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EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES,
PROMOTING FAIR TRADE 
ENSURING CONSERVATION:

FairWild certification in India

A report on the progress of FairWild certification at two sites in India which has resulted in the first company in the country to be awarded a FairWild certificate.

The operation involved in the collection and processing of the fruit of two species (*Terminalia bellirica* and *T. chebula*), which are ingredients of Triphala—one of the most important Ayurvedic preparations—was recently awarded FairWild certification at two sites in India. The story of this first FairWild certification success in India provides an example of how such a marketing tool can act as a key facilitating mechanism in a project designed to precipitate positive conservation outcomes through the improvement of livelihoods.

Certification has proven to be a valuable means of securing market access and adding value to resources. It also offers potential for encouraging wider community ownership, building capacity, ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits, and providing an educational tool for developing understandings of the nature, value and proper use of these resources. FairWild certification is more rigorous compared to other certification schemes as it provides specific guidance on sustainability of wild harvesting and trade. The FairWild certification of *T. bellirica* and *T. chebula* has been achieved through a carefully developed programme of training and supply chain development as part of a project initiated by an Indian NGO, the Applied Environmental Resource Foundation (AERF), working with rural communities in two locations in the Western Ghats, a global biodiversity hotspot. It has been designed and implemented in partnership with the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, in the School of Anthropology and Conservation, at the University of Kent, and Pukka Herbs Ltd., UK, through a project supported by the UK's Darwin Initiative. Additional funding for the project was provided through a joint TRAFFIC-AERF initiative supported by the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF).

AERF identified candidate project sites in 2011 and established good relationships with key members of the local communities, including *Mahadev Koli* tribal people living in the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in the North Western Ghats, and, 400 km further south, marginal farmers (farmers cultivating—as owners, tenants or sharecroppers—agricultural land up to one hectare) in the Sangameshwar block of Ratnagiri District. Both groups were lacking sustainable harvesting skills and market access, hence limiting their range of economic opportunities. Through the Darwin Initiative and KNCF funding, AERF has since implemented resource assessments of *T. bellirica* (primarily within sacred groves in the south), and of *T. chebula* (in large wild groves of this species in the north), providing a sound basis for management of the harvest. Funding was also used to develop and purchase equipment for the drying and processing of fruits, thereby enabling



AMIT KOTIYA / TRAFFIC

◀ ▲ Collectors of *Terminalia chebula* (*Haritaki*) fruits, Dhage Wadi village, Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, North Western Ghats with (above) community members.

considerable value to be added to the front end of the supply chain. However, it was in pursuing FairWild certification that the most important aspects of the project to date have been achieved. Parties engaged in a careful process of consultation and discussion with collectors and buyers of the products, designed local access and benefit-sharing agreements and helped set up the organizations to oversee the implementation of these agreements: e.g. local committees of registered collectors and knowledge holders. Partners further formulated and delivered a training programme for those engaged in collection and processing. Also, a company, Nature Connect, has been set up specifically to co-ordinate the trade and business relations, promote the products, and develop the business plans. The long-term purchase agreement has been secured between Nature Connect and Pukka Herbs Ltd, which includes the provision of the guaranteed payment of a premium price. Nature Connect in turn has entered into a long-term purchase contract with collectors from both sites and carries out business activities on behalf of communities.

The organic certification for *Terminalia* spp. harvesting sites was achieved in September 2014, followed by FairWild certification in February 2015, and the first FairWild-labelled Triphala products are expected to be marketed in the UK in 2015. The project in North Western Ghats and its links to Pukka Herbs resulted in Pukka Herbs winning the prestigious 2degrees *Sustainability Champions Award* in July 2014, allowing the company to communicate more widely the conservation and economic impacts of the project and the FairWild Standard. The project partners are now further extending the work into



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◀ *Terminalia chebula* fruits, known as *Haritaki*, drying in the sun. Dhage Wadi village, Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary, North Western Ghats.

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the sustainable harvesting and trade in other medicinal plant species, including *Tinospora cordifolia*, which is used to treat a range of ailments including Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, gout, rheumatoid arthritis, lymphoma, allergies and peptic ulcers.

The approach employed on this project, which has used the FairWild certification process to build dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders to create a complete and reasonably robust supply chain, offers considerable promise for the conservation of these tree species, their habitats, and the associated biological diversity. For example, of 33 nests of the Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* and Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* recorded in one of the project site areas, 23 are located in *T. bellirica* hollows. Hornbills are well-known as seed dispersers of rare species such as *Antiaris toxicaria*, *Strychnos nux-vomica*;

further, because the *T. bellirica* fruits are gathered using passive netting methods, the livelihood benefits accruing to the local communities do not conflict with the existence of these birds and also respect the traditional conservation practices that are applied in sacred groves. The felling of these massive trees to provide structural timber and firewood, which has been practised widely in recent times, most certainly does.

Over the coming years, the project will continue to support the

certification process, strengthening resource management and additional requirements for social and economic sustainability so that the sustainable harvesting business becomes economically viable over the longer term.

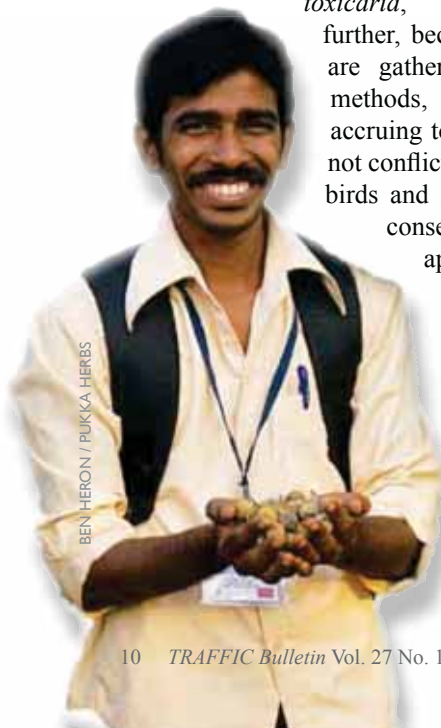
The process described here for the sustainable use of natural resources may offer a model for others to follow. The FairWild Standard will hopefully enable other species to be brought into value chains in a manner that supports peoples who are amongst some of the most vulnerable in the modern world and ensures the sustainability of wild-harvesting. However, it should also be noted that little of what has been achieved to date would have been possible without significant project funding from the KNCf and the Darwin Initiative, and the commitment and contributions by the project partners and the communities themselves.

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◀ **Collector of fruits of *Terminalia bellirica* (bibhitaki).** The astringent fruits of this species and of *T. chebula* (above) are the source of some of Ayurveda's most valued ingredients in medicines to treat stomach disorders.



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