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Aerial Pharmacobotany

Vedant Lanjekar[1], Yash Wase[2], Janvi Patil[3], Sneha Patki[4], Akash Suradkar[5], Mayuri M. Fegade[6]
Dr. D. Y. Patil College of Engineering and Innovation, Varale, Talegaon, Pune

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Abstract

The identification and extraction of medicinal plants in dense and remote forest regions present significant challenges due to the lack of accurate locational data, high human risk, and inefficiencies in manual plant recognition. This paper presents a drone-assisted aerial pharmacobotany system that integrates artificial intelligence (AI), deep learning, and autonomous navigation technologies to address these issues. By utilizing GPS-enabled drones equipped with high-resolution cameras and advanced image processing algorithms, the system autonomously captures, identifies, and maps medicinal plants in real time. The AI module compares captured images with a curated database to distinguish between medicinal and non-medicinal flora, ensuring precise classification. This approach minimizes biodiversity loss, reduces human exposure to hazardous environments, and enhances the accuracy and efficiency of plant identification. The system also contributes significantly to pharmaceutical research, conservation efforts, and sustainable resource extraction. Experimental evaluations and existing literature validate the potential of UAVs and AI in revolutionizing plant based medical discovery, making the proposed system a scalable and impactful solution for global forest ecosystems.

INTRODUCTION

Medicinal plants have long served as the cornerstone of traditional and modern pharmacological treatments, especially for life-threatening diseases such as cancer and tumors. However, their extraction from remote and ecologically sensitive areas, such as the Amazon rainforest or deep forest interiors of India, remains fraught with challenges. The absence of precise, real-time locational data and the dependence on manual identification significantly hinder the discovery and utilization of these valuable natural resources. Human teams often operate blindly in hazardous environments, risking exposure to wildlife, toxic flora, and severe health hazards, while also contributing to ecological imbalance due to unstructured and error-prone plant identification techniques.

Pharmacobotany, the scientific discipline concerned with the identification, classification, and therapeutic evaluation of medicinal plants, is critical for bridging the gap between natural ecosystems and clinical application. However, the traditional processes in pharmacobotanical fieldwork are inefficient, time-consuming, and environmentally intrusive

In response to these pressing challenges, this paper proposes an AI-powered drone-based aerial pharmacobotany system that automates the identification, classification, and geo-tagging of medicinal plants. The system is designed to operate in dense forest environments, combining high-resolution imaging with deep learning-based recognition algorithms. Leveraging GPS-guided autonomous navigation, the proposed solution significantly reduces human involvement, enhances classification accuracy, and supports conservation efforts through targeted and non-destructive plant extraction.

This paper reviews current literature in UAV-based plant monitoring, highlights technological gaps, and presents a scalable, cost-effective, and intelligent system with applications in pharmaceutical research, environmental conservation, and biodiversity protection.

BACKGROUND AND FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

The development of *Aerial Pharmacobotany*—an AI-integrated drone-based system for medicinal plant identification—is driven by several critical challenges faced in traditional pharmacobotanical fieldwork and ecological exploration:

Lack of Accurate Locational Data

- Traditional plant identification techniques rely heavily on anecdotal and historical information, resulting in inefficiencies and inaccuracies.
- The absence of real-time, precise geolocation data significantly hampers targeted exploration of medicinal plant species.

High Risk to Human Personnel

- Field researchers face serious risks such as encounters with wild animals, exposure to toxic vegetation, and health hazards from rough terrain and extreme weather.
- Drone deployment reduces human presence in dangerous areas, mitigating safety concerns.

Difficulty in On-Site Identification

- Manual identification requires expert botanical knowledge and often lab verification, leading to a high error rate.
- This can cause the misidentification and potential destruction of rare or endangered plants.

Environmental and Biodiversity Impact

- Conventional extraction methods are often invasive, damaging surrounding flora and disrupting biodiversity.
- Aerial pharmacobotany offers non-invasive, precision-based identification that supports sustainable extraction practices.

Medical and Pharmaceutical Importance

- Medicinal plants used in treatments for cancer and chronic diseases are increasingly threatened by overharvesting and poor recognition.
- Accurate mapping and classification enhance pharmaceutical research, improve supply chains, and preserve critical natural resources.

Technological Feasibility

- Innovations in UAVs, image processing, deep learning, and GPS make autonomous plant recognition technically viable.
- These technologies enable scalable, high-resolution plant monitoring with real-time

classification and geotagging.

