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New species, pollinator interactions and pharmaceutical potential of Himalayan orchids

Subedi, A.

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Abishkar Subedi was born on October 1st 1976 in Nepal. He obtained his Master degree in botany in 2001 at the Central Department of Botany, Tribhuvan University of Nepal specializing on plant systematics and phytogeography. He prepared the orchid flora of Marsyangdi and Seti river valleys of central Nepal as part of his master degree thesis. Abishkar started studying wild orchids in Nepal in 1998. He widely travelled different parts of Nepal to study orchids in their natural habitats and was involved in raising awareness on conservation of wild orchids. Abishkar received the 'Young scientist award' 2003 from the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology under the Ministry of Science and Technology of the government of Nepal for his contribution to orchid conservation. From 2002 onwards, Abishkar has been a member of the Indian subcontinent Orchid Specialist Group of SSC/IUCN.

In 2005, Abishkar was invited to the 18th World Orchid Conference in Dijon, France for a presentation on his research on orchids of Nepal where he met Dr. Barbara Gravendeel, Dr. Ed de Vogel and Dr. Jaap Vermeulen. At this meeting, the first actions were undertaken to start a PhD project at Leiden University on Himalayan orchids. After a startup grant was obtained from the United Nations Development Programme - GEF Nepal, this PhD project could officially start in September 2006. The PhD project was called 'Prospects of conservation of wild orchids of Nepal Himalaya' and was carried out with Prof. Dr. Erik Smets of Leiden University, The Netherlands and Prof. Dr. Ram P. Chaudhary of the Central Department of Botany, Tribhuvan University, Nepal as promotores and Dr. Barbara Gravendeel of NCB Naturalis NHN Leiden University as copromotor.

During his PhD project, Abishkar attended two international and several regional conferences where he presented results obtained during his PhD project. Traveling, field- and labwork and publication costs were sponsored by the Alberta Mennega and Uytenboogaart-Eliassen Foundations, NCB Naturalis and NUFU (Norwegian Council for Higher Education's Programme for Development Research and Education) and NoMA (Norwegian Medicines Agency).

Abishkar is currently serving as programme director of a non-governmental organization in Nepal known as 'Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development' (LI-BIRD) where his main task is to supervise and coordinate the implementation of a number of projects in the areas of agriculture, biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate change in Nepal and other Asian countries.

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Bajracharya DM, Subedi A, Shrestha KK. 2003. *Eria pokharensis* sp. nov. (Orchidaceae), a new species from Nepal Himalaya. The Journal of the Orchid Society of India 17: 3-6.

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