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Unveiling hidden beauty: Two new *Camellia* species from Center South of Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: Two new species of *Camellia* section *Bidoupia* are described and illustrated as new for science *Camellia lienthuongiae* and *C. danhducii*. Both species share morphological similarities with *C. inusitata*, such as a single, branchless trunk, but clearly differ in leaf size and shape, larger flowers, shorter pedicels, bracteoles, petals, and sepals, as well as ovary and style indumentum. This study provides formal taxonomic descriptions, comparative morphological analyses with related species, and detailed illustrations of floral structures.

KEY WORDS: *Bidoupia*, *Camellia danhducii*, *Camellia inusitata*, *Camellia lienthuongiae*, *Corallina*, plant taxonomy, Theaceae.

INTRODUCTION

The genus *Camellia* L., the largest within the Theaceae family, includes 813 published names and 316 accepted species, as reported by POWO (2025). Vietnam and China are regarded as the diversity centers of *Camellia* diversity, with China hosting 95 species (54 of which are endemic) and Vietnam 97 species (76 endemic), based on data from Quach *et al.,* (2024).

Various taxonomic work has been applied to classify the genus *Camellia* globally. Sealy (1958) originally categorized the genus into two groups and 12 sections. Later, Chang and Bartholomew (1984) revised this system by introducing four subgenera and 20 sections. Ming & Bartholomew (2007) proposed a new classification, dividing *Camellia* into two subgenera comprising 14 sections. Subsequently, Orel still kept the four-subgenera and expanded Chang & Bartholomew's system to 27 sections, adding seven new sections specific to Lam Dong Province (Orel, 2015). Since 2020, many new species have been published such as *Camellia bidoupensis* Truong, Luong & Tran (Truong *et al.,* 2020), *C. hainanica* Y.L. Zhao & Z.G. Xu (Xu *et al.,* 2020), *C. mingii* S.X. Yang (Liu *et al.,* 2020b), *C. rostrata* S.X. Yang & S.F. Chai (Liu *et al.,* 2020a), *C. zhaiana* S.X. Yang (Liu *et al.,* 2020c), *C. proensis* V.D. Luong, Doudkin & V.H. Quach (Quach *et al.,* 2021), *C. luteocalpandria* S.X. Yang & E.D. Liu (Yu *et al.,* 2021), *C. flosculora* Curry, V.S. Le, Q.C. Truong & V.D. Luong (Le *et al.,* 2021), *C. thuanana* T.T. Hoang (Hoang *et al.,* 2022), *C. annamensis* N.S.Lý, V.D. Luong, N.D. Do, T.H. Lê & Thi L. Nguyen (Ly *et al.,* 2022), *C. quynhii* V.D.Luong, V.H. Quach & T.T. Hoang (Quach *et al.,* 2022b), *C. sphamii* Q.C. Truong & V.S.Le (Truong *et al.,* 2022), *C. phuongchiana* Curry, V.H. Quach, T.T. Hoang & Q.C. Truong (Quach *et al.,* 2022a), *C. maianhii* Curry, V.D. Luong & N.D. Do (Nguyen, T. T. *et al.,* 2023), *C. hiepii* V.S. Dang, Vuong, V.C. Nguyen & V.D. Luong (Nguyen, T.L.T. *et al.,* 2023), *C. vanlangensis* V.D.Luong & V.T. Pham (Trinh, 2023), *C. hoabinhensis* V.D. Luong, Ninh & V.T. Pham (Quach *et al.,* 2024), *C. pyriformis* T.S. Hoang & T.N. Bon (Trinh *et al.,* 2024), *C. zijinica* M. Lin, Q.L. Ye & Q. Fan (Lin *et al.,* 2024), *C. shuangbaiensis* G.P. Yang & B.H. Wu (Li *et al.,* 2025) and *C. yangii* D. Wei Zhao (Zhao, 2025).

Camellia section *Bidoupia* Orel, Curry & Luu is a monotypic section that was first established by Orel *et al.,* (2012) based on single type species, *Camellia inusitata* Orel, Curry & Luu. Both the section and species are endemic to Vietnam. Orel *et al.,* (2012), working only from the type specimens, described the section as a small tree either completely branchless or with a few rudimentary branchlets along the trunk, bearing pedunculate flowers, solitary or geminate; with 5–6 sepals, a 3-locular ovary, and a 3-lobed style.. The two newly described species in this paper belong to this section and also exhibit these branchless in *Camellia lienthuongae* and few rudimentary branchlets in *Camellia danhducii* along the trunk. This shows that the branchless habit, emphasized in the original description, may not be a consistent or defining character for the section. Thus, the diagnostic characters of section *Bidoupia*, based on current evidences, can be summarized as follow pedunculate flowers, solitary or geminate; sepals 5–6;

ovary 3-locular; style 3-lobed.

According to Nguyen (2017), section *Bidoupia* was treated as synonym of section *Corallina* with type species is *Camellia corallina* (Gagnep.) Sealy. However, *Bidoupia* can be distinguished from *Corallina* by its habit of having nearly branchless tree trunk or very few branchlets (vs. well-branched tree with many lateral branches), number of sepals 5 to 6 (vs from 3 up to 7), style proximally fused (vs. 3 and free or 1 and 3-fid in section *Corallina*). These morphological differences are sufficient to justify the recognition of section *Bidoupia* as distinct from section *Corallina*. Despite some taxonomic treatments reducing *Bidoupia* to synonymy under *Corallina*, the suite of unique morphological traits, especially in habit and style structure, supports its continued recognition as a separate section. Further studies, including phylogenetic and anatomical analyses, will provide additional clarification and help solidify its infrageneric placement. In this study, we follow the treatment that recognizes *Bidoupia* and *Corallina* as two distinct sections. With the addition of the new species described here, the number of species in this section recorded in Vietnam has now increased to three.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The measurements and plant descriptions were primarily based on living specimens collected during fieldwork conducted in Center South of Vietnam. Additional data were obtained from herbarium specimens stored at DLU Herbarium (The Herbarium of Da Lat University, Lam Dong province). Digital herbarium specimens were also examined via platforms such as KEW, P-MNHN, *etc*. and related taxonomic references. The terminology for the morphological description follows Beentje (2016). Conservation assessment of the species was done following IUCN guidelines (IUCN Standards and Petitions Committee 2024).