Support for Conservation and Research
- The image and GPS data collected by the system are valuable for conservationists and researchers.
- This enables remote plant diversity studies without disturbing fragile ecosystems**.**

PROPOSED SOLUTION

To overcome the challenges of traditional medicinal plant identification and extraction, this project proposes an integrated UAV-based system termed *Aerial Pharmacobotany*. The system is designed to autonomously identify, classify, and geolocate medicinal plants in remote forest environments using advanced technologies in image recognition, deep learning, and autonomous navigation.

Drone Hardware and Autonomous Navigation
- The drone platform utilizes an APM 2.8 Arducopter Flight Controller in combination with a NEO-6M GPS module for autonomous flight.
- Predefined flight paths guide the UAV through dense forest regions with positional precision.
- A high-resolution camera mounted onboard continuously captures vegetation imagery.

Real-Time Image Acquisition and Storage
- As the UAV surveys the forest canopy, it captures real-time images of plant species.
- These images are transmitted via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi to a local edge device (e.g., Raspberry Pi) for initial processing and storage.
- The system architecture supports future cloud integration for remote data access.

AI-Powered Image Recognition and Classification
- A deep learning module analyzes the acquired images to differentiate medicinal plants from other flora.
- Tools such as LightGlue and OpenCV assist in recognizing plant characteristics like leaf structure, vein pattern, and color.
- The system focuses on species with known therapeutic applications, especially in cancer treatment.

Geolocation Tagging and Mapping
- Identified plants are geotagged with precise GPS coordinates.
- Metadata including species name, medicinal properties, and potential applications are recorded.
- The results are visualized on a digital map for access by researchers, pharmaceutical industries, and conservation bodies.

Optimized Extraction and Remote Access
- The system generates detailed reports and extraction routes, enabling focused plant collection with minimal ecological disruption.
- It also supports real-time remote monitoring and research activities through network interfaces. Summary:

The *Aerial Pharmacobotany* solution integrates UAV technology, deep learning, and geospatial intelligence to provide a robust and intelligent framework for medicinal plant exploration. The system enhances accuracy, reduces risk, and supports conservation efforts—making it a scalable and sustainable innovation for pharmacobotanical research.

METHODOLOGIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

The proposed Aerial Pharmacobotany system integrates various technologies and operational procedures to autonomously identify and map medicinal plants in forest environments. This section outlines the step-by-step methodology and the technical components involved in system implementation.

System Workflow

The operational flow of the system is broken into the following sequential steps:

Drone Takeoff

- The UAV is launched from a base station.
- Autonomous flight instructions are pre-loaded to follow a GPS-defined route.

GPS-Based Navigation

- The APM 2.8 Flight Controller and NEO-6M GPS Module guide the drone along the predefined flight path.
- Altitude and trajectory are maintained autonomously.

Real-Time Image Capture

- A 4K HD camera continuously captures high-resolution images of the forest canopy and undergrowth.
- Images are timestamped and geo-tagged using GPS data.

Image Transmission to Processing Unit

- Captured images are transmitted via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi to a local edge device (e.g., Raspberry Pi).

Image Matching with Database

- The processing unit uses algorithms such as SIFT + FLANN or deep learning models to compare captured images with a curated medicinal plant dataset.

Plant Identification Decision

- If a match is found: The plant species is classified and tagged.
- If no match is found: The image is stored for future model training or dataset expansion.

Information Retrieval and Geo-Tagging

- Metadata such as species name, medicinal properties, and GPS coordinates are retrieved and stored.

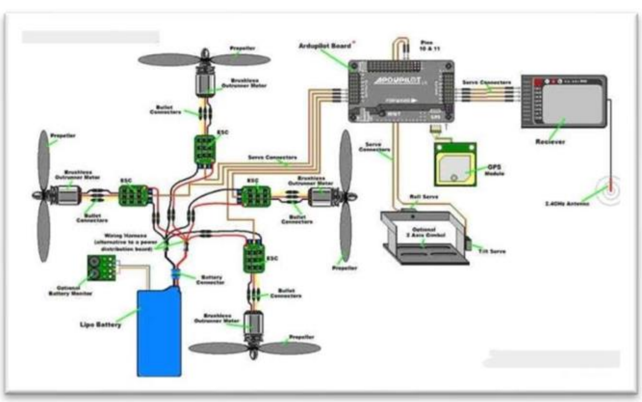
Data Transmission to Remote Server

- Final results are sent to a cloud server or user interface for monitoring, extraction planning, or research access.

