Rhododendrons Not In The Book

New species of Rhododendrons are constantly being discovered and described and our garden oriented books are hard pressed to keep up with them. Here is a selection of species described in the last ten years – it is certainly not comprehensive and it is unlikely any are available in Australia at the moment. I could find no pictures of any of these on the net so, for photos, the reader is referred to the papers in which they are described - most of which are available on the web.

The first three species are from western China.

***Rhododendron huangpingense* Xiang Chen & Jia Y. Huang**

This is a large species growing to over 5 m high discovered in 2008 on the slopes of the Baili Rhododendron Nature Reserve, Huangping County, Guizhou, China at 1,679 to 1,719 m elevation (Chen *et al.* 2010). In the original description it wad described as growing "...in thickets dominated by *R. delavayi* Franch. and *R. agastum* Balf. f. & W. W. Sm." It may be extremely rare. Chen *et al.* (2010) state, "Since only two populations and a total of five mature individuals of this species were found in the area where the type collections were made, we make a preliminary conservation assessment for the species as Critically Endangered (CR)". It has rose coloured, funnel form to campanulate flowers with deeper rose flecks, in heads of eight to eleven flowers. Chen *et al.* (2010) present a comparison table with *R. oreodoxa* var *adensotyla* and *R. decorum*, which are similar species.

***R. lilacinum* Xiang Chen & X. Chen**

In the same publication Chen *et al.* (2010) describe *R. lilacinum*, again from the Baili Rhododendron Nature Reserve but in a narrow altitudinal band around 1,673 m elevation. This is a small deciduous species up to 2m tall in the section Tsutsui and is similar to *R. simsii*. It differs from that familiar species in having a longer pedicel and calyx, and smaller flowers (2 cm vs. 3.5 to 4 cm), which are pale purple with purple flecks rather than red. The small flower heads consist of two to three flowers. It was found growing in thickets dominated by *R. delavayi, R. irroratum,* Franch., and *R. agastum*, and Chen *et al.* (2010) describe its conservation status as "… Endangered, (EN) ... since approximately 10 populations, and fewer than 200 mature individuals were found in the area where field observations were conducted."

***Rhododendron baihuaense* Y. P. Ma**

This is an interesting, small leaved and small flowered evergreen shrub discovered in the forests on the west slopes of the Gaoligongshan range in Yunnan near the Burmese border in 2011. It is only know from the vicinity of Baihualing at an altitude of 2,600 to 2,700 m. It is most similar to *R. hanceanum* and *R. genestierianum* but lacks leaf scales, is smaller leaved and the 2 cm long flowers are only in heads of two to five flowers compared with seven to nine in *R. hanceanum* and eight to 15 in *R. genestierianum.* Interestingly this species appeared on the 2012 seed list of the Danish chapter of the ARS under "Rhododendron species: New very distinctive species, lvs glaucous underside, flowers in 3's well developed calyx. W Yunnan 2600m" (http://www.rhododendron.dk/baihuaense.html).

Next, two species from northern India.

***Rhododendron rawatii* I. D. Rai & B. S. Adhikari**

This lovely species was discovered in 2010 in the western Himalayas in the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary in Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand state. A second population was discovered in Pithoragarh district in the same state. It is a shrub to small tree up to 4.5 m high with thin papery bark, big heads (13 to 16) of medium sized (49 x 59 mm) pink flowers with red to brown blotches and a globose calyx with hairy margins. It is in the subsection Fulgensia and most closely related to *R. fulgens*. Plants were found at an altitude of 3,100 to 3,375 m on the edge of open canopy forest with a northwest aspect. The Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary population consists of about 11 individuals and that in Pithoragarh about 150. This is a tiny distribution, and on this basis the species is considered Endangered (EN). According to Rai and Adikhari (2012) "On the basis of total number of individuals (ca. 161) found in 2 populations, the status of species may be considered for immediate conservation measures and the habitat as critical, as the area is under high anthropogenic pressure. The geographical range is extremely narrow and the population is fragmented, therefore, the species requires immediate in-situ conservation and habitat management interventions."

Rudraprayag was the scene of Jim Corbett's hunt for a man-eating leopard made famous in his book *"The Man-eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*". Corbett's eponymous national park, the oldest in India, lies 150 km to the south-south-east of Kedarnath.

***Rhododendron mechukae* A. A. Mao & A. Paul**

In a very short paper Mao *et al.* (2013) described this new species collected in 2011 from the West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is a 5 to 12 m tall tree most similar to *R. hodgsonii* from which it differs in having rough, brown peeling bark, a rufous brown indumentum under the leaves, and an indistinct calyx. The flowers are tubular campanulate up to 4.5 cm long, pink to purple with a basal blotch in heads of 12 to 18. According to Mao *et al.* (2013) "The plants grow in semi-dense temperate forest mixed with *Rhododendron arboreum* Sm., *R. arizelum* Balf.f. & Forrest, *Taxus wallichiana* Zucc., *Pinus roxburghii* Sarg. and other shrubby species. It is only known from the type locality at 2,436 m elevation but is "common but localised on hillsides in this area". It is "Critically Endangered CR ... The total area of occupancy of this species is only around 5–10 km^2 and the area is subject to timber extraction, greatly threatening the population."

While it may be expected that western China and the Himalayas are the main sources of new species there are novelties still hidden away in the rest of Asia and even the USA. (We have managed to source pictures of these two)

***Rhododendron chamahensis* Rafidah**

This is the first new Rhododendron described from peninsular Malaysia since 1935. It is an epiphytic vireya found in 2010 on Gunung Chamah in Kelantan state at an elevation of 1,200 to 1,700 m. It is a slender branched epiphyte with dark green elliptic to oblong leaves in pseudowhorls. The attractive inflorescences have two to three pure white rotate campanulate flowers 18 mm long x 22 m wide with a short cylindrical tube. It is most similar to *R. seimundii* and differs in the longer petiole, bigger, wider leaves, rounded

bracts, smaller flowers without red scales, and white rather than maroon anthers. It is obviously a rare and narrowly distributed species. The paper has good photographs of the plant and flowers (Figure 1).

***Rhododendron colemanii* R. Miller**

This new American deciduous azalea from the upper coastal plain of Alabama and western Georgia, was named in 2008 in an exhaustive study by Zhou *et al.* (2008). The species was known as the "Red Hills Azalea" and is very close to *R. alabamense* and co-occurs with it. Like *R. alabamense* it is fragrant, the scent being described as "sweet, musky, and lemony". Its species status was confirmed by genetic analysis and Zhou *et al.* (2008) provide detailed differences between this and the very similar *R. alabamense. R. colemanii* has longer flower buds, and the flowers are thick and opaque rather than thin and more-or-less translucent . It is a many-stemmed shrub to small tree up to 7 m high. The inflorescences appear after, not before, the leaves have expanded and occur in heads of eight to ten. The flowers are white with a yellow blotch on the upper corolla lobe, or uniformly white, pink with yellow blotch, or uniformly pink 1.6 to 2.5 cm long and 0.25 to 0.4 cm wide at the base. It grows on sandy ridges or creek banks or on north-facing bluffs in moist woods whereas *R. alabamense* occurs on dry ridges and open, dry oak woods with scattered pines. The species is available from nurseries in the USA (Figure 2).

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