Mission statement

The Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG) is a global network of specialists contributing within our own institutions and in our own regions, as well as worldwide, to the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants. The MPSG was founded in 1994 to increase global awareness of conservation threats to medicinal plants, and to promote sustainable use and conservation action.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we envision a significant increase in knowledge of the conservation status of priority species of medicinal and aromatic plants, planning and actions to conserve and sustainably use these species, and broader industry and consumer awareness and participation in the conservation of threatened species.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Red List: complete IUCN Red List assessment of 1,500 priority species of medicinal and aromatic plants.

Plan

Policy: promote the recognition of the sustainable use, trade and conservation of medicinal and aromatic plants in policy and action at the global, regional and national levels (action via Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), CITES, World Health Organization (WHO), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (ITPGR), and other policy fora).

Act

Conservation actions: (1) develop and implement Plants for People initiatives for medicinal plants in at least three regions; (2) contribute to the implementation of the FairWild Standard and certification scheme for sustainable use of wild plants for at least 50 species, 50 companies and 20 countries.

Communicate

Communication: increase the visibility and recognition of the contribution of medicinal and aromatic plant conservation and sustainable use to livelihoods, health, food security and biodiversity.

Activities and results 2020

Assess

Red List

Most assessments drafted and those published in 2020 are medicinal plants and close relatives native to North America, including all ‘At Risk’ and ‘To Watch’ species identified by United Plant Savers. Indian Nard or Jatamansi (Nardostachys jatamansi) – a CITES Appendix II-listed, highly valued medicinal plant native to the Himalayan region – was reassessed with expert contributions from MPSG members. Eight medicinal plant species endemic to Pakistan were assessed for the national Red List (to be reviewed in 2021 for the global Red List). The MPSG Red List Authority provided reviews of numerous medicinal plant assessments submitted by other Specialist Groups and projects (including 20 additional species from Pakistan). Globally, 11 assessments were published and 99+ assessments were drafted. (KSR #1)
Plan

Policy

i. CITES: MPSG contributed to further development of procedures and training for Non-Detriment Findings (NDF) for perennial plants; MPSG members contributed expert knowledge to case studies involving local and traditional knowledge on participatory assessments, monitoring and management of CITES-listed medicinal and aromatic plant species (related to 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP18) Decisions 18.230–18.303 on trade in medicinal and aromatic plant species). (KSR #26)

Act

Conservation actions

i. The North American initiative (in partnership with IUCN Member Albuquerque BioPark) was expanded from assessment stage to planning, communication, and action stages: e.g. near-completion of assessment report/action plan for all species in the genus Trillium; development of an Assess to Plan (A2P) agenda for a workshop on Appalachian medicinal plant species (postponed to 2021 or 2022 due to COVID-19 restrictions); engagement with North American native communities in New Mexico on conservation of locally significant medicinal plants and other flora; engagement with the Canadian Wildlife Federation (IUCN Member organisation) to develop a citizen science iNaturalist project for Canada and the US. (KSR #1, 15, 31)

ii. A European medicinal plant reassessment proposal was developed and funded by the European Union (led by the IUCN Global Species Programme); preliminary discussions have taken place with potential partners in the A2P agenda, especially area planning/protected areas networks. (KSR #1, 15, 31)

iii. Himalayas: A priority list for assessments has been developed; MPSG membership relevant to the A2P strategy was developed. A MPSG member in India is engaged as a subject matter specialist for the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-Government of India project SECURE Himalaya (2017–2023), including evaluation of diversity and status of medicinal plants important to health care traditions. (KSR #1, 15, 31)

iv. Additional regional initiatives were undertaken by MPSG members in Israel (identification of native medicinal flora, including sampling and ex situ protection of genetic diversity). (KSR #15, 31)

v. MPSG contributed technical support to development and implementation of remote auditor training and certification audits in response to COVID-19 travel restrictions. As members of the FairWild Foundation Board of Trustees and Advisory Panel, Secretariat staff, and FairWild partners, MPSG members contributed to further development of FairWild Standard (FWS) implementation, and further development of the scope of FWS (including consultation to adapt the FairWild Standard for fungi, together with the IUCN Fungal Conservation Committee). COVID-19 impacts and uncertainty, combined

Training session on good harvesting practices for Jatamansi, Nardostachys jatamansi, Baghjahale Community Forest, Jumla district, Nepal

Photo: ANSAB
Jatamansi, *Nardostachys jatamansi*, harvesters, Furkisalla Community Forest User Group (CFUG), Nepal
Photo: ANSAB

Field inventory of *Nardostachys jatamansi* in Nepal
Photo: ANSAB

Harvested *Nardostachys jatamansi*, Furkisalla, Nepal
Photo: ANSAB
with the practical difficulties in scheduling audits for new operations, meant that few new companies were in a position to formally join FairWild in 2020 and some companies were forced to exit due to business disruption but, despite this, three new brand manufacturers and one trader joined, resulting in a total of 34 formal participants at the end of 2020. Under a memorandum of understanding with FairWild Foundation, MPSG evaluates the risk of unsustainable wild collection for collection operations in the process of joining the FairWild certification scheme. MPSG provided wild harvest risk analyses for eight species accepted for FairWild certification, supported by the MAPROW database. The pipeline of companies joining looks strong, and this target may feasibly be reached in 2021. MPSG members also contributed to a Darwin Initiative-funded TRAFFIC/Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources (ANSAB) initiative to develop FairWild-certified sustainable wild harvest of Indian Nard or Jatamansi (Nardostachys jatamansi) – a Critically Endangered, CITES Appendix II-listed medicinal plant – in Nepal. (KSR #36)

Communicate

i. Newsletter: The Journal of Medicinal Plant Conservation (in partnership with IUCN Member United Plant Savers) included nine contributions from MPSG members; the 2020 issue was planned for release at the 2020 IUCN World Conservation Congress but was released separately when the congress was postponed. (KSR #28, 43)

ii. MPSG participated in FairWild Week 2020, an annual social media event in collaboration with TRAFFIC, highlighting challenges for industry and consumers sourcing wild plants in trade. Outcomes include: 17 partners engaged in the event; 20+ media articles on the week; reach of 2.7 million on social media; launch of the report The Invisible Trade: Wild Plants and You in the Time of COVID-19 and the essential journey towards sustainability. (KSR #28)

iii. MPSG members contributed to establishment of a botanic garden at Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan, and educational landscape of Umm Al Quwain University (and associated public education events for Dubai EXPO 2020) with a focus on native medicinal flora and its conservation; transformation of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) landscape to include educational sections of medicinal plants, as well as the transfer of an important private collection of Chinese medicinal plants to Huntington Botanic Gardens (California, US). (KSR #28, 43)

iv. MPSG members contributed to a Sustainability and Regenerative Practices Toolkit for the herbal products industry, developed by the American Botanical Council Sustainable Herbs Program. (KSR #28)

v. Through the Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions, MPSG members contributed to the founding of a UNESCO Chair ‘Plants for Health in the Mediterranean Traditions’ at the University of Salerno, Italy. (KSR #28, 43)

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Summary of activities 2020

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 4/5

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Main KSRs addressed: 1, 15, 26, 28, 31, 36, 43

KSR: Key Species Result