TAXONOMIC TREATMENT

Camellia* sect. *Bidoupia Orel, Curry & Luu
Type species: *Camellia inusitata* Orel, Curry & Luu

Camellia danhducii V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen **sp. nov.** **Figs. 1-4**

Type: VIETNAM, Quang Nam province, Nong Son district, Phuoc Ninh commune, 6 February 2023, *Luong Van Dung, Nguyen Van Canh, Nguyen Danh Duc & Pham Vo Hien DL230205* (DLU00008052).

Small tree 4–5 m tall, twigs glabrous. **Leaves** glabrous, broadly elliptic to obovate, 14.5–18 cm long, 6.5–10 cm wide, very thick, coriaceous; apex acuminate, base obtuse to subrounded, margin sparsely and shallowly serrate; above dark green, shiny, below pale green with white glandular punctate; midrib and lateral veins sunken above, protruding below; secondary venation 5–6 pairs, pinnate; petiole slightly curved, 0.5–1 cm long, glabrous. **Flowers** pedunculate, 1–2 in the axils, nodding, 4–4.5 cm in diameter; pedicel green, glabrous, 0.5–0.9 cm long, stout and thickened upward. Bracteoles 3–4, orbicular to suborbicular, 1–1.6 mm long, 1.5–3.5 mm wide, glabrous, ciliate, deciduous. **Sepals** 5–6, broadly triangular to subglobose, 4–6 mm long, 3.5–7 mm wide; inner surface light yellow with green margin, glabrous, outer surface green, velutinous, ciliate, persistent. **Petals** 6–7, elliptic to broadly obovate, 2–3.5 cm long, 1.6–2.2 cm wide, glabrous; 3 outermost ones light yellow with purple striped at base, light green at apex; innermost 3–4, light yellow with purple stripes, petals basally connate 3–5 mm. **Androecium** not numerous, from 86 to 109 stamens, arranged in 4 circles, filaments 0.8–1.5 cm long, yellow, glabrous, outermost filament connate 2–3 mm at base; anthers dark yellow, dorsifixed. **Gynoecium** superior, ovary 3(4) locular, ovate, 2–2.5 mm long, 3–3.5 mm wide, glabrous; style 3 to 4, glabrous, free to the base, 1.1–1.4 cm long. Young fruit flattened-globose, 3 lobed, glabrous, sepals persistent.

Etymology: The species is named after Mr. Nguyen Danh Duc, who found and collected the specimens for this study.

Vernacular name: Trà Danh Đức

Phenology: Flowering occurs from January to February; young fruits are recorded in April.

Distribution and habitat: The species is only known from its type locality in Quang Nam province, Vietnam. Species was found in tropical evergreen broad-leaved forest on granite at elevation approximately 200 to 275 m a.s.l.

Conservation assessment: *Vulnerable (VU) B1ab(iii)+2ab(iii)*. The species is found in tropical evergreen broad-leaved forest at an elevation of 200 to 275 m a.s.l., where around 100 mature individuals and numerous seedlings have been observed within an area of approximately 50 hectares. The presence of abundant seedlings suggests ongoing natural regeneration. The extent of occurrence (EOO) and area of occupancy (AOO) are both estimated to be less than 10,000 km², but still above the thresholds for more threatened categories. The habitat is undisturbed, with no active logging or forest clearance currently taking place. Although the population is larger and the area of occupancy is greater than other species assessed, the species remains vulnerable due to its restricted range and the potential risks posed by future land-use changes. Based on its small range, limited distribution, and ongoing habitat stability, the species is assessed as *Vulnerable* under criteria B1ab(iii)+2ab(iii).

Paratype: VIETNAM, Quang Nam province, Nong Son district, Phuoc Ninh commune, 6 February 2023, *Luong Van Dung, Nguyen Van Canh, Nguyen Danh Duc & Pham Vo Hien, DL200206* (DLU00008053).

