



Aizoaceae (Magnoliopsida: Caryophyllales) - a new family record to the flora of Andaman Islands, India

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The Family Aizoaceae (Fig-marigold family or Ice plant family) comprises 127 genera and about 1860 species (Mabberley 2008) distributed mostly in the arid and semi-arid regions of Africa and a few of them from Asia, Australia and the central Pacific regions. Majority of the species (96%) are endemic to southern Africa (Chesselet et al. 2000). In India the family is represented by three genera, namely, *Sesuvium*, *Trianthema* and *Zaleya* with seven species distributed in the coastal and lowland areas of peninsular India and the Gangetic plains (Karthikeyan et al. 2009).

The genus *Sesuvium* L. comprises of about 22 species distributed in the warmer parts of the world, mostly confined to the tropics and sub-tropics worldwide (Mabberley 2008). In mainland India, the genus is represented by two species namely *S. portulacastrum* (L.) L. distributed in the coastal

areas and *S. sesuvioides* (Fenzl) Verdc., distributed in Gujarat and the Upper Gangetic Plains (Karthikeyan et al. 2009). During the course of studies on the floristic diversity of Little Andaman Island, the author collected a succulent prostrate herb with pink flowers from the sandy coasts of South Bay area. On critical examination and study of the specimen, it was identified as *Sesuvium portulacastrum* (L.) L. Survey of literature revealed that its occurrence has not been reported from these islands so far (Rao 1986; Lakshminarasimhan & Rao 1996; Mathew 1998; Pandey & Diwakar 2008). It is now reported here as a new addition to the flora of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The collection of this species from Little Andaman Island also forms a new addition of the family Aizoaceae to the flora of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. A brief description, photographs and uses are given for easy identification and further utilization of this economically important plant.

Sesuvium portulacastrum (L.) L.

Syst. Nat., ed. 10. 2: 1058. 1759; Roxb., Fl. Ind. [ed. Carey] 2: 509. 1832; C. B. Clarke in Hook.f., Fl. Brit. India 2: 659. 1879; Ridl., Fl. Malay. Penins. 1: 866. 1922; Backer in Steenis, Fl. Males., Ser. 1, Spermat. 4: 272. 1951; Karthik. et al., Fl. Pl. India-Dicot. 66. 2009. *Portulaca portulacastrum* L., Sp. Pl. 446. 1753. (Images 1 & 2).

Specimen examined: 27.xi.2005, South Bay, Little Andaman Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India, coll. L. Rasingam #25973 (PBL - Herbarium of the Botanical Survey of India, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Port Blair).

Small prostrate herb; stems reddish, succulent, rooting at nodes, densely caespitose, glabrous. Leaves simple, opposite, fleshy, lanceolate, linear-lanceolate, often oblong, 20–50 x 5–10 mm, attenuate at base, entire along margins, obtuse at apex, flat above, convex beneath. Petioles very short, ca 7mm long, dilated at the base into a scarious, semi-amplexicaul sheath. Flowers solitary in the leaf axils; pedicels up to 1cm long, thickened upwards, glabrous. Perianth segments broadly lanceolate or oblong-ovate, ca 8x4 mm, central thicker parts green, thin, imbricate, margins pink,

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Image 1. *Sesuvium portulacastrum* (L.) L. (Aizoaceae)
a - Habit; b - Flowering twig;
c - Flower

inner surface pink, apex with fleshy apiculus. Stamens many, included; filaments free, coherent at base, pink; anthers dark coloured. Ovary 3–4-locular, glabrous. Styles as many as locules, white. Capsule included by the perianth, oblong, ca 10mm long; seeds many, orbicular, long-funicled, shining black.

Flowering & fruiting: Throughout the year.

Distribution: Cosmopolitan in the tropics, seashores of eastern and western coasts in India. Presently recorded from Andaman Islands.

Habitat & ecology: Rare, in the sandy beaches and along the tidal creeks between 0 to 5 m above sea level

in association with *Wedelia biflora*, *Ipomoea pes-caprae*, *Launaea sarmentosa*, *Ischaemum muticum*, *I. rugosum* and *Crinum asiaticum*.

Uses: The whole plant is sold in the markets of Asian countries as a green vegetable. It is also a good fodder for cattle and cultivated as a sand-binder in eroded sea shores.

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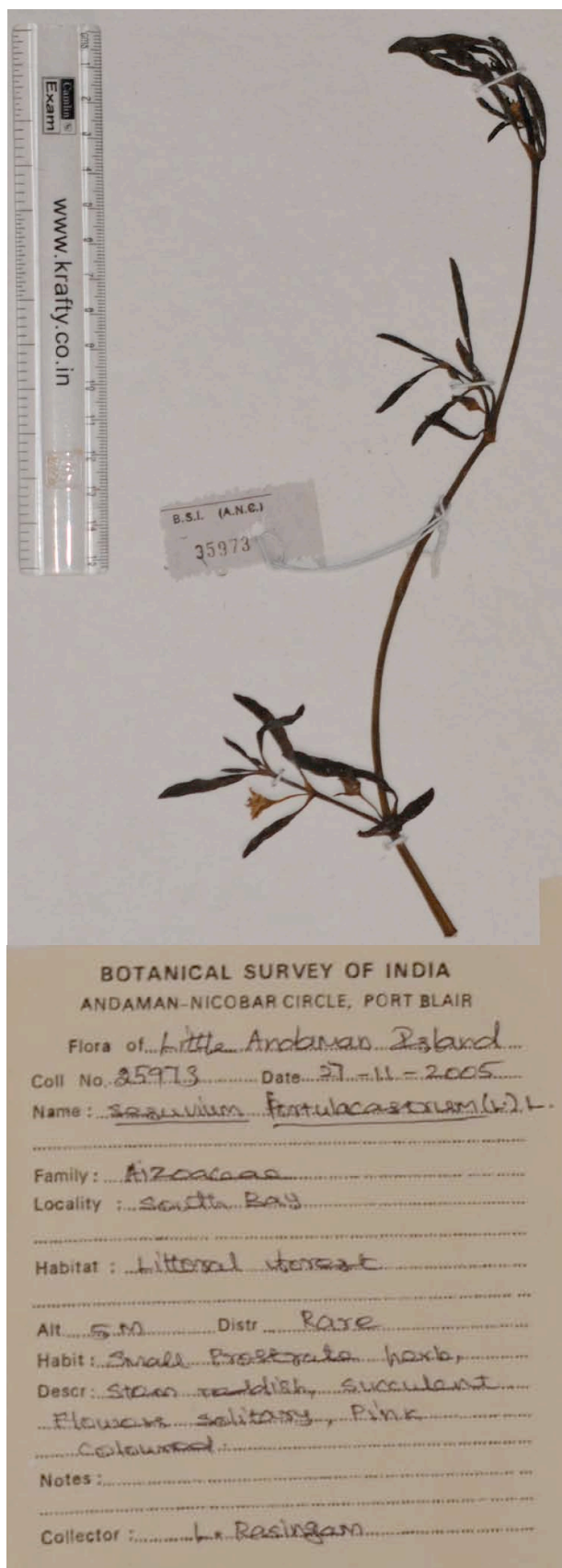


Image 2. Herbarium image of *Sesuvium portulacastrum* (L.) L. (Aizoaceae)

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