



## Wild Edible Plants of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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### Abstract

The present study deals with the identification, documentation and exploration of wild edible plants consumed in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. During the study 104 plant species belonging to 84 genera and 54 families have been recorded which are commonly used by ethnic and other inhabitants as wild edible plants in these islands. Name of plant are arranged alphabetically in a tabular form, followed by families, vernacular name(s) and plant part(s) used.

**Keywords:** *Biodiversity, Vegetation, Ecological Zone, Micronutrients, Deforestation.*

### Introduction

Wild edible plants (WEPs) play significant role in the rural economy of a country providing nutrient food supplement and also by generating side income to the rural people. Fruits collected by local people from natural forests are often seen for sell in the market. Many valuable fruits are familiar to certain areas or to certain communities are unknown to others. The cattle grazers, wood cutter, poachers and forest trekkers generally use these fruits in the forests. The villagers, as they have constant association and dependence on the forests and its products for their daily needs, have developed much knowledge on wild edible fruits. Often pickles, jams, curry and alcohol are prepared from these fruits by local people. Despite maximum potentialities and scope of the use of wild edible fruits, many people which know thoroughly only a few species. On the other hand over population, increasing deforestation and over exploitation have created the danger of extinction of some of the valuable species of wild edible fruits. Over 9500 wild plant species used by Indian tribal for meeting their varied requirements have been recorded so far. Out of which around 3900 wild plant species used as food by the tribal, at least 250 from them are worthy of being developed as alternative source of nutritive food that the civilizations would

need in the near future (GOI, 1994). Wild food plants are important in many indigenous communities around the world (Reyes-Garcia, *et al.*, 2005, Tiruneh & Herbert, 2008). Wild edible plants play a vital role providing nourishment and variety in the diet (Grivetti & Ogle, 2000) and contribute to health maintenance as functional or medicinal foods (Pieroni & Price, 2005). The nutritional value of many traditional leafy vegetables is higher than several known common cultivated vegetables. The International Institute for Environment and Development (1995) reported that many WEPs can supplement nutritional requirements, especially vitamins and micronutrients. Dependence on WEPs is more significant for the poor and marginalized rural families. WEPs also provide rural households with supplemental income opportunities through collection and sale in local markets (Moreno Black & Price 1993). However, the magnitude of the income derived from wild plant resources is not well known due to lack of systematic data collection and analysis. Local economic surveys of biological resources need to be supplemented with assessment of plant and animal products sold in the local markets (Bennett, 1992, Wells & Brandon, 1992).

In spite of their immense importance as a valuable food source, WEPs remain widely unknown. Many of the wild food plants are restricted to certain areas or communities. Given the rapid decline of traditional knowledge about WEPs and increased reliance on processed food, documentation and evaluation of the traditional knowledge related to the diversity, usage, and status of WEPs are crucial.

Although traditional leafy vegetables have the potential for income generation, lack of awareness may not allow them to compete with exotic vegetable crops (Jansen van Rensburg, *et al.*, 2004, Maikhuri, *et al.*, 2003, Maikhuri, *et al.*, 2004). Documentation of WEPs with an ethnobotanical approach that includes assessment of diversity and availability, as well as extraction sustainability is important for conservation and management of these resources. In this study I have collected, identified diversity of the WEPs available in local markets, and have assessed local household dependence on selected species. It is expected that these data will give impetus for policy makers, NGOs, and local communities to take up issues on biodiversity conservation through sustainable use and management of WEPs. Further analysis of nutritional contents of some of these species may help to identify and prioritize species that could be included in agricultural or agroforestry systems based on their dietary value.