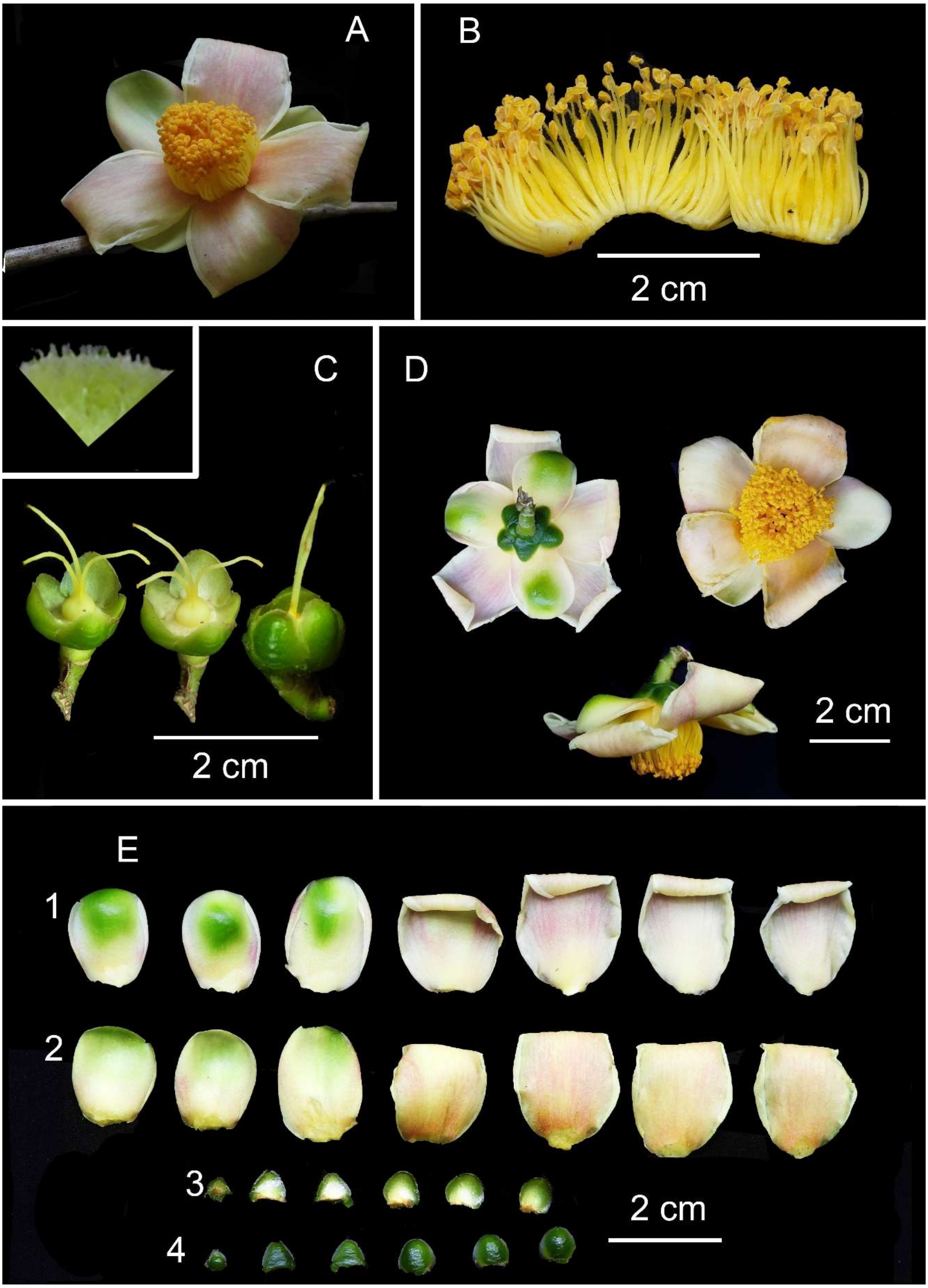

Fig. 1. ***Camellia danhducii*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen **A. & D.** Flower from different views, **B.** Androecium **C.** Gynoecium with sepals (small photo ciliate along the margin of sepals); **E.** Petals (1) Outer surface (2) inner surface, Sepals (3) Inner surface (4) Outer surface (Left to right the outermost to innermost) (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, corrected by Ba Vuong Truong from type specimen)

