

REDISCOVERY OF *AESCHYNANTHUS ALBIDUS* (BLUME) STEUD. (GESNERIACEAE) IN SINGAPORE

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INTRODUCTION

Aeschynanthus albidus (Blume) Steud. (*Aeschynanthus purpurascens* Hassk. in the older literature) is a slender climbing epiphyte in the African violet family (Gesneriaceae). It has fleshy, stalked, opposite leaves whose narrowly elliptic blades are dull green above and dark pink below, with one to a few flowers developing in some axils. Each flower has a blackish-red, shortly-tubed calyx and shiny, light green corolla with rounded, sparsely hairy and purple-brown tipped lobes. The long, narrow capsule splits when ripe to release the seeds which have a long, thread-like hair at one end, and at the hilar end, a tuft of thread-like hairs which has a cluster of bubble-like cells basally (Christie & Mendum, 2002). The species inhabits humid lowland tropical rain forests on trees and branches (Ridley, 1923) and has been recorded from freshwater swamp forest in Sedili, Johore, Peninsular Malaysia (Corner, 1978). It has been recorded in Singapore (Chua Chu Kang, Mandai, Pulau Damar and Seletar), Sumatra, Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and Java, (Ridley, 1923; Burt & Woods, 1975; Keng, 1990). *Aeschynanthus albidus* was noted as an epiphyte of an ant garden association on the giant bamboo (*Gigantochloa scortechinii*) in Ulu Gombak, Malaysia (Kaufmann et al., 2001).

It was classified as nationally extinct in the first edition of The Singapore Red Data Book (Turner et al., 1994) because since 1894 no further collections were made till that book's publication (Table 1). However, it was recently rediscovered.

Table 1. Previous Singapore collections of *Aeschynanthus albidus* (Blume) Steud. deposited in the Herbarium, Singapore Botanic Gardens (SING).

S/ No.	Bar Code No.	Collector	Collector's No.	Year	Locality
1.	0011168	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1889	Seletar
2.	0011173	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1890	–
3.	0011173	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1890	Bukit Mandai
4.	0011167	J.S. Goodenough	s.n.	1891	Teban
5.	0011171	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1892	Chan Chu Kang
6.	0011172	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1892	Chan Chu Kang
7.	0011174	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1894	Chan Chu Kang
8.	0011175	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1894	Kranji
9.	0011170	H.N. Ridley	s.n.	1894	Pulau Damar*
10.	0011169	H.N. Ridley	6244	1894	Seletar

*Ridley's handwritten herbarium sheet label stated "Pulau Daman" which does not exist. We have interpreted it to be Pulau Damar instead. However, present day Singapore has Pulau Damar Darat and Pulau Damar Laut, so we cannot be certain which of the two islands this specimen was found on.



Fig. 1. A leafy branch bearing a capsule of *Aeschynanthus albidus*. Scale bar = 5 cm.

DETAILS OF COLLECTION AND REDISCOVERY

On 22 November 2007, *Aeschynanthus albidus* was rediscovered on a dead tree along the Nee Soon pipeline, about 150 m from the access road leading from Old Thompson Road to Upper Peirce Reservoir. The voucher specimen is A. F. S. L. Lok 22 (SINU Accession no. 2007007710).

This specimen (Figs. 1, 2) was rescued and brought back for cultivation at the nursery of the Plant Systematics Laboratory, National University of Singapore, because the dead tree trunk it was growing on was already tilted, without branches and close to falling over. From this single plant, 12 pots of *Aeschynanthus albidus* stem cuttings were propagated (Fig. 3). Further propagation will be carried out before they are reintroduced into the wild.

On the 29 April 2008, the site was revisited to monitor the progress of the plant's remainder. Unfortunately, the tree was not longer standing and had been sawn up neatly without a trace of *Aeschynanthus albidus* remaining (Fig. 4).

We are unaware of other localities for this species, although it is likely that there are other viable populations of these plants in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve or Central Catchment Reserve, especially in the Nee Soon Swamp Forest of the latter. Because this species grows epiphytically high in the crown of trees and because the swamp forest is so inaccessible, further discoveries of other populations are likely in future.



Fig. 2. Axillary flower buds of *Aeschynanthus albidus*. Scale bar = 1 cm.



Fig. 3. Plant propagation of *Aeschynanthus albidus* at the Plant Systematics Laboratory Nursery, Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore.



Fig. 4. The site where *Aeschynanthus albidus* was rediscovered on a dead leaning tree. The dead tree's trunk has been neatly sawn into sections, with no trace of the remainder of the plant.

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