

# Nepal harvest rush threatens 'Himalayan Viagra' fungus

Demand soars as supplies drop from loss of habitat and over-harvesting

By REUTERS  
in Kathmandu, Nepal

For decades, a rare fungus, prized as an aphrodisiac and dubbed "Himalayan Viagra", has been a source of income for poor villagers in Nepal's remote Himalayan foothills.

Men, women and children stream into high meadows every year to harvest the fungus called *yarsagumba*, meaning "summer grass, winter worm", which grows from dead moth larvae. High-quality specimens fetch thousands of dollars a kilogram.

But experts say the fungus, found only above 3,500 meters, is under threat and yields are falling, threatening the livelihood of thousands of people who depend on it for up to 70 percent of their income.

"Over-harvesting, premature harvesting, destruction of the pastureland where it grows, and perhaps climate change are the major causes of the decline," said Uttam Babu Shrestha, a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts.

"If this continues it could become extinct soon."

The parasitic fungus *yarsagumba* kills and then grows on ghost moth larvae in the ground.

Although there is no scientific evidence, the small fungus is prized in traditional Chinese medicines as a tonic to increase sexual vigor.

During the annual May and June picking season, thousands of Nepali villagers travel in mule and yak trains to high pastures to look for the tiny buds that protrude from the ground.

Shrestha said villagers who were used to collecting kilograms of *yarsagumba* at a time 10 years ago, now struggle to gather even small amounts of the fungus, which grows to roughly the size of a potato chip.

"This year has been the worst. Many collectors in Dolpa returned without any," said Shrestha.

The area, where 50,000 people compete to find the fungus every year, accounts for more than half of Nepal's annual harvest, which topped 1,170 kilograms last year.

Demand for the fungus is soaring. Villagers received



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UTTAM BABU SHRESTHA  
GRADUATE STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

\$6 for a piece of *yarsagumba* about the size of a chili this year — twice the amount they received last year.

In Kathmandu, high-quality fungus sells for up to \$31,000 a kg.

Commercial collection of the fungus began some 30 years ago.

Nepali villager Tshewang Lama saw how some Chinese took drops of *yarsagumba* as tincture to increase immunity and cure tuberculosis, fatigue, paralysis and cancer.

Lama used the fungus to cure his sleep disorder and other ailments and became one of the first gatherers. Shrestha said abandoned trash, open defecation and trees cut for cooking and heating damaged the hills where the fungus grows.

"If these are not checked, in time the environmental cost will be bigger than its economic benefits," he explained.

Officials said the Nepali government collected \$132,000 from the export of the fungus in 2011, but analysts said the figures may be low because many villagers sell their crop directly to customers in China without reporting transactions.

Filmmaker Dipendra Bhandari, who made a documentary about the fungus harvest, *Journey to Yarsa*, said in several remote villages children accompany their parents during the picking season when schools are closed for two months.

He added that it can be dangerous, and villagers fall sick or die during the long journey.

In 2009, seven gatherers were killed in a fight with locals over the fungus in west Nepal, and two years earlier at least 16 people perished when a snowstorm buried their camp in Dolpa.

Lama believes the government should regulate trade and strengthen local institutions to ensure pickers get the maximum benefits from the trade.

"It is a money plant. We should conserve it so the harvest becomes sustainable in the long run," Lama said.



Bob Dylan performs at Festival des Vieilles Charrues in Carhaix, France, on July 22.

DAVID VINCENT / ASSOCIATED PRESS

# Author acknowledges faking Dylan quotes

By ASSOCIATED PRESS  
in New York

A staff writer for The New Yorker has resigned, and his best-selling book has been halted after he acknowledged inventing quotes by Bob Dylan.

Jonah Lehrer released a statement on Monday through his publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, saying that some Dylan quotes appearing in *Imagine: How Creativity Works* did "not exist". Others were "unintentional misquotations, or represent improper combinations of previously existing quotes".

