

non-wood

news

EDITORIAL

Anniversaries are times of reflection, and reflections provide a good opportunity to look back in order to move forward with continued commitment. This edition of *Non-Wood News* is the twentieth issue I have been involved in: my involvement started with issue 3 in March 1996. Changes have obviously taken place during this time, but important issues still remain. For example, issue 3 included an article on "Bioprospecting or biopiracy?", covering plant-based pharmaceutical potential, a topic that is still relevant today and a regular feature in our News and Notes section for many years. Much progress has been made in this area since 1996, as can be seen from the recent historic Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing. In acknowledgement of this, in the present issue we have a Special Feature on "Recognition of traditional knowledge", which includes articles on bioprospecting and benefit sharing, as well as information on how countries are developing policies to protect traditional knowledge from biopiracy.



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Over the years, we have strengthened our reporting on the role of people, their communities and their use of NWFPs. Mindful that "Forests for People" is the theme of the International Year of Forests 2011, we have reflected this focus throughout this issue. For example, we provide information on how NWFPs are used in Amazonian life (Special Feature); how people are using rattan in a sustainable way in the Greater Mekong (International Action); how a project in Central Africa is helping communities achieve greater food security (Country Compass, International Action); and how edible

insects – important food sources in many forest communities – are now being considered as an alternative solution to livestock in feeding a hungry world (Products and Markets, and Country Compass).

A strong feature of the 1996 issue was its Country Compass section. This emphasis has been maintained over the years and throughout the current issue, which includes news reports and readers' contributions from 34 countries: in fact, you will find diverse stories ranging from wildlife in Afghanistan and the economic value of NTFPs in Canada, to the impacts on beekeeping of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, as well as the ecological and financial impacts of the bushmeat trade in Zimbabwe.

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Non-Wood News is open to contributions by readers. Contributions are welcomed in English, French and Spanish and may be edited to fit the appropriate size and focus of the bulletin.

If you have any material that could be included in the next issue of *Non-Wood News* for the benefit of other readers, kindly send it, before 31 January 2012, to:

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Mike Wilkinson from Aberystwyth University. The team is taking on the substantial task of collecting samples from every species of Welsh flora. Using a combination of freshly picked plants and dried specimens housed in the National Museum Wales collections, they have gathered examples of all the "floral heritage" of Wales. The scientists have extracted and sequenced a section of the DNA code from each plant.

By comparing the DNA barcodes of modern-day plants with specimens from the Wales Natural History Museum, the team will be able to determine whether plants are losing their genetic variation. The results of the Barcode Wales project are due to be published this summer; the findings will be used to establish tailored conservation programmes for Welsh plants. The scientists hope eventually to extend the project to include the rest of the United Kingdom. (Source: BBC News [Wales], 7 April 2011.)



CONGO BASIN: CAN'T SEE THE WOOD FOR THE TREES? LOOK AGAIN

Export products such as timber dominate any superficial glance at the forests of the Congo Basin. Recent studies, however, argue that there is more to the forest – in this case of the second largest tropical forest in the world – than just its trees as export products.

A spate of recent publications highlight that massive hidden economies, mainly for domestic and regional consumption, are largely hidden or ignored. The latest *Forests of the Congo Basin: State of the Forest 2010*, an exhaustive biannual appraisal of the state of the region's forests, ecosystems, biodiversity, population and socio-economic situation, devotes a whole section to looking deeper into the forest and uncovering the large scale of commerce in four hidden products: fuelwood, bushmeat, NTFPs and domestic timber.

The chapter on NTFPs indicates that the vast majority of NTFPs used across the Basin provide important contributions for household food and medical needs, as well as for cultural use and as multiple tools. The sector is also a major employer, for example in Cameroon, where more people work in the trade of a handful of the major products than in the industrial timber sector.

Bushmeat is another lucrative trade. While exports to a hungry diaspora in Europe may previously have been underestimated, the domestic market in the Basin appears

much larger and remains largely unquantified. Many of the popular species of bushmeat traded are not captured either in national statistics or by international trade conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Like other hidden forest products, bushmeat provides a vital source of nutrition, as well as providing significant employment and revenue for those involved in the trade. These conflicting aspects, however, have formed a contradictory crisis for conservation and development circles. (Source: CIFOR, 10 May 2011.)



CONSERVATION ETHNOBOTANY IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC

A survey was conducted across the Faroe Islands and Iceland with wild collectors, gardeners, farmers and chefs, with the support of the Partridge Foundation's Trans-Atlantic Partnership between the College of the Atlantic in the United States of America, the University of Kassel in Germany and the Organic Research Centre in the United Kingdom. The aim was to determine the extent, composition and function of uses of native species of terrestrial plants, algae and fungi in the region through the use of quantitative ethnobotanical methodology. By identifying culturally significant native species of terrestrial plants, algae and fungi, researchers in the study hope to show that the potential for conservation also increases.

The survey identified a total of 130 native species with cultural significance from 88 genera, including 99 native species of terrestrial plants (65 species of annual and eight species of perennial herbs, 15 species of perennial shrubs and 11 species of perennial trees), 20 native species of algae, ten native species of fungi, and one native

species of lichen. In Iceland, 109 native species were cited as culturally significant (CI [Cultural Importance] Index), whereas 57 were identified in the Faroe Islands. All respondents collected some wild species and 50 percent grew some native species in home gardens or commercially.

The proportion of all potentially usable native species with CI in the Faroe Islands and Iceland could, however, be much greater. Nevertheless, some native species of plants are known ubiquitously. Those most commonly used are *Angelica* spp. and *Betulla* spp., traditionally used for food and medicine and still used today for these purposes. A strong possibility for sustainable management of wild collection of these native species exists through expansion of organic certification.

The identification of cultural keystone species is hence paramount in their conservation. Looking at ways to increase the cultural importance and the number and types of uses by people living in an area will increase the likelihood that the natural areas where these species exist will be preserved. Culture and knowledge are dynamic, and this survey attempts to look at cultural uses of native plants while being mindful of the dynamism of cultural knowledge and the changes that are taking place in both ecology and culture.

Through the interviews and sample collections, it became apparent that there exists a conservation mentality in the culture of native plant collection and usage in the Faroe Islands and Iceland. People who tend to use native biodiversity also tend to have an appreciation and a conservation attitude towards that biodiversity. Many of the wild collectors are also activists and politically active change agents in the Icelandic and Faroese politics related to natural resources management.

A chef in Tórshavn in the Faroe Islands said that wild collection by his kitchen staff and others around Scandinavia is leading to a new paradigm of food in the North Atlantic. The movement is called the "Nordic Kitchen" and is leading to conservation efforts by chefs and food enthusiasts around the region to learn, preserve and utilize native species for traditional and innovative local dishes.

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Angelica spp.