Impatiens wawuensis (Balsaminaceae): a new species from Sichuan, China

BO DING1, SUDHINDRA R. GADAGKAR2,3, JIA-CAI WANG4, MEI ZHANG5, HUI GUO1 & SHENG-XIANG YU5*

1 College of Life Science and Engineering, Chongqing Three Gorges University, Chongqing 404000, China
2 Biomedical Sciences, College of Health Sciences, Midwestern University, AZ 85308, USA
3 College of Veterinary Medicine, Midwestern University, Glendale AZ 85308, USA
4 Management Bureau of Sichuan Wawu Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve, Sichuan 620634, China
5 State Key Laboratory of Systematic and Evolutionary Botany, Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing 100093, China.
*Correspondence: yushengxiang@ibcas.ac.cn

Abstract

We describe Impatiens wawuensis B. Ding & S. X. Yu, a new species from Mt. Wawu, Sichuan Province, China. The new species is superficially similar to I. oxyanthera in having an inflorescence consisting of two pink flowers with a reddish vein. Differences include smaller leaves and flowers, lower sepals with shorter and slightly incurved spur, lower petal of lateral united petals with an elongate linear auricle inserted into the spur, and a fusiform capsule that is sparsely verrucous. We also present for the new species its seed micromorphology and palynological features under Scanning Electron Microscopy.

Key words: Balsaminaceae, China, Impatiens, new species, Sichuan

Introduction

The genus Impatiens Linnaeus (1753: 937) is considered to be a taxonomically difficult group, containing over 1000 species (Grey-Wilson 1980, Fischer 2004). It is distributed largely in the tropical and subtropical regions of the Old World, with the greatest diversity seen in tropical Africa, Madagascar, southern India and Sri Lanka, eastern Himalaya and Southeast Asia (Yuan et al. 2004). Impatiens is divided into two subgenera, i.e., Clavicarpa and Impatiens, and the latter is further subdivided into seven sections (Yu et al. 2016).

China contains approximately 270 species of Impatiens, of which roughly 240 are native (Yu 2012). However, the diversity of this genus coupled with insufficient field work has meant that several species new to science are still being discovered (Zhang and Zhang 2011, Zhang et al. 2013, Cai et al. 2015, Luo et al. 2015, Zeng et al. 2015, Wang et al. 2016). Most species are restricted to southwest China, in Guangxi, Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Xizang (Tibet) (Yu 2012).

Wawu Mountain (29°25′–29°34′ N, 102°49′–103°00′ E, 1023–3522 m) is a typical mesa mountain, with an 11-km² plateau on the summit. It runs largely from north to south, and is named after the eastern and western edges that slant like the roof of a “wawu” (a type of dwelling in China). Wawu Mountain is located in the transition zone between the Sichuan Basin and the Hengduan Mountains, and is geologically and environmentally very heterogeneous in altitude, temperature, and precipitation.

This mountain lies in the center of a wet and humid part of West China, and has a subtropical climate with abundant monsoon rainfall. It was also a refugium during the quaternary glaciations and consequently exhibits high biodiversity (Wang et al. 2005). The flora is affected by the Sino-Japanese forest subkingdom as well as the Sino-Himalayan forest subkingdom. Several new species have been discovered in this region, such as those belonging to Carex (Cyperaceae; Liang 1999) and Primula (Primulaceae; Xu 2014).

Unknown plants of Impatiens were collected during our botanical survey in Wawu Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve in 2014 and 2015. Based on a detailed morphological study, we recognize them as representing a species new to science.
Material & Methods

Morphological traits, including habit and various leaf, inflorescence and flower characters were described/measured with both fresh and dried specimens (vouchers preserved in PE). Leaves and flowers were fixed with a formalin-acetic acid-alcohol (FAA) solution after they were photographed in the field. Pollen grains and seeds were fixed to stubs and sputter-coated with gold (EIKO IB-5) before examination and photography with a scanning electron microscope (SEM; Hitachi S-4800). Pollen was treated as in the protocol of Punt et al. (2007) and evaluated as in Janssens et al. (2012). Seeds were treated as in Song et al. (2005), and the traits evaluated as in Cai et al. (2013).

Taxonomic treatment

Impatiens wawuensis B. Ding & S. X. Yu, sp. nov. (Figs. 1–3)

Diagnosis: Similar to I. oxyanthera Hooker & Joseph Dalton (1908: 254) with the inflorescence comprising two pink flowers with a reddish vein, but differing from this species by smaller leaves and flowers, lower sepals with shorter and a slightly incurved spur, the lower petal of the lateral united petals with an elongate linear auricle inserted into the spur, and a fusiform capsule that is sparsely verrucous.