Lehrer said he acknowledged his actions after being contacted by Michael Moynihan of the online publication Tablet Magazine, which earlier on Monday released an in-depth story on the Dylan passages in *Imagine*.

"I told Mr Moynihan that they (the quotes in question) were from archival interview footage provided to me by Dylan's representatives. This was a lie spoken in a moment of panic. When Mr Moynihan followed up, I continued to lie and say things I should not have said," Lehrer wrote in his

statement.

"The lies are over now. I understand the gravity of my position. I want to apologize to everyone I have let down, especially my editors and readers."

Houghton Mifflin said in a statement that Lehrer had committed a "serious misuse". Listings for the e-book edition of *Imagine* will be removed and shipments of the physical book have been stopped. *Imagine*, published in March, has sold more than 200,000 copies, according to Houghton Mifflin. It has spent 16 weeks on The New York Times' hardcover nonfiction bestseller list and was ranked No 105 on Amazon.com as of Monday. Amazon had cited the book as among the best March releases.

A spokesman for Dylan did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Over the past decade, numerous books have been pulled, whether because of lifting material from other sources or fabricating events. Canceled books inevitably lead to calls for publishers to fact-check releases. But publishers say the time and expense of reviewing thou-

sands of texts, on a vast range of subjects, makes the process impractical.

"Publishing books is fundamentally different from publishing a newspaper or magazine," Bruce Nichols, Houghton Mifflin's senior vice-president and publisher of adult trade books, said in a statement. "We rely on the authors' contractual warranties that the work is original and, for non-fiction, accurate."

"Nonetheless, we consider accuracy and originality to be essential standards, and whenever any of our authors transgresses these standards, we take it very seriously."

The 31-year-old Lehrer had been a rising star at The New Yorker, which is famous for its thorough fact-checking. But he was already in trouble with the magazine after he acknowledged last month that he had recycled passages he had written for previous publications. Some recycled passages also appeared in *Imagine*, the latest of three books by Lehrer, who is known for his explorations of science and literature and how the mind works.

"This is a terrifically sad situation, but, in the end, what is most important is the integrity of what we publish and what we stand for," said David Remnick, editor-in-chief of The New Yorker.

Among Lehrer's inventions was a quote that first appeared in the famous documentary from the mid-1960s, *Don't Look Back*, in which Dylan tells a reporter about his songs: "I just write them. There's no great message." In *Imagine*, Lehrer adds a third sentence: "Stop asking me to explain," which does not appear in the film.

According to Tablet, Lehrer also invented quotes on how Dylan wrote *Like a Rolling Stone* and, when confronted about them, alleged that he had been granted access to an uncut version of *No Direction Home*, a Dylan documentary made by Martin Scorsese. Lehrer now says he never saw such footage.

Dylan himself has been challenged about his use of material. His album *Modern Times* included lines lifted from blues songs and from the Civil War poet Henry Timrod. An exhibit of paintings by the rock star turned out to contain images from other sources.

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# Hollywood hits bull's eye for archery

By REUTERS in London

All the way from Errol Flynn to Kevin Costner, Hollywood has always been all a-quiver about Robin Hood and his trusty bow and arrow.

Now the heroine of a science fiction romp has made archery a cool sport again.

Thanks to *The Hunger Games*, teenagers are lining up to try their hand and, with the huge media hype, the Olympics are helping to bring archery out of the shadows even more.

Brady Ellison, whose US Olympic team lost a nail-biting final to Italy, said: "One of the great things about the Olympics is that it brings a lot of the smaller sports into the limelight every four years."

"It's a lot more popular right now. Let's hope it stays that way."

*The Hunger Games*, with Jennifer Lawrence as the feisty heroine with the deadly bow and arrow, was a box office smash when it came out in March.

It was then followed by the Disney Pixar animated movie *Brave* with yet another bow-wielding heroine to give the sport a further boost.

"I do feel like this year that with all the movies and stuff that has come out, especially in the States, we are getting a lot more recognition for the sport," Ellison added.

