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Richard Henry Beddome (1830-1911): A Centennial Remembrance

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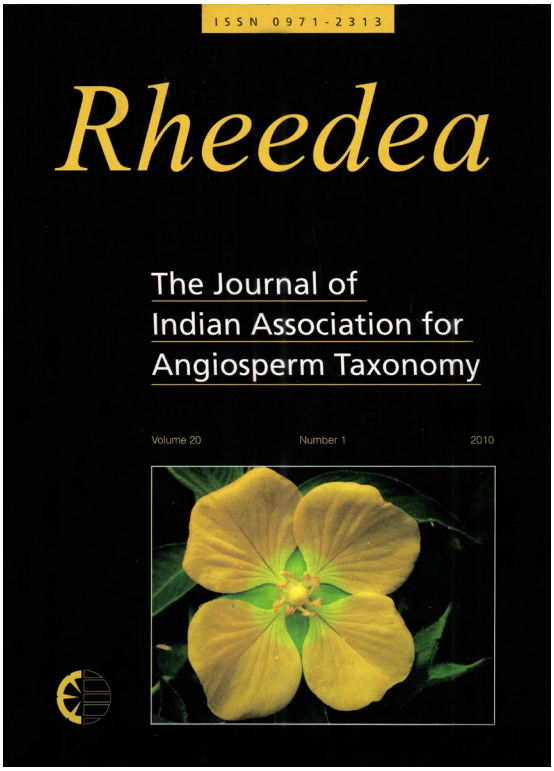

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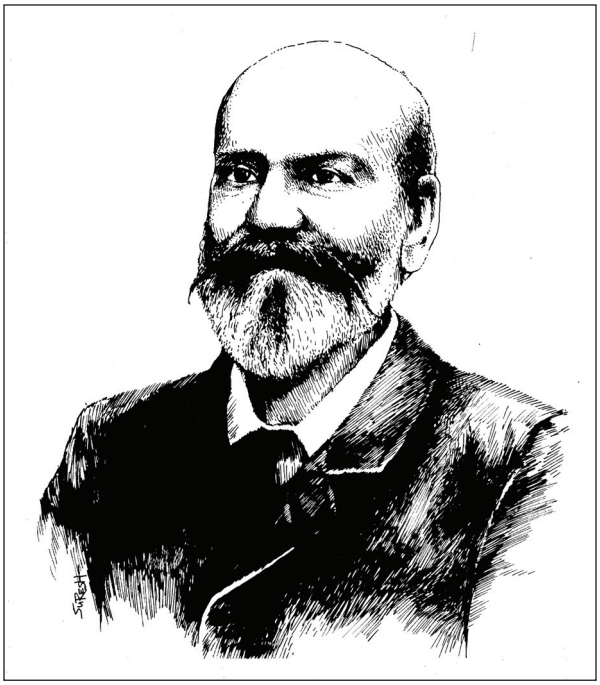

The year 2011 marks the death centenary of two great British botanists who contributed substantially to science of plant taxonomy in India. Both were born in the first part of 19th century and died at the beginning of 20th century: Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817 – 1911) and Richard Henry Beddome (1830 – 1911). J.D. Hooker contributed heavily to the science of Indian flora which will be discussed in the second installment of this article. My modest attempt here is to remember R.H. Beddome and his scientific contributions to South Asian natural history especially botany.

Many years ago I was trying to get an image of Beddome for an article on *Paphiopedilum druryi* (Bedd.) Stein, the lone lady's slipper orchid of South India, which, Beddome himself described (as *Cypripedium druryi*) in 1874. I tried my luck through various sources, my amphibian friend, Zoo Outreach friend and Hunt Institute, but all attempts failed. After a decade or so, all of a sudden I found an image of Beddome in Hunt Institute's Bulletin and far away in Australia in a website on mollusks. In the meantime, the English daily *The Hindu* carried an article titled 'A herpetologist remembered' with a photo of Beddome. The credit of this photograph was erroneously given to Chennai Snake Park Trust which when contacted informed that it was taken originally from *Bulletin of the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation* (18(1): 8. 2006). This Bulletin in turn said that the picture was shared by Prof. Kraig Adler of Cornell University who was on the lookout for Beddome.

Adler wrote to me: His was one of the most difficult biographies to write because it was so difficult to get information and, especially, his portrait. I believe that I was the first to ever publish his likeness. It took me nearly 20 years to find it, after many false leads and dead ends. It was found not in England or India, or America where most of the Beddomes immigrated but in Australia! This picture was promptly included in Adler's second installment of *Contributions to the History of Herpetology* (Adler, 2007) and a copy was kindly given to me. My efforts collectively prompted me to dwell more on Beddome's scientific activities because just like any botanist I also thought Beddome was only a botanist. As I quickly learnt that Beddome was much more than a botanist, a herpetologist, a conchologist and to sum up a perfect naturalist (a word we forgot to use nowadays).

Richard Henry Beddome was born on 11 May 1830 as the eldest son of Richard Boswell Brandon Beddome, a solicitor of Clapham, South London. He was educated at Charterhouse School in Surrey. He initially studied for a legal profession but soon gave up for a life abroad. At the tender age of 18 he obtained a cadetship in the East India Company service and came to India. He was first posted in the 42nd Madras Native Infantry first in Jabalpur and later in Secunderabad.

