Taiwania 71(4): 744–752, **2026**
DOI: 10.6165/tai.2026.71.744

Two new species, *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* and *S. purpurifolia* (Melastomataceae, Sonerileae), from the Central Highlands of Vietnam

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(Manuscript received 21 May 2026; Accepted 15 October 2026; Online published 22 October 2026)

ABSTRACT: Vietnam is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, with high levels of plant endemism shaped by diverse geological formations, complex terrain, and extensive habitat heterogeneity. Ongoing botanical exploration in the country has led to the discovery of two new species, *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* and *S. purpurifolia*, which are described and illustrated here. Both species resemble *S. namii*, but can be clearly distinguished from it by several characters. *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* differs in having stems covered with white villous-hirsute trichomes, somewhat glossy leaf blades, suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate venation, petals up to 13 mm long, and a style13–15 mm long. *Sonerila purpurifolia* differs from *S. namii* in having stems densely covered with villous-hirsute trichomes, petals 7–9 × 2–3 mm, and narrowly ovate anthers *ca*. 2 mm long. Data on distribution, ecology, phenology, and conservation status are provided for both described species.

KEY WORDS: Endemism, flora of Vietnam, Melastomataceae, plant taxonomy, *Sonerila namii*, tribe Sonerileae.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is recognized as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots (Myers, 1988, 1990). The Central Highlands, including a series of contiguous plateaus, represent a potential center of diversity for the family Melastomataceae in southern Vietnam. Although our current knowledge of the local Melastomataceae remains limited, extensive fieldwork suggests that certain genera exhibit exceptionally high diversity in this region, particularly *Sonerila* Roxb. (Roxburgh, 1820). Comprising over 200 species (Nguyen *et al*., 2026), the genus is widely distributed across tropical and subtropical regions from Indo-Malaya and China to northern Oceania (Liu *et al*., 2022). Many species show high localized endemism and narrow geographical ranges. Members of *Sonerila* are recognized by 3-merous flowers, anthers with 1 or 2 apical pores, and stamens lacking a distinct connective (Renner *et al*., 2001; Chen and Renner, 2007). Most species in the genus are small herbs or subshrubs with high morphological variation, making fine details, particularly indumentum types, critical for identifying species (Sae Wai and Hu, 2023). Recent studies have revealed a high level of endemism among *Sonerila* species in Thailand (Sae Wai and Hu, 2023), highlighting the strong potential for significant species diversity within this genus in the Indochina region, especially in Vietnam (Nguyen *et al*., 2024a,b, 2025, 2026; Dinh *et al*., 2026; Hsu *et al*., 2026).

During fieldwork in the Central Highlands conducted in 2025 and 2026, we discovered two unusual species of *Sonerila*. These species share several morphological similarities with *S. namii* C.H.Nguyen, Aver. & C.W.Lin (Nguyen *et al*., 2026), including their dense indumentum with gland-tipped trichomes. However, these three species differ markedly in several morphological characters. After examination of the relevant literature and herbarium material, we conclude that the two taxa discovered represent species new to science and are herein described and illustrated as *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* and *S. purpurifolia*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Species descriptions and morphological analyses of the new species were based on field studies conducted in 2025 and 2026 as well as examination of type specimens deposited in the LE and VNM herbaria. More than five field surveys in the Central Highlands revealed only a few populations of each species, though each population comprises over 100 mature or near-mature individuals. Morphological terminology follows Beentje (2016). Conservation status was assessed according to the Guidelines for the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, Version 16 (IUCN Standards and Petitions Committee, 2024).

TAXONOMIC TREATMENT

Sonerila ngoclinhensis V.C.Nguyen, Vuong, Aver. & C.W.Lin, ***sp. nov.*** **Figs. 1, 2**

Type: VIETNAM. Kon Tum Province, Tu Ma Rong District, forest near Ngoc Linh Mountain, around point 15°00'N 107°51'E, 20 September 2025, *Nguyen Van Canh, Nguyen Van Khuong, Truong Ba Vuong, BV 1999* (holotype VNM VNM00075809!; isotype VNM VNM00075489!).

Diagnosis: *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* resembles *S. namii* in its ovate, hairy leaves, petals bearing gland-tipped hispid trichomes abaxially, and lanceolate anthers. It can, however, be distinguished by stems covered with white villous-hirsute trichomes (*vs*. trichomes golden-brown to maroon, hispid or hispid-hirsute), leaf blade with a somewhat glossy adaxial surface (*vs*. subvelutinous) and suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate venation (*vs*. pinnate), petals oblong-obovate, 10–13 × 6–7.5 mm (*vs*. 13–23 × 4–7 mm), and style 13–15 mm long (*vs*. 20 mm).