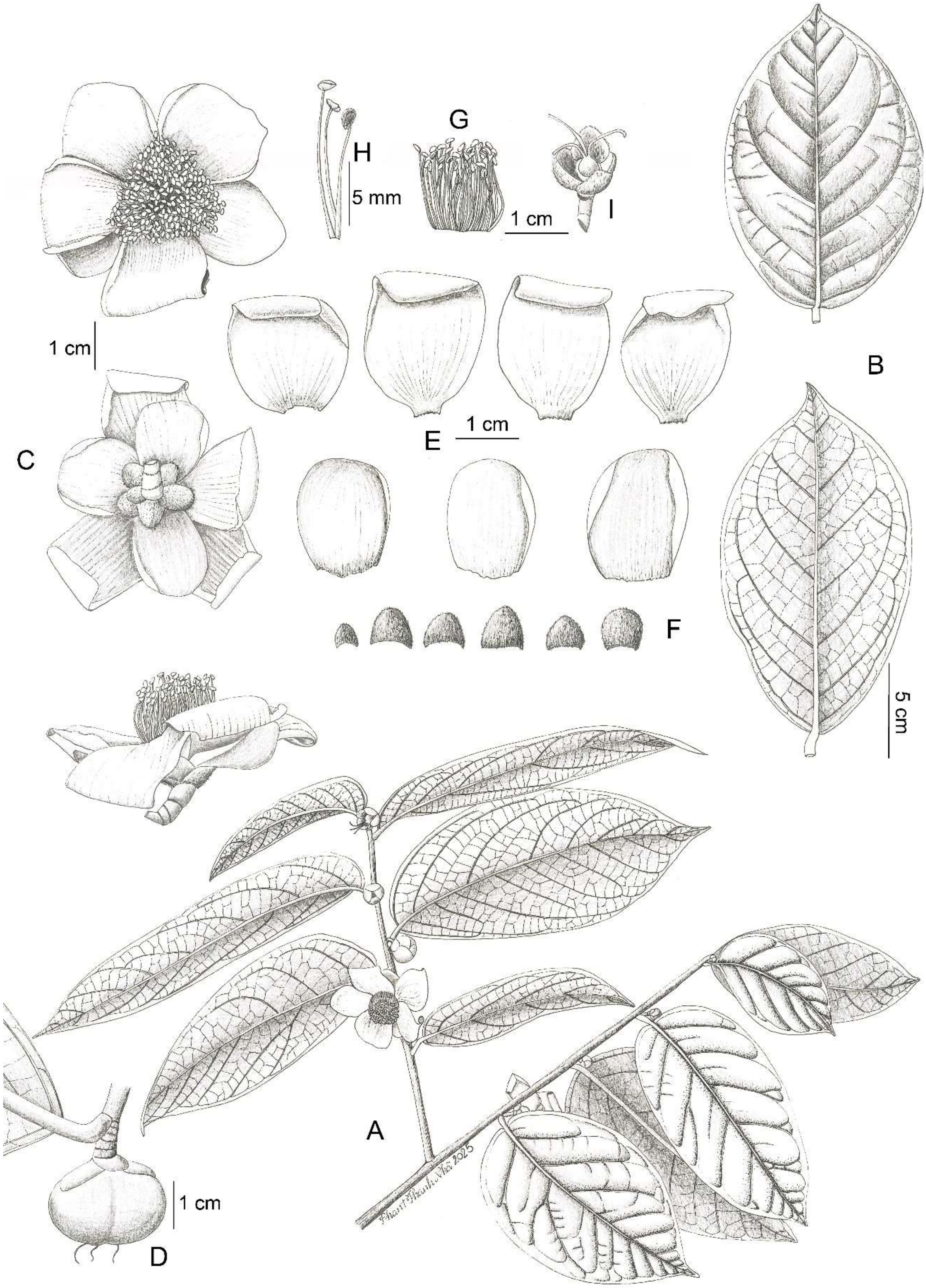

Fig. 2. ***Camellia danhducii*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen. **A.** Flowering plant; **B.** Leaf blade; **C.** Flower from different views; D. Fruit; **E.** Petals; **F.** Sepals; **G.** Androecium; **H.** Anther and filament; **I.** Gynoecium with sepals (Drawing by Thanh Nha Phan-Thi from type specimen)

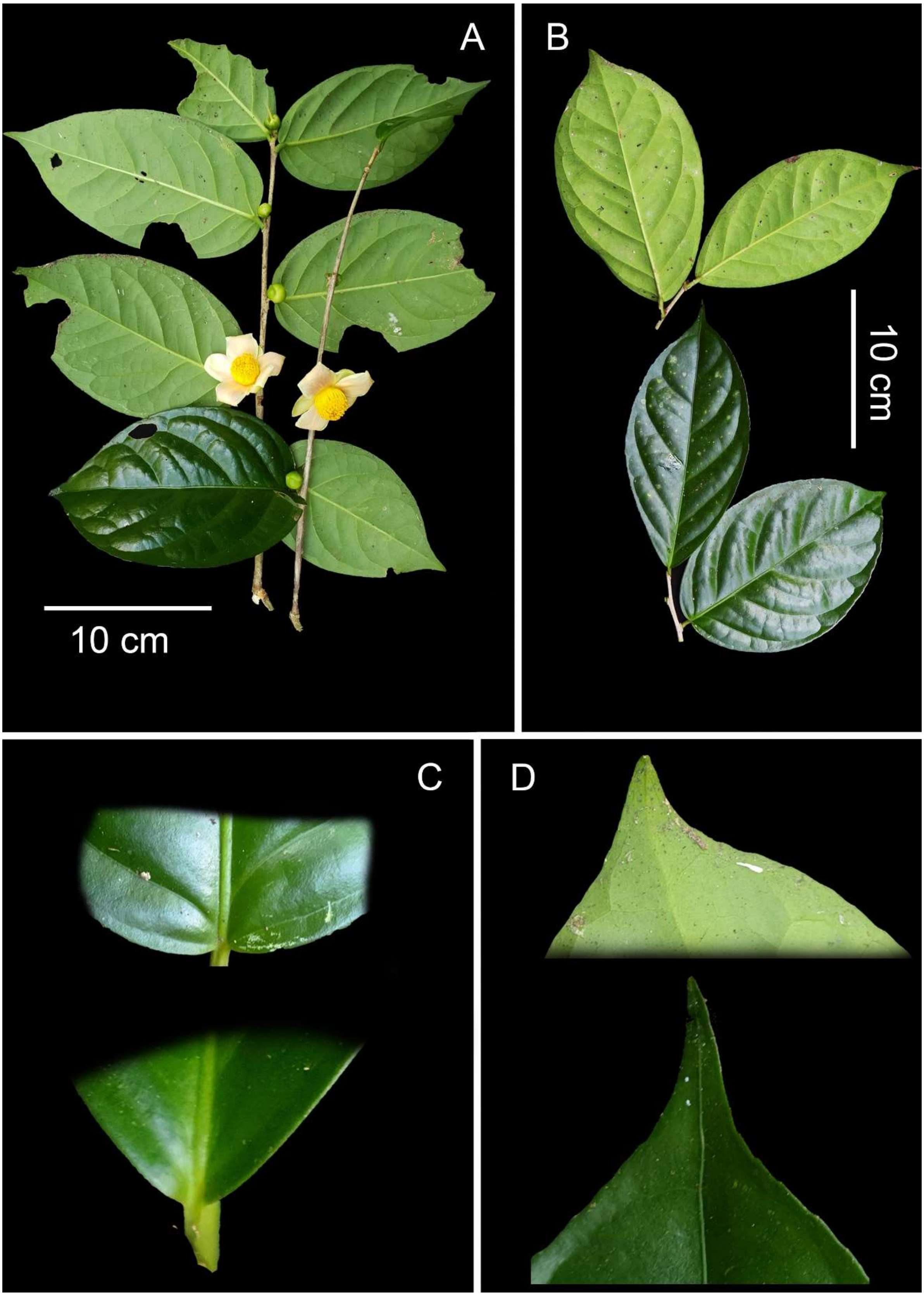

Fig. 3. ***Camellia danhducii*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen. **A.** Flowering plant; **B.** Leaves blade; **C.** Leaves base; **D.** Leave apex (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, designed by Ba Vuong Truong from type specimen)

Fig. 4. ***Camellia danhducii*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen **A to D.** Flower on stem from different views; **E & F.** Young fruit (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, designed by Ba Vuong Truong)

Table 1. The morphological comparisons of ***Camellia danhducii***, ***C. lienthuongae*** and ***C. inusitata***.