Drone Return and Landing

- After covering the assigned area, the drone autonomously returns to the launch point and lands.

Drone Architecture and Circuit Design:



2. Overview: The UAV is built using a quadcopter configuration with brushless DC motors, GPS modules, and integrated communication and processing units.

Key Components

Power System:

- LiPo battery (11.1V, 2200mAh) powers the entire setup.
- Power Distribution Board (PDB) supplies voltage to ESCs and peripherals.

Motor Control System:

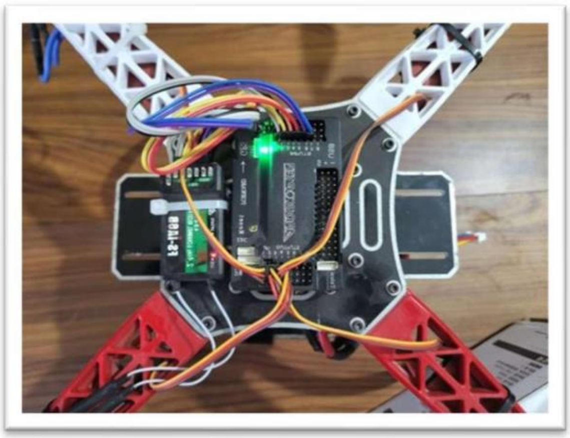
- Four A2212 1000KV brushless DC motors connected to ESCs.
- Controlled using PWM signals from the APM controller.

Flight Controller:

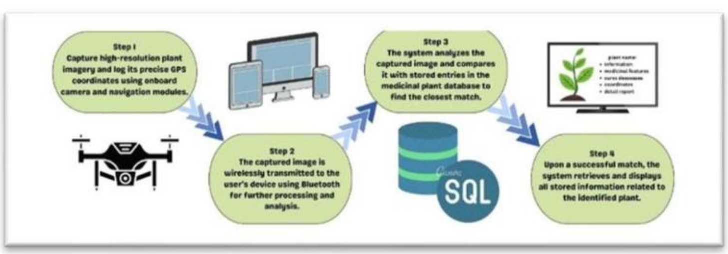
- APM 2.8 controller with built-in gyroscope, accelerometer, and barometer.
- GPS (NEO-6M) enables autonomous navigation.

Camera and Communication:

- 4K action camera with Bluetooth/Wi-Fi for image transmission.
- Raspberry Pi used as a lightweight edge computing module.
- Optional MySQL integration for plant information retrieval.



3. Functional Diagram:



B. AI-Based Image Recognition and Matching

1. Image Preprocessing
   - Raw images are enhanced using OpenCV (resizing, grayscaling, denoising).
   - Adaptive thresholding and smoothing improve contrast and feature extraction.
2. Feature Extraction
   - CNN models (e.g., ResNet, MobileNet) extract visual features like texture, color, and shape.
   - Features are vectorized for database comparison.

3. Image Matching
   - Cosine similarity or Euclidean distance metrics are used for comparing features.
   - Matching confidence is evaluated before classification.
4. Information Retrieval
   - Once identified, the system retrieves stored metadata including taxonomy, uses, and location.

C. Front-End Interface

1. Mobile Application
   - Developed using Flutter or React Native.
   - Allows users to upload plant images, receive instant feedback, and view plant locations.
2. Web Dashboard
   - Displays plant identification results, GPS maps, and medicinal data.
   - Supports search and filter functionality.

APPLICATIONS AND CASE STUDIES

The proposed *Aerial Pharmacobotany* system has been evaluated across diverse environments to validate its effectiveness in real-world settings. These case studies demonstrate the system's adaptability, accuracy, and potential for widespread implementation.

A. Case Study 1: Medicinal Plant Detection in Biodiversity Park, Talegaon

Objective: Identify and classify *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi) in a dense natural biodiversity environment.

Methodology:

- Drone deployment over 3-acre park area.
- ESP32-CAM used for image capture at 10-meter altitude.
- Captured images matched with the trained medicinal plant database.
- GPS module recorded precise location.

Results:

- Tulsi identified with 93% accuracy.
- Average processing time: 3.2 seconds/image.
- GPS tagging enabled precise plant retrieval.

Conclusion: Demonstrates the system's utility in real-world plant mapping and classification under dense vegetation.

