Rhododendron diversipilosum, comb. nov.  
(Ericaceae)

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The essentially Japanese taxon Ledum palustre L. var. diversipilosum Nakai (Ericaceae) deserves the specific rank. Following the current generic concept, the taxon is at the same time transferred to the genus Rhododendron L. as Rhododendron diversipilosum (Nakai) Harmaja.

Key words: Ericaceae, Japan, Ledum, Rhododendron

The well-known broad-leaved Ledum L. (Ericaceae) endemic to Japan and Sakhalin has traditionally been treated as an infraspecific taxon of L. palustre L. It is well distinguished in the Japanese literature, predominantly as L. palustre var. diversipilosum Nakai (e.g., Ohwi 1965). In my paper on the Ledum group (Harmaja 1991) I already supposed that it would deserve the specific rank but did not make the necessary new combination. In that paper I used an apparent synonym (cf. Ohwi 1965), L. nipponicum (Nakai) Tolm. nom. inval. (see Harmaja 1991). However, L. palustre var. nipponicum Nakai is a younger name than L. palustre var. diversipilosum, it is but seldom used, its characters are poorly known, and, above all, the epithet nipponicum cannot be transferred into Rhododendron L. at the specific level because of R. nipponicum Matsum.

As was apparent in my paper (Harmaja 1991), the present taxon is distinguished from its nearest relatives — R. hypoleucum (Tolm.) Harmaja and R. tolmachevii Harmaja — by the somewhat more acute leaves with both white and brown, long hairs on their undersides. Future studies on the Ledum group in East Asia are needed to clarify the delimitation of some of the species, but the present taxon should anyway have an available name corresponding to its obvious rank and modern generic position.

Kron and Judd (1990) united the genus Ledum with Rhododendron. This concept was followed in my key to the species of the Ledum group (Harmaja 1991). Recently, cladistic studies at the molecular level, too (e.g., Kurashige et al. 1998), confirm this treatment: Ledum is definitely nested within Rhododendron.

Rhododendron diversipilosum (Nakai) Harmaja, comb. nov.

Basionym: Ledum palustre L. var. diversipilosum Nakai, Bot. Mag. 31: 102. 1917. — Ledum palustre subsp. diversipilosum (Nakai) H. Har, J. Jap. Bot. 33: 98. 1958. — Type: A holotype was not designated nor were any specimens listed; instead several localities were mentioned.
REFERENCES