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# *Ranunculus nilgiricus*, a Replacement Name for the Illegitimate *R. reniformis* (Ranunculaceae)

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**ABSTRACT.** *Ranunculus reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn. is a rare species endemic to southern India (Western and Eastern Ghats), which is characterized by long-petiolate basal leaves with crenately dentate lamina. This species name is an illegitimate later homonym of *R. reniformis* Gilib. A new name, *R. nilgiricus* Sennikov & Val. N. Tikhom., is proposed to replace the later homonym.

**Key words:** Eastern Ghats, endemic species, India, lectotype, nomenclature, Wallich, Western Ghats.

According to the latest taxonomic revision (Srivastava, 2010), which was based on an extensive inventory of herbarium material, the genus *Ranunculus* L. is represented by 41 species in India. The greatest part of this diversity is concentrated in the Himalayas, whereas the Western and Eastern Ghats are the second, minor center, with four species recorded in the area. Two species (*R. muricatus* L., *R. subpinnatus* Wight & Arn.) extend their distribution from the Himalayas to the southern mountains, whereas two other species (*R. reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn., *R. wallichianus* Wight & Arn.) are endemics or near-endemics of the Western and Eastern Ghats.

The Western Ghats and Sri Lanka are a biodiversity hotspot (Myers et al., 2000). The Western Ghats harbor ca. 5588 native vascular plants, of which 1273 species (nearly 23%) are endemic to this area (Nayar et al., 2014). This remarkable plant endemism is partly shared with the Eastern Ghats, with a further 359 species being endemic to both areas (Reddy et al., 2002).

*Ranunculus reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn. is singled out from the other species of the genus in India due to the unlobed, crenately dentate laminas of its leaves, whereas the other Indian species of *Ranunculus* are characterized by lobate to dissected leaves. Its large, conspicuous flowers, ca. 2.5 cm diam., are borne on very long pedicels, usually (1)2 to 3(6) per stem.

This species occurs mostly in the Nilgiri Mountains of the Western Ghats, is also present in the Eastern Ghats, and is therefore endemic to India (Tamil Nadu and Kerala). Its isolated locality in Rajasthan may belong to some alien occurrence. *Ranunculus reniformis* occurs on moist meadows along watercourses, at altitudes of 1600–2400 m. It is a rare plant, known from only ca. 20 gatherings kept in European and Indian herbarium collections (Srivastava, 2010).

*Ranunculus reniformis* was named by Wallich (1831) and then described by Wight and Walker-Arnott (1834) on the basis of two collections, which were cited as “Wall.! L. n. 4709; Wight! cat. n. 14. Neelgherries.” The first notation refers to the plants distributed under no. 4709 in the Wallich Catalogue (Wallich, 1831). It corresponds to the specimens collected in the Nilgiri Mountains by Benjamin Noton, Assay Master of the Bombay Mint at the East India Company (Noltie & Watson, 2021), for N. Wallich as a head of the Calcutta Botanic Garden, prior to 1828 when Wallich brought the collections to Europe (de Candolle & Radcliffe-Smith, 1981). The second designation stands for the specimens collected in the Nilgiri Mountains by native collectors for R. Wight when he stayed at Negapatam (Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu) during 1828–1831 (Noltie, 2005), and distributed under no. 14 by Wight (1833). It seems that Wight did not collect this species himself during his earlier visits to the Nilgiri Mountains because those collections remained in the possession of the East India Company and were eventually included in Wallich’s distribution (Wight & Walker-Arnott, 1834), but without *R. reniformis*.

As the original material of *Ranunculus reniformis* comprises more than one gathering, lectotypification of this species name may be warranted. Srivastava (2010) designated a specimen at P, which belongs to the collection distributed by Wight, as the “holotype” of *R. reniformis*. This type designation is correctable to lectotypification (Art. 9.10 of the International Code

of Nomenclature [ICN]; Turland et al., 2018) because Srivastava provided a statement of intent, “designated here” (Kumar & Maurya, 2019).