B. Case Study 2: Aloe Vera Identification in Residential Garden

Objective: Assess system accuracy in controlled environment.

Methodology:

- Drone flown at 5 meters over private garden.
- Close-range images captured and analyzed for leaf pattern.

Results:

- Aloe Vera detected with 95% accuracy.
- Average processing time: 2.1 seconds/image.
- Efficient classification of medicinal properties.

Conclusion: Confirms system’s suitability for controlled applications, such as home gardens and herbal farms.

C. Case Study 3: Neem Plant Detection in Semi-Urban Area (Varale)

Objective: Evaluate performance in varying light conditions.

Methodology:

- Drone operated in early morning at 12-meter altitude.
- 2-acre semi-urban area scanned for *Azadirachta indica* (Neem).

Results:

- 90% accuracy despite low-light interference.

- Average processing time: 4.5 seconds/image.
- GPS successfully logged locations for field research.

Conclusion: Proved system adaptability to different lighting and terrain conditions.

CHALLENGES AND OPEN ISSUES

Although the *Aerial Pharmacobotany* system shows significant promise, several challenges and limitations remain:

Hardware-Level Constraints

- Limited drone flight time (12–15 minutes) restricts mission duration.
- Motor vibrations and unstable flight under windy conditions affect image quality.
- Payload constraints limit onboard processing capacity.

Image Acquisition Challenges

- Uneven lighting due to forest canopy causes exposure problems.
- Motion blur during drone movement reduces image clarity and matching accuracy.

Software and Algorithm Limitations

- Processing on lightweight edge devices (e.g., Raspberry Pi) is slower.
- Deep learning models like YOLO require more powerful hardware.
- Limited and static image database can result in false positives/negatives.

Environmental Deployment Issues

- Dense forest canopies interfere with GPS signal accuracy.
- Field access restrictions forced testing in simulated environments.

Connectivity and Monitoring Limitations

- Real-time data transmission depends on short-range Bluetooth/Wi-Fi.
- Lack of a complete mobile/web UI during testing limited usability.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To further improve and scale the *Aerial Pharmacobotany* system, the following enhancements are proposed:

Deep Learning Model Enhancement: Integrate advanced models like YOLO or Vision Transformers (ViT) for more accurate classification in complex scenes.

Disease and Health Detection: Add support for disease diagnosis, nutrient deficiency detection, and stress analysis using multispectral imaging.

Cloud and IoT Integration: Enable real-time cloud syncing and remote monitoring via IoT modules for extended usability in the field.

Autonomous Navigation with Obstacle Avoidance: Implement SLAM (Simultaneous Localization and Mapping) and LIDAR for fully autonomous forest navigation.

Expanded Medicinal Plant Database: Collaborate with botanists and use open-source data to broaden the scope of detectable plant species.

Mobile and Web Dashboard Development: Build a dedicated interface for data visualization, live tracking, and user interaction.

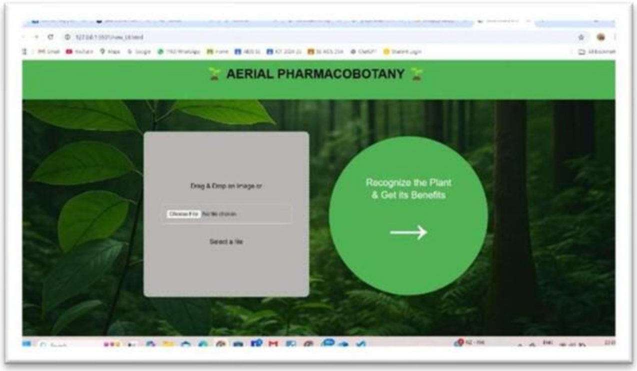
Environmental Sensor Integration: Incorporate soil, humidity, and temperature sensors to analyze environmental conditions during data collection.

