

## L - II

# Seasonal Wetland Flora of the Laterite Plateaus of Coastal Uttara Kannada

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Low altitude (<100 m) flat topped laterite hills and plateaus abutting part of Central Western Ghats, in the coastal district of Uttara Kannada in Karnataka, are often considered a harsh, infertile and barren terrain covered with mostly scrub or isolated stunted clumps of bushes and hardy, dwarfish trees. All the while ignored was the rich seasonal life of rare herbal flora during the June to September period, when these plateaus on account of torrential rains turn into a network of seasonal pools and streams and slimy, algal covered shallow wetlands.

These seasonal wetlands seldom ever studied, were surveyed from floristic and ecological angles during the rainy weather of 2012. The fertility of the substratum is reflected in the predominance among the herbs of the insectivorous *Utricularia* spp. and to lesser extent *Drosera indica* and *D. burmanii*. Partial parasitic scrophulariace herbs like *Ramphicarpa longiflora*, *Striga lutea*, *S. gesneroides*, *Sopubia delphinifolia* etc. also indicate the prevailing nutrient stress situation. The laterite expanses are notable for several endemic herbs such as *Eriocaulon fysonii*, *E. lanceolatum*, *E. cuspidatum*, *Rotala malampuzhensis*, rare grasses like *Danthonidium gammiei* and threatened endemic hydrophyte *Wisneria triandra*, and many more interesting species. Whereas pockets of soils amidst rocks have perennating tuberous herbs like *Ceropegia* spp., *Euphorbia acaulis*, *Curculigo orchioides*, *Theriophonum dalzelli*, *Ophioglossum* spp. Etc. hardy perennial herbs like *Lepidagathis 17rostrate* persist alive on eroded and porous boulders. As these laterite formations adjoining villages and towns have been subjected to encroachments, quarrying, removal of brushwood and trees, overgrazing by cattle and conversions into monoculture of *Acacia auriculiformis*, we put forth proposal for conservation of some of the stretches of these unique formations, on the basis of their special biotic communities, into conservation reserves.

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