

# COSTLIEST FUNGUS OF THE WORLD – ITS BIOLOGY, HARVEST AND TRADE

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*The costliest fungus, *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* or commonly known as Caterpillar fungus, is widely distributed in upper hilly regions of the Himalaya in China, Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and India. It is a peculiar insect pathogenic fungus with a larva of moths at the base and the fruiting body of fungus at the top. The life cycle of this fungus is also very interesting. The wide use of this fungus in the Traditional Chinese Medicine of China has made the fungus as costliest of the world. The characteristics and medicinal importance of the fungus in general has been discussed before going to the study of caterpillar fungus. The morphology, life cycle, harvesting, medicinal importance, and trade of Caterpillar Fungus have been elaborated. The overharvesting of this Caterpillar fungus by collectors is affecting the ecosystem of the alpine regions of Himalaya leading to the threat of many endangered plant and animal species of that area. All these aspects have been discussed.*

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