Characters	*C. danhducii*	*C. lienthuongae*	*C. inusitata*
Habit	Small tree 4–5 m high	Small treelet 2–3 m high	small to medium treelet to 3 m high
Leaf blade shape	broadly elliptic to obovate	elliptic to broadly elliptic	narrowly lanceolate to lanceolate
Leaf size	14.5–18 x 6.5–10 cm wide	18–27 x 10–14 cm	18 x 3–4(5) cm
Leaf apex	Acuminate to long acuminate	Acuminate	Acuminate
Leaf base	obtuse to subrounded	obtuse to subrounded	cordate to shallowly amplexicaul
Above leaf	glabrous	glabrous	glabrous
Below leaf	glabrous, white glandular punctate	glabrous	glabrous
Petiole	0.5–1 cm long, glabrous	1.0–1.8 cm long, glabrous	6–8(10) mm long, glabrous
Flower	1–2 in the axillary	1–2 in the axillary on older stems or terminal	1–2 in the axillary on older stems or the trunk, or sometimes terminal,
Flower diameter	4–4.5 cm	3.5–4.5 cm	2–2.6 cm
Pedicel	0.5–0.9 cm long, glabrous	0.5–0.8 cm long, glabrous	11–18 mm long, glabrous
Bracteole	3–4, glabrous, deciduous	3–5, glabrous, persistent	1–2(3), glabrous, persistent
Sepal	5–6, outer surface velutinous, persistent	5–6, glabrous, persistent	5, glabrous, persistent
Petal	6–7, glabrous	9–10, light pink, pubescent	5(6), yellow, glabrous
Stamen	4 circles, glabrous	glabrous	glabrous
Ovary	3–(4) locular, glabrous	3 locular, glabrous	3–carpellate, densely tomentose
Style	3–(4), free to the base, glabrous	3, free to the base, glabrous	3, proximally fused then free, finely pubescent proximally

Camellia lienthuongae V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen, ***sp. nov.*** **Figs. 5-8**

Type: VIETNAM, Quang Nam province, Nong Son district, Que Phuoc commune, 18 February 2023, *Luong Van Dung, Nguyen Van Canh & Pham Vo Hien DL230218* (DLU00008054).

Small treelet 2–3 m tall, trunk single, branchlets laterally compressed towards the apex, twigs glabrous. **Leaves** elliptic to broadly elliptic, glabrous, 18–27 cm long, 10–14 cm wide, very thick, coriaceous; apex acuminate, base obtuse to subrounded, margins sparsely serrate; above surface dark green, shiny, below pale green, young leaves deep blackish blue; midrib and lateral veins sunken above, protruding below; secondary venation 6–9 pairs, pinnate; petiole slightly curved, glabrous, 1.0–1.8 cm long. **Flowers** pedunculate, 1–2 in the axils of old stems or terminal, nodding, 3.5–4.5 cm in diameter; pedicel 0.5–0.8 cm long, stout, thickened upward, glabrous. Bracteoles 3–5, broadly triangular to orbicular, 1.5–3 mm long, 2–4 mm wide, glabrous, ciliate, persistent. **Sepals** 5–6, suborbicular to orbicular, 3.5–7 mm long, 4–9 mm wide, glabrous, inner surface light yellow with green margin, outer surface light green, ciliate, persistent. **Petals** 9–10, 4outermost petals subglobose to broadly obovate, 1–1.8 cm long, 1.2–1.7 cm wide; inner surface light pink–green, pubescent, outer surface bright green with light pink margin, pubescent at base; 5–6 innermost petals broadly obovate, pale pink, sometimes purple at base, 2.3–2.7 cm long, 1.8–2.5 cm wide, both surfaces pubescent, connate 2–5 mm at base. **Androecium** not numerous, from 92 to 117 stamens, arranged in 3 circles, filaments 0.8–1.4 cm long, light yellow, glabrous, outer filament connate 0.4–0.6 cm at base; anthers light yellow, dorsifixed. **Gynoecium** superior, ovary 3 locular, ovate, 2.5–3 mm long, 2–2.7 mm wide, glabrous; style 3, free to the base, 1–1.2 cm long, glabrous. Fruit not seen.

Etymology: The species is namedafter Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Thi Lien Thuong, Director of the Institute of Innovation in Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Food, Thu Dau Mot University, in recognition of her contributions for the development of tea industry in Viet Nam.

Vernacular name: Trà Liên Thương

Phenology: Flowering in January and February

Distribution and habitat: The species is only known from its type locality in Quang Nam province, Vietnam. It was found in tropical evergreen broad-leaved forest on granite at elevation approximately 300 m a.s.l.

Conservation assessment: *Endangered (EN) B1ab(iii)+2ab(iii)*. The species is known from a single locality in tropical evergreen broad-leaved forest at approximately 300 m a.s.l., where approximately 20–30 mature individuals and numerous seedlings were observed within an area of about 5 hectares. The population appears to be regenerating naturally, and the extent of occurrence (EOO) and area of occupancy (AOO) are both estimated to be less than 10 km². The habitat is well-protected, with no active logging or forest clearance currently taking place. Despite the stable habitat conditions, the species remains at risk due to its extremely limited range and small population size. The species is therefore assessed as *Endangered* under criteria B1ab(iii)+2ab(iii), based on its restricted distribution, small population, and potential vulnerability to future disturbances.

Note: Within section *Bidoupia*, *C. lienthuongae, C. danhducii*, and *C. inusitata* share several morphological features, branchless single trunk tree or with few rudimentary branchlets along the trunk, including glabrous young branches, glabrous stamens, a 3-locular ovary, and three free styles.

