

Project Update: July 2005

Nothapodytes foetida (Wight) Sleumer is globally endangered tree species endemic to the Western Ghats, India. It is threatened by the over harvest of the wood for extracting Camptothecin (CPT), which is used in the treatment of cancer and HIV-I. As a consequence of fragmentation of its habitat and overexploitation, the population of this species has declined by 50-80%. This project explores the use of traditional techniques to cultivate the species, developed by local 'bare-foot botanists' and suggests optimal harvesting scheme for achieving maximum CPT yield.

Seeds that were collected during field visits across northern Western Ghats were subjected to various seed treatments. The proposed propagation method involves pre-sowing cow dung slurry treatment. Seeds are shade dried for a week and later soaked in fresh cow dung slurry (35-40 °C) for 24 hrs. These are sown in well-prepared mother beds. We recorded 70-80% germination in 30 days in case of treated seeds as against 30-35% germination in 60 days achieved by conventional methods. The highest germination was observed with the seed coat removed seeds. Experimentation regarding vegetative propagation trials is underway.



Germination of *Nothapodytes foetida*. Photo by Dr. Ankur Patwardhan.