

FLORA OF THE HILL WETLANDS OF THE NILGIRIS

Wetlands of the Nilgiris region serve as unique habitats for a variety of wildlife & flora and perform 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



This rush grows in swamps and peat bogs as well as in wet grasslands and stream sides.

WATER-SEDEGE

Schoenoplectus mucronatus



This sedge typically occurs in organic sediments or sometimes clays in marshes, the margins of ponds and lakes, and in rice fields.

COMMON RUSH

Dicanthium foulkesii



This grass grows along stream side and wetlands. The adventitious roots help in arresting soil erosion and with water retention.

LAWN MARSH PENNYWORT

Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides



A creeping herb growing in marshy, damp, sunny or shady localities, in river beds, sometimes floating when flooded.

INDIAN WILLOW

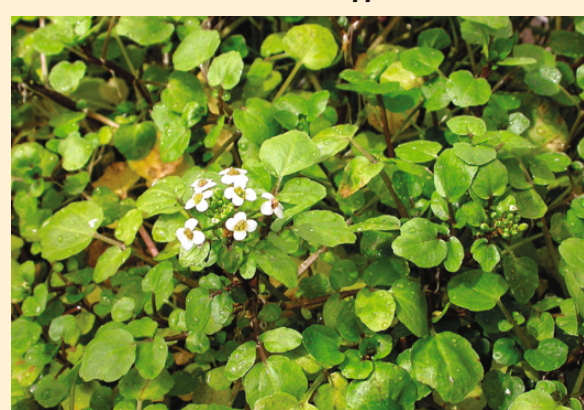
Salix tetrasperma



A medium-sized deciduous tree of wet and swampy places. An indicator of water. Helps in prevention of erosion.

WATER CRESS

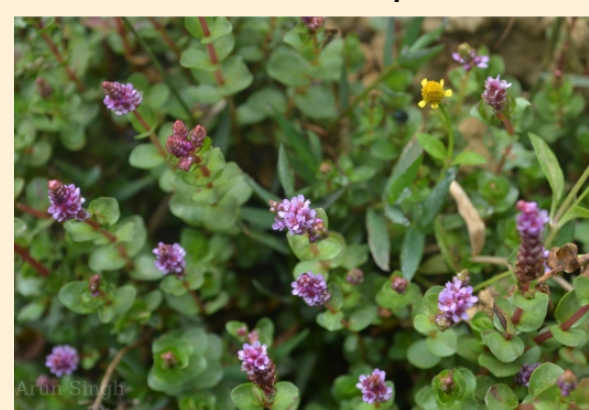
Nasturtium officinale



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.

DWARF ROTALA

Rotala rotundifolia



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

FRAGRANT PIPEWORT

Eriocaulon odoratum



An annual plant growing in open marshy places and wet grasslands.

LOUISIANA FLATSEDGE

Pycnus sanguinolentus



An annual or perennial sedge in permanent water. However, common in wet open places, swamps, margins of pools, river banks and wet fields.

BURMANN'S SUNDEW

Drosera burmannii



A small compact insectivorous plant. Found growing in moist localities in grasslands and rock patches.

CRIMSON SEEDED SEDGE

Carex baccans



An evergreen grass is found growing in wet moist places and in swamps at an altitude of 1,500-2,500 m, in dense moist to semi-evergreen forest.

Chrysopogon zeylanicus



Its is the largest native tussock of the grassland. The adventitious roots helps in preventing soil erosion and retention of water.

FLAT FINGER SEDGE

Cyperus digitatus



A perennial herb, found in swamps or seasonally flooded areas, wet rice fields, ditches and river banks.

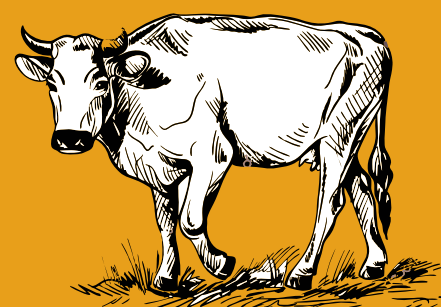
SOME OF THE THREATS TO THE WETLAND FAUNA



Pesticide pollution: Most vegetable growers are located in valleys close to wetlands. Pesticide pollution of wetlands reduces the "crop" of aquatic insects essential for the growth and development of aquatic birds. The use of pesticides on farmlands has further reduced the amount of safe habitat available for birds. Herbicide use, in plantations, may cause ground-dwelling birds to lose the leafy shelters that protect them against predators and bad weather.



Invasive and exotic species: Non native plants and trees such as Black wattle, Common grose, Scotch broom, Lantana 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.



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 the 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. Drastic changes in land use in the catchments of wetlands will also impact the state of the wetlands.