Description: Terrestrial or lithophytic, perennial caulescent herbs. **Stems** creeping with the distal part suberect to ascending, unbranched or rarely few-branched, dusky pinkish-brown to pale green with pink tint, terete, 5–10(15) cm tall, internodes 0.5–1.5(2.5) cm long, 3.5–5 mm in diameter, villous-hirsute with white trichomes 1–2 mm long, mixed with minute, semi-transparent glandular trichomes less than 0.1 mm long (visible under magnification). **Leaves** 6–8; opposite, petiolate, decussate, isomorphic, equal or slightly unequal in size within each pair, held horizontally; petiole subterete, grooved above, light green, up to 5 cm long, becoming shorter (less than 1 cm) in the apical part of stem, 1.8–2.3 mm in diameter, densely villous-hirsute with white trichomes up to 1.5 mm long mixed with minute, semi-transparent glandular trichomes; leaf lamina thick chartaceous, symmetrical, rarely slightly asymmetrical, ovate to broadly ovate, (1.8)3.5–9.5 × (1.1)2–6 cm, at the base deeply cordate, margin denticulate-serrulate, with each tooth tipped by a hirsute-puberulous trichome 0.5−1 mm long, apex acute to shortly acuminate; adaxially emerald green, somewhat glossy, densely hirsute-puberulous with white trichomes; abaxially pale green, moderately sparsely puberulous-hirsute, more densely so along the primary veins; venation suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate, with 3–5 major lateral veins on either side of median vein; all veins grooved on adaxial side and prominent on abaxial surface; leaves become smaller from the base to the apex of stem. **Bracts** minute, inconspicuous, triangular to narrowly triangular, up to 1 mm long. **Inflorescence** terminal, simple scorpioid cyme, erect, 2–6(11)-flowered; peduncles quadrangular with 4 narrow wings, 1.7–4.5 cm long, pale green, villous-hirsute or puberulous-villous with white trichomes mixed with minute, semitransparent glandular trichomes. **Flowers** 3-merous; pedicels pale green, obtusely hexagonal in cross section, 3–4 mm long, with indumentum similar to the peduncle. **Hypanthium** cylindrical-obconoid or narrowly campanulate, pale green with red tint, 5–6 mm long, 2.5–3 mm in diameter, triangular in cross section, obscurely 6-ribbed, villous-hirsute or puberulous-villous with white trichomes mixed with minute, semi-transparent glandular trichomes; part of hypanthium free from ovary 3–3.5 mm long. **Calyx lobes** 3, light green, broadly triangular, keeled, 1.3–1.5 × 2.5–2.8 mm, connate into a torus, each lobe with an acute, narrowly triangular external tooth (≤ 1 mm long), hirsute-puberulous. **Petals** 3, pink, oblong-obovate, slightly oblique, 10–13 × 6–7.5 mm, median vein abaxially with gland-tipped hispid trichomes, margin entire, apex acuminate. **Stamens** 3, isomorphic, glabrous; filaments rosy-pink to magenta, slightly flattened, 6–8 mm long; anther golden-yellow, lanceolate, apex acuminate to rostrate, curved ventrally, 7–8 mm long, deeply cordate at base, with two pores at apex. **Ovary** *ca*. 3 mm long, 3-locular; ovary crown *ca*. 1 mm high, pink to magenta, margin repand-denticulate; ovules numerous. **Style** filiform, dark rosy-pink, 13–15 mm long; stigma obscurely capitate, often laterally positioned. **Fruit** cupuliform capsule, *ca*. 5.5 × 3 mm.

Distribution and ecology: The species grows both lithophytically on granite rocks and terrestrially on steep slopes along trails in broad-leaved forests mixed with conifers, at an elevation of about 1,500 m a.s.l. Flowers in September.

Etymology: The specific epithet refers to Ngọc Linh Mountain where the new species was discovered.

Proposed IUCN conservation status: The new species was found growing both lithophytically and terrestrially in generally intact forest. It appears to be locally common within an area of approximately 10 ha, where both fruiting individuals and seedlings were observed, indicating successful natural regeneration. The habitat currently shows relatively little disturbance, with no obvious evidence of extensive logging or major habitat degradation. However, the species is presently known from only a single locality, and available information remains insufficient to accurately assess its distribution range, population size, population trends, and potential threats under the Guidelines of IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, Version 16 (IUCN Standards and Petitions Committee, 2024). Therefore, the conservation status of the species is here provisionally assessed as Data Deficient (DD).

