

Crude and Ecological Densities of Certain Variants of the Medicinal Shrub, *Gaultheria fragrantissima* Wallich in Shola Forests of Nilgiris, the Western Ghats

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ABSTRACT The crude and ecological densities of four leaf type variants of the medicinal plant, *Gaultheria fragrantissima* such as ovate, lanceolate, elliptic-lanceolate and oblanceolate leaf type variants were determined in four major shola forests of Nilgiris, the Western Ghats such as Ebbenadu shola, Honnathalai shola, Kodappamand shola and Kothagiri terrace shola for a period of one year from January 2004 to December 2004. The study revealed that the ecological densities of all the four variants of *G. fragrantissima* were higher than that of the respective crude densities at all times of sampling. The annual mean crude density determined for the whole habitat was varying between 0.31/m² (oblanceolate leaf type variant in Kothagiri terrace) and 0.84/m² (ovate leaf type variant in Ebbenadu shola). The mean annual ecological density of the four variants was varying between 1.33m² (elliptic lanceolate leaf type variant in Kodappamand) and 4.22/m² (ovate leaf type variant in Ebbenadu shola). The present study revealed that Ebbenadu shola margins have suitable microclimate for the growth and perpetuation of the study species, *G. fragrantissima* in Nilgiris.