



TRADITIONAL AND WILD:

establishing sustainable collection of wild plants

Pilot initiatives to establish sustainable management practices for wild-collected plants in Central Europe have been running since 2011 with the aim of providing local inhabitants with related capacity-building tools by 2014. The project—*Traditional and Wild*—focuses on the sustainable harvest of and trade in wild plants in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland, through the implementation of the FairWild Standard. TRAFFIC was among the organizations that helped develop the Standard, and promote its use through partnership with the FairWild Foundation and, together with WWF Hungary, is one of the partners of this project.

Having successfully completed the first half of the project (May 2011–October 2012), the *Traditional and Wild* partnership has produced several significant outputs, conducted various workshops and promotional events, and participated in numerous internal and external meetings related to wild medicinal plants.

The first undertaking of the project was to develop a list of priority wild plant species with the potential for product development and certification. The list comprised common, but valuable wild plants that have been traditionally used in the four participating countries by target groups, which include the Roma population, unemployed people, the elderly, and women. The plant species selected were: Common Juniper *Juniperus communis*, Goldenrod *Solidago canadensis*, Black Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, European Blueberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Common Horsetail *Equisetum arvense*, Common Walnut *Juglans regia*, Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*, Common Nettle *Urtica dioica* and Dog Rose *Rosa canina*.

In 2012, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary contributed to the finalization of a situation analysis for each of the aforementioned species, which included an examination of wild collection and conservation requirements, including determination of the conservation status of selected species, knowledge-based collection practices, collection intensity and species regeneration. Legal and ethical requirements, i.e. compliance with national laws, regulations and agreements and the respecting of customary rights, were also examined by each project partner.

The results of the situation analysis were shared by the partners and their botanists at the transnational workshop on resource assessment and management planning in Lokve, Slovenia, in September 2012, and preliminary suggestions for product development from the target plants were made. In order to ensure the sustainability of wild harvesting, several partners plan to conduct resource assessments for the selected plant species in spring 2013 and to develop management plans based on the available guidance from the FairWild Foundation, and with the support of TRAFFIC.

SILVER BIRCH *applications*

Silver Birch *Betula pendula* has a wide range of pharmaceutical, cosmetic and other uses. The sap is used to produce syrup, wine and vinegar. The bark, juice and essential oil from the leaves are used for medicinal purposes: for example, the leaves and bark contain a pharmaceutically active compound—*betulin*—which has a diuretic and blood-cleaning effect, speeding up the excretion of organic waste products and preventing the formation of kidney stones. A tincture from the buds is recommended against colds, osteoporosis and swellings. Parts of the plant are also used as ingredients in healing cosmetics, for example to prevent hair loss and promote blood circulation, and oil is added to soaps. The compound *betulin* contains a waterproof wax which is used to provide water resistance to leather products.

Source: training materials on plant collection and utilisation activities prepared by Blanka Kocourková, Mendel University in Brno, December 2012, on behalf of the project partner Central Europe Programme of the European Union, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.





Left to right:

Blueberry
Vaccinium myrtillus,
 Common Walnut
Juglans regia and
 Goldenrod
Solidago canadensis



Other presentations included experiences of species' resources assessments by the Forest Sciences Center of Catalonia, Spain. In particular, case studies for "*Gentiana lutea* in the Val d'Aran region from the perspective of sustainable traditional wild collection", "*Arnica montana* in Aigüestortes and its sustainable wild collection for commercial trade" and "Looking into maximizing the value of medicinal flora in the Ports de Beseit region". The presentations outlined the major steps needed for the successful assessment of these resources and the methodology described provided useful models for partners to apply to their own resource assessments.

Another significant output designed for the project target groups, the "*Training materials on plant collection and utilization, building entrepreneurial skills, and providing employment opportunities*", was completed by the partnership in December 2012. The general training course aims to demonstrate the importance of plants collected from the wild in Central Europe and their traditional use by local communities, in order to help trainees build their entrepreneurial and marketing skills required for improving unemployment opportunities and increasing possible additional income.

Included with these materials is a training course on aspects of sustainable wild plant collection and FairWild that was prepared by TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary. The course contains a brief overview of the medicinal plants sector in Central Europe, the main principles of good collection practices (based on Good Agricultural Collection Practices for medicinal plants (GACP)), aspects of sustainable wild-plant collection (based on the framework of the FairWild Standard)—including main collection instructions—and the handling of plant material before and after collection. Practical exercises have been designed to make wild plant collection in the participating countries more sustainable.

The training is intended to be delivered to target groups in six project implementation areas in Hungary (Felső-Kiskunság and Ormánság regions), Poland (Podkarpackie province), Czech Republic (South Moravia) and Slovenia (Kozjansko and Dravinjsko area and Northern Primorska area) during April–July 2013.

The project also included a workshop for children which took place at the Folk Museum in the Kolbuszowa region of Poland in October 2012. The aim of the workshop was to spread knowledge among children about the traditional use of common wild plant species as part of the cultural heritage of the region. The children were introduced to the rich and colourful folk traditions of plant use, and taught about the valuable properties of these plants, their history and the folklore surrounding these species.

Another event supported by TRAFFIC was the opening ceremony of a "folklore house" dedicated to preserving traditional knowledge about the use of wild plants in the village of Kunadacs, Hungary, with the aim of focusing attention on the different traditional uses of wild plants, and to help preserve the cultural traditions of the Upper Kiskunsag region of Hungary. The house is located close to Kiskunsagi National Park, where collection of wild plants is regulated to ensure their protection and to secure the management of wild-harvested medicinal plants in the National Park buffer zone. The "folklore house" contains rooms dedicated to training and exhibitions, where schoolchildren, students and other visitors can learn more about traditional plant use and the techniques used for processing wild plants, and to examine pictures and posters of the wild flora of the Kiskunsag region.

A socio-economic analysis of the project implementation areas and a capacity-building strategy for the sustainable collection and use of wild plants has been finalized; these examine ways to reduce social and economic disparities in rural areas of Central Europe and will be used as supplementary training materials.

By the end of the second year of the project (May 2013), an online suite of learning tools will have been developed that will provide scientific and educational institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders with a better understanding of the practical skills required for the cultivation, sustainable collection, processing and marketing of wild plant material.

Looking to future events to be carried out within the framework of the project, TRAFFIC and WWF Hungary plan to organize a workshop in October 2013 for project participants and observers on linking sustainable livelihoods with the conservation of nature. The workshop will summarize two years of work on the establishment of pilot initiatives for the sustainable management of wild-collected plants and capacity-building of local inhabitants in Central Europe, as well as share tangible sustainability-related project outcomes.

For more information about the project, which is implemented through the Central Europe Programme of the European Union and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), please visit: www.traditionalandwild.eu (available in all national project languages).

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PHOTOGRAPHS: CZESLAWA TRABA (BLUEBERRY); JENO BERNATH, CORVINUS UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST (WALNUT AND GOLDENROD)