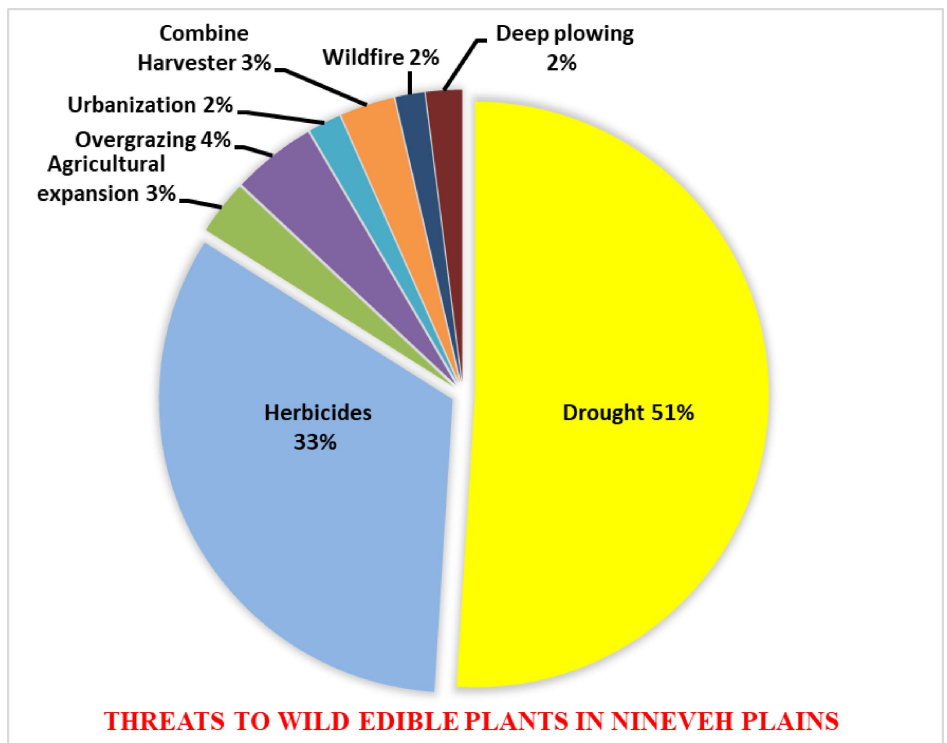




Wild plants have long been essential to ethno-religious minority groups in the Nineveh Plains and are endangered by drought, herbicides, and other preventable factors. If these plants disappear, so will millennia of cultural and economic heritage that have united the people of Nineveh. Wild plants play a significant role in diet, medicine, animal husbandry, construction, crafts, and ornament-making, as well as in religious ceremonies and rituals. Springtime trips to gather wild plants have long been a time when locals interacted with neighbors and those of other faiths and cultures. However, many of these plants have not been seen in the wild for over 10 years. Without specific policies to conserve and propagate these plants, as well as policies that preserve and share the cultural knowledge around them, crucial elements of minority cultures will be threatened.



The Wild Plants research team from the University of Duhok and Indiana University, supported by USAID’s project “Support to Traditional Cultural Practices in Northern Iraq”, have worked with communities to restore the wild plant cultural practices of Christians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and Kaka’i living in the Nineveh Plains of Northern Iraq with a particular focus on the districts of Hamdaniya, TelKaif and the sub-district of Bashiqa.

The research team collected an abundance of wild plant stories, recipes, and herbal remedies from 42 villages. People discussed how the loss of medicinal wild plants has contributed to the loss of valuable folk remedies.

Yezidis talked about cultural loss related to barriers they experience to collecting the red Nisanok flowers that are essential for their New Year celebration, residents must travel farther and farther into areas where they might feel unsafe

“Previously, wild plants filled our needs and were sold in the markets. But now, no. They have become almost extinct. Now I would have to go into debt to buy any!”

Man from Baybokh village

Research also identified locally endangered wild plants, including Nisanok, that have disappeared or are at risk of disappearing. A villager from Ain Albaqr village said “In the past, we used to venture out to the fields to gather whatever plants were available. Nowadays, there is nothing left. The use of pesticides has eradicated everything. One particular plant called Kangr (*Gundelia tournefortii*), which was both delicious and abundant,

is now extinct, and we no longer have it.”

Nineveh residents were aware of the threats that have led to the decline of wild plants, and research has shown that nearly half of the habitat degradation and human activities contributing to local extinction are preventable. Thankfully, this trend may be reversed with better strategies.

Some Locally Endangered Wild plants- Nineveh Plains							
Botanical taxon/	<i>Gundelia tournefortii</i> L.	<i>Terfezia</i> spp	<i>Eminium spiculatum</i> (Blume) Schott	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i> L.	<i>Tordylium aegyptiacum</i> L.	<i>Allium ampeloprasum</i> L.	<i>Agaricus bisporus</i> (J.E.Lange)
Local names	Kangir/ Ka'ob/ Karang/ Allakna / Kharqitha/Kengirdana/ Kangroshk	Alchama/ Dombalan/ Dobil /Komay Kama'/Alkama	Kardi/ Kardik/ Kelagh/ Kari/ Kelagh/ Nowa/ Nota/ Kardo/ La'aya/	Alza'ater/ Jadir/ Jatir/ Sathra	Gorgyma/ Gorgym/ Gorgyman/ Gorgame/ Gorgymata/ Gyafala/ Giyaky falye	AL- Korad/ Korath/ Kerat/ Kerata/ Boqa/ Qorad	Kon Faqerok/ Kharchik /Kobalal /KomFaqerok/ Kifar/ Fatir/ Bitrea/ Qatch/ Bitir/ Barterolky/ Qarchoka

Conservation policies must prioritize wild plant habitats.

We recommend policymakers in Ninawa take the following actions:

Enforce measures to protect endangered wild plants in compliance with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which prohibits human activities that have a negative impact on threatened plants.

Reactivate Environmental Inspection to prevent and eliminate violations of natural habitats and their plants. Address issues such as overharvesting of endangered wild plants, overgrazing, use of herbicides, and the expansion of agricultural lands into wild areas.

Fund botanical gardens and construct modern public nurseries to cultivate threatened and culturally valuable wild plants. The Directorate of Environment, Forestry Department in Mosul and environmental NGOs can then reintroduce them.



Establish funding initiatives to encourage universities and research centers to propose project proposals for long-term conservation strategies. Ensure that environmental impact assessment studies are conducted for all investment projects.

Finally, the **local government should collaborate with NGOs in Nineveh** to support communities' abilities to engage in cultural practices and traditions, including wild plants.

Authors

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Images: Wild plant gathering, Wild plant survey in Jarahiya Village. Credit: Research Team