Medicinal Plants in Amazonia

Medicinal plant sourcing and use are widespread and commonplace throughout Amazonia. Far more than 1,000 plant species are used for medicinal purposes, mostly for primary health care, in the region. Only a small number of these is important for national and international trade. The local population of the region has a great wealth of knowledge on the local medicinal plants and their use, which is only gradually being acknowledged.

Use of Selected Species

*Carapa spp.*: Seeds (oil) and bark are used to treat fever, worms, bacterial infections, rheumatism and tumors.

*Mauritia flexuosa*: Vegetable fat oil from pulp is mainly used by the cosmetic industry to produce sun creams and skin protection lotions.

*Licaria puchury major*: Leaves and seeds are used to treat stomach disorders; essential oils from the leaves can treat insomnia and rheumatism.
**Conservation Status**

*Carapa guianensis* is a highly praised and heavily used species throughout its natural range. Its resources have declined in past decades; as a consequence, the species was banned from collection in Amazonia on June 1st, 2005, by DECRETO N.º 25.044.

*Licaria puchury* major is not classified as endangered but is a rare plant in the Amazon due to heavy exploitation between the 17th and 19th century. In the Silves district the species is endemic to one community in the floodlands of the Amazon River.

The collection of all non-timber forest products for commercial production must be licensed by the Amazon State Institute for Environmental Protection (IPAAM), and is allowed only after taxonomic identification and confirmation of the species and if an annual, sustainable harvesting plan, defined good collection practices and a forest certification system are available.

**Towards Sustainability**

Sustainable sourcing of timber and non-timber forest products such as medicinal plants is a key tool to contribute to the effective conservation of Amazonia’s rain forest, which is, despite the destruction in the past decades, still the world’s largest tropical forest ecosystem. The project develops mechanisms for community-based resource management and aims to work with responsible private sector companies, government and academic experts to establish a model for the sustainable use of medicinal plants that can be replicated throughout Amazonia.