Research on wild food plants is still active even in the present day. Such research is carried out in many countries and continents. Dietary use of wild fruits appear in numerous records from Andhra Pradesh (Reddy, *et al.*, 2006, Mishra, *et al.*, 2007), Maharashtra (Datar & Vertak, 1975, Kumbhojkar and Vartak, 1988, Natrajan & Paulsen, 2000), Himalaya (Rakesh, *et al.*, 2004, Kala, 2007). Some botanical exploration and publications have emphasized on the diversity and food value of wild edible fruit plants (Vartak, 1959; Billore & Hemadri, 1969; Maikhuri, *et al.*, 2000, Sundriyal, 2001, Bhattacharjee, *et al.*, 2008; Khyade, *et al.*, 2008, Deshmukh and Shinde,

2010). Thothathri, (1980) categorized the wild edible plants consumed by the tribal in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Onges of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are known to consume 21 wild edible plants (Bhargava, 1983). Awasthi and God, (1999) documented 26 wild edible plants consumed by the Onges and Negritos in the little Andaman Islands. Maximum number of wild edible plants is used as food by the Great Andamanese of the Negrito Island of the Andamans (Awasthi, 1991). Chakraborty and Rao, (1988) enumerated 27 wild edible plants eaten by the Shompen tribe inhabiting the Great Nicobar Island.

However there is no concrete report about the nutritional potential of wild edible fruits from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Hence the study was undertaken.

#### **Geography, Vegetation, and Climate of Andaman and Nicobar Islands:**

These Islands comprises of 572 islands and islets and the total area is 8073 sq. km. Out of 572 islands of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, only 37 are inhabited permanently (Forest report-2017, MoEF, GOI). The islands are spread across 6°45' to 13°41' latitudes in the north and from 92°12' to 94°16' longitudes in the east. Andaman Islands is separated from the Nicobar group by a channel which is at 10 degree with a width of 150 km. Saddle Peak with a height of 732 m is the highest point in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The capital of the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is Port Blair which is at a distance of 1303 km from Chennai. Indira Point, which is the official southernmost point of India is at 6°45'10 N and 93°49'36 E.

There are six aboriginal groups, viz Great Andamanese, Ongese, Jarawas, Sentinelese, Nicobarese and Shompens, of which the first four are Negrito hunter-gatherers inhabiting Andaman Islands while the last two are Mongoloid race and live in Nicobar Islands. These aboriginal people widely use and dependent upon wild plants in their day today life.

As these islands are situated in the equatorial belt and are exposed to marine impacts having warm and humid tropical climate with the temperature ranging between 18°C and 35°C. The islands receive heavy rainfall from both Southwest and Northeast monsoons, the former is from May to September and latter is from October to December with the average annual rainfall ranging from 300mm to 3000mm. Cyclonic winds accompanied by thunder and lightning is very frequent here. During January to March a fairly dry weather with scanty rainfall occurs. The mean relative humidity is rather high and usually remains between 70-90% throughout the year.

The total forest area in these islands is about 7144 sq.km which is more than 80% of the land area of the islands. The unique positioning of these islands between the two major biodiversity areas endows it with an unmatched distribution of plants with representatives of the Indian, Myanmarese, Thai, Malaysian and Indonesian floras.

Natural vegetation of the entire A&N Islands is broadly classified into 2 major groups consisting of eight types, giving importance not only to forests but also to the other types of vegetation occurring in various ecological zones (Balakrishnan, 1977). The vegetation of these islands can be broadly classified as tropical evergreen with minor variations from north to south depending upon rainfall, type of soil and degree of salinity in the soil (Balakrishnan, 1989). Based on the proximity to the sea and salinity of the soil, the vegetation can be placed into two major groups, i.e. Littoral and Inland types, each further subdivided as follows:

- A. Littoral: (i) Submerged vegetation, (ii) Mangrove vegetation (iii) Strand vegetation, (iv) Tidal or swamp forest  
B. Inland: (i) Evergreen forests, (ii) Deciduous forests, (iii) Grasslands, (iv) Aquatic vegetation.