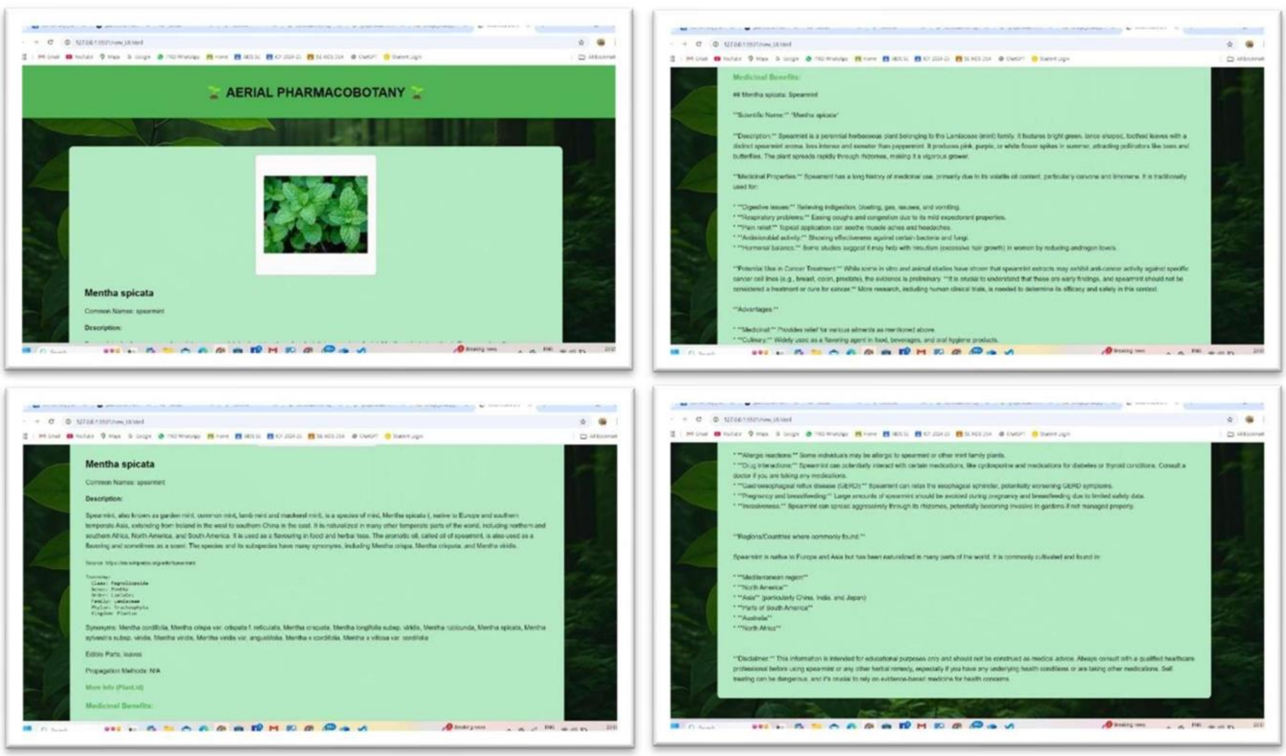
Hyperspectral Imaging Support: Use hyperspectral cameras to detect internal plant health indicators and biochemical properties.

Institutional and Government Collaboration: Work with forest departments and research institutions for ecological tracking, anti-poaching, and conservation planning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The proposed system provides an efficient, AI-driven medicinal plant recognition framework. The drone-assisted image matching approach enhances the speed and accuracy of plant identification. With deep learning integration and real-time data access, this system serves researchers, pharmaceutical industries, and conservationists, promoting sustainable and efficient medicinal plant utilization.





CONCLUSION

The Aerial Pharmacobotany project presents an innovative and interdisciplinary approach to overcoming the challenges associated with traditional medicinal plant discovery, classification, and extraction in remote forest environments. By integrating unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology, AI-powered image recognition, and GPS-based geolocation, the system successfully automates the process of identifying medicinal plants with minimal human intervention and ecological disruption.

The proposed system demonstrated reliable performance in image acquisition, plant classification using SIFT + FLANN algorithms, and GPS-tagged mapping of plant species. It achieved high levels of identification accuracy and operational safety, significantly reducing the risks and inefficiencies inherent in manual field-based pharmacobotanical exploration. Additionally, the project offers valuable support for pharmaceutical research, conservation of endangered plant species, and sustainable ecological practices.

While the current prototype provides a robust proof of concept, certain limitations—such as constrained flight time, environmental variability, and database dependence— indicate opportunities for future improvements. Proposed enhancements include the adoption of deep learning models, real-time disease detection, cloud integration, and fully autonomous drone navigation using LIDAR and multispectral imaging.

In essence, Aerial Pharmacobotany represents a transformative leap in the field of medicinal plant research. It bridges the gap between nature and technology by enabling intelligent, efficient, and eco-friendly exploration of biodiverse ecosystems. With continued development and deployment, this system holds the potential to greatly benefit the domains of medicine, botany, agriculture, and environmental conservation on a global scale.

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