Note: Morphologically, *Sonerila ngoclinhensis* is most similar to *S. namii*, but differs in having stems covered with white villous-hirsute trichomes (*vs*. trichomes golden-brown to maroon, hispid or hispid-hirsute), leaf blade somewhat glossy adaxially (*vs*. subvelutinous), suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate venation (*vs*. pinnate), petals up to 13 mm long (*vs*. 23 mm), and up to 15 mm long (*vs*. 20 mm). The new species

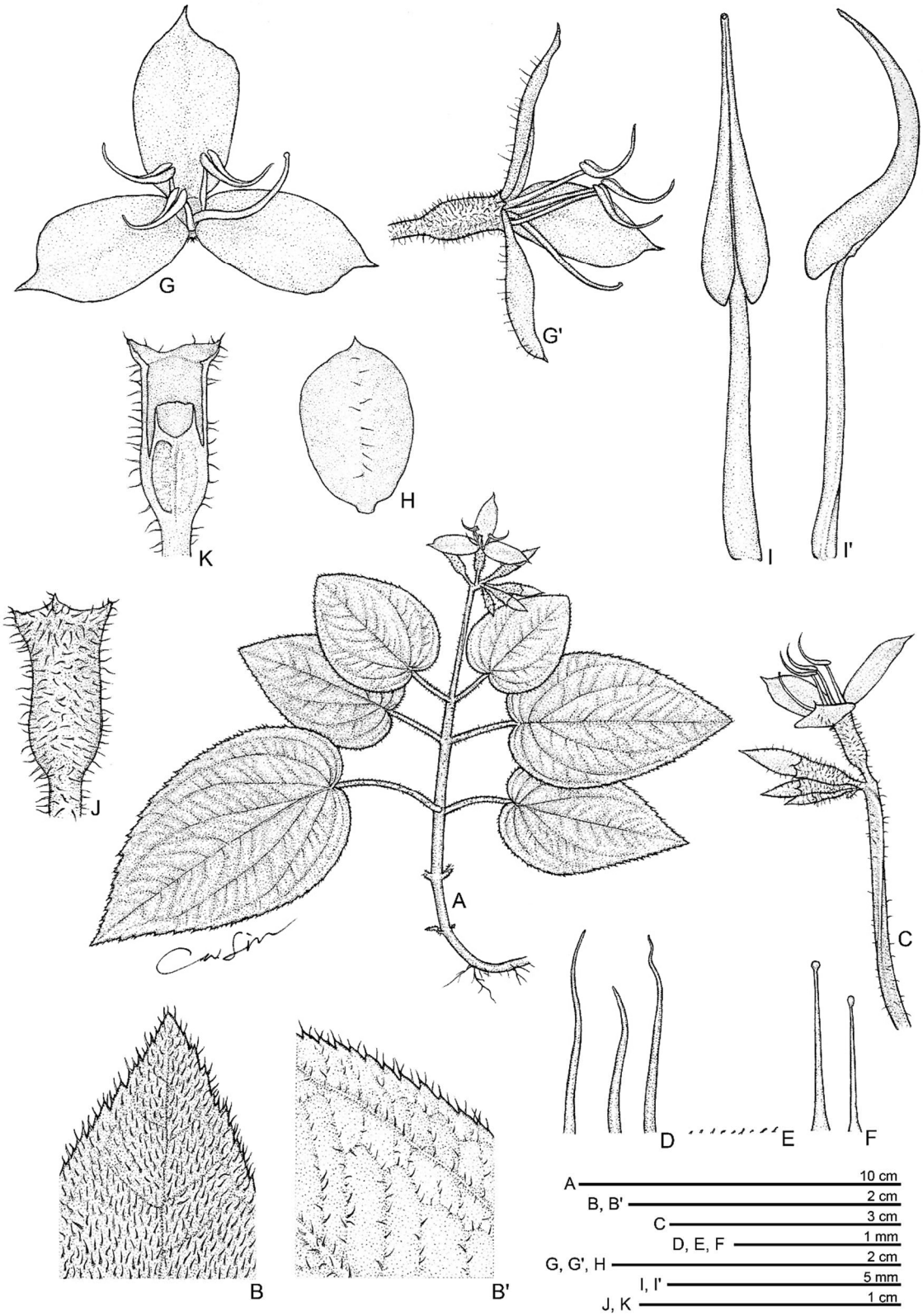

Fig. 1. ***Sonerila ngoclinhensis***. **A**. Plant habit. **B, B'**. Portions of a leaf, adaxial and abaxial surfaces. **C**. Inflorescence. **D–F**. Indumentum of vegetative and reproductive structures, (**D**) Villous-hirsute or hirsute-puberulous indumentum on stem, leaf, pedicel, and calyx, (**E**) Minute glandular trichomes on vegetative parts, (**F**) Gland-tipped hispid trichomes on abaxial side of petal. **G, G'**. Flower, front and side views. **H**. Petal, abaxial surface. **I, I'**. Stamens, front and side views. **J**. Hypanthium. **K**. Sagittal section of hypanthium and ovary. Drawing by Che-Wei Lin from the type specimen.