The tribal groups inhabiting the Andaman & Nicobar Islands are the oldest human population, which settled around 35 to 60 thousand years ago, who have been known to

consume the leaves and roots of certain plants, which have proven to be good wild food and as well as used as highly effective medicines. The eating of leaves and roots might have been supplementary food items but their regular use has been established as a social system. More than 2000 plant species are known to these tribal groups—there are hundreds of species whose leaves, fruits and/or roots are selectively used orally before or after dietary intake or as per need of the body. This is a hard fact that they have been well versed with the medicinal uses of these plants (Pandey, *et al*).

### Materials and Methods

A survey of wild edible plants used in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was undertaken during 2017-2019. Several field visits were carried out during 2017-2019 covering all seasons of the year. Prior to this, available literatures on flora of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Thothathri 1980; Bhargava, 1983; Awasthi and Jacob, 1987; Awasthi and God, 1999; Chakraborty and Rao, 1988; Pandey and Diwakar, 2008; Dagar and Singh, 1999; Balakrishnan and Vasudeva Rao, 1984) were consulted to document the wild edible plant species.

Questionnaire was prepared for the collection of data such as local name, edible parts used, time of availability, mode of preparation and uses as food. Local markets (viz. Jungli Ghat, Ratna Market, Bhatu Basti and Bamboo flat) of selected localities of the study area were surveyed. Live specimens along with photographs were taken and interacted with local vegetable vendors and villagers for name, identification and to assess the traditional knowledge on wild edible plants. Voucher specimen were collected and preserved in the Department of Botany, Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya, Port Blair.

Study Site



Map of India and Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Tables 1: Wild Edible Plants of Andaman and Nicobar islands

Sl.No.	Plants	Local name	Family	Habit	Part Used
1.	<i>Abrus precatorius L.</i>	Pon-yamoh(N) Tanuve(O)	Fabaceae	C	Flower
2.	<i>Ageratum conyzoides L.</i>	Punnoh	Asteraceae	H	Leaf
3.	<i>Alstonia scholaris L.</i>	Chattim	Apocynaceae	C	Fruit
4.	<i>Alternanthera sessilis (L.)</i>	Chanchi	Amaranthaceae	H	Leaves
5.	<i>Alocasia cucullata (Lour.) G. Don</i>	Mankachu	Araceae	H	Corm
6.	<i>Amaranthus viridis(L.)</i>	Notya	Amaranthaceae	S	Leaves and shoot
7.	<i>Amomum aculeatum</i>	Jungli haldi	Zingiberaceae	H	Fruit

