



# Natural History Snippets

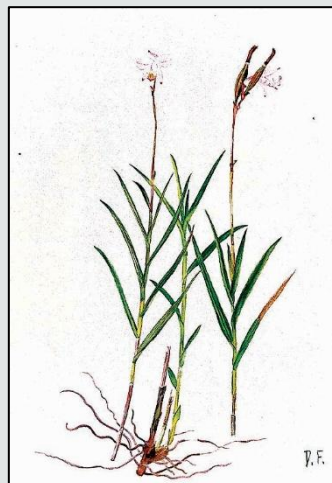
## Sri Lanka Natural History Society



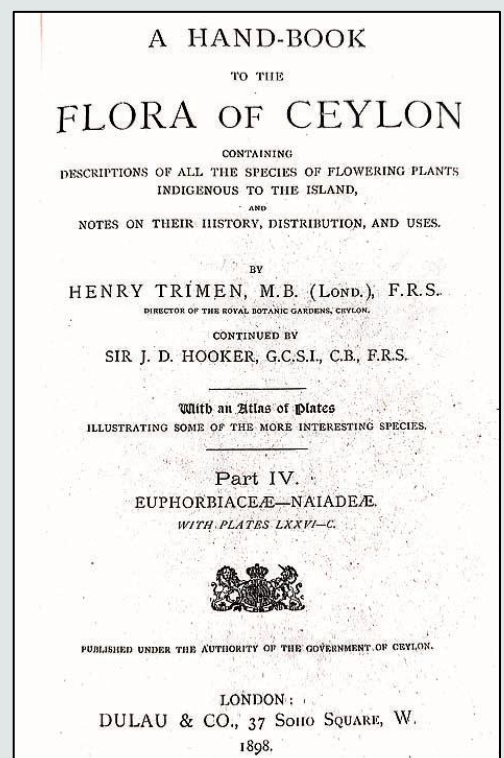
### THE BAMBOO ORCHID *Arundina graminifolia*

My first close encounter with this orchid was in 1970 at Kitulgala, on an orchid hunt with my mother Dorothy Fernando. She was painting the indigenous orchids of the country, and I was trailing behind as escort and plant collector. The collected orchids were sent to the Herbarium at Peradeniya for identification after they were painted.

The orchid genus *Arundina*, we learnt later, was represented in the country by two species. *Arundina minor* was listed in Volume IV of Trimen's Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon that had been printed in 1898, and *A. graminifolia* was listed in Volume VI that had been printed in 1931. We came across *A. minor* in a rather curious place—on a little sandy island in the middle of a stream at the Fishing Hut, in Maskeliya. At that time, the location was quite undeveloped and one with nature, unlike the image that comes up on Google Earth.



Dorothy Fernando water colours, 1970-1971.  
*A. graminifolia* (l), *A. minor* (r).



The next Flora that was published—*A Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon* Ed. Dassanayake & Fosberg, Vol II 1981—listed both *A. minor* and *A. graminifolia*. *A. minor* was listed as endemic and *graminifolia* as “...an escape from cultivation.” Suranjan Fernando & Paul Ormerod in their 2008 publication *An Annotated Checklist of the orchids of Sri Lanka* while noting that *minor* had been synonymised with *graminifolia*, decided that they were distinct entities and listed them both.

But science marches on and in the 2020 National Red List these orchids are re-named *Arundina graminifolia* subsp. *caespitosa* (synonym: *Arundina minor*) and *Arundina graminifolia* subsp. *graminifolia*. Why? I do not know, preferring to leave it to the botanists. Does it end there? So far, yes—the Kew Gardens *Plants of the World on line* lists both these subspecies as accepted. I am still to learn why they are subspecies.



Found in grasslands and open spaces. Adapts well under cultivation. The plant photographed is just over 1 metre tall, growing in a pot in Colombo. Needs sunlight. The flowers open sequentially, each lasting about three days. The subspecies *caespitosa* is dwarf, with pale-coloured flowers. Look for it in marshy places.

National Conservation Status	
Subspecies <i>graminifolia</i>	Data deficient
Subspecies <i>caespitosa</i>	Endangered

#### References

- \*Henry Trimen & J. D. Hooker, 1898. *A Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*, Part IV. *Arundina minor* p. 170
- \*Henry Trimen, Supplement A. H. G. Alston, 1931. *A Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*, Part VI. *Arundina graminifolia* p. 275
- \*The National Red List 2020 – The Conservation Status of the Flora of Sri Lanka
- \*Dassanayake MD & Fosberg FR, 1981. *A Revised Handbook to the Flora of Ceylon*, pp. 163 – 165.
- \*Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, *Plants of the World on line*. <https://powo.science.kew.org/taxon/urn:lsid:ipni.org:names:1003834-2#children>. Accessed 17.3.2026.
- \*Samantha Suranjan Fernando & Paul Ormerod, 2008. *An Annotated Checklist of the Orchids of Sri Lanka*. <https://journals.rheedeia.in/journal/LsmUF9lu>. Accessed 17.3.2026.

Photography and layout  
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