

Medicinal Plant Conservation



MEDICINAL
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Chairs' Note

As Co-Chairs of the newly established *Medicinal Plant Specialist Group* (MPSG), we are very pleased to present this first issue of *Medicinal Plant Conservation* to you. This newsletter is designed to inform you about the work and achievements of the Specialist Group and the developments in medicinal plant conservation. It will be distributed not only to members but to also to the broader public interested in this topic. In the wide range of journals dealing with medicinal plants, we believe that our newsletter is filling a gap by dealing with issues focussed on the **conservation** of these valuable taxa - a field that has been widely neglected so far.

History of the Group. In May 1994, the IUCN /SSC *Plant Conservation Subcommittee* recommended that a *Medicinal Plant Specialist Group* should be formed in response to rising concerns from many independent experts about plant conservation issues relating to medicinal plants. Following this meeting, Tony Cunningham and Uwe Schippmann were appointed Co-Chairs of the MPSG. Uwe Schippmann has a taxonomy background and is the head of the plant division of Germany's CITES Scientific

Authority and has broad experience in international trade issues. Tony Cunningham has been carrying out ethnobotanical research for many years and is the African field coordinator for the WWF/UNESCO/KEW *People and Plants Initiative*. He was President of the *International Society of Ethnobiology* from 1992-1994.

Objectives. The *Medicinal Plant Specialist Group* is not just another traditional use group. Instead, it will be concentrating its efforts on vulnerable species for which demand exceeds supply from wild populations. Here, the greatest conservation threat is faced by high demand for slow growing, slow reproducing, habitat specific species. The biodiversity prospecting debate needs to be recognized by the MPSG as an issue in which conservation aspects need to be further developed through interaction with the IUCN *Ethics Group* and others. Benefit sharing for the commercialisation of natural resources can be an incentive for their long-term conservation through local communities.

In 1993, WHO, IUCN and WWF have jointly published guidelines for the conservation of medicinal plants. The major task for the MPSG will be to draw up a conservation Action Plan with both taxonomic and geographic focus. The Action plan will review the conservation needs