Primulina heterochroa (Gesneriaceae), a new species from a tropical limestone area in Guangxi, China

Authors: Fang Wen, Bi-Dan Lai, Zhi-Guo Zhao, Jin-Yan He, and Bai-Sheng Jiang

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Abstract


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Primulina heterochroa (Gesneriaceae) is described and illustrated here. This new species morphologically resembles P. pungentisepala and P. minutimaculata, but it is easily distinguished from congeners by some qualitative and quantitative characters in leaf, bract, calyx, indumentum, corolla and inflorescence. The conservation status of P. heterochroa is assessed as Critically Endangered (CR) according to IUCN Red List categories and criteria.

Additional key words: taxonomy, Primulina pungentisepala, Primulina minutimaculata, Critically Endangered

Introduction

Molecular studies have shown that some former groups of Old World Gesneriaceae were artificial and unnatural (Li & Wang 2007; Möller & al. 2011; Wang & al. 2011; Weber & al. 2011; Möller & Clark 2013). For example, the previously recognized as unspecific genus Primulina Hance has been enlarged to some 163 species not only by the description of new species but also by the inclusion of all species of Chirita sect. Gibbosaccus C. B. Clarke and Chiritopsis W. T. Wang, as well as Wentsaiiboea luochengensis Yan Liu & W. B. Xu and W. renifolia D. Fang & D. H. Qin (Wang & al. 2011; Weber & al. 2011; Xu & al. 2012; see also IPNI 2015+). The limestone areas of SW and S China and N Vietnam possess the highest biodiversity and differentiation of Primulina (Wei & al. 2010). As previously mentioned in many monographs and other literature (Wang & al. 1990, 1998; Hong & al. 2012; Wu & al. 2012; Wen & al. 2012; Zhao & al. 2013; Li & al. 2014; Zheng & Deng 2014), most species of this redefined genus have a narrowly restricted distribution, e.g. they often occur in only one or two limestone caves, sinkholes or small gorges. As a result of further exploring and study, some of these special and unique habitats are now better understood (Xu 2007). Many new taxa of Primulina have been reported in recent years, such as P. bullata S. N. Lu & Fang Wen (Lu & al. 2013), P. carinata Y. G. Wei, F. Wen & H. Z. Lü (Wen & al. 2014), P. crassirhizoma F. Wen, Bo Zhao & Xin Hong (Zhao & al. 2013), P. diffusa X. Hong, F. Wen, & S. B. Zhou (Zhou & al. 2014), P. leprosa (Yan Liu & W. B. Xu) W. B. Xu & K. F. Chung (Xu & al. 2010, under Chirita; Xu & al. 2012), P. ningmingensis

1 Gesneriad Conservation Center of China (GCCC), Guangxi Key Laboratory of Plant Conservation and Restoration Ecology in Karst Terrain, Guangxi Institute of Botany, Yanshan, Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 541006, China; *e-mail: wenfang760608@139.com (author for correspondence).
2 Guilin Botanical Garden, Guangxi Institute of Botany, Yanshan, Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region 541006, China; e-mail: zwskf@139.com
3 Guangxi Agricultural Vocational and Technical College, Xixiangtang District, Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China; e-mail: julia_dan1983@yahoo.com
4 College of Life Sciences, Anhui Normal University, Wuhu, Anhui 241000, China; e-mail: 18375314855@163.com
5 Guilin Institute of Forestry Science, Guilin, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China; e-mail: gljiangbaishen@126.com
In 2008, we collected some living Primulina-like plants when we visited a local Chinese medicine market in Pingxiang, Guangxi, China. At first, we considered them to be *P. pungentisepala* (W. T. Wang) Mich. Möller & A. Weber (Weitzman & al. 1997, under *Chirita*; Weber & al. 2011) or *P. minutimaculata* (D. Fang & W. T. Wang) Yin Z. Wang (Wang 1981, under *Chirita*; Wang & al. 2011). However, when the plants flowered, the colour and morphology of the flowers really shocked us: the purplish brown and dark yellow bicoloured corolla had never been found in the genus *Primulina* before. The plants seemed to be a new and unique species. We tried to find the natural habitat of the plants and, fortunately, during a limestone flora survey in 2013, we found by chance a small natural population with fewer than 25 individuals near the Sino-Vietnam border in Pingxiang, Guangxi. After a thorough examination of herbarium material and relevant literature (Wang 1985; Wang & al. 1990, 1998; Li & Wang 2004; Wei & al. 2010; Wang & al. 2011; Weber & al. 2011), we have determined that this is a new species of *Primulina*. It is described, illustrated and compared with the morphologically similar *P. pungentisepala* and *P. minutimaculata*.