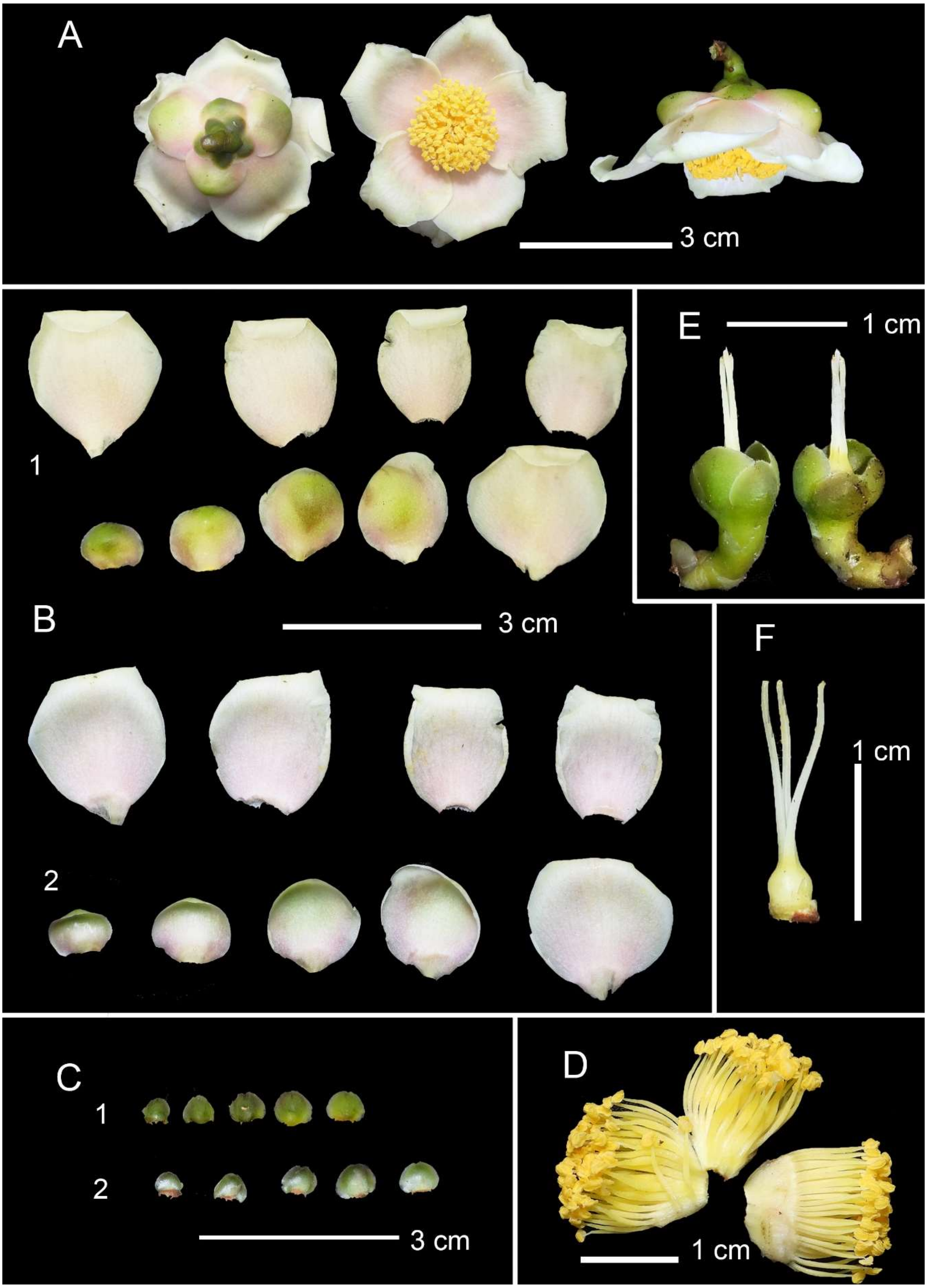

Fig 5. ***Camellia lienthuongae*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen. **A.** Flower from different views; **B.** Petals (1) Outer surface (2) Inner surface; **C.** Sepals (1) Outer surface; (2) Inner surface(Left to right the outermost to innermost); **D.** Androecium; **E.** Gynoecium with sepals; **F.** Gynoecium (sepal removed) (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, designed by Ba Vuong Truong from type specimen)