	<i>Roxb.</i>				
8.	<i>Amorphophallus sylvaticus Roxb.</i>	Elephant Foot	Araceae	H	Young leaves and tubers
9.	<i>Anacardium occidentale Linn.</i>	Sarifa	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
10.	<i>Annona muricata L.</i>	Jungli ata	Annonaceae	T	Ripened fruits are eaten
11.	<i>Annona squamosa L.</i>	Sita phal	Annonaceae	T	Fruit
12.	<i>Anthocephalus chinensis Lam.</i>	Bol kadam	Rubiaceae	T	Fruit
13.	<i>Ardisia solanacea Roxb.</i>	Kanheyo	Primulaceae	S	Raw fruit
14.	<i>Artabotrys speciosus Kurz ex Hook.f. &amp; Thomson</i>	Jungli haldi	Annonaceae	C	Pulp
15.	<i>Artocarpus chaplasha Roxb.</i>	Toung-Peinne, Sam	Moraceae	T	Fruit
16.	<i>Artocarpus lakoocha Roxb.</i>	Lakuch	Moraceae	T	Fruit
17.	<i>Baccaurea ramiflora Lour.</i>	Khatta phal	Phayllanthaceae	T	Fruit
18.	<i>Baccaurea sapida Roxb.</i>	Khatta phal(J)	Phayllanthaceae	T	Fruit
19.	<i>Bacopa monieri(L)Penn.</i>	Buti patti	Scrophulariaceae	H	Young leaves ,whole plants
20.	<i>Bambusa bambos L.</i>	Bansh	Poaceae	S	Tender shoots and leaves
21.	<i>Barleria prionitis L.</i>	Kanta-jati	Acanthaceae	S	Whole Plants
22.	<i>Calamus andamanicus Kurz</i>	Benta	Araceae	S	Stem juice as drinking water, raw fruit eaten
23.	<i>Capsicum frutescens Linn.</i>	Bird peeper	Solanaceae	H	Fruit as condiments
24.	<i>Cassia tora L.</i>	Chakunda	Cesalpiniaceae	T	Young leaf
25.	<i>Cardiospermum helicacabum L.</i>	Kanphuti	Sapindaceae	C	Leaf and young shoot
26.	<i>Caryota mitis Lour.</i>	Maripatti	Arecaceae	T	Tender shoot
27.	<i>Centella asiatica (L.) Urban</i>	Tholkhuri, Medhak bhaji	Apiaceae	H	Leaf
28.	<i>Cissus quadrangularis L.</i>	Hadjod	Vitaceae	S	Whole Plants
29.	<i>Cleome viscosa L.</i>	Hurhur	Capparidaceae	H	Stem
30.	<i>Cocos nucifera Linn.</i>	Taoko	Araceae	T	Fruit - kernel
31.	<i>Colocasia esculenta(L.)Schott.</i>	Kachalu	Arecaceae	H	Young leaf, tube, flower
32.	<i>Commelina bengalensis L.</i>	Kanisira	Commelinaceae	H	Leaf
33.	<i>Costus speciosus(Koenig.)Sm</i>	Keu	Zingiberaceae	H	Young shoot
34.	<i>Cycas rumphii Miq.</i>	Arguna	Cycadaceae	T	Fruit
35.	<i>Desmedium umbellatum (L.) DC</i>	Damle(O)	Fabaceae	H	Fruit
36.	<i>Desmos cochinchinensis</i>	Saingswe	Annonaceae	S	Fruit

	<i>Lour.</i>				
37.	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i> L.	Banalu	Dioscoriaceae	C	Tuber
38.	<i>Dioscorea pentaphylla</i> L.	Suar alu	Dioscoriaceae	C	Tuber
39.	<i>Dioscorea vexans</i> Prain & Burkill.		Dioscoriaceae	C	Tuber
40.	<i>Dioscorea glabra</i> Roxb.	Lailong	Dioscoriaceae	C	Tuber
41.	<i>Dillenia andamanica</i> C.E.Parkinson	Chalta, Karkad	Dilleniaceae	T	Fruit
42.	<i>Dillenia indica</i> L.	Chalita	Dilleniaceae	T	Fruit
43.	<i>Dinochloa andamanica</i> Kurz.	Wa-nwe	Poaceae	T	Tender shoot
44.	<i>Diospyros andamanica</i> (Kurz) Bakh.	Tendu	Ebenaceae	T	Fruit
45.	<i>Diploclisia glaucescens</i> (Bl.) Diels	Vatab-bel	Menispermaceae	C	Fruit
46.	<i>Dolichandrone speathacea</i> (L. fill.) K. Schum	Tue	Bignoniaceae	T	Fruit
47.	<i>Donax cannaeformis</i> Rolfe.		Marantaceae	S	Fruit
48.	<i>Dracontomelon dao</i> (Blanco) Merr. & Rolfe	Dahu, Walnut	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
49.	<i>Drynaria quercifolia</i> (L.) J. Sm.	Oak leaf Fern	Polypodiaceae	H	Leaf
50.	<i>Elaeagnus latifolia</i> L.	Khata phal	Elaeagnaceae	S	Fruit
51.	<i>Entada pusaetha</i> DC.	Kakavalli	Mimosaceae	C	Kernel
52.	<i>Ficus fulva</i> Reinw. Ex Blume	Hampam	Moraceae	T	Fruit
53.	<i>Ficus hispida</i> L.f.	Dumoor	Moraceae	T	Fruit
54.	<i>Ficus racemosa</i> L.	Jagyadumur	Moraceae	T	Fruit
55.	<i>Garcinia kawa</i> L.	Cauphala	Clusiaceae	T	Fruit
56.	<i>Garcinia xanthochymus</i> Hook f.	Lal phal	Clusiaceae	T	Fruit
57.	<i>Garcinia microstigma</i> Kurz.	Taung-thale-ani	Clusiaceae	T	Fruit
58.	<i>Garcinia speciosa</i> Wall.	Palawa	Clusiaceae	T	Fruit
59.	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i> L.	Baro kherie, Dudhi	Euphorbiaceae	H	Leaves
60.	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i> (L.) R. Br.	Anantamul	Asclepiadaceae	H	Tuber
61.	<i>Ipomoea aquatica</i> Forssk.	Kalmisag	Convolvulaceae	H	Leaf and young shoot
62.	<i>Mangifera andamanica</i> King	Jungli aam	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
63.	<i>Mangifera camptosperma</i> Pierre		Anacardiaceae	T	Raw fruit
64.	<i>Manilkara littoralis</i> (Kurz) Dub	Sea Mohua	Sapotaceae	T	Fruit
65.	<i>Mimusops elengi</i> L.	Bakul	Sapotaceae	T	Fruit
66.	<i>Mimusops littoralis</i>	Sea mohua	Sapotaceae	T	Fruit