Type:—CHINA. Sichuan Province: Hongya County, Wawu Township, Baisha River, Wawu Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve, 29°26′34.4″N, 102°54′37.8″E, ca. 2350 m a.s.l., 24 September 2015, B. Ding 201509062 (holotype PE!, isotype KUN!, IBK!).

Description:—Herbs, annual, 15–30 cm tall, Stems erect or creeper, slender, branched. Leaves alternate, petiolate or subsessile on upper stem; petiole 0.5–1 cm; leaf blades ovate-oblong, 2–4 × 1–1.5 cm, membranaceous, abaxially puberulent, with 2 stipitate glands at base, base cuneate, margin crenate, apex acuminate. Inflorescences axillary, 2-flowered, peduncle 1.5–2.5 cm long, puberulent, pedicels 0.5–1 cm long, bracteate above base, bracts persistent, lanceolate, 2–3 mm. Flowers pink, 0.5–1 cm long; lateral sepals 2, ovate, ca. 3 × 2 mm, entire, apex acuminate, mucronulate. Lower sepal navicular, ca. 0.5 cm long, spur narrowed into a slightly incurved spur; spur stout, obtuse; mouth oblique, tip acute; dorsal petal orbicular, ca. 5 × 5 mm, base retuse, apex rostellate, abaxial midvein puberulent; lateral united petals not clawed, with fuchsia striations, ca. 0.5 cm long, 2-lobed; upper lateral united petals orbicular; lower lateral united petals dolabriform, auricle linear, elongate, inserted into spur. Stamens 5, filaments linear, anther small, apex obtuse. Ovary 4–5 mm long, erect, apex acuminate, glabrous. Capsule erect, fusiform, 1–1.5 cm long, 5-angled, sparsely verruculous along ribs.

Palynology—Pollen grains subellipsoid in polar view, 4-colpate, P×E = (17.7–19.5) 18.4 × (27.9–29.3) 28.7 μm, broadly ellipsoid in equatorial view; sexine ornamentation reticulate, bottom of ridge with irregular granules, lumina sparsely granulated (Fig. 3A–C).

Seed micromorphology—Seeds ellipsoid, 2.5 (2.3–2.7) × 1.5 (1.4–1.8) mm, local epidermal cells digitiform (Fig. 3D), digitiform cells channeled (Fig. 3F), most epidermal cells irregularly alveolate (Fig. 3E).

Etymology—The species epithet wawuensis refers to the locality of the type specimen: Wawu Shan Provincial Nature Reserve, Sichuan, China.

Phenology—Flowering and fruiting from August to November.

FIGURE 1. Impatiens wawuensis B. Ding & S. X. Yu. A. Flowering plant; B. Enlarged basal portion of leaf; C. Flower (lateral view); D. Flower (front view); E. Flower (dorsal view); F. Lateral sepal; G. Dorsal petal; H. Lower sepal; I. Lateral united petals; J. Ovary surrounded by stamens; K. Immature capsule; L. Mature capsule.
**Conservation status**—Only two populations, with a total of about 400 individuals, were found in a small area (< 4 km²) in Wawu Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve. We classify the conservation status of *Impatiens wawuensis* as Vulnerable (VU D2), based on current information and following the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources guidelines (IUCN 2011). Although the area is under protection as a national nature reserve, habitat disturbance brought about by human activities such as grazing, trampling and forest clearance (e.g., firebreaks) may have a negative impact on the species.

**Paratypes—**CHINA. Sichuan: Wawu Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve, 29°26′35.2″N, 102°54′38.0″E, elev. ca. 2300 m, 25 September 2015, B. Ding 201509064 (PE!).

**Similar species**—*Impatiens wawuensis* is superficially similar to *I. oxyanthera* in its inflorescence comprising two pink flowers with a reddish vein. However, it differs from this species by the following characters: flower much shorter: 0.5–1 cm vs. 2–2.5 cm; spur slightly incurved vs. incurved; lower petal of the lateral united petals with elongate linear auricle inserted into the spur vs. linear auricle absent; capsule fusiform vs. linear; capsule ribs verruculose vs. smooth.

**Acknowledgments**

We thank Yun-Xi Zhu for the illustration. This work was supported by the National Natural Science Foundation of China (31170177) and the Chongqing Commission of Science and Technology Projects (KJ1501008).

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