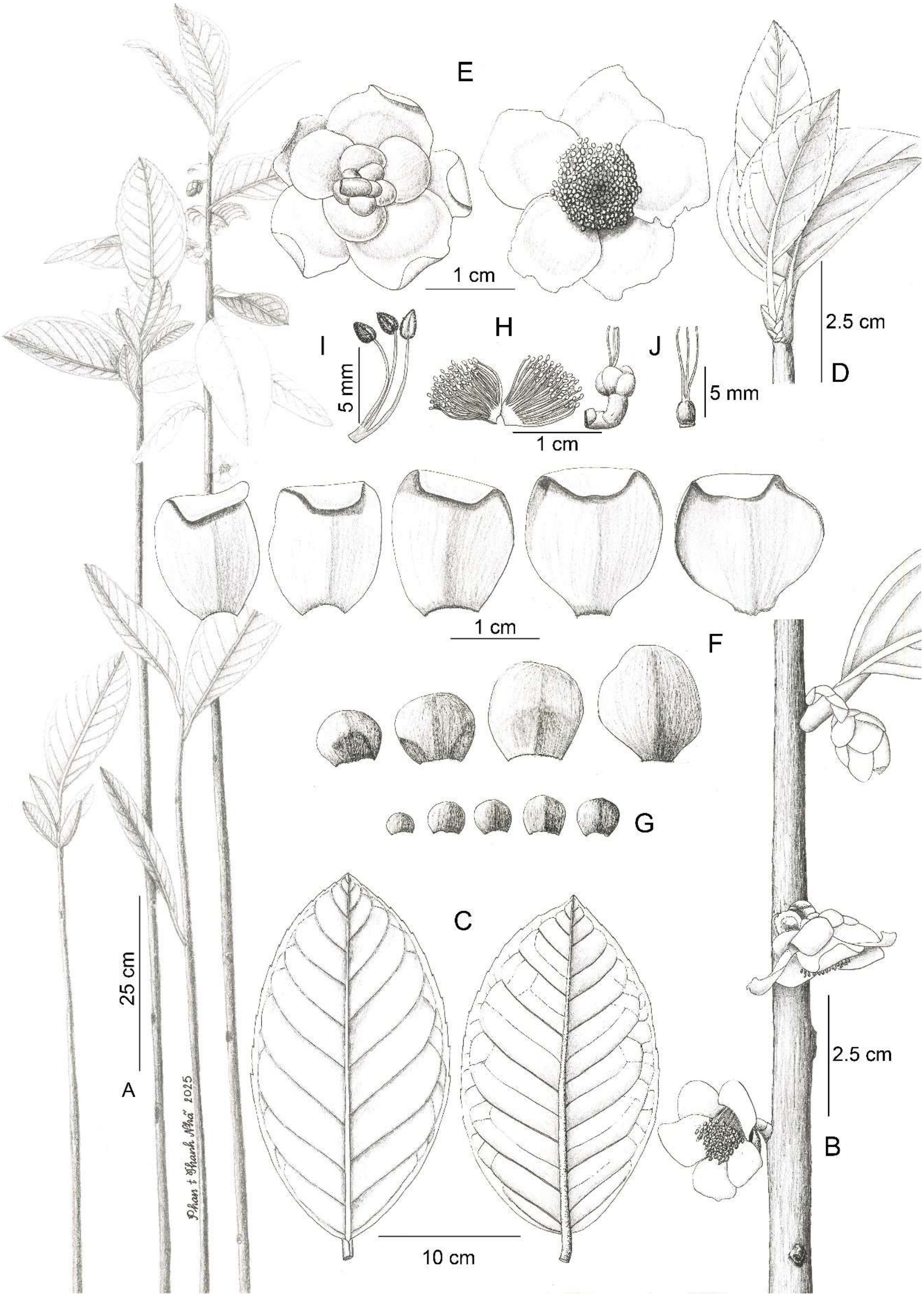

Fig. 6. ***Camellia lienthuongae*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen **A& B.** Mature stems with flowers; **C.** Leaf blade; **D.** Young leaves on upper most of stem; **E.** Flower from different views; **F.** Sepals; **G.** Petals; **H.** Androecium; **I.** Anther and filament; **J.** Gynoecium with sepals (left), sepals removed (right) (Drawing by Thanh Nha Phan-Thi from type specimen)

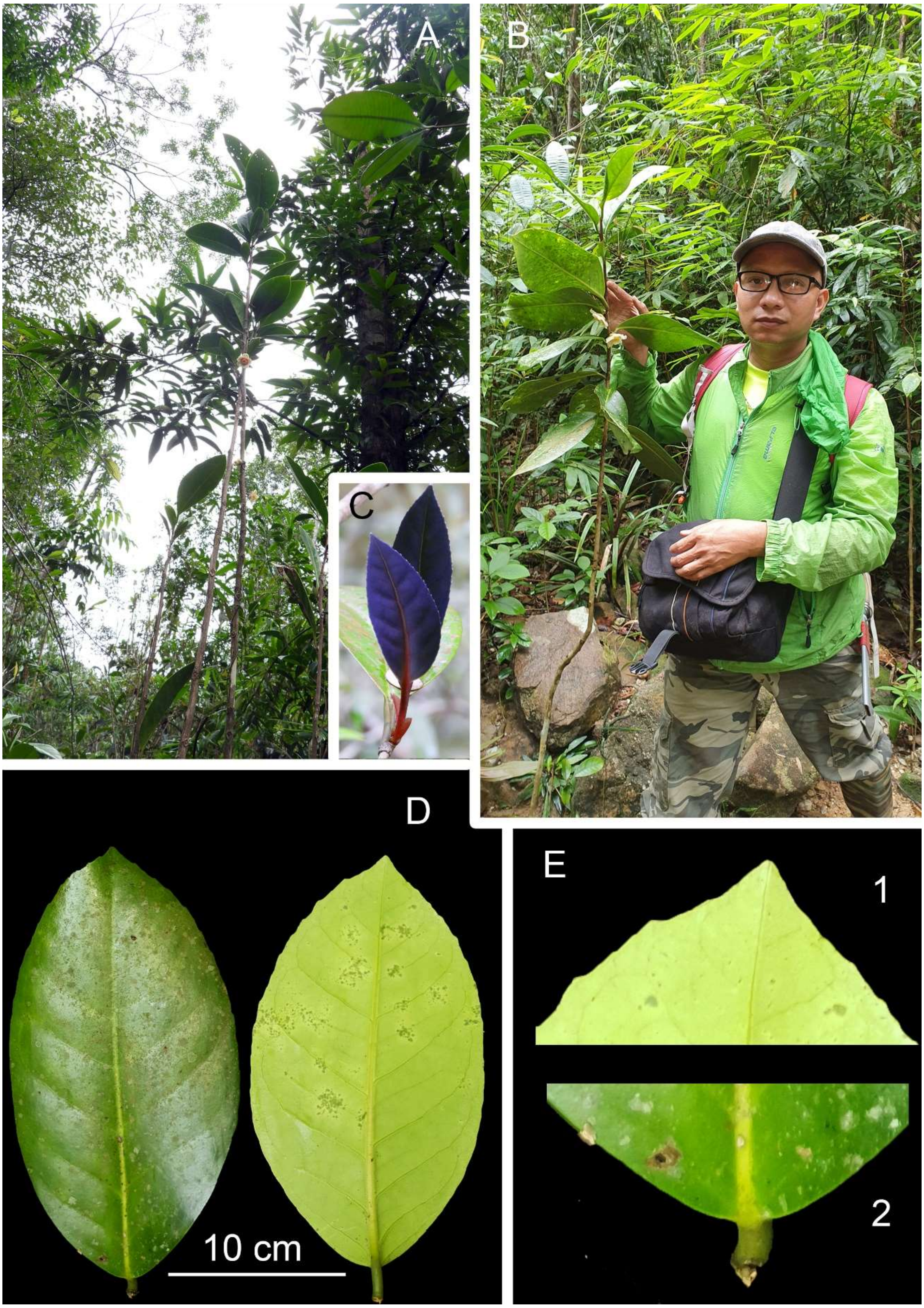

Fig. 7. ***Camellia lienthuongae*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen. **A.** Flowering plant branchless; **B.** Flowering plant more or less branchless to the upper most of the plant; **C.** Young leaves; **D.** Leaves blade; **E.** Leaves (1) apex (2) base. (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, designed by Ba Vuong Truong from type specimen)

