

Finding Peace in Search of Fascinating Lichens from the Himalayas

-Suman P Pradhan

Just a week after I landed at Kathmandu, the panicked situation of the Gen-Z movement and the two massive floods in Nepal tried their best to stop us from meeting with the most fascinating lichens from the Himalayas. But we never gave up and won the situation and succeeded in navigating the path to finally explore those fascinating creatures from the Himalayas. It was a thrilling moment for my team, going to new places with uncertainty but full of hope. It was more exciting for me to continue my lichen bioindicators work in the Himalayas, and nostalgia hit, reminded my undergraduate and master's work in remote forests. But it was painful to see only a few people remaining in the remote areas of Nepal.



Complex landscapes, dense forests, and struggle

To be at the first site, not far from Kathmandu, but very remote landscape, people were excited to see how our project would start. We are also equally enthusiastic to make everything in place. But the things never been easy for us. Finding suitable trees for sampling is much more excruciating than dealing with harsh roadways and slippery forest trails. We spent hours and travelled more than 10 km uphill each day to locate suitable trees and wonderful lichen communities. The slippery forest trails, dense vegetation, leeches, and fear of wildlife were giving additional panic in our heads. But thanks to local field supporters who constantly encouraged us with their positive attitudes. In the end, the hard work paid off, and with a happy

face, we headed to the next site. This journey continued smoothly till we got stranded during our visit to the sixth site. The massive, unpredictable post-monsoon rain again tried hard to ruin everything. We spent three days without electricity and any mobile/internet connection. That moment provided us plenty of time to think about life without technology and look closely to the real-life struggles of people living in remote areas.



Life is hard, but hospitality is warm as always

Despite these struggles, we completed our field work in all nine sites by collecting required lichen specimens, lichen samples, establishing required atmospheric ammonia monitoring stations and acquiring knowledge from indigenous people and local communities. The peace of mind looking at those fascinating lichens from the Himalayas cannot be expressed in words. I will always be indebted to the field support team, local people, Kathmandu University and the Government of Nepal for their support. We learnt an important lesson: planning is easy, but accomplishment requires real courage – especially when working in the Himalayan landscapes.



Few fascinating lichens from the Himalayas

This journey has been filled with excitement, fun, pain, struggles, laughter and tears – struggles we never imagined, and the exciting moment of witnessing the ever-shining Himalayas, which left us with beautiful memories, along with the love from people. This was such an incredible experience and an encouragement for us to continue our work, benefiting both the environment and human well-being in the Himalayan region. This was not only the expedition to collect samples but also an opportunity to foster collaboration for long-term research in Nepal.



Happy lichens, happy people, happy mountains, happy places and happy us

My research journey should continue for the betterment of the environment and the people of the Himalayas. I believe that we were able, at least, to make a few people aware of the changing environment and the importance of lichen conservation. Thanks to the Davis Expedition Fund for making this all possible. My next visit to other parts of Nepal will be next year, and I hope to bring beautiful stories, encounters with extraordinary landscapes, and the warmth of joyful people and communities.

Until next time – Suman.

