

**A BASIC STUDY CARRIED OUT TO OBSERVE THE LAND USE
AND THE VEGETATION TYPE OF FOREST RESERVE AT
RITIGALA**

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The Ritigala Strict Nature Reserve has an ideal setting for ethno botanic studies on account of its unique features. It is a living folder of information regarding bio diversity and is regarded as an 'oasis of vegetation'. Therefore protection and conservation of its flora and fauna is of vital importance.

As this area extends over 1528 hectares, observation of encroachments is a difficult task. Forest clearance can be clearly observed by using aerial photographs of consecutive years. The aerial photographs may provide sufficient data to observe the land uses and vegetation types of the Strict Nature Reserve.

Aerial photographs of 1982 and 1992 were used as a tool to observe the usable pattern of the forest. The texture of the aerial photographs was studied and qualitatively it could be divided into three categories. Textural variations were significant. Restrictions of some textures could be observed to some specific areas, which can be explained as an effect of the Northeast monsoon rains.

The aerial photographs show improvement of the natural habitat of the forest area within a period of ten years from 1982 to 1992. No constructions were seen within the limits of the Strict Nature Reserve until 1992.

The study of aerial photographs indicated different patterns in the canopy cover. For instance, temporal changes observed in white canopies appeared significant. It is surmised that these white crowns are those of *Mangifera zeylanica* (Bl.) Hook.f (Etamba) in bloom.

Key words: Ritigala, Strict Natural Reserve, aerial photographs, temporal changes, *Mangifera zeylanica* (Bl.) Hook.f.