

USES OF PTERIDOPHYTE FLORA IN SRI LANKA

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Pteridophyte flora (ferns and fern allies) plays a significant role in understorey of the rain forest. Even though Pteridophytes are not widely used in Sri Lanka, it has been reported that they have ability to provide food, medicines, fiber, craft and building materials. Adrasive and decorations, in Sri Lanka, 360 Pteridophyte species have been recorded, although information Pteridophytes and their uses is scanty. Consequently, this study was carried out to identify the food, medicinal and ornamental uses of Pteridophyte flora in Sri Lanka. Studies were carried out at Kanneliya Man and Biosphere Reserve (MAB) in Southern Province, Maliboda area in Sri Pada range and Hunnasgiriya area in the Knuckles range. Observation of Pteridophyte flora and their identification and sample collection were done using scientific methods. From discussion with adjacent communities, Hanthana, Dolosbage and Loolkandura (Kandy), Kalupahana (Matale), Namunukula (Badulla) and Watawala, Thalawakele and Hortain planes areas (Nuwara eliya) were also visited to observe and collect information on Pteridophytes, particularly with respect to uses. Relevant literatures on Pteridophytes were also reviewed to find out traditional and current uses of this plant category.

Results of the study revealed that out of the 360 Pteridophytes species in Sri Lanka, only 4% (16 species) were used for medicinal purposes, while another 4% (15 species) and 1% (5 species) were used as ornamental and plants, respectively. Eight species, namely *Acrostichum aureum*, *Blechnum orientale*, *Drynaria quercifolia*, *Huperzia phlegmaria*, *H. squarrosa*, *Lycopodiella cernua*, *Nephrolepis falcata*, and *Ophioglossum pendulum* were used for the both medicinal and ornamental purpose. Two species, namely *Acrostichum aureum* and *Blechnum orientale* were used for ornamental, medicinal as well as foods. *Cyathea walkera* is the only endemic fern used for ornamental plant and it was unable to find uses of the endemic Pteridophytes as medicinal or food uses. Six species used for medicinal purposes and 4 species used for ornamental purposes have been identified as threatened species. During the study, it was noted that the adjacent communities collected species from the wild and none of the species under cultivation, suggesting that for some species immediate conservation and utilization measures are required.