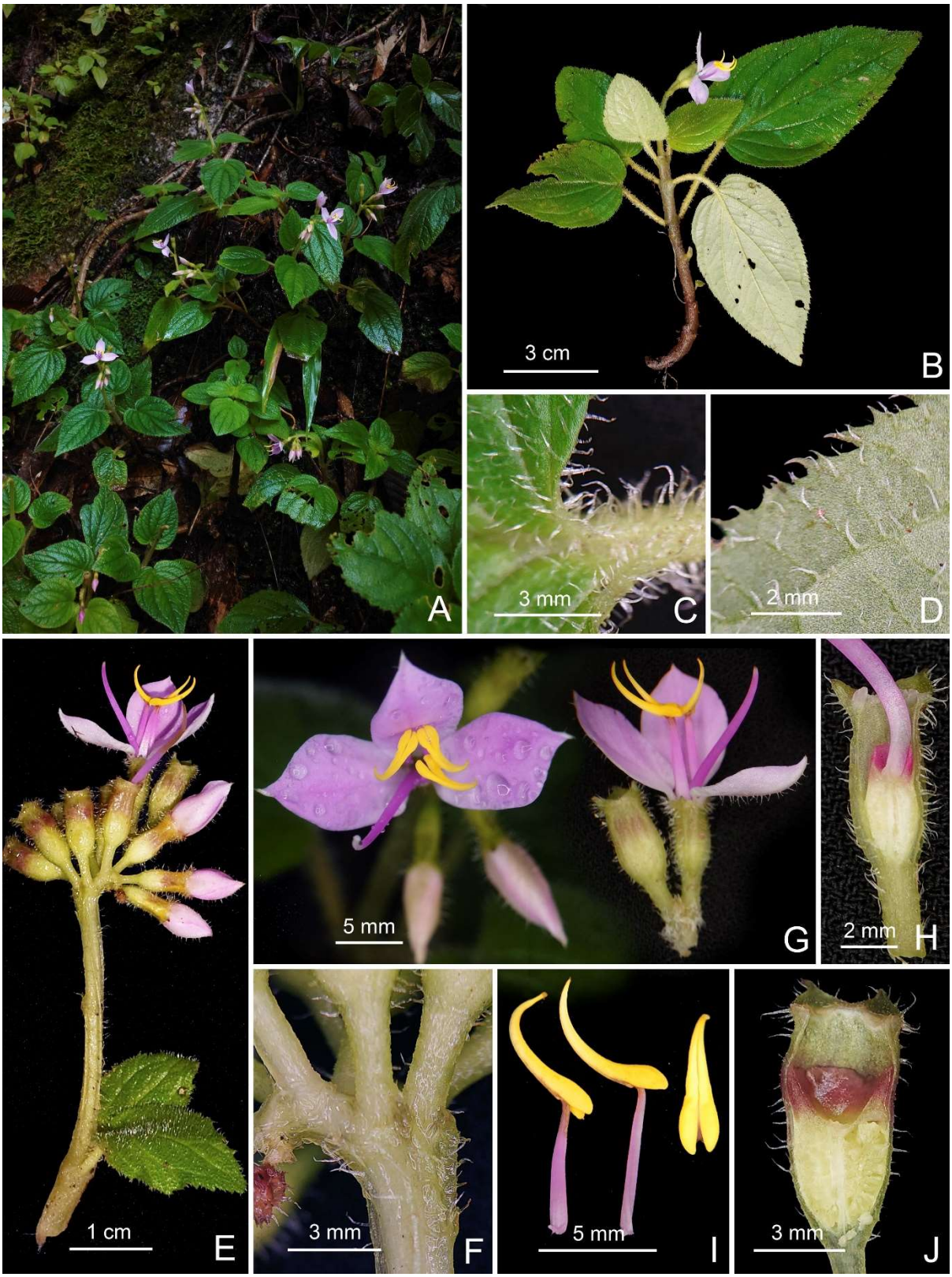

Fig. 2. ***Sonerila ngoclinhensis***. **A.** Flowering plant in natural habitat. **B.** Plant habit. **C.** Portions of petiole and leaf, adaxial surface. **D.** Portion of leaf, abaxial surface. **E.** Inflorescence. **F.** Base of scorpioid cyme, showing winged peduncles. **G.** Flowers, front and side views. **H.** Sagittal section of hypanthium and ovary. **I.** Stamens. **J.** Sagittal section of immature capsule. All photographs were taken by Van Canh Nguyen in nature from plants used for the preparation of the type specimens.

Table 1. Comparison of ***Sonerila ngoclinhensis***, ***S. purpurifolia***, ***S. yunnanensis***, ***S. namii***, and ***S. reptans***.