*Ranunculus reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn. has been universally accepted as a good taxon since its original publication and is currently adopted in major national checklists and international databases (Mao & Dash, 2020; POWO, 2023). However, according to Art. 53.1 of the ICN (Turland et al., 2018), this species name is an illegitimate later homonym of *R. reniformis* Gilib., the latter being a superfluous and illegitimate replacement name for *R. cassubicus* L. (Gilibert, 1793). This work of Gilibert was reprinted from an abridged version of his infamous *Flora Lithuanica* (Gilibert, 1781, 1782), which is the first treatment of vascular plants occurring in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. This synopsis was originally published elsewhere, in a collection of miscellaneous botanical works titled *Systema plantarum Europae* (Gilibert, 1785). These works of Gilibert, in the expanded and abridged versions, have been suppressed for species and infraspecific names (Wiersema et al., 2018+) because of the use of non-binomial nomenclature and because the Linnaean classification was not adopted as the only one, universal system of plant naming (McVaugh, 1949). However, the reprint of Gilibert’s 1785 synopsis, which was published in 1793 in a collection of poorly available botanical works or dissertations (Gilibert, 1793), has not been suppressed and is currently available as a source of validly published and potentially acceptable plant names (cf. Ardenghi, 2015).

Bibliographically, different editions and reissues of the same work are considered separate publications and may be indexed and cited as such. Reissues and later editions may also contain deviations in their contents, which potentially affect plant nomenclature. For these reasons, issues, editions, and versions of suppressed works are specifically mentioned or separately listed in particular entries of Appendix I to the Code of botanical nomenclature (Wiersema et al., 2018+).

The existence of other reprints, which provide partial contents of otherwise suppressed works, has been already noticed and taken into account in botanical nomenclature. For example, Gilibert (1785–1787) is suppressed as a seven-volume edition. However, its parts, when issued and distributed separately, are considered effectively published for the purposes of plant nomenclature. Such reissues include Villars (1785) and La Tourrette (1785), which have been indexed as sources for validly published plant names in IPNI (2023) and contain five and two currently accepted species names, respectively.

As the common bibliographical and nomenclatural practice accepts reprints and reissues as separate items, we do not consider an option to extend the scope of

suppressed works according to their content rather than bibliographic features, which could have been done by an amendment to the rules of botanical nomenclature. Similar amendments, which proposed to treat pre-Linnaean works reprinted after 1753 as ineffectively published (Sennikov, 2010, 2015), were not welcomed because they were viewed as disturbing the current status quo.

We also do not recommend an option to add Gilibert (1793) to the list of suppressed works because of its minor impact on plant nomenclature (Sennikov & Tikhomirov, in prep.), and because it contains one widely accepted species name, *Leonurus quinquelobatus* Gilib. (POWO, 2023, and references therein). Moreover, we do not think that an option to conserve the name *Ranunculus reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn. against its earlier homonym is a strong case because of the very limited importance of this narrowly distributed species and its scarcity in herbarium collections.

Having considered these options, we hereby propose a replacement name for this distinct species of *Ranunculus*, endemic to India.

The new species name reflects its major distribution area, the Nilgiri Mountains of the Western Ghats, southern India. Historically, such species epithets were derived from the spellings “Nilgherry,” “Nilghery,” “Nilghiry,” “Neelgherry,” or “Neelgerry” as adjectives of mostly third declension, whereas we prefer the modern spelling “Nilgiri” and a second-declension adjectival epithet as used by contemporary Indian botanists (IPNI, 2023).

***Ranunculus nilgiricus*** Sennikov & Val. N. Tikhom., nom. nov. Replaced synonym: *Ranunculus reniformis* Wall. ex Wight & Arn., Prodr. Fl. Ind. Orient. 3. 1834, nom. illeg., non Gilib., 1793. TYPE: India. [Nilgiri Mts.] s.d., Herbarium Wight no. 14 (lectotype, designated by Srivastava [2010: 283], P [barcode] P00193281 image!; isolectotypes, BR [bc] BR0000035548737 image!, E [bc] E00174053 image! and E00174054 image!, G [bc] G00085135 image! and G00085168 image!, K [bc] K000357826 p.p. [another specimen under the same barcode is *Foulkes s.n.*] image!, MH [bc] MH00001733 image!).

*Notes.* A species description, list of available specimens, line drawing, and distribution map have been published by Srivastava (2010). Images of the type collection are available online via JSTOR (<<https://plants.jstor.org>>), Global Biodiversity Information Facility (<<https://www.gbif.org>>), Herbarium Catalogue of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (<<https://data.rbge.org.uk>>), and Indian Virtual Herbarium of the Botanical Survey of India (<<https://ivh.bsi.gov.in>>).

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