



Helping Local Women

The Park management, in collaboration with a local NGO, SAHARA (Society for Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas), has been helping the Women Saving and Credit Groups (WSCG) to develop medicinal plant nurseries in the buffer zone of the Park.

The Park is providing the forest-land for the Participatory Forest Management programme of the Himachal Pradesh government. This is to facilitate involvement of hill women in conservation of natural resources.

Each WSCG plants about 22,500 seedlings in a hectare of forest-land and tends the plants until they are ready for harvest three to four years later.

From 2001 to 2004, more than 150 hectares of Medicinal Plants Propagation Areas have been planted by 40 WSCG.

The Park management and SAHARA are developing marketing opportunities for the sale of medicinal plant in India and abroad.



A typical village in GHNPEcozone.

The evolving model of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNPE) is to conserve biological diversity, by resolving the socio-economic issues of the local people. Livelihoods based on sustainable management of natural resources, provide villagers with economic incentives to conserve the environment.

Income generation through sustainable production of medicinal plants is one such example that the Park management is actively promoting.

Credits:

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GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

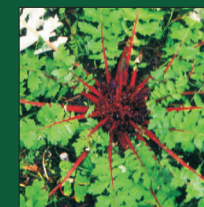
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Healing Himalayan Herbs



Members of WSCG with medicinal plants.



Conserving the Western Himalayan Environment

About the Park

A visitor to the villages on the western boundary of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) cannot fail to notice the clear interdependence between people and the environment. The traditional nature-based lifestyle has formed an intimate part of the area's ecology. An understanding of the role that traditional practices such as grazing, clearing, and medicinal plant collection on the area's flora and fauna is very important to understand the eco-system we see today.

The Park was developed by the Himachal Pradesh government to conserve a unique area of the Western Himalaya based on its remoteness and inaccessibility, low levels of habitation, traditional lifestyle, and high diversity of flora and fauna. GHNP now covers approximately 750 square kms and is naturally protected on the northern, eastern and southern boundaries by areas under permanent snow or by impassable ridges.



Bankakri
Podophyllum hexandrum
The rhizomes are used as a purgative and liver stimulant. Fruit is used for coughs.



Dhoop
Jurinea macrocephala
Root is aromatic and is a source of incense and is also used as a heart tonic.

Herb Collection Impacts

To support sustainable development in the surrounding villages, an area up to 5 km from the western periphery of the Park, totalling 260 sq km, was delineated as the Ecozone. Ninety percent of the Ecozone is forested while the remaining area contains 160 small villages, comprising 2200 households with a population of 13 to 14,000 people. In addition, there are two wildlife sanctuaries adjacent to the Park: Sainj (90 sq.km) and Tirthan (60 sq. km).

Villagers living close to the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) have been collecting medicinal plants for as long as anyone can remember.

Elderly people from the nearby villages still recall the methods they used when collecting medicinal plants. They would wait until Bis Bhadon, a day falling in September, before gathering any herbs so that the herbs developed their full potency. On this day they would offer prayers to the local deities and bathe in sacred ponds. Villagers would always leave a part of the root behind so that the plant would continue to grow and could be harvested again. Now with commercialization, all these traditional practices have been lost.

Over the years, as population pressures in the area increased, regulated access to the forests and pastures gave way to a virtual free access.

With the opening of new markets, construction of roads and population growth, herb collection became increasingly lucrative. Local herb dealers began to hire labourers to collect the herbs, and many collectors abandoned the sustainable harvesting traditions of the elders, resulting in widespread destruction of medicinal plant habitats.

With the establishment of the GHNP in 1999 permission was no longer granted to herb collectors and graziers to enter the area. Despite initial resistance pressure on the medicinal plants was reduced and their natural habitats were able to start regenerating.



Patish
Aconitum heterophyllum
The root is used for digestive disorders, fevers, and as a tonic and aphrodisiac.



Himalayan Blue Poppy
Meconopsis aculeata
Used as a tonic for general weakness.



Karu
Picrorhiza kurroa
Roots are used as liver tonic, diuretic, and blood purifier.



Hathpanja
Dactylorhiza hatagirea
Tubers used as nerve tonic and aphrodisiac.



Nihani
Valeriana jatamansi
Roots are used for stomach problems, as a sedative and aphrodisiac.

Medicinal Plant Areas

Soon after the GHNP was established, the Park management initiated work in the Ecozone by organizing village women from poor households who had been dependent upon the Park resources into self-help groups. One of the main objectives of organising the women was to help them develop through Women Savings and Credit Groups (WSCG), alternative sources of income that would reduce their dependency of GHNP resources.

In 1999-2000, the Park staff and WSCG established 10 major nurseries for medicinal plants. The main species here are of very high-value such as Karoo, Patish, Hathpanja, and Bankakri.

The Park management introduced the concept of Medicinal Plant Propagation Areas in the Ecozone. It provides returns through short rotation herbal plantations which is only three to four years and substantial enough to promote and sustain public and immediate stakeholder interest in the programme. This is much more rapid and profitable than conventional tree-oriented joint forest management.

Local economic empowerment, NGO participation further supported by environmental education, Joint Forest Management, and the development of appropriate policies has formed a rich beginning to biodiversity conservation of the Great Himalayan National Park. This combined socio-economic and environmental approach is considered to be a leading example of habitat conservation in India.