

CONSERVATION ISSUES - General

See also the article: Global warming

The trade scams that are covered in my article on '**Rosewood oil**' also extend to many other supposedly 'organically grown' oils. Investigations have indicated that most of the certifying organisations are not undertaking adequate inspection of the growers. For the more exotic oils such as sandalwood, rosewood, atlas cedar, etc. they have no sound inspection system and are granting certificates **on what the oil suppliers tell them**. [Those same suppliers who have lied to their customers for years over the quality and origin of their oils](#). Likewise, OG certificates are being granted to oils grown in Madagascar on cleared forest lands against all the principles of conservation and also without adequate inspection regimes.

Read much more in the excellent articles from Chrissie Wildwood. Please read the comments on the 'THE-FOOL-S-PARSLEY-PRIZE' on the lies told by aromatherapy suppliers and some of the trades leading lights on these issues. The Chrissie Wildwood archives are here: <http://web.archive.org/web/20060711194031/http://www.chrissie-wildwood.com>

A detailed assessment of the Sandalwood situation in Australia as well as several other articles about threatened species: See the file on this site [threatened_aromatic_species.pdf](#)

Some excellent articles on issues surrounding Agarwood production:
<http://www.enfleurage.com/pages/Media.html>

Preface to the article below: I am publishing the correspondence below as an example of trade associations whose prime interest is in fooling politicians, Civil Servants and their customers. Some of the biggest aromatherapy oil suppliers have been saying for many years that "their rosewood oil is from sustainably harvested wood or from the leaves of the trees". I believe this scam started in France many years ago and was quickly taken up by UK based aromatherapy suppliers from where it spread around the world. Chrissie Wildwood exposed these lies in several articles published in various journals and web sites. **Yet, despite that, most aromatherapy teachers still teach about the use of endangered species.**

A response from Chrissie Wildwood over an article from the Aromatherapy Trade Council (UK) in 2003, but little has changed since:

An article entitled 'Environmental Issues & Aromatherapy' appears in the Natural Medicines Society's newsletter (Spring 2003). In this article, Sylvia Baker of the Aromatherapy Trade Council (ATC) congratulates the NMS for raising public awareness about commercial over-exploitation of wild medicinal plants and aromatics. However, she makes no reference to my own article Spotlight on the Trade in Wild Plants, which appeared in the same newsletter earlier on. Yet clearly, she writes in direct response to the issues raised in that article.

I am grateful to Martin Watt for inviting me to post on his web site the relevant parts of my letter sent to Sato Liu of the NMS. In this correspondence I express my concerns about the ATC's apparent dismissal of my painstaking research into sandalwood (*Santalum album*) and rosewood (*Aniba spp.*) The ATC appears to accept no responsibility for the demise of these two trees. **Choosing instead to repeat the tired old story that rosewood and sandalwood are ethically harvested from well-managed forests.**

Here are a few paragraphs taken from Sylvia Baker's article:

We are, in fact, reaping the results of the over-harvesting of rosewood for the fragrance industry during the 1950s and 1960s and the failure to encourage replanting. Had it not been for the switch to synthetic linolol, a cheaper replacement for rosewood in fragrances, we would have lost the trees altogether long ago.

Later:

Responsible essential oil traders that are members of trade associations, such as the ATC, are able to trace their supplies of essential oils back to their origins.

And finally:

All in all, it is fair to say that while the aromatherapy industry must remain ever vigilant, it is not the villain in the demise of plants. Other much larger industries, such as the pharmaceutical industry, must take much of the responsibility for this and campaigners should be targeting those larger industries that really can make a difference to sustainable sources.

Chrissie Wildwood Replied to the Natural Medicines Society:

Dear Sato,

I note that Sylvia Baker has contributed a defensive article on behalf of the ATC. Isn't it interesting that the aromatherapy organisations should feel the need to blame the pharmaceutical industry and take no responsibility whatsoever for the continuing demise of sandalwood and rosewood?

In stark contrast, the National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH) are recommending to their members that they avoid using endangered herbs listed by CITES (Convention on Trade in Endangered Species). They are also encouraging organic cultivation of medicinal plants. They see no need to be defensive in response to articles such as mine. Indeed, a number of NIMH members are writing in a similar vein.

We all know the pharmaceutical industry is the biggest offender when it comes to 'slaughter harvesting' of medicinal plants, as stated in my own article on the subject. But sandalwood and rosewood are used almost exclusively by the perfumery and aromatherapy industries. No matter what Sylvia implies to the contrary, neither sandalwood nor rosewood can possibly be harvested in a sustainable way.

Take rosewood: there are only four working distilleries left in the Amazon because of the tree's decline. Two of these distilleries are operating illegally. True, the Brazilian government believes, erroneously, that it is acceptable to fell endangered wild forest trees in order to extract the essential oil, which has little use other than for the trivial purposes of perfumery, cosmetics and aromatherapy massage. However, the government in Brazil is failing miserably to control the harvesting and replanting - hence the illegal distillation of the oil. Rosewood is notoriously difficult to cultivate, partly because it produces such little seed, and because even when seed can be found, the plants are unable to thrive in the degraded soil resulting from deforestation.

There are similar, if not worse problems with sandalwood. Not least because of the sandalwood bandits who happen to be trading in illicit ivory and tiger skins as well. Even torture and murders have been committed in the name of sandalwood! The vibrations of murder, torture and environmental destruction have no place in holistic aromatherapy.

Now, I don't expect the NMS or Sylvia Baker to take my word for any of this. So I urge Sylvia in particular to carry out her own investigations. She could begin by contacting my colleague, an environmentalist who is attempting against all odds to replant rosewood trees in the Amazon Basin. She will confirm everything I've said, and much more besides (email address supplied to the NMS is not given here in order to protect my colleague's privacy, C.W.)

If Sylvia would like further information on sandalwood, then I will gladly provide this. She should always bear in mind that *Santalum album* is a threatened species listed in the IUCN Red Book. It also meets CITES requirements as a species in dire need of protection. Since the NIMH advises its members to avoid such plants, then why not the aromatherapy organisations?

It takes 50-60 years for sandalwood and rosewood trees to reach maturity, the age they need to be before distillation of the heartwood is considered to be commercially viable. Currently there are no properly established plantations of either species. These trees are not being harvested sustainably. The replanting of sandalwood in India has only recently been carried out, so it will be at least 50 years before the trees are mature enough to be felled for oil production - if indeed, the trees ever reach maturity. Many trees are being smitten by disease or failing to grow because, like rosewood, they are not especially amenable to cultivation. **Update 2018. Since Chrissie wrote this there are now established plantations of sandalwood in several countries. When viable oil production will start is open to question.**

I would be grateful, Sato, if you would kindly forward this letter to Sylvia Baker. I would like the ATC to work with me on this. I feel Sylvia would begin to see things differently if presented with the facts, rather than the usual trade hype.

Chrissie Wildwood - May 2003

Source and copyright: Chrissie Wildwood and <http://www.aromamedical.org>