

India's biodiversity riches grow by 499 species

The Himalayas, northeast, Western Ghats and Andamans yield the most discoveries of flora and fauna

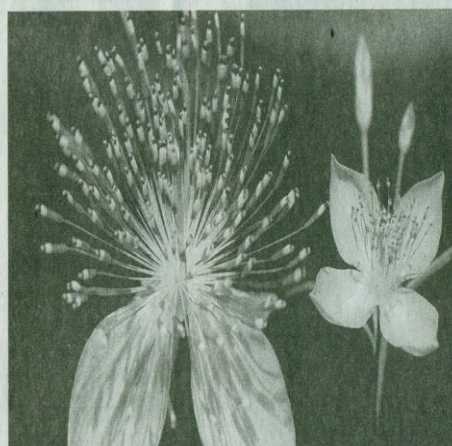
SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

On World Environment Day, India has 499 reasons to cheer: 313 species of animal and 186 of plants have been discovered from various areas of the country last year.

Animal Discoveries 2016, New Species and Records, brought out by the Zoological Survey of India on Monday, and *Plant Discoveries 2016*, by the Botanical Survey of India, bring the glad tidings.

Wide variety

Of the new animal species, 258 are invertebrates and 55 vertebrates. As many as 97 species of insects, 27 of fish, 12 species of amphibians, 10 of Platyhelminthes, nine of



Floral find: *Corynandra elegans*, discovered from Sakar in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Crustacea and six of reptiles have been discovered and described by the scientists. There are 61 species of moths and butterflies (order Lepidoptera) and 38 of beetles (Coleoptera).

ZSI Director Kailash Chandra said most of the

new species were from the four biological hotspots of the country – the Himalayas, the northeast, the Western Ghats and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Animal Discoveries 2016 says that for the first time,

the number of animal species in the country, including protozoa, has crossed one lakh – 1,00,693 is the exact count.

Till last year, India was home to 97,514 species of animals.

Updated list

"A lot of species in different groups have been updated during the past one year. India is one of the 17 megadiversity countries and it has about 6.42 per cent of the global fauna," Mr. Chandra said.

Plant Discoveries 2016 says that along with 186 new species, scientists have discovered seven new genera, four subspecies and nine new varieties from India, taking the number to

206. The publication lists 113 new records from India.

The geographical distribution of the new plant species reveals that most discoveries were made in the Western Ghats (17%), followed by the Eastern Himalayas (15%), the Western Himalayas (13%), the Eastern Ghats (12%) and the west coast (8%).

"Among the interesting discoveries of the year are eight new species of wild balsams, five species of wild ginger and one species of wild amla [Indian gooseberry]. Also, 39 varieties of mushrooms have been discovered. These new species will have use in horticulture and have medicinal value too," BSI Director Paramjit Singh said.