

***RHODODENDRON BENOMENSE* RAFIDAH & A.C.ELLIOTT (ERICACEAE), A NEW NAME FOR *RHODODENDRON OBSCURUM* SLEUMER, A SPECIES ENDEMIC TO PENINSULAR MALAYSIA**

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Rhododendron obscurum Sleumer (Ericaceae) is a species endemic to Peninsular Malaysia. This name is a later homonym of *Rhododendron obscurum* Franch. ex Balf.f. In preparation of a revision of the Ericaceae for the *Flora of Peninsular Malaysia* and of a Red List assessment of this species by the Global Conservation Consortium for Rhododendron, a new name, *Rhododendron benomense* Rafidah & A.C.Elliott, is proposed here.

Keywords. Ericaceae, Malaysia, new name, nomenclature, Red List, *Rhododendron*.

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Introduction

Sleumer (1960: 104) initially published *Rhododendron obscurum* as a species but stated that it appeared to be a naturally occurring hybrid between *R. malayanum* Jack and a species with retuse leaves, tubular corollas and a lepidote ovary, speculating that the other parent might have been *R. perakense* King & Gamble, *R. scortechinii* King & Gamble or *R. spathulatum* Ridl. He later reported an additional collection (Sleumer, 1973), noting that it grew with *Rhododendron wrayi* King & Gamble but was not a hybrid with that species. In the same report, Sleumer also stated that *Rhododendron obscurum* was common at the summit of Gunung Benom, which altered his opinion that it was a hybrid.

The little-known species was collected on Gunung Benom in 2009 along with three other species: *Rhododendron malayanum*, *R. robinsonii* Ridl. and *R. wrayi* (Ummul-Nazrah *et al.*, 2011). This was the first collection of *Rhododendron obscurum* in over 40 years.

Sleumer was seemingly unaware that his *Rhododendron obscurum* was a later homonym of *R. obscurum* Franch. ex Balf.f., published in 1922, which is considered a synonym of *R. siderophyllum* Franch. of Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou. Sleumer's name has remained in use in the literature (Chua & Saw, 2006; Ummul-Nazrah *et al.*, 2011), up to and including Argent's monograph of *Vireya* (2015).

In preparation for the Ericaceae account for the *Flora of Peninsular Malaysia* (Rafidah, forthcoming) and publication of a Red List assessment of this species, a new name is proposed here. We follow Sleumer (1973) and Argent (2015) in treating this *Rhododendron* as a species until Sleumer's original hypothesis of a hybrid origin has been researched.

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Nomenclatural treatment

Rhododendron benomense Rafidah & A.C.Elliott, *nom. nov.*

Rhododendron obscurum Sleumer, *Reinwardtia* 5: 104 (1960), *nom. illeg., non Rhododendron obscurum* Franch. ex Balf.f., *Notes Roy. Bot. Gard. Edinburgh* 13: 278 (1922). – Type: Peninsular Malaysia, Pahang, on top of Gunung Benom, 23 v 1930, *Strugnell* F.M.S. 22344 [protologue erroneously records it as 223U] (holotype KEP [KEP62885], isotype L, fragment plus photograph [L0007648]). **Figures 1, 2.**

Proposed IUCN conservation category. Vulnerable (VU D2) (IUCN Standards and Petitions Subcommittee, 2019). Several scattered populations were found during a survey of Gunung Benom in 2009 (Ummul-Nazrah *et al.*, 2011), but no estimate of numbers was made. Although trekking is popular at this location, it has limited impact on the habitat. Gunung Benom, the only known locality of *Rhododendron benomense*, is part of Krau Wildlife Reserve, which offers some protection. The pressures and threats reported for Krau Wildlife Reserve are focused primarily on the lowland forest area of the reserve (Birdlife International, 2021), not the summit of Gunung Benom where this species occurs. The restricted distribution (area of occupancy c.8 km², based on summit area above the minimum recorded altitude) and the presumably small size of the population (fewer than



Figure 1. Habit of *Rhododendron benomense* Rafidah & A.C.Elliott. Photograph: Mohd Hairul, M.A.



Figure 2. Inflorescence detail of *Rhododendron benomense* Rafidah & A.C.Elliott. Photograph: Mohd Hairul, M.A.

250 mature individuals) leave *Rhododendron benomense* extremely vulnerable to stochastic events that could critically endanger it or cause its extinction.

Additional specimens examined. MALAYSIA. **Peninsular Malaysia:** Gunung Benom, Pahang, Summit, Open *Leptospermum* woodland, 6740 ft, common bush, Flowers orange-red, 19 iii 1967, *Whitmore* FRI 3284 (KEP, L [L0614189]); Gunung Benom, Pahang, Summit, (3°49.83'N, 102°06.41'E), 2065 m, Flowers orange, 13 xi 2009, *Mohd. Hairul M.A.* et al. FRI 69875 (KEP [KEP187085], SAN).

It is our recommendation that additional survey work be carried out to ascertain the population size of *Rhododendron benomense*, to collect germplasm for storage, and to establish a genetically diverse *ex situ* conservation collection of this species in Peninsular Malaysia.

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