USA Archery reports that its membership has grown by almost 20 percent since last year with its youth division now the largest.

Its website is being bombarded with queries from would-be William Tells. On Facebook and Twitter it is the same story — figures are soaring.

Hollywood has certainly played a starring role in giving impressionable teenagers some swashbuckling role models.

Take Orlando Bloom as Legolas in the fantasy epic *Lord of the Rings*. Or the blue Navi people in the James Cameron blockbuster *Avatar*.

But it was *The Hunger Games* that gave archery the boost it needed and with sequels now planned from the best-selling Suzanne Collins books, the impetus is there to be maintained.

Cool and archery haven't always been synonymous. They are now.

Khatuna Lorig, now appear-



US Olympic archers Brady Ellison (left) and Jake Kaminski celebrate during the men's archery team semifinals at the London 2012 Olympic Games on Saturday.

ing at her fourth Olympics, gave Jennifer Lawrence lessons for the film in which one of the most spectacular scenes showed her shooting an apple from the mouth of a roasted pig.

Lorig, who has represented the former Soviet Union, Georgia and now the United States at the Olympics, can certainly attest to how archery has become such a hit.

"I have a friend who is coaching and he usually gets four or five calls a month about archery. Now he's getting 10 a week," she said.

"When I train in North Hol-

lywood, you have to get there two hours early to get a chance to shoot. The kids from 6 to 16 are trying this great sport. We need to keep the kids off the street."

And she is hoping there will be a domino effect all the way down the line in the education system.

"I heard from the universities and colleges that students who tried archery, their grades went up because archery is such a mentally disciplined sport that it actually helps you concentrate better on your homework," she said.

# Chinese experts criticize US report

By CHENG GUANGJIN  
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The United States has named China as one of eight "countries of particular concern" in its annual report on religious freedom issued on Monday.

Critics have hit back at the report, claiming the US is interfering in the internal affairs of other countries in the name of religion.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on Monday that the report "sends a signal ... that the world is watching."

"It also provides information to help us and others target our advocacy, to make sure we reach the people who most need our help," Clinton said.

A Xinhua News Agency commentary published on Tuesday accused the report of being "nothing but a political tool used by the US government to exert pressure on other countries, mostly deemed as its rivals".

Four Asian countries — China, Myanmar, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Uzbekistan — were among eight nations designated as "countries of particular concern" on religious freedom. Eritrea, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Sudan were also named.

The report is largely based on unconfirmed media reports and groundless allegations from outlawed groups and organizations with an ulterior motive, the Xinhua commentary said.

By blaming China for "marked deterioration" in religious freedom, the report apparently ignored the basic facts and realities in China, which has made utmost efforts to defend religious freedom and the right to express religious belief on condition that laws are respected, it said.

Contrary to the report's claims that "increased restrictions on religious freedom" led to at least 12 self-immolations in 2011 in the Tibet autonomous region, these incidents were in fact part of the Dalai Lama clique's scheme to internationalize the Tibet issue, according to Xinhua.

Only a few members from banned cults and illegal extremist religious organizations, which engage in illegal or separatist activities under the guise of seeking religious freedom, have been punished in China strictly in accordance with the laws, Xinhua said.

The US State Department has been issuing to the Congress the annual Report on International Religious Freedom, which covers nearly 200 countries and territories, since 1999, under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.

Releasing the report "will only backfire by creating more suspicion and distrust rather than fostering mutual understanding and improving relations with other countries", said the Xinhua commentary.

"Equality and mutual respect have been the cornerstones for building nation-to-nation relations, but the United States has shown no respect to others by imposing its own standards on religious policies, regardless of the differences in history, cultural tradition and economic and political realities," it said.

Niu Jun, an expert on US studies at Peking University, said that conflict between China and the US on religious issues has been a "chronic problem" between the two countries, which have different political systems.

The US has been issuing such reports annually for many years, but "not all of the information in the reports is precise and some is far from the real situation of China's religious reality", Niu said.

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