

THREE HIMALAYAN MEDICINAL PLANTS ENTER IUCN RED LIST

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Under threat: *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* has been assessed as 'endangered'. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Three medicinal plant species found in the Himalayas have made it to IUCN Red List of Threatened Species following a recent assessment. *Meizotropis pellita* has been assessed as 'critically endangered', *Fritillaria cirrhosa* as 'vulnerable', and *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* as 'endangered'.

Meizotropis pellita, commonly known as Patwa, is a perennial shrub with restricted distribution that is endemic to Uttarakhand. "The species is listed as 'critically endangered' based on its limited area of occupancy (less than 10 sq. km)," the study stated. The species is threatened by deforestation, habitat fragmentation and forest fires.

"The essential oil extracted from the leaves of the species possesses strong antioxidants and can be a promising natural substitute for synthetic antioxidants in pharmaceutical industries," the assessment said.

Meizotropis pellita has been categorised as 'critically endangered'. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Fritillaria cirrhosa (Himalayan fritillary) is a perennial bulbous herb. "It is reasonable to conclude a decline of at least 30% of its population over the assessment period (22 to 26 years). Considering the rate of decline, long generation length, poor germination potential, high trade value, extensive harvesting pressure and illegal trade, the species is listed as 'vulnerable,'" it said.

In China, the species is used for the treatment of bronchial disorders and pneumonia. The plant is also a strong cough suppressant and source of expectorant drugs in traditional Chinese medicine, the IUCN assessment said.

The third listed species, *Dactylorhiza hatagirea* (Salampanja), is threatened by habitat loss, livestock grazing, deforestation, and climate change. It is extensively used in Ayurveda, Siddha,

Unani and other alternative systems of medicine to cure dysentery, gastritis, chronic fever, cough and stomach aches. It is a perennial tuberous species endemic to the Hindu Kush and Himalayan ranges of Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

“The Himalayan region is a biodiversity hotspot but there is lack of data on many species here. The assessment of these plants will set our conservation priorities and help protect the species,” said Harsh Kumar Chauhan, member, IUCN Species Survival Commission, Medicinal Plant Specialist Group.

Earlier, Dr. Chauhan, who is associated with Kumaun University, had assessed six species with medicinal values, including Himalayan *Trillium govanianum* (Himalayan Trillium) and *Trillium tschonoskii* (Keun-yeon-yeong-cho), which have been marked as ‘endangered’. He said the the Himalayas are a rich repository of medicinal plants and studies carried out in 1998 had pointed out that the number of such species in the region stands at 1,748.

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