

***OBERONIA ACAULIS* GRIFF. VAR. *LATIPETALA* (ORCHIDACEAE) - A NEW VARIETY FROM MANIPUR, INDIA**

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The genus *Oberonia* is characterised by fleshy, flat, ensiform leaves; sub-erect or drooping inflorescence with many densely arranged flowers; sub similar sepals and petals; entire or 3-lobed lip; very short column and 4 pollinia. It comprises of about 150-200 species centered in tropical South and South-east Asia further extending to the tropical Africa, Madagascar, the Mascarene Islands, the Philippines, New Guinea, North-east Australia and South-west Pacific islands across Tahiti (Chen *et al.*, 2009). In India, it is represented by 65 species (Misra, 2007) out of which about 38 species are in North-east India (Rao, 2007; Choudhery, 2009) and 11 species are reported so far from Manipur (Kumar and Kumar, 2005; Chowlu *et al.*, 2012).

During a field exploration in Hengbung area, Senapati District of Manipur in November 2011, some *Oberonia* plants have been collected in vegetative condition and brought under cultivation at the Centre for Orchid Gene Conservation of Eastern Himalayan Region (COGCEHR), Hengbung, Senapati District, where they flowered during June-July 2012 and critically studied. Based on the literature (Seidenfaden, 1968, 1978; Ansari and Balakrishnan, 1990; Pearce and Cribb, 2002; Chen *et al.*, 2009) it is proved to be distinct from *Oberonia acaulis* Griff. in having thin leaves and broad petals with glandular dots. Hence it is described as a new variety ***Oberonia acaulis* Griff. var. *latipetala* Chowlu, Nanda & Nageswara Rao var. nov.**

***Oberonia acaulis* Griff. var. *latipetala* Chowlu, Nanda & Nageswara Rao var. nov. (Fig. 1).**

Diagnosis: *Oberonia acaulis* var. *latipetala* is more allied to *Oberonia acaulis* but differs in having longer inflorescence, broader and not reflexed petals whereas in *Oberonia acaulis* inflorescence is only up to 9 cm long, petals narrow-oblong and reflexed. Further, the present new variety flowers during June to July, while the variety flowers during October to November.

Type: India, Manipur, Senapati District, Hengbung, 25°25.40' N and 94°13.47' E, 1298 m, 20 June 2012, Chowlu 00368 (Holotype. COGCEHR herbarium).

Stem 3-7 mm long, tufted, enveloped by leaf base. Leaves 8-20 × 0.3-0.7 cm, jointed, ensiform, acuminate, slightly falcate, very unequal in size. Inflorescence 20-30 cm long, slender, much decurved; peduncle 1.5-2.0 cm long, terete, naked; rachis 18.5-28.0 cm long, with many flowers in whorls; pedicellate ovary 1.0-1.7 mm long, green; floral bract 2.2-2.7 × 0.5-0.7 mm, lanceolate, acuminate, margin erose, yellowish-green. Flowers 1.5-1.7 mm across, green. Sepals subequal; dorsal sepal 1.1-1.3 × 0.7-0.9 mm, lanceolate-elliptic, obtuse; lateral sepals 1.2-1.4 × 0.7-0.9 mm, lanceolate-elliptic, acute. Petals 1.1-1.3 × 0.9-1.1 mm, subacute, green with glandular dots, slightly serrate at margin. Lip 1.2-1.3 × 1.0 mm, green, 3-lobed; lateral lobes 0.3-0.4 × 0.3 mm, rectangular, truncate; mid lobe c. 0.6 mm long, divided into two lobules separated by a sinus in the middle. Anther cap c. 0.25 × 0.20 mm, creamy, 2-chambered. Pollinia c. 0.15 mm long, yellow, subglobose.

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Flowering: June - July.

Habitat: The present new variety is found on moss covered tress branches in subtropical forest, at 1298 m in association with other orchids and fern species.

Etymology: The varietal epithet indicates the species unique character broad petals.

