
Preface

How did this manual come about?

I became interested in writing a book on ethnobotanical methodology while studying indigenous classification of plants in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca, Mexico. When writing up the results of this research for my doctoral thesis, I met Alan Hamilton, Plants Conservation Officer of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF International). He considered ethnobotany to be an essential part of his program and together we sketched out a proposal to include this book in a series of WWF manuals on plant conservation.

After the manual was underway, WWF joined forces with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to launch 'People and Plants', an international initiative that provides support and training for local ethnobotanists. Among other activities, the partner institutions in this initiative are sponsoring a series of training seminars that bring together local people, researchers and students to discuss how to carry out and apply ethnobotanical studies.

As part of the People and Plants initiative, I am continuing my work in Mexico and am participating in ethnobotanical projects in Kinabalu Park in Sabah – a Malaysian state on the island of Borneo – and in the Beni Biosphere Reserve, which is located in the Bolivian Amazon. These field experiences, as well as the contacts I have made with colleagues during seminars and visits in other countries, have much enriched this manual.

The concepts and techniques I present are drawn in small part from my own fieldwork and in large part from the research and publications of other ethnobotanists. From among these talented colleagues, I chose a group of international experts to advise me on the project. The panel's members, who are listed at the front of the manual, reflect the diverse origins and disciplines that characterize ethnobotany. In addition, several colleagues from WWF, UNESCO and Kew who participate in People and Plants – also listed at the front of the manual – reviewed the manuscript and contributed their valuable perspectives on the link between ethnobotany, biodiversity conservation and community development. Various colleagues have provided comments on specific chapters, including Michael

Balick, John Beaman, Chayan Picheansoonthon, Eugene Hunn, Oliver Phillips and Lionel Robineau. Participants in a graduate seminar on ethnobiology, organized by Brent Berlin at the University of California at Berkeley, reviewed the entire manuscript and provided many useful comments.

Malcolm Hadley and Alison Semple of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Program provided encouragement and technical support throughout the period of writing. Martin Walters, editor of the WWF plant conservation manual series, worked closely with me on the text, ensuring its readability. He also arranged for all of the illustrations, skilfully executed by Oxford Illustrators and Janet Simmonett. Although I drew upon the expertise of many people in writing the manual, I assume responsibility for its final form.

An autobiographical note and some acknowledgements

Because this manual reflects my own cultural and scientific biases, readers should know how I came to study ethnobotany and who supported me in this endeavor.

At first, I didn't wander far from home in my botanical explorations. I merely crossed the street in East Lansing, my home town, to study botany at Michigan State University. John Beaman, the curator of the University's Beal-Darlington Herbarium, invited me to collect plants with him in Mexico and Guatemala, an experience which converted me to tropical botany.

After finishing my bachelor's degree, I returned to Mexico to pursue a lingering dream left from my first trip – to discover which plants were being used for food and medicine or traded in rural marketplaces by indigenous communities in Oaxaca. After a year in Mexico, I opted to pursue a doctorate in anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, where I focused on ethnobiology.

When it came time to pursue my dissertation research, I returned to Oaxaca to work among the Chinantec, Mixe and Zapotec Indians of the Sierra Norte. My theoretical approach was guided by Brent Berlin, a professor of anthropology at Berkeley who has written extensively on the folk classification of plants and animals. I owe my methodological orientation to Eugene Hammel, a Berkeley demographer who taught me how to use computers, statistics and common sense in designing my research.

In Mexico, I had the opportunity to work with Stefano Varese, a Peruvian anthropologist who was coordinating the Oaxaca regional office of *Culturas Populares*, a program of Mexico's *Secretaría de Educación Pública*, which brought together cultural promoters from Chinantec, Mixe and Zapotec communities. While interacting with Stefano and his co-workers, I came to appreciate the complexities of applying basic ethnobotanical research to community development.

Towards the end of my stay in Oaxaca, several colleagues and I began to form a non-profit group that eventually became known as SERBO: *Sociedad para el Estudio de los Recursos Bióticos de Oaxaca* (Society for the Study of the Biotic Resources of Oaxaca). SERBO's focus on integrating research with efforts towards

biodiversity conservation and community development has been a constant source of inspiration for this manual.

The writing of this manual was made possible through a grant from WWF International, with additional support from UNESCO. The field projects in Mexico, Malaysia and Bolivia in which I participate have been supported by various foundations. The ethnobotanical survey of the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca was funded by grants from the Garden Club of America, National Science Foundation (Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Award), Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and World Wildlife Fund (US). I was supported during my tenure in Mexico by Fulbright-Hays and National Science Foundation pre-doctoral training fellowships and by a scholarship from the Inter-American Foundation. Additional support was provided by the University of California at Berkeley, Missouri Botanical Garden and New York Botanical Garden. The *Proyek Etnobotani Kinabalu* in Malaysia was initiated through grants from WWF International and UNESCO, and is continuing with support from the MacArthur Foundation. My participation in the *Proyecto Etnoecológico del Beni* in the Beni Biological Station of Bolivia began through a Fulbright award from the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars of the United States. Additional support has been provided by UNESCO.

Without the hospitality and collaboration of many local people in communities in Latin America and Asia, I would never have realized my goal of becoming an ethnobotanist. I would like to thank in particular the people of Santiago Comaltepec and Totontepec who helped me during my first intensive study.

A dedication

A. Barrera, one of the first promoters of ethnobotany in Mexico, wrote:

The best ethnobotanist would be a member of an ethnic minority who, trained in both botany and anthropology, would study . . . the traditional knowledge, cultural significance, and the management and uses of the flora. And it would be even better – for him and his people – if his study could result in economic and cultural benefits for his own community.

This book is dedicated to those aspiring ethnobotanists who set out to record and apply ecological knowledge among their own people.

The manual is also dedicated to my family, who have endured with patience my long hours at the computer and my frequent trips abroad. I hope that they will increasingly share in the fruits of my work.

Paris, France

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