FLORA OF THE HILL WETLANDS OF THE NILGIRIS

Wetlands of the Nilgiris region serve as unique habitats for a variety of wildlife and flora as well as performs a number of important ecosystem services such as water provision, flood control, water purification, supporting biodiversity, recharging groundwater etc. Over the years, there has however been a global destruction of these valuable habitats, the scale of which is unprecedented in human history. Often regarded as wastelands, wetlands continue to be among the world's most threatened regions. The Nilgiris wetlands are no exception. They have been considered obstacles in the path of progress and hence drained, filled, despoiled and degraded for economic gains. The wetland loss has been responsible for bringing to the verge of extinction many species of animals and plants. Inadequate understanding of the crucial role and utility of wetlands is a matter of serious concern.

Angled fruit rush
Juncus prismatocarpus

Grows in swamps and peat bogs as well as in wet grasslands and stream sides.

Water-sedge
Scripus mucronatus

Workhouse of wetland water purifiers

Lawn Marsh Pennywort
Hydrocotyle hydrophoroides

Found in damp, sunny or shady localities in river beds. Sometimes floating when flooded.

Common Rush
Juncus glaucus

Found in Marshy places. Stems erect and has spongy tissue.

Indian willow
Salix tetrasperma

Found in swampy places and is an indicator of water. Prevents erosion.

Flat finger sedge
Cyperus digitatus

Found in swamps or seasonally flooded areas, ditches and river banks. Leaves are used for making mats and for thatching.

Some of the threats to the wetland flora

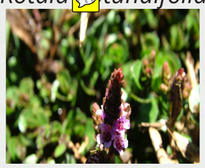
Invasive and exotic species: Non-endemic plants and trees such as Wattle, Ulex spp., Cytisus spp., Lantana camara and Eucalyptus are widespread in the Nilgiris district. Invasives are found growing on the edges of the swamps forming potentially harmful threats to the health of wetland systems.

Pesticide pollution: Most vegetable growers are located in valleys close to wetlands. In most cases, there appears to be unrestricted access for water and no controls on the inputs of agriculture, resulting in high chemical runoff.

Grazing: Many of the wetlands are subjected to high levels of grazing and in a number of places, pressure from cattle has increased manifold times and a large number of wetlands are shrinking in their biodiversity levels. Grazing stunts growth of vulnerable plants and wildlife is forced to compete with cattle for the limited amount of fodder available.

Change in landuse: Small hill wetlands in the Nilgiris have been converted to other land use such as agriculture, tea plantations, built up area etc. The increasing proliferation of open wells in the district, often in or near wetlands is also likely to lead to the drying up of wetlands.

Dwarf Rotala
Rotala rotundifolia



Small herb growing by the waterside and occasionally in shallow water.

Nepal Dock
Rumex nepalensis

Leaf bases grow in nitrogen-enriched and more productive habitats. Palatable to cattle.

Louisiana flatsedge
Pycreus polyanthrus

Common in wet open places, swamps, margins of pools and river banks.

Burmann's Sundew
Drosera burmanni

Grows low to the ground. Absorbs ultraviolet light and is very attractive to insects.

Watercress
Rorippa indica

Watercress. A perennial herb found growing in open running watercourses or near cool shallow springs and spring holes. Rich in vitamins and minerals, and valued as a food and medicinal plant.

Blue Bladderwort
Utricularia caerulea

Carnivorous, perennial aquatic herb found on moist rock exposed to sun, muddy lake edges.

Crimson seeded sedge
Carex baccans

Grows in wet moist places and swamps. Has a triangular stem.