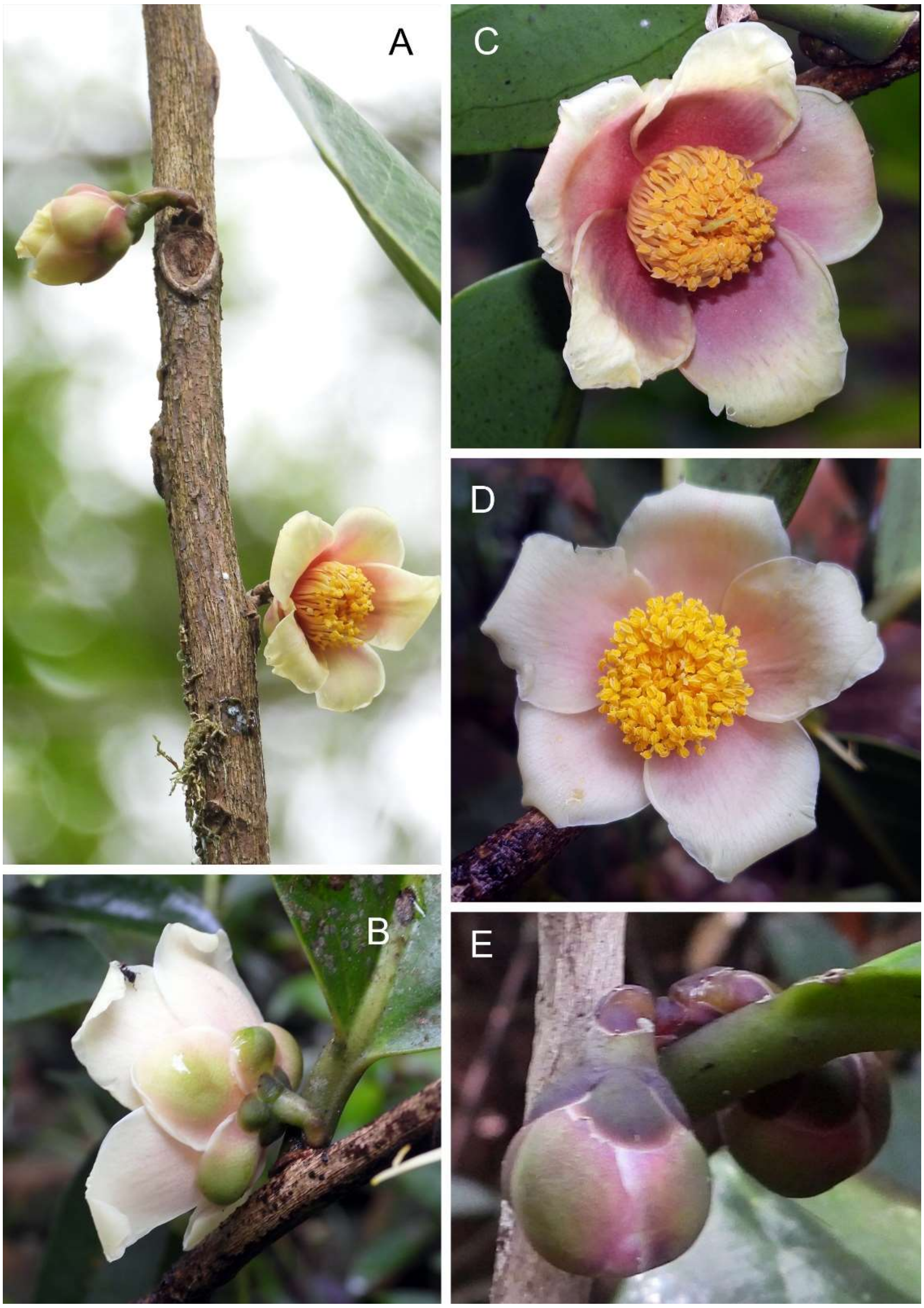

Fig. 8. ***Camellia lienthuongae*** V.D. Luong, Vuong & V.C. Nguyen. **A.** Stem with flowers; **B-D.** Flower on stem from different views; **E.** Flower buds (Photo by Van Canh Nguyen, designed by Ba Vuong Truong)

However, they differ in the following characters: **Habit**: *C. lienthuongae* and *C. inusitata* are small, branchless treelets; *C. danhducii* is a small tree with branching. **Leaf undersurface**: Smooth in *C. lienthuongae* and *C. inusitata*; white glandular-punctate in *C. danhducii*. **Bracteoles**: Persistent in *C. lienthuongae* and *C. inusitata*; deciduous in *C. danhducii.* **Sepals**: Glabrous in *C. lienthuongae* and *C. inusitata*; velutinous on the outer surface in *C. danhducii*. **Petals**: Glabrous in *C. inusitata* and *C. danhducii*; pubescent in *C. lienthuongae*. **Ovary indumentum**: Glabrous in *C. lienthuongae* and *C. danhducii*; densely tomentose in *C. inusitata*. **Style indumentum**: Glabrous in *C. lienthuongae* and *C. danhducii*; finely pubescent proximally in *C. inusitata*. The detailed comparisons of similar species are presented in **Table 1.**

Paratype: VIETNAM, Quang Nam province, Nong Son district, Que Phuoc commune, 18 February 2023, *Luong Van Dung, Nguyen Van Canh & Pham Vo Hien DL230219* (DLU00008055).

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