

IUCN SSC Plant Conservation Committee



2020 Report



John Donaldson



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Co-Chairs

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Location/Affiliation

South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), South Africa

Number of members

15

Mission statement

The IUCN SSC Plant Conservation Committee (PCC) leads IUCN's efforts in stemming the loss of global plant diversity through its wide-ranging network of plant conservationists. The PCC is responsible for advising and assisting on the overall prioritisation and programme oversight within the SSC to deliver on its plant conservation responsibilities. The PCC works to support and facilitate the activities of the SSC Chair, the IUCN Global Species Programme, and the expert volunteer network of Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, Task Forces and others, providing overall strategic guidance and direction in accordance with the mandate of the SSC.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

The Plant Conservation Committee aims to achieve the following outputs by 2020: (1) barometer of life targets achieved for plants (38,000 plants included on the IUCN Red List); (2) guidelines on including plant diversity in action plans and sector based plans developed; (3) ex situ conservation of plants promoted by involving botanic gardens in conservation and support of IUCN SSC groups; (4) each IUCN SSC Specialist Group has a sustainable use focus; (5) quantifiable targets related to plant diversity incorporated into the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Green List: test the Green List for Cycads, Kew Caribbean plants, Cacti, and sample Global Tree Campaign species.

Red List: (1) manage and drive assessments forward in 13 megadiverse countries (US, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, South Africa, Ethiopia, Madagascar, India, Indonesia, China, Australia); (2) champion Red List assessment of CITES-listed plants (those affected by trade, not look-alike): identify the gaps, encourage Specialist Groups to prioritise assessments; (3) assess conservation status of species important to livelihoods (Plants for People/P4P species prioritised) in order to support conservation action, such as species conservation action plans, national strategies, etc.; (4) develop a system for automating Least Concern assessments for plants, that includes: (i) clearly defined thresholds for what qualifies as Least Concern, e.g. minimum extent of occurrence (EOO) and number of countries, (ii) determine how habitat information can be automatically brought in and test different spatial ecosystem classification systems, e.g. ecosystem assessment for South America, WWF ecoregions, etc., (iii) determine what land cover layers are best used to determine level of habitat loss, (iv) determine thresholds of habitat loss that mean a species cannot qualify as Least Concern; (5) prioritise Crop Wild Relative (CWR) assessments in hotspots, e.g. Indonesia (underway with Crop Wild Relative Specialist Group; Global Trees to build it in through David Gill), investigate working on Crop Wild Relatives in Brazil with the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA) and in Ethiopia; (6) develop an information system to automate Least Concern assessments that is compatible with SIS Connect; (7) develop a protocol for producing semi-automated Least Concern assessments approved and signed off by the Red List Committee; (8) determine timelines for production of Least Concern assessments and determine feasibility of conducting global plant assessments.



Large old plant of Critically Endangered *Encephalartos latifrons*, one of the species assessed for the Green List
Photo: John Donaldson

Plan

Policy: (1) produce a policy brief on Crop Wild Relatives (CWR) and their role in adaptation to climate change, and consider turning this into a resolution for the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC); (2) champion/support piloting of the FairWild Standard and certification for high risk CITES-listed species, and summarise the case study at the relevant CITES events (in particular as relevant to livelihoods and incentives agenda items); (3) develop the next iteration of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation that incorporates the views and aspirations of the entire plant conservation community (not just the ex situ community), develop better indicators for the post-2020 global biodiversity targets, and develop tools and data services for conservation practitioners and policymakers, including Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) national focal points.

Research activities: (1) hotspot regions (Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Madagascar, Colombia) to list Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) sites for plants (once on the Red List); (2) hotspot regions (Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Madagascar, Colombia) where possible to identify Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) for plants (once on the Red List).

Act

Conservation actions: (1) ensure that use and trade of plants is reflected in the work of Specialist Groups as/when appropriate, including to request plant Specialist Groups integrate species use and trade in their work, in particular for the new Specialist Groups; (2) champion the use of the Plant Sustainable Use guidelines by expanding the use of the FairWild Standard and its certification scheme as a recognised international best practice for sustainable harvest and trade in wild plants.

Network

Capacity building: (1) support Specialist Groups to achieve the assessments committed to in the IUCN Species Strategic Plan, through having one-on-one skype calls with each group and emailing them to encourage progress; encourage them to submit in new languages allowed on the Red List; provide training and reviews of assessments where needed; (2) encourage students to conduct assessments at selected universities where a champion lecturer is able to both teach assessment methodology and review assessments produced.

Synergy: facilitate the identification and engagement of plant Specialist Groups, designate CITES focal points with IUCN Global Species Programme (GSP) and SSC and work together to: (i) review plant Specialist Group engagement with CITES in 2017–18 and report back to PCC, (ii) make Specialist Groups aware of the usefulness of the application of the CITES Non-detriment Findings Guidance for Perennial Plants (the nine-steps methodology) for relevant taxa, (iii) identify how to flag priority issues to the Specialist Groups prior to particular CITES events, (iv) identify Specialist Group members who are involved with wildlife trade discussions and ask how to best support them in strengthening the arguments for plant trade in the international wildlife trade discussions, (v) encourage plant Specialist Groups to contribute to the CITES and livelihoods item, including responding to the current call for case studies on CITES and livelihoods, and also the CITES Rural communities process. Specifically, some of the potential case studies include: Palms; Medicinal plants; FairWild; Madagascar CITES species (ornamental); Central African ebonies—Taylor guitars (check with George Schatz).

Communicate

Communication: engage with/contribute to the underpinning materials/publications for TRAFFIC's public/consumer campaign (with/ via botanic gardens, private sector), to increase the awareness of the use of wild plants in products, highlight issues around their sustainability, and promote the more responsible practices to key companies involved in key plant resources in trade.

Activities and results 2020

Assess

Green List

i. A sample of 39 plant species were tested for the Green List of species, including cycads and trees. (KSR #11)

Red List

i. Assessments in megadiverse countries: good progress has been made in South Africa, Madagascar, Mexico, Indonesia, India, Australia, Brazil and Colombia; remaining work needs to be done in Peru, the US, Ecuador and Ethiopia. (KSR #1)

ii. A total of 224 taxa of crop wild relative species (CWR) from Mesoamerica, including squash (*Cucurbita* spp.), cotton (*Gossypium* spp.), potato (*Solanum* sect. *Petota*) and vanilla (*Vanilla* spp.), have been assessed (<https://doi.org/10.1002/ppp3.10225>). Other hotspots will be worked on in the new quadrennium. (KSR #1)

iii. Information system to automate Least Concern assessments: the tool Rapid Least Concern (<https://spbachman.shinyapps.io/rapidLC/>) was developed and is freely available online. (KSR #1)

Recovery site with c. 50 juvenile
planted cycads
Photo: John Donaldson



Plan

Policy

i. Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad (CONABIO) produced a policy brief focused on Mesoamerica. We will explore the opportunity