67.	<i>Morinda citrifolia</i> Linn.	Lurong	Rubiaceae	T	Leaves & fruits are eaten
68.	<i>Moringa olefera</i> Lam.	Sahjan	Moringaceae	T	Fruit and leaf
69.	<i>Murraya koenigii</i> (Linn.)	Meetha Neem	Rutaceae	T	Leaf
70.	<i>Musa acuminata</i> Colla	Hipuh	Musaceae	S	Raw/boiled fruit eaten
71.	<i>Musa sapientum</i> L.	Jungli kela	Musaceae	S	Fruit
72.	<i>Myristica</i> spp.	Jaiphal	Myristicaceae	T	Fruit
73.	<i>Nypa fruticans</i> Wrumb.	Dhani phal	Arecaceae	T	Nut
74.	<i>Oroxylum indicum</i> L.Kurz.	Patrona	Bignoniaceae	T	Fruit
75.	<i>Pandanus andamanensis</i> hort.	Keora	Pandanaceae	T	Fruit
76.	<i>Pandanus leram</i> var. <i>andamanensium</i> Jones .	Munkung	Pandanaceae	T	Raw/ boiled fruit eaten
77.	<i>Pangium edule</i> Reinw.	Football Fruit	Achariaceae	T	Roasted seeds eaten
78.	<i>Parishia insignis</i> Hook. f.	Red Dhoop	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
79.	<i>Passiflora foetida</i> L.	Kinvaal,Jhumka	Passifloraceae	C	Fruit
80.	<i>Phoenix paludosa</i> Roxb.	J/khajur	Arecaceae	T	Fruit
81.	<i>Phrynium pubneroe</i> Blume.	Sausage Tree	Marantaceae	H	Fruit
82.	<i>Physalis minima</i> L.	Ban Tipariya	Solanaceae	H	Fruit
83.	<i>Pinanga costata</i> Kurz.	Kumba	Arecaceae	T	Tender shoot
84.	<i>Pinanga kuhlii</i> (Blume ex Mart.)	Ivory Cane Palm	Arecaceae	T	Tender shoot
85.	<i>Pinanga manii</i> Becc.	Slender brake fern	Arecaceae	T	Tender shoot
86.	<i>Piper betle</i> Linn.	Takoocho	Piperaceae	C	Leaf eaten, digestive
87.	<i>Pometia pinnata</i> J.R. Forst & G.Forst.	Thitkandu, Island lichhee	Sapindaceae	T	Fruit
88.	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i> L.	Barloniya	Portulacaceae	H	Leaves, Stem
89.	<i>Prunus martabanica</i> Kurz.	Lal thingham(J)	Rosaceae	T	Fruit
90.	<i>Pteris ensiformis</i> Burm.f.	Silver lace fern	Pteridaceae	H	
91.	<i>Rubus moluccanus</i> L.	Bramble bush	Rosaceae	S	Fruit
92.	<i>Sideroxylon longepetiolatum</i> King & Prain	Lamba patti	Sapotaceae	T	Fruit
93.	<i>Solanum torvum</i> Sw.	Gota begun	Solanaceae	S	Fruit
94.	<i>Spondias mangifera</i>	Ambara	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
95.	<i>Spondias pinnata</i> (L f.) Kurz	Pullichia Kaii	Anacardiaceae	T	Fruit
96.	<i>Stachyterpheta indica</i> L.Vahl	Kariyutharani	Verbenaceae	T	Fruit
97.	<i>Sterculia rubiginosa</i> Vent.		Malvaceae	T	Seed