**Material and methods**

An overview of the genus *Primulina* from S and SW China and adjacent areas of Vietnam was prepared. All available specimens of *Primulina* stored in the following herbaria in China, Vietnam, the United States and the United Kingdom were examined (codes according to Thiers 2015+): ANU, BJFC, CDIB, CTC, E, HGAS, HIB, HN, IBK, IBSC, K, KUN, MO, PE, SZ, VNMN; as was material of *Primulina* from recent field work by the current authors in SW and S China and living material cultivated at the Gesneriad Conservation Center of China. All morphological characters were studied under dissecting microscopes, and are described using the terminology presented by Wang & al. (1990, 1998).

**Results and Discussion**

*Primulina heterochroa* F. Wen & B. D. Lai, **sp. nov.** – Fig. 1 & 2.
Holotype: China, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Pingxiang city, Baiyun town, Jiaoguo village, near Sino-Vietnam border, 22.255854°N, 106.716474°E, 150 m,
on moist tufa and rocky surface of limestone cliff, 22 Jul 2013, F. Wen, B. D. Lai & F. Y. Nong 20130722-01 (IBK!; isotype: IBK!).

**Diagnosis** — *Primulina heterochroa* F. Wen & B. D. Lai differs from its congeners, *P. pungentisepala* (W. T. Wang) Mich. Möller & A. Weber and *P. minutimaculata* (D. Fang & W. T. Wang) Yin Z. Wang, by the following combination of characters: peduncle densely covered with spreading reddish purple eglandular and glandular hairs; bracts purple, outside reddish brown pubescent, inside densely purple glandular pubescent; calyx lobes outside densely spreading purple pubescent, inside sparsely shortly pubescent; corolla outside dark reddish purple to purplish brown, densely reddish purple pubescent, lobes inside dark yellow or bronzed yellow with dark brown longitudinal stripes (see also Table 1).

**Description** — *Herbs* perennial. *Rhizome* cylindric, 4–6 cm long, 1–1.5 cm in diam. *Leaves* 15–18, ba-
Table 1. Morphological comparison of *Primulina heterochroa*, *P. pungentisepala* and *P. minutimaculata*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Primulina heterochroa</th>
<th>Primulina pungentisepala</th>
<th>Primulina minutimaculata</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leaf blade indumentum</td>
<td>lower surface densely strigose and appressed pubescent, upper surface densely appressed pubescent</td>
<td>upper surface densely appressed pilose</td>
<td>sparsely appressed puberulent to nearly glabrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peduncle indumentum</td>
<td>densely spreading reddish purple eglandular and glandular pubescent</td>
<td>spreading white puberulent and glandular puberulent</td>
<td>spreading white glandular puberulent and strigose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bract colour</td>
<td>purple</td>
<td>green</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bract shape</td>
<td>slightly rhombic to broadly lanceolate</td>
<td>triangular-linear</td>
<td>ovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bract size</td>
<td>12–15 × 5–6 mm</td>
<td>c. 6 × 1.2 mm</td>
<td>15–25 × 8–12 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bract indumentum</td>
<td>outside reddish brown pubescent, inside densely purple glandular pubescent</td>
<td>outside pubescent, inside glabrous</td>
<td>outside strigose, inside glabrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calyx lobe shape</td>
<td>lanceolate</td>
<td>narrowly triangular-linear</td>
<td>linear-lanceolate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calyx lobe size</td>
<td>c. 7 × 2 mm</td>
<td>c. 6 × 1.2 mm</td>
<td>c. 5.5 × 0.8 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calyx lobe indumentum</td>
<td>outside densely spreading purple pubescent, inside sparsely shortly pubescent</td>
<td>outside pubescent, inside glabrous</td>
<td>outside densely glandular puberulent, inside glabrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corolla colour</td>
<td>outside dark reddish purple to purplish brown, lobes inside dark yellow or bronzed yellow with dark brown longitudinal stripes</td>
<td>pink, with 2 yellow stripes inside</td>
<td>pale purple to purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corolla indumentum</td>
<td>outside densely reddish purple pubescent, inside nearly glabrous</td>
<td>outside sparsely appressed puberulent, inside pilose below filaments</td>
<td>outside with densely semitransparent erect glandular hairs, inside glabrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowering time</td>
<td>July</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phenology — Flowering specimens were collected in July; the fruiting time is unknown.

