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“Solidarity in a competing world —
fair use of resources”

Peru, Ten Years Later: Medicinal Plant Species from Piura

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Abstract

The world has scarcer natural resources as time goes by. Humans are by far the most demanding species on earth, in competition for food, health and shelter with the other living beings. Therefore, women and men are addressing the scarcity of plant species in their environment that results from excessive and uncontrolled exploration of our forests and bushlands. Peru is one of the most biodiverse countries in South America, integrating altogether extensive Amazon rainforest areas, Andean terraced farming lands, and coastal arid and semi-arid urbanised territories. In 2006, at the service of the Tropical Research Institute of Lisbon, we have conducted a survey to the markets and fairs of Lima, looking for plants used for therapeutic purposes. We collected sixty different species then, mostly native, some endemic. The standing curiosity was that chamomile, a European herb, was the most consumed plant, a mild sedative. Ten years later, we decided to go back to Peru, in order to conduct a similar sample in another littoral and dry environment, using the same methodology. Results show that chamomile is again the preferred species, even though native plants continue to be dominant in consumption, most of them collected in Andean, Amazon or semi-arid tropical environments. A total of 150 plants were collected in this survey, 99 of which have medicinal uses. This finding demonstrates that in ten years there is increase in natural remedies consumption in Peru. About 49 species encountered in Piura, the northern city investigated, coincide with the ones collected in Lima, ten years ago. Current research registered the existence of an international project focusing the reforestation of local semi-arid lands using a native tree, algarrobo, aimed at improving research, learning processes and fair use of this cherished resource, in cooperation between European institutions and Peru, meaning, between the North and the South. The seed is antioxidant and anti-anemic, which feeds a good number of local businesses that make oil, bread, cookies, algarrobina syrup, and powdered algarrobo (a coffee alternative). Another Piura project, supported by the United Nations and the regional government, replants ceibos, palo santo, guayacán and hualtaco, in mountainous environments.

Keywords: Algarrobo, biodiversity, evolution, medicinal, Peru, Piura, solutions