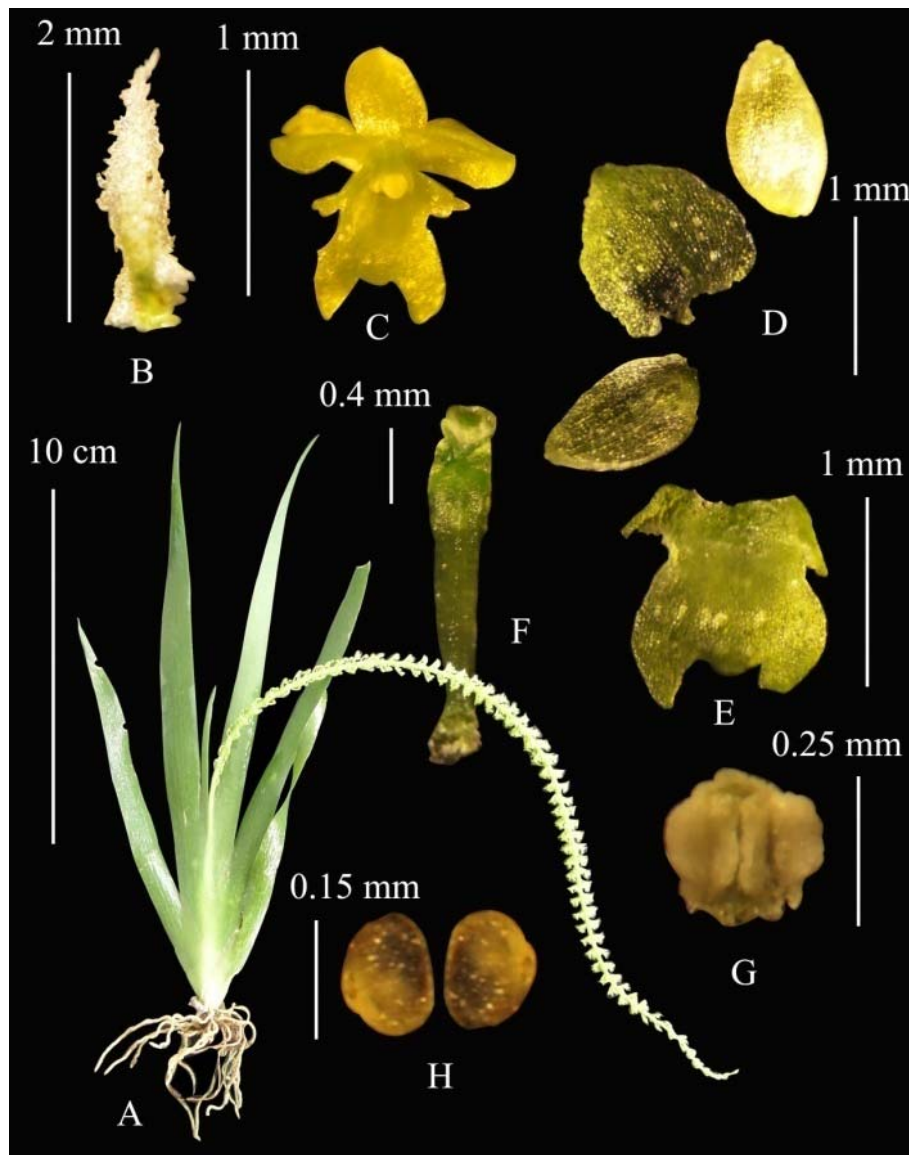


Fig. 1. *Oberonia acaulis* Griff. var. *latipetala* Chowlu, Nanda & Nageswara Rao, A. Habit, B. Bract, C. Flower, D. Dissected parts, E. Lip, F. Colum with pedicel ovary, G. Anther cap, H. Pollinia.

Table 1. Morphological variations of *Oberonia acaulis* and *Oberonia acaulis* var. *latipetala*.

Characters	<i>Oberonia acaulis</i>	<i>Oberonia acaulis</i> var. <i>Latipetala</i> var.nov.
Inflorescence	5-9 cm long, decurved	20-30 cm long, much decurved
Petals	c. 0.1 × 0.5 mm, reflexed, no glandular dots	1.1-1.3 × 0.9-1.1 mm, not reflexed, glandular dots present
Flowering	October - December	June - July

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