Distribution — *Primulina heterochroa* is known only from a single population at the type locality in Pingxiang city, SW Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, S China, near the border with Vietnam (Fig. 4). It might be eventu-
ally discovered in the adjacent county of Longzhou and in Vietnam.

Ecology — *Primulina heterochroa* grows on shaded moist tufa of limestone cliffs under northern tropical limestone seasonal rain forest on the N-facing slope of a limestone hill at an altitude of about 150 m. The average annual temperature of Pingxiang is 21°C, the average annual precipitation is c. 1400 mm. Dominant plants at the type locality belong to *Apocynaceae*, *Begoniaceae*, *Euphorbiaceae*, *Lauraceae*, *Moraceae*, *Rubiaceae* and *Urticaceae*.
Conservation status and provisional Red List category — The new species is known only from one population with fewer than 50 mature individuals. We could not find a second population or any individual plants around the type locality despite careful field explorations on five occasions over the past several years. We therefore assess that *Primulina heterochroa* should be provisionally considered as Critically Endangered: CR B1ab(i,ii,iii,v)+2ab(i,ii,iii,v); D, according to IUCN Red List categories and criteria (IUCN 2012).

Etymology — The specific epithet “heterochroa” is a Greek-derived compound adjective meaning different-coloured, referring to the remarkable contrasting colours of the corolla.

Vernacular name — Chinese: 异色报春苣苔 (yì sè bào chūn jù tái). The first two characters mean “different colour” and thus mirror the specific epithet in referring to the corolla colours. The last four characters are the Chinese name for the genus *Primulina*.

Remarks — Several characters place this new species in the genus *Primulina*, e.g. stamens 2, stigma 1, capsule linear, straight, significantly longer than the persistent calyx lobes. *Primulina heterochroa* is very similar to *P. pungentisepala* and *P. minutimaculata* from a morphological point of view, but it can be distinguished from the latter two species by certain qualitative and quantitative characters in leaf, inflorescence, bract, calyx, corolla, hairs, etc. The three species share some similar characteristics, e.g. thicker and nearly fleshy leaf blades with silvery lateral veins, and thick pubescent hairs on the peduncles and pedicels. This hints at convergent evolution in three different species adapting to the subtropical monsoon climate with warm year-round temperatures and obviously alternating dry and wet seasons. The morphological differences between the three species are itemized in Table 1 and illustrated in Fig. 3.

Many new taxa of *Primulina* have been discovered, described and published recently, including this new one. We now know that the biodiversity of *Primulina* in limestone areas is very dependent on specialized habitats, such as caves, cliffs, crags, overhanging rocks, crevices, damp tufa, and so on, which are on a calcium-rich sub-strate further enriched from the weathering of the limestone. In exploring for plants in the past, the above-mentioned localities were usually ignored. Thus we expect additional undescribed taxa to be discovered in future field investigations.

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