

ORCHIDACEAE

Paphiopedilum hirsutissimum (Lindl. ex Hook.) Stein

Common English name : Lady's slipper orchid.

Distribution : INDIA: Scattered in Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Meghalaya; CHINA; MYANMAR; THAILAND; LAOS and VIETNAM.

Habitat : In hilly forest tracts and humus rich soil, at altitudes ranging from 200 to 1800 m.

Population status/Cause for RET : Critically Endangered. No information is available on its pollinator, population size and dynamics. As it has beautiful flowers it is collected in bulk for its commercial trade. Loss of its natural habitat has affected its natural population. The species is very rare and known from isolated pockets. Ghatak & Devi in 1986 recorded it from the lowest elevation (200 m) known for the species which usually occurs between 1200 and 1800 m. *P. hirsutissimum* var. *esquirolei* (Schltr.) K. Karas. & K. Saito is recorded from the limestone cliffs and rocks of southwest China, northern Thailand, northern Laos and Vietnam at 450-1800 m. This differs from the typical variety in its slightly larger flowers, peduncle and ovary shortly purple-pubescent; dorsal sepal 4.2-5.2 cm long, 3.4-4.5 cm wide; synsepal 4.2-4.5 cm long, 2.9-4 cm wide; petals 6.9-8 cm long, 2.1-3 cm wide and lip 3.8-5.2 cm long, 1.5-2.8 cm wide. It is under cultivation at the National Orchidaria of Botanical Survey of India at Shillong, Barapani and Yercaud; Forest Department Orchidarium at Khongampatt, Manipur and at



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Photo Courtesy: B.K. Sinha

Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden & Research Institute, Thiruvananthapuram and several private lands.

Description : Epiphytic or terrestrial herbs up to 40 cm tall. Leaves 3-5, 30 x 4 cm, ligulate, acute, green. Scape ca 30 cm long, purple hairy, one flowered. Flowers 12-15 cm in diam., ciliate; dorsal sepal ca 4 x 3.5 cm, pale green with dark green centre and base, purple veined, distinctly keeled; petals tongue-shaped, hairy, base waxy, deep purple and green. Lip helmet shaped, green flushed with dark purple; ovary up to 8 cm long, cylindrical, covered with purple hairs.

Fl. & Fr. : April - May.

References :

Jain, S.K. & A.R.K. Sastry (1980). Threatened Plants of India. A State-of-the Art Report. P. 28.

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