98.	<i>Syzigium cumini</i> (L.)Skeels	Neredu	Myrtaceae	T	Fruit
99.	<i>Tacca leontopetaloides</i> (L.) Kuntze	Sanuch	Dioscoreaceae	S	Boiled rhizome eaten
100.	<i>Terminalia catappa</i> L.	Tohangko	Combretaceae	T	Nut , Raw fruit
101.	<i>Terminalia procera</i> Roxb.	Badam	Combretaceae	T	Fruit
102.	0 <i>Thespesia populnea</i> Soland. ex Correa	Tebokala	Malvaceae	T	Leaf as vegetable
103.	<i>Vitex trifolia</i> L.	Legundi	Verbenaceae	T	Fruit
104.	<i>Ximenia americana</i> L.	Samudri neembu	Olacaceae	T	Fruit

**Note:** J-Jarawas; O-Onges; N-Nicobar; H-Herb; S-shrub; T-Tree; C-Climber



*Morinda citrifolia* *Dillenia indica*



*Amaranthus viridis*



*Murraya koenigii*



*Pteris ensiformis*



*Moringa olifera*



*Centella asiatica*



*Colocasia Sps.*



*Annona squamosa*



*Cissus quadregularis*



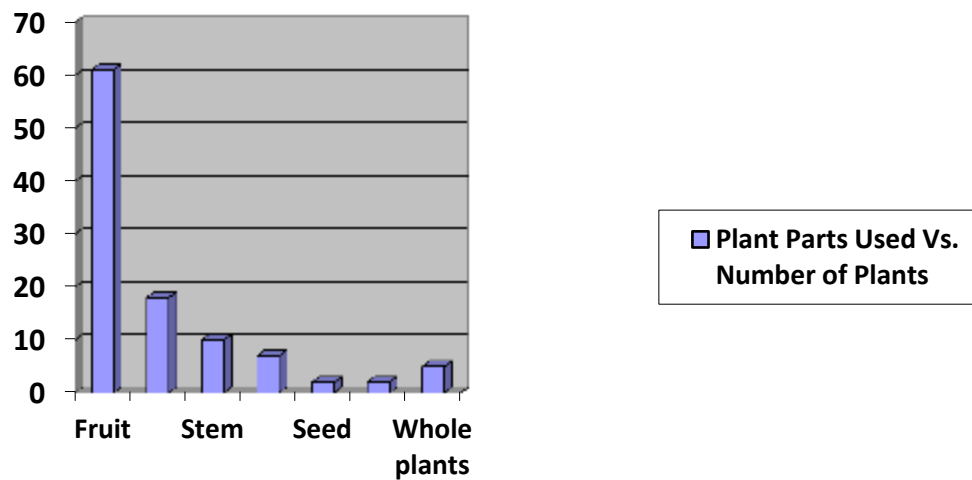
*Ipomea aquatica*

*Enhydra fluctuans*

**Table 2:** Showing frequency of plant parts used.

Parts Used	Fruit	Leaf	Stem	Tuber	Seed	Flower	Whole Plant*
Number of Plant parts	62	19	10	07	02	02	06

