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Mistaken identity

By Tom McLaughlin

A NEW tree species has been identified on the peninsula after having been mislabelled since 1866. Previously the tree was thought to be the same as its Borneo relative *Memecylon megacarpum* Furtado but a new examination showed it to be quite different.

The tree on the peninsula, now known as *Memecylon pseudomegacarpum* M Hughes, was untangled through the efforts of Mark Hughes (the M Hughes in the last part of the name) – a botanist with the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

This small tree, which is in the Class: Magnoliopsida, is a member of the Melastomataceae family and is widespread in lowland to montane forest reaching altitudes

up to 1,800 metres.

“The tree is actually quite common in Peninsular Malaysia, but it was a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees! It was known under another name, which only applies to a tree from Borneo, and so it was a case of mistaken identity, which only became apparent after looking at ‘type’ (reference) material for the Borneo species, that was collected by the Italian botanist Odoardo Beccari in 1866 and kept in an archive in Florence.

“The find shows that there is still a huge amount to discover about the flora of the region, and why the work on the new ‘Flora of Peninsular Malaysia’ led by the forestry research institute in Kepong is so important,” Hughes said in an email.

His speciality is the genus



DIFFERENT PLANT: The *Memecylon pseudomegacarpum* M Hughes flower.



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Begonia, where he has spent time in Sumatra and the Philippines documenting the species. His recent publication, in conjunction with the Universities of Ache in North and West Sumatra is the ‘Sumatran Begonia, a field guide with colour plates’. He has many other technical monographs to his credit.

The ‘Flora of Peninsular Malaysia’ is a project which aims to provide a comprehensive

revision of all the species of vascular plants in Peninsular Malaysia.

The first series deals with the ferns and lycophytes (mosses, liverworts) and is currently available while the second volume, the seed plants is still being compiled. The project also publishes a series ‘The Tree Flora of Sabah and Sarawak’ through the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM).



NEW NAME: The *Memecylon pseudomegacarpum* M Hughes fruit.

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