropical and neotropical regions of the world and over 400 species were recorded from the Malesian region alone (de Waard & Anunciado, 1999) Revision work of Piperaceae for Peninsular Malaya was done by Ridley (1924) in which he documented a total of 75 species. Literatures on the wild *Piper* of Borneo were scarce till today. In Brunei, six species have been documented, namely *P. abbreviatum* Opiz, *P. caninum* Blume, *P. muricatum* Blume, *P. poryphyrophyllum* N.E.Br. and *P. vestitum* while several collections were still awaiting proper scientific identification (Coode *et al.* 1996). However, the enumeration and revision works of the Philippines wild Piperaceae were quite extensive. These included studies done by C. de Candolle (1910) where he recognized a total of 133 species of *Piper* and 26 species of *Peperomia* occurring in the Philippines. Later, Merrill (1923), in his enumeration of the Philippines flowering plants, only recognized 115 species of *Piper* and 25 species of *Peperomia* and one species of *Zippelia*. The systematic study of the Philippines Piperaceae was later done by Quisumbing (1930) and from his intensive study, documented 87 species of *Piper* and 21 species of *Peperomia*. He also recognized the