By 1856 he moved to Madras Forest Department to assist Dr. Hugh Cleghorn, the first Conservator of Forests of the then Madras Presidency. This was an opportunity for a life time which Beddome used effectively. He also used the service of the botanical artists whom Robert Wight trained. Beddome vigorously collected, studied and described. Publications after publications came on the novelties in plants, amphibians, snakes, geckos, mollusks,

etc. Most important botanical works are: 1. *Trees of the Madras Presidency* (1863), 2. *The Ferns of Southern India* (1863), 3. *The Ferns of British India* (1866 – 1868), 4. *The Flora Sylvatica for Southern India* (1869 – 1874), 5. *Forester's Manual of Botany for Southern India* (1869 – 1874), 6. *Icones Plantarum Indiae Orientalis* (1874), 7. *A Supplement to the Ferns of Southern India and British India* (1876) and 8. *Handbook of the Ferns of British India, Ceylon and the Malay Peninsula* (1883 with *A Supplement* in 1892).

He published several novelties in plants (824 species and 4 varieties in total): Acanthaceae (29 spp.), Adiantaceae (7 spp. & 1 var.), Anacardiaceae (5 spp.), Annonaceae (15 spp.), Apocynaceae (4 spp.), Aquifoliaceae (1 sp.), Araliaceae (3 spp.), Arecaceae (1 sp.), Asclepiadaceae (6 spp.), Aspleniaceae (10 spp. & 1 var.), Asteraceae (3 spp.), Begoniaceae (5 spp.), Blechnaceae (1 sp.), Burseraceae (1 sp.), Celastraceae (5 spp.), Chrysobalanaceae (3 spp.), Clusiaceae (5 spp.), Combretaceae (2 spp.), Convolvulaceae (1 sp.), Cucurbitaceae (2 spp.), Cyatheaceae (10 spp.), Cycadaceae (1 sp.), Davalliaceae (14 spp.), Dennsteadtiaceae (25 spp.), Dichapetalaceae (1 sp.), Dicksoniaceae (1 ap.)< Dipteridaceae (1 sp.), Dipterocarpaceae (6 spp.), Dryopteridaceae (112 spp.), Ebenaceae (8 spp.), Elaeocarpaceae (1 sp.), Erythroxylaceae (1 sp.), Euphorbiaceae (25 spp.), Flacourtiaceae (4 spp.), Gentianaceae (4 spp.), Gesneriaceae (2 spp.), Grammitidaceae (3 spp.), Hymenophyllaceae (14 spp.), Icacinaceae (1 sp.), Lamiaceae (3 spp.), Lauraceae (1 sp.), Leguminosae (21 spp. & 2 var.), Lomariopsidaceae (9 spp.), Lythraceae (1 sp.), Melastomataceae (14 spp.), Meliaceae (8 spp.), Myristicaceae (3 spp.), Myrsinaceae (5 spp.), Myrtaceae (23 spp.), Oleaceae (4 spp.), Oleandraceae (1 sp.), Oliniaceae (8 spp.), Ophioglossaceae (2 spp.), Orchidaceae (1 sp.), Plagiogyriaceae (1 sp.), Poaceae (3 spp.), Podostemaceae (3 spp.), Polypodiaceae (107 spp.), Proteaceae (2 spp.), Pteridaceae (6 spp.), Ranunculaceae (1 sp.), Rhamnaceae (3 spp.), Rosaceae (1 sp.), Rubiaceae (45 spp.), Rutaceae (2 spp.), Sabiaceae (1 sp.), Sapindaceae (3 spp.), Sapotaceae (14 spp.), Sterculiaceae (5 spp.), Symplocaceae (5 spp.), Thelypteridaceae (85 spp.), Thymelaeaceae (1 sp.), Tiliaceae (2 spp.), Trichopodaceae (1 sp.), Urticaceae (7 spp.), Valerianaceae (1 sp.), Violaceae (1 sp.), Vitaceae (6 spp.), Vittariaceae (6 spp.), Woodsiaceae (44 spp.) and Zingiberaceae (2 spp.). What an amazing diversity of families that Beddome worked with! Of this, more than half the number of species (459 spp.) are ferns just as half the number of books which Beddome published are also on ferns, somewhat justifying to call him as a pteridologist.

He had some special liking for *Impatiens* in which he described 19 species mostly from Nilgiris, Anamalais and the Travancore Hills. His discovery of *I. denisonii* and *I. orchioides* from Sispara are noteworthy. He visited Sispara several times and even named his home as 'Sispara' back in London. Despite this, for botanists, Beddome was essentially a pteridologist as he was a herpetologist to the zoologists. Between these two, Beddome studied many our bio-resources fully utilizing the facilities of a forest officer. After retirement in 1882 he left for England and stayed at Sispara, West Hill, Putney.

Godwin-Austin remembered in his obituary note (1912) that Beddome attended the Council Meeting of the Malacological Society in London on 20th January 1911. On 23rd February 1911 Beddome passed away at the age of 81. When botanists and zoologists specialize on groups narrowing down to low levels, here is a man who truly represented a naturalist par excellence.

There are several species of both plants and animals named after Beddome: *Cycas beddomei* Dyer, *Cynometra beddomei* Prain, *Litsea beddomei* Hook.f., *Psychotria beddomei* Deb & Gang., *Syzygium beddomei* (Duthie) Chithra, to name a few from the plant group.

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