

**A Report on the
Conservation Assessment, Management and Prioritization Workshop
for Threatened Plants of Tamil Nadu**

26 to 27th September 2023

The ICFRE- Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (ICFRE-IFGTB), Coimbatore in collaboration with The Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project for Climate Change Response (TBGPCCR) organized the Conservation Assessment, Management and Prioritization workshop for selected plant species of Tamil Nadu on 26 & 27th September 2023 at the auditorium of the institute.

The major goals of the workshop were to provide information on the threats faced by each assessed taxa, to assess the conservation status and assign an IUCN Red List category to the selected flora, to provide additional information about the taxa which would assist in developing a conservation plan and finally, prioritize taxa for initiating conservation measures.

The workshop was inaugurated by Shri. I. Anwardeen, IFS, APCCF & Chief Project Director, TBGPCCR by lighting the lamp. He commented that the workshop will help in prioritization of plants species which will be taken up by Tamil Nadu Forest department for conservation and restoration efforts. He also suggested that apart from the threat status, plants with medicinal, cultural and spiritual significance should be given special preference during the workshop. He appreciated the efforts taken by the institute towards organizing the workshop. Dr R Yasodha, Group Coordinator Research, delivered the welcome address. Dr. C Kunhikannan, Director, ICFRE-IFGTB, in his special address, highlighted the significance of the workshop in developing a comprehensive conservation effort for the selected plants species of Tamil Nadu. The coordinator of the workshop, Dr. A Rajasekaran, Scientist-F and workshop coordinator presented an overview of the workshop and explained the International Union for Conservation of Nature criteria for threat assessment to the participants. Dr, B Nagarajan, Scientist G, Forest ecology and climate change division of the institute delivered the formal vote of thanks.

There were about 75 participants from diverse backgrounds including Scientists, Plant taxonomists, Ecologists, Conservationists, IFS officers, State Forest officers and Professors. The workshop aimed to address the growing concerns on the preservation of Tamil Nadu's unique and threatened flora, providing a platform for experts to share insights, exchange ideas, and prioritize

the species for better management and conservation strategies. Around 100 shortlisted plant species were discussed and reviewed. Four groups headed by Dr. D. Narasimhan, Dr. Gopalan R., Dr. N. Parthasarathy and Dr. Sanjappa M. were formed consisting 15 expert members and a facilitator, with each group working out 25 species. Each plant species was discussed in detail and taxon data sheets were filled for the species by the expert members. On the second day of the program the group leaders presented the taxon data sheets to the participants for their comments and finally, 25 plants species were prioritized for further conservation efforts. The experts prioritized species emphasizing those with the highest risk of extinction through a comprehensive assessment of the selected plant species by analyzing their distribution, population trends, and threats they face. Apart from these medicinal value, ecological role of the plant species, economic importance, spiritual and religious significance of the plant species were also taken into consideration for the prioritization.

Participants suggested that in order to make the plan sustainable, habitat improvement through community involvement and species recovery research should be conducted simultaneously. Further, the experts emphasized the importance of trying different propagation techniques to rapidly multiply the prioritized species along with long term monitoring to ensure the successful recovery of the species. During the concluding remarks, the experts suggested that such exercises should be carried out regularly to assess and conserve the various threatened plant species of Tamil Nadu. Further, Shri. I. Anwardeen, IFS, during his concluding remarks assured support to ICFRE-IFGTB to carry out conservation efforts of the prioritized plant species in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Forest Department.



Inaugural address by Shri. I. Anwardeen, IFS



A view of the Inauguration programme



Overview of the workshop by Dr. A. Rajasekaran



A view of Expert members



Group photo of the participants



A view of concluding session



A view of Group activity



A view of Group discussion

A mission rolls out to protect rare and threatened flora of Tamil Nadu

More than 30 taxonomists of premier institutions in the country carried out an assessment of threat to the State's flora and came out with a list of 25 plants. Conservation strategies will be designed for these plants under the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project for Climate Change Response

Wilson Thomas

Tamil Nadu, with its rich flora spread across a unique combination of the Western and Eastern Ghats, is on a mission to save some of the rare, endangered and threatened plants, of which many are endemic to the State.

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The taxonomists initially shortlisted 100 plants for the exercise. They conducted a conservation assessment management and prioritisation (CAMP) workshop in collaboration with the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), Coimbatore, and 25 rare, endangered and threatened endemic plants were chosen for conservation and restoration.

M.U. Sharief, scientist 'F' and head of the Botanical Survey of India's Southern Regional Centre, Coimbatore, said the taxonomists came up with the list of 25 plants by assessing their conservation status in four groups and considering various factors.

Population assessment surveys

"The Forest Department will carry out population assessment surveys and come out with recovery plans for them. It will also collect the germplasm in *ex-situ* gardens. Some of the species are fewer than 500 or 1,000 individuals left in the wild. The remaining plants in the list of 100 will continue to be in the reckoning," says I. Anwardeen, Additional Principal Conservator of Forests and Chief Project Director, the Tamil Nadu Biodiversity Conservation and Greening Project.

Besides their conservation status, the 25 shortlisted species were assessed for their economical, biological, cultural and ecosystem values, says A. Rajasekaran, scientist 'F' of the Forest Ecology and Climate Change Division, IFGTB.

"Since identification of the species in the wild is not very easy, we will help the Forest Department identify them, assess their



A natural marvel: The grasslands and shola forests in the upper Nilgiris are a vital part of the Western Ghats, which is home to 85% of the endemic taxa. M. SATHYAMOORTHY

population status and develop propagation techniques. Ecosystem improvement should also be carried out in places identified as micro-centres of endemism," says Mr. Rajasekaran.

P.S. Udayan, senior consultant, Kerala Forest Research Institute, points out that some of these plants have a very restricted population. There needs to be more field explorations to check the occurrence of these plants in the wild.

Three species over-exploited

Three species that have come up in the list – *Dysoxylum malabaricum*, *Coscinium fenestratum* and *Myristica malabarica* – are assessed to be over-exploited for their medicinal values, he

notes. "Now, 25 plants having been prioritised, the aim is to enrich their population through propagation methods and reintroduce them in the same agro-climatic conditions and habitats," he adds.

According to IFGTB Director C. Kunhikannan, the threat assessment and the CAMP workshop cement Tamil Nadu's commitment to preserving its rich flora.

Flowering Plants of Tamil Nadu: A Compendium, authored by D. Narasimhan and Sheeba J. Irwin, lists 6,723 taxa belonging to 1,979 genera and 225 families in the State. The 212 endemic taxa reported in the State, according to the book, include 22 herbs, 51 shrubs, 36 trees and three climbers. While 85% of the endemic

taxa are from the Western Ghats, 8% are from the Eastern Ghats and 6% are from coastal regions.

M. Sanjappa, former director of the Botanical Survey of India, feels the exercise is crucial to protecting the endangered plants as they are identified and preserved to save them from extinction.

"Human interventions in the name of development, in the name of agriculture; expansion of the plantation of crops; and diversion of forest areas for other activities are the major threats to these rare plants. Over-exploitation of the medicinal and wood-yielding plants for commercial purposes also pose threats to these plants and their habitats," he says.