	S. ngoclinhensis	*S. purpurifolia*	*S. yunnanensis**	*S. namii*	*S. reptans*
Stem					
indumentum	white villous-hirsute	white to magenta villous-hirsute	white or pink hirsute or villous-hirsute	golden-brown to maroon hispid or hispid-hirsute	woolly
Leaf					
adaxial texture	glossy	subvelutinous	subvelutinous	subvelutinous	unavailable
adaxial indumentum	hirsute-puberulous	hirsute-strigose	villous-hirsute	hirsute or gland-tipped hirsute	pubescent
venation	suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate	pinnate	pinnate	pinnate	suprabasal acrodromous or occasionally subpinnate
margin	denticulate-serrulate	denticulate	denticulate	serrulate	shallowly serrulate
Flower					
hypanthium indumentum	villous-hirsute or puberulous-villous	gland-tipped hispid	gland-tipped hispid	hispid or gland-tipped hispid	woolly
peduncle shape	quadrangular with 4 narrow wings	quadrangular or obtusely quadrangular	quadrangular with 4 narrow wings	terete	terete
petal size (mm)	10–13 × 6–7.5	7–9 × 2–3	7–12 × 3–4	13–23 × 4–7	9–12 × 4.5–5
anther shape	lanceolate	narrowly ovoid	lanceolate	lanceolate	lanceolate
anther length (mm)	7–8	*ca*. 2	5–7	7–10	6–7
anther color	yellow	yellow	yellow proximally, pale purple to light grayish distally	yellow	yellow
style length (mm)	13–15	7–8	7–12	up to 20	17–19
Distribution	South Vietnam	South Vietnam	Southwest China to northern Indochina	South Vietnam	North Thailand

* Based on the examination of type specimens and high-resolution photographs of conspecific specimens deposited in BM, E, GXMG, HITBC, IBK, K, KUN, MO, NY, and PE.

also shows notable resemblance to material traditionally identified as *S. yunnanensis* Jeffrey ex W.W.Sm. (Smith, 1914), but *S. ngoclinhensis* can be distinguished by its terete stems (*vs*. quadrangular), suprabasal acrodromous or subpinnate venation (*vs*. pinnate), hypanthium covered with villous-hirsute or puberulous-villous trichomes (*vs*. gland-tipped hispid trichomes), yellow anthers (*vs*. bicolorous), and distinct geographical distribution (South Vietnam *vs*. Southwest China to North Vietnam). Additionally, it resembles *S. reptans* J.Wai & J.M.Hu (Sae Wai and Hu, 2023) from Thailand, but differs in its ovate to broadly ovate leaves (*vs*. elliptic or elliptic-ovate) with a deeply cordate base (*vs*. rounded, obtuse, or shallowly cordate), 3–5 pairs of secondary veins (*vs*. 2 or 3 pairs), a quadrangular peduncle with four narrow wings (*vs*. terete), and a dark rosy-pink style 13–15 mm long (*vs*. white, 17–19 mm). A detailed diagnostic comparison among *S. ngoclinhensis* and its morphologically similar allies is presented in Table 1.

Sonerila purpurifolia Aver., Vuong, Bao, V.C.Nguyen & C.W.Lin, ***sp. nov.*** **Figs. 3, 4**

Type: VIETNAM. Gia Lai Province, K'Bang District, secondary evergreen broad-leaved dry forest and remnants of primary evergreen broad-leaved dry forest with *Dacrydium* on lava rocks (red soils) at an elevation of about 1000 m a.s.l., around point 14°22'N 108°31'E, 6 April 2026, *L. Averyanov, Nguyen Van Canh, Truong Ba Vuong, Nguyen Quoc Bao, T. Maisak, AL4782* (holotype LE LE01317778!; isotypes VNM VNM00075846!, VNM00075847!, VNM00075848!). Photographs of the plant used for the preparation of the type specimens (LE LE01360001 https://en.herbariumle.ru/?t=occ&id=278297).

Diagnosis: *Sonerila purpurifolia* resembles *S. namii* in its ovate, hairy leaves with pinnate venation, a subvelutinous adaxial surface, and petals bearing gland-tipped hispid trichomes abaxially. However, the new species differs from the latter in having a stem covered with white villous-hirsute indumentum (*vs*. golden-brown to maroon hispid or hispid-hirsute), leaves densely hirsute-strigose adaxially (*vs*. moderately to sparsely hirsute or gland-tipped hirsute), margins denticulate (*vs*. serrulate), petals 7–9 × 2–3 mm (*vs*. 13–23 × 4–7 mm), and narrowly ovate anthers *ca*. 2 mm long (*vs*. lanceolate, 7–10 mm long).

Description: Terrestrial, perennial, caulescent herbs. **Stems** ascending to suberect, few- to many-branched; stem dusky pinkish-brown to crimson, terete, 3–7(12) cm tall, internodes (0.5)1–1.5 cm long, 1.5–3.5 mm in diameter, moderately to densely villous-hirsute with white to magenta trichomes 0.5–3 mm long mixed with minute, semi-transparent, brown, glandular trichomes *ca*. 0.05 mm long (visible under magnification). **Leaves** 8 to numerous; opposite, petiolate, decussate, isomorphic, equal or subequal in each pair, held horizontally; petiole subterete, grooved above, vinaceous to greyish-red, up to

