

X. IS SOLANUM FEROX VAR. FEROX (SOLANACEAE) EXTINCT?**C. B. HEISER**

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In 1995 I wrote letters to over 50 people (botanists, agricultural scientists, and former students of Indiana University) in south-eastern Asia trying to obtain a few seeds of *Solanum ferox* L. var. *ferox* (*S. involucreatum* Blume). I had over 25 replies, five of which included seeds, but none of the seeds produced plants that proved to be *S. ferox* var. *ferox*.

At one time this variety was known from southern Thailand (Kerr, 1954), northern Peninsular Malaysia (Ridley, 1923), Indonesia, mainly Java, Madura (Backer & Bakhuizen van den Brink f., 1965), Bali, and Christmas Island. Recently *S. ferox* has been treated in some detail by Hasan & Jansen (1994) who recognize both wild and cultivated forms, which are used as food and in medicine. Accepting their treatment, Heiser (1996) proposed the name *S. ferox* var. *ferox*, for the typical element in which the fruits are completely enclosed by the prickly calyx and *S. ferox* var. *lasiocarpum* (Dunal) Miq. for plants where the calyx, usually non-prickly, does not cover the fruit.

In 1999 I spent two weeks in Bali searching for *S. ferox* var. *ferox*. In view of my failure to find it and that additional letters have failed to elicit information concerning it, I am wondering if it still survives.

Therefore, I am requesting information about this plant. Does it still grow either wild or as a cultivated plant? Is it still used for food or medicine? Even more desirable would be obtaining a few viable seeds which would allow me to learn more about its relationships through crossing and molecular studies, to evaluate its potential as a source of genes for the improvement of the South American domesticated species, *S. quitoense* Lam. and *S. sessiliflorum* Dunal, and to deposit seeds in the *Solanaceae* seed bank at Nijmegen. Quite apart from the fact that it is a tragedy for any plant to become extinct, even a spiny weed like this one, it is obvious that there are other reasons for preserving *S. ferox* var. *ferox*.

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