X. IS SOLANUM FEROX VAR. FEROX (SOLANACEAE) EXTINCT?

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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. involucratum 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.

REFERENCES