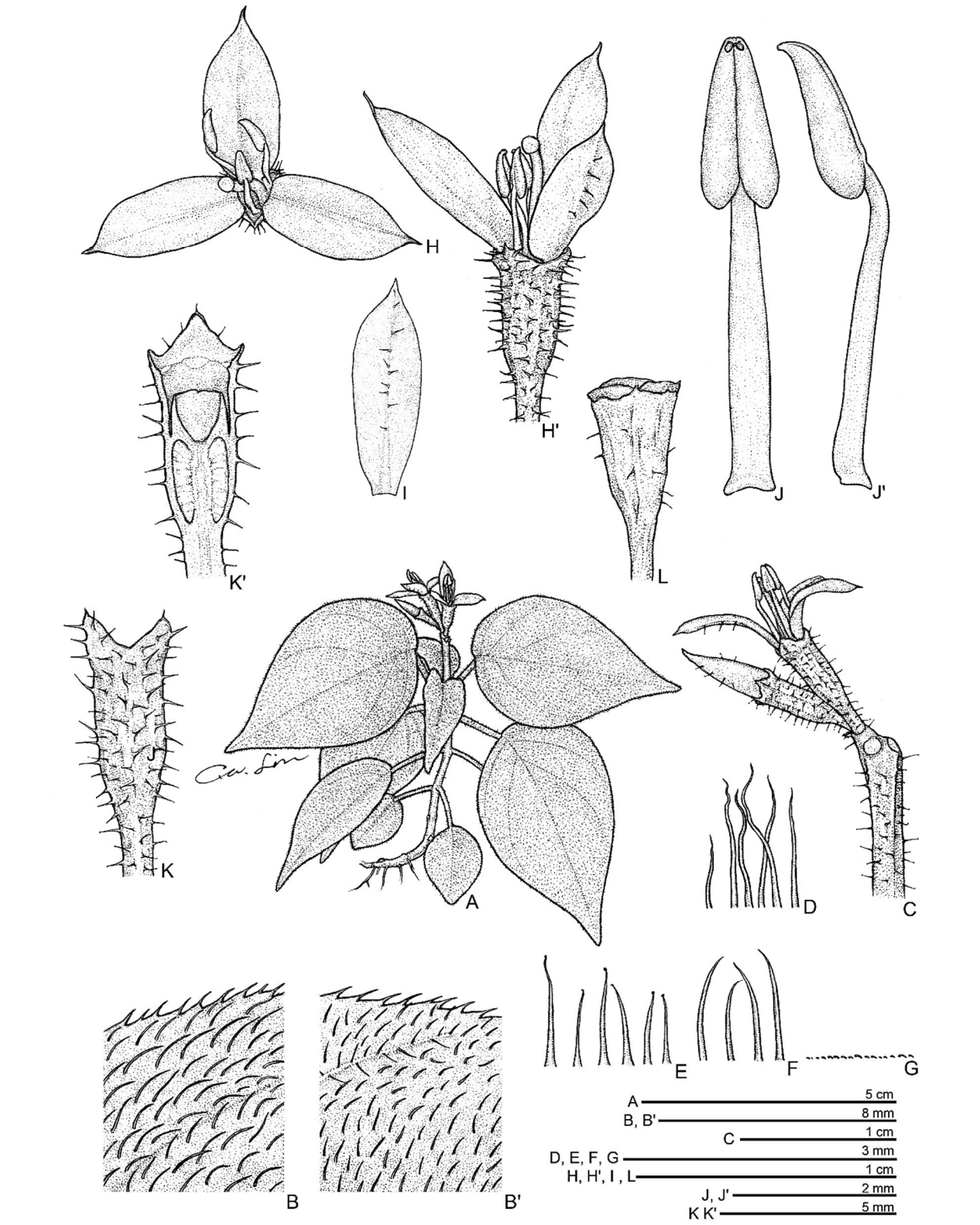

Fig. 3. ***Sonerila purpurifolia***. **A**. Plant habit. **B, B'**. Portions of leaf, adaxial and abaxial surfaces. **C**. Inflorescence. **D–G**. Indumentum of vegetative and reproductive structures, (**D**) Villous-hirsute indumentum on stem and petioles, (**E**) Gland-tipped hispid trichomes on petal and hypanthium, abaxial surface, (**F**) Hirsute-strigose trichomes on leaves, (**G**) Minute glandular trichomes on vegetative parts. **H, H'**. Flower, front and side views. **I**. Petal, abaxial surface. **J, J'**. Stamens, front and side views. **K**. Hypanthium. **K'**. Sagittal section of hypanthium and ovary. **L**. Old capsule. Drawing by Che-Wei Lin from the type specimen.

