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Notes on the Sikkim Himalayan rhododendrons: a taxa of great conservation importance

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Abstract: Rhododendrons form dominating species all along the temperate, subalpine and alpine zones in the Sikkim Himalaya. Rhododendron L. is one of the largest genus of the Ericaceae family, occurring in the higher altitudes having ecological significance and economic importance in addition to its splendiferous flowers. It has aesthetic, sacred, aromatic, medicinal and fuelwood values. There are 36 species with 45 different forms (including subspecies and varieties) in the Sikkim Himalaya. Using IUCN guidelines for categorization eight species are being evaluated according to population characters. It has been observed recently that the rhododendrons of the region are under pressure, which are basically exploitations, and some of the species are in the verge of extinction. An effort is made in this note to understand the current status of the rhododendrons in the region.

Key words: Rhododendron, conservation, Sikkim Himalaya

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