Oryx

In search of rare pear species in the mountains of Armenia

By Anna Asatryan, 9th April 2026

Finding trees representing rare and threatened pear species in Armenia can be compared to searching for a needle in a haystack. The country's flora is rich in pears, including many endemic and threatened species that are often difficult to identify due to the variability of their diagnostic features. My research for wild pear conservation began more than 10 years ago with funding from Fauna & Flora and The Global Trees Campaign, and has become one of the most interesting and long-term studies in my practice. Many questions remained regarding the distribution, ecology and biology of the rare endemic pears, ten of which are threatened globally. For the development of approaches to their conservation and for population reinforcement measures, it was necessary to study the threats and other factors limiting the distribution and natural reproduction of such endangered pear species. These questions were certainly intriguing and prompted a search for answers, which served as the impetus for my research.

In 2020 and 2021, as part of the ‘Protection of threatened pear species and securing viability of their populations in Armenia’ project (implemented by the NGO Armenian Society of Biologists, with financial support from Fondation Franklinia), with technical support from Tigran Abgaryan and the local foresters, I carried out fieldwork in the Vayots Dzor province of Armenia in the surroundings of the Herher and Artavan villages, and in the Yeghegis river gorge. Many threatened pear

species are found in mountain forests, grasslands and along roadsides, often as solitary trees scattered through the landscape. In order to find a target species, it is therefore necessary to examine every pear tree you come across. With so little information to guide us about the exact locations of pear species, our trip quickly became a great adventure.

P. daralagezi. Photo: Anna Asatryan.

Searching for wild pears was definitely the most delicious research I've carried out in my career. One of the most enjoyable parts of the fieldwork was tasting the wild pear fruits, some of which turned out to be juicy and incredibly tasty, like for example, the fruits of *Pyrus gergerana*. Our field trips were carried out in September and October—the autumn colours of the fruit forest and vast grasslands, combined with the warm autumn sun and bright blue sky, were ample reward for the difficulties associated with the cut terrain and the inaccessibility of a number of locations.

Wild pear natural reproduction in the Herher state sanctuary. Photo: Anna Asatryan.

Throughout our fieldtrips, we gathered new data on the distribution, threats and biology of the globally threatened endemic pear species *P. daralagezi* Mulk., *P. hajastana* Mulk. and *P. gergerana* Gladkova. We also rediscovered a population of *P. hajastana* in its locus classicus, 52 years after the first record was made. This, as well as finding a new locality for *P. gergerana*, made our fieldwork on the project particularly rewarding.

During this project, we also explored the role of animals in the seed dispersal and reproduction of pear trees. There's an Armenian proverb, "The bear knows seven songs, and they are all about the pear". According to a forester who accompanied me during the field studies, bears readily eat ripe pears, but they are quite selective and sometimes react emotionally to the fruit taste. For example, he recounted how he once spotted a bear sampling the fruit from a young pear tree. The bear didn't like the taste of those particular fruits and, in anger, broke off the tree's branch and walked away. I think, given the great contribution the bear makes to the natural reproduction of pear trees, he can be forgiven for this damage.

P. hajastana fruits collected for seeds. Photo: Anna Asatryan.

Wild pears seem to be endlessly researchable. Their genetic diversity in Armenia is so remarkable that studying them in any depth would require years and many resources.

Although identifying threatened pear species and understanding their distribution is challenging, this does not stand in the way of their potential conservation. Our priority is to protect these remarkable trees in their natural habitats, where they continue to play an irreplaceable role in unique ecosystems.

The article ‘New data on globally threatened pear species (Pyrus spp.) in Armenia’ is available open access in Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation.

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