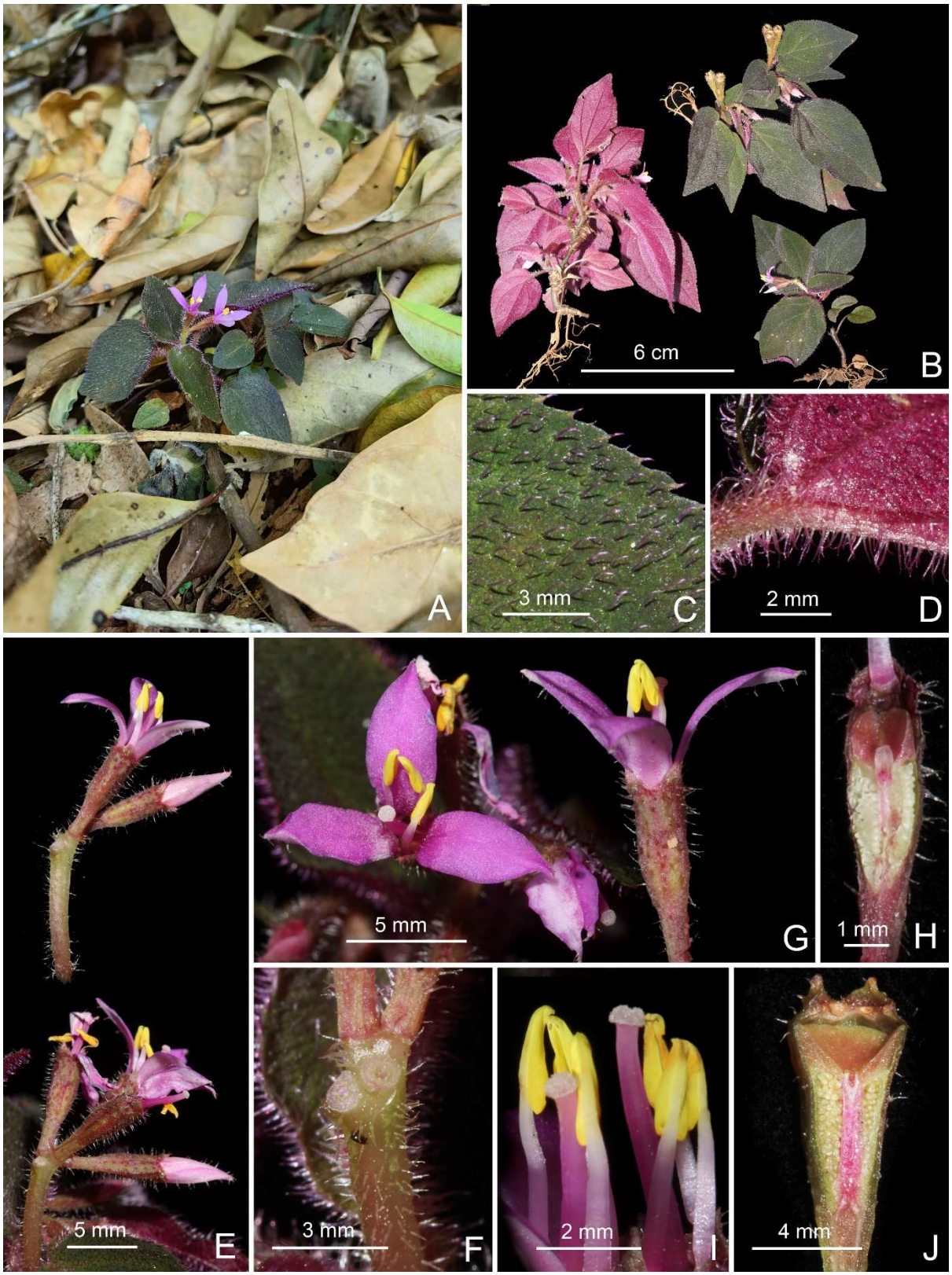

Fig. 4. ***Sonerila purpurifolia***. **A**. Flowering plant in natural habitat. **B**. Plant habit. **C, D**. Portions of leaf, adaxial (**C**) and abaxial (**D**) surfaces. **E**. Inflorescences. **F**. Base of scorpioid cyme. **G**. Flowers, front and side views. **H**. Sagittal section of hypanthium and ovary. **I**. Stamens, styles, and stigmas. **J**. Sagittal section of immature capsule. Photos made by Van Canh Nguyen (A) and Ba Vuong Truong (B–J) in the nature from plants used for the preparation of the type specimens.

