Swertia wattii flowering on Japfu hill in the Naga hills of Nagaland state. Photo: A. Srivastava.

Japfu) in the Naga hills of Nagaland state. Because of the lack of details available for this species it has sometimes been erroneously merged with the closely related *Swertia paniculata* Wall.

While working on the revision of genus *Swertia* L. in India, author AS surveyed localities in the Naga hills lying in Manipur and Nagaland states during 19 September–3 October 2023. On Japfu hill AS located a small population of *S. wattii* (LWG 119225) on a hill top at 3,024 m and on the adjoining slopes of Dzukou valley at 2,600 m. This is the first record of the species since 1885. The species is locally common on open hill slopes where it grows amidst the native dwarf bamboo *Sinarundinaria rolloana* (Gamble) C.S.Chao & Renvoize. We recorded the species in a total of 11 locations on Japfu hill and the adjoining Dzukou hills.

The main threat to the species is seasonal forest fires caused by anthropogenic factors, but it is also exploited for medicinal use, with the decoction used as a febrifuge. Our observations indicate that *S. wattii* is endemic to a narrow geographical area. A single stochastic event or any change in land use could result in a major depletion of the population.

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Conserving *Camellia mingii*, the golden-flower camellia endemic to Yunnan province in south-west China

The golden-flower camellias of the family Theaceae are threatened by overcollection of the flowers for making tea, digging up of the whole plant for use in landscaping, and habitat destruction. *Camellia mingii*, known only from Funing County, south-eastern Yunnan province in south-west China, was described in 2019. It is categorized as Endangered on the China Biodiversity Red List–Higher Plants of 2020 but has not yet been assessed for the IUCN Red List. The species is one of the second-ranked National Key Protected Wild Plants and one of the 101 target species in the Yunnan Provincial Conservation Action Plan for Plant Species with Extremely Small Populations (2021–2030).

From October 2020 to December 2023, we carried out field surveys in the type locality of *C. mingii* and in adjacent areas. We recorded a total of c. 500 mature individuals in three populations, none of which are within a protected area, and the habitat of one population has been degraded by cropping of the economically valuable spice *Amomum villosum*. With a narrow distribution range, limited number of individuals and a high risk of extinction as a result of anthropogenic activities, *C. mingii* requires urgent conservation attention.

We collected seeds of *C. mingii* in October 2021, and 125 seedlings have been propagated in Kunming Botanical Garden. The average height of these young plants is c. 45 cm, and we are now also trying to propagate the species by tissue culture. Our additional investigations show that the associated plant community of *C. mingii* includes 222 species and that *C. mingii* has low genetic diversity and a high inbreeding coefficient.

Camellia mingii blooming in the wild. Photo: Lei Cai.

As anthropogenic disturbance and habitat degradation are the main threats to this camellia, one of the most urgent conservation actions is to protect the three populations from collection and habitat destruction. In addition, further ex situ conservation, population reinforcement and population restoration programmes are needed.

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First recorded bloom of the Critically Endangered ironwood *Ostrya rehderiana* in Kunming Botanical Garden

In March 2024, the Critically Endangered ironwood tree *Ostrya rehderiana* (family Betulaceae) blossomed for the first time in Kunming Botanical Garden, China. This tree was originally transplanted from the Hangzhou Botanical Garden in 1990. Its natural habitat is Tianmu Mountain, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province. Since its description in 1927, only a single remaining wild population of five mature individuals is known, a consequence of extensive and long-term anthropogenic disturbance. It is designated as a Class I Protected Wild Plant Species in China and is included in the national conservation initiative for Plant Species with Extremely Small Populations.

Comparative research of *O. rehderiana* and its more widely distributed relative, *Ostrya chinensis*, indicates that the effective population size of *O. rehderiana* has declined over the past 10,000 years, with an accumulation of deleterious mutations. On the brink of extinction, the remaining wild population is safeguarded within a nature reserve. Conservation efforts, including pollination management, seed collection, germination, ex situ conservation and in vitro cultivation, have been implemented for over 4 decades. More than 3,000 seedlings have been propagated, and eight ex situ conservation sites have been established across China.

In Kunming Botanical Garden, *O. rehderiana*, influenced by Kunming's cold climate and high altitude, has a slow growth rate. The tree is 8.42 m tall and has a diameter at breast height of 9.8 cm. Its crown measures 7.5 × 4.8 m. Despite the tree taking approximately 30 years to bloom—a significantly delayed development—the event is unprecedented and is significant for botanical records.

The Critically Endangered ironwood tree *Ostrya rehderiana* blossoming for the first time in Kunming Botanical Garden, China, in March 2024. Photo: Lian Tao.

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Potential evidence of the Critically Endangered Arabian leopard in southern Saudi Arabia

The Critically Endangered Arabian leopard subspecies *Panthera pardus nimr* is endemic to the Arabian Peninsula. Until the early 20th century, leopards were widespread across the north-western and south-western mountains of Saudi Arabia. However, in the last 100 years the subspecies has been driven to the verge of