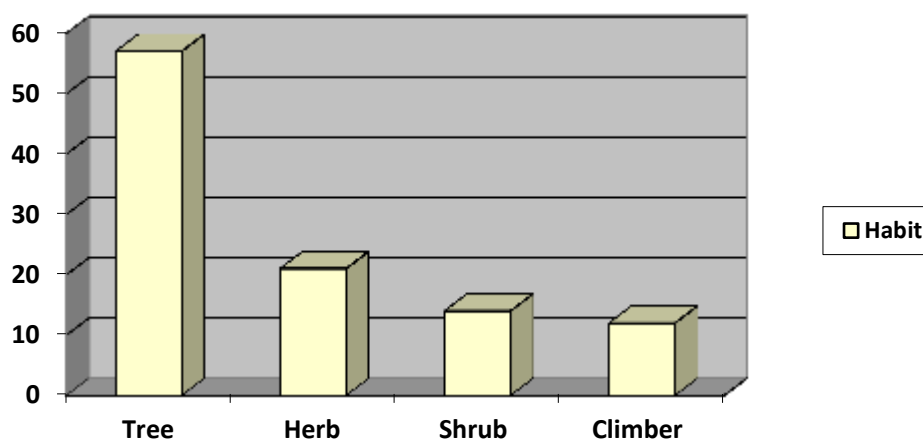
\*Sometimes whole plants or part(s) is/are used.



**Figure 1:** Bar graph showing plant parts used and their number (some cases more than one parts used)

**Table3:** Showing Habit of plant species

Habit	Herb	Shrub	Tree	Climber	Total
Number of Plants	21	14	57	12	104



**Figure 2:** Bar graph showing habit of the Plants

### Result and Discussion

The most common part of the plant consumed is Fruits with 62 species (59.61%), leaves with 19 species (18.26%), stem with 10 species (9.61%), tuber 7 species (6.73%), seed and flower 2 species each (about 2%) and whole plants 5 species.

The study also found that maximum number of the plant species belongs to Anacardiaceae and Arecaceae with 8 species each, Dioscoriaceae and Moraceae with 5 species, Annonaceae, Clusiaceae and Zingiberaceae with 4 species each, Araceae, Poaceae, Solanaceae and Sapotaceae with 3 species each, Amaranthaceae, Bignoniaceae, Combretaceae, Fabaceae, Malvaceae, Marantaceae, Musaceae, Pandanaceae, Rosaceae, Rubiaceae, Phyllanthaceae, Sapindaceae, Dilleniaceae and Verbenaceae with 2 species each. The rest of the family is represented by 1 species each.

Some plant parts such as seeds and tender shoots are traditionally fermented and preserved; leaves of certain plants are also dried under the sun and preserved to be used during off seasons. Some species are roasted, pounded and soaked with ash water for 24 to 72 hours. Then the ash water is washed off many times. The lump tuber mixed with salt and chilies is consumed. The Study also found out that this traditional knowledge on wild edible plants is now mostly confined to elderly persons only, as the new generations

have adapted to consuming and cultivating the modern high yielding varieties. In general, traditional knowledge exists among the tribes and ethnic groups of these islands on preparing nutritionally rich food items from various indigenous wild plants and forest products. These foods are part and parcel of their social spectrum of life. They are not only rich in nutrients but also have certain curative properties against many diseases and disorders.

### Conclusion

The rich biodiversity of wild plants in Andaman and Nicobar Islands will be useful in screening newer source of food for present and future need. Inventory of wild edible food resources, ethnobotanical information on their diversity, usage, status, etc. coupled with nutritional evaluation can establish native species as an alternative to achieve food and nutritional security. Therefore, efforts to be made to collect this information will provide avenues for future work and further investigation of the nutritional aspects of less familiar wild edible plants. It is therefore necessary to readvocate the domestication of wild edible plant and to take up proper conservative measures to preserve these local gene pools before they are lost forever from our planet.

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