2.5 cm long, becoming shorter (less than 0.7 cm) toward the stem apex, 1–2 mm in diameter, densely villous-hirsute or hirsute with white to magenta trichomes up to 2.5 mm long mixed with minute, semi-transparent, brown, glandular trichomes; leaf lamina chartaceous, symmetrical or subsymmetrical, ovate to broadly ovate, 2.8–5.5 × 1.7–3.3 cm, rounded at the base, margin denticulate, with each tooth tipped by a hirsute-strigose trichome 0.5–1.2 mm long, apex obtuse to acuminate; adaxially dark malachite green to green with purple tint, densely hirsute-strigose with pink to magenta trichomes slightly curved toward the apex of the lamina; abaxially purplish-red, subvelutinous, densely hirsute-strigose; venation pinnate, with 2 or 3 secondary veins on either side of median vein; all veins slightly grooved on adaxial side and prominent on the abaxial surface. **Bracts** minute, inconspicuous, narrowly triangular, *ca*. 0.7 mm long. **Inflorescence** terminal or axillary, arising from axils on upper nodes, simple scorpioid cyme, erect, 3–7-flowered; peduncles quadrangular or obtusely quadrangular, 0.5–1.5 cm long, olive green to pale greenish with red tint, covered with white to magenta gland-tipped hispid trichomes mixed with minute, semi-transparent, brown, glandular trichomes. **Flowers** 3-merous; pedicels brownish-pink to pale green with reddish tint, obtusely hexagonal in cross section, 2–3 mm long, with indumentum similar to the peduncle. **Hypanthium** campanulate to cylindrical-obconoid, yellowish-red to green with reddish tint, 4–5 mm long, *ca*. 2 mm in diameter, 3-sided, obscurely 6-ribbed, covered by white to magenta gland-tipped hispid trichomes mixed with minute, semi-transparent, brown, glandular trichomes; part of hypanthium free from ovary *ca*. 2 mm long. **Calyx lobes** 3, green with vinaceous tint, broadly triangular, keeled, *ca*. 1 × 2 mm, connate into a torus, each lobe with an acute, narrowly triangular tooth (*ca*. 0.5 mm long), puberulous. **Petals** 3, pink, narrowly oblong-obovate, slightly oblique, 7–9 × 2–3 mm, median vein abaxially with scattered gland-tipped hispid trichomes, margin entire, apex acuminate. **Stamens** 3, isomorphic, glabrous; filaments pinkish-white, slightly flattened, 3.8–4.5 mm long; anther golden-yellow, narrowly ovate, apex acute, curved ventrally, *ca*. 2 mm long, deeply cordate at base, with two pores at apex. **Ovary** *ca*. 3 mm long, 3-locular; ovary crown 1–1.5 mm high, brownish-pink, margin subentire to repand; ovules numerous. **Style** filiform, rosy-pink, 7–8 mm long; stigma capitate, often centrally positioned. **Fruit** cupuliform capsule, *ca*. 6.5 × 4 mm.

Distribution and ecology: The species grows in primary and secondary evergreen broad-leaved dry forests with *Dacrydium*, on lava-derived red soils at an elevation of about 1000 m a.s.l. Flowers in March and April and fruits in April and May.

Etymology: The specific epithet refers to the purple abaxial surfaces of the leaves.

Proposed IUCN conservation status: The species grows terrestrially in primary and secondary evergreen broad-leaved dry forests within Kon Ka Kinh National Park, an area that remains relatively well preserved. The discovered population spreads along a roadside; however, numerous seedlings and many mature fruiting individuals were observed, suggesting successful natural regeneration and a stable local population. Although no direct threats were detected at the type locality, the species is currently known from only a limited area, and available data remain insufficient to evaluate its full distribution, population size, and long-term population trends. Therefore, following the Guidelines of the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, Version 16 (IUCN Standards and Petitions Committee, 2024), the species is provisionally assessed as Data Deficient (DD).

Additional specimen examined: VIETNAM, Gia Lai Province, K'Bang District, elevation *ca*. 900 m a.s.l., around point 14°28'N 108°32'E, 9 April 2026, *L. Averyanov, Nguyen Van Canh, Truong Ba Vuong, Nguyen Quoc Bao, T. Maisak, AL4842* (LE LE01317784, photos of plant used for the preparation of the voucher specimen LE01360002 https://en.herbariumle.ru/?t=occ&id=278295).

Note: *Sonerila purpurifolia* is readily distinguished from all known congeners occurring in Vietnam by its dwarf and compact habit, densely hairy leaves, and minute anthers. Meanwhile, like the previous species, it somewhat resembles *S. namii* in its ovate, hairy leaves with pinnate venation, a subvelutinous adaxial surface, and petals bearing gland-tipped hispid trichomes abaxially. However, it differs in having a stem covered with dense white to magenta villous-hirsute indumentum (*vs*. golden-brown to maroon hispid or hispid-hirsute), leaves densely hirsute-strigose adaxially (*vs*. moderately to sparsely hirsute or gland-tipped hirsute), margins denticulate (*vs*. serrulate), petals *ca*. 7–9 × 2–3 mm (*vs*. 13–23 × 4–7 mm), and narrowly ovate anthers *ca*. 2 mm long (*vs*. lanceolate, 7–10 mm long).

The new species also looks superficially similar to *S. yunnanensis*, but differs in having much smaller anthers, *ca*. 2 mm long (*vs*. up to 7 mm long), which are uniformly yellow (*vs*. yellow proximally, pale purple to grayish-white distally). It is notable that *S. yunnanensis* is currently known only from southwestern China and northern Vietnam, areas geographically quite distant from the Central Highlands of Vietnam, where the new species was found. Key diagnostic characters separating *S. purpurifolia* from morphologically similar species are detailed in Table 1.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are indebted to the Management Board of Kon Ka Kinh National Park for their help during the fieldwork. The laboratory study was supported in part by the institutional research project of the Komarov Botanical Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences "Vascular plants of Eurasia: systematics, flora, and plant resources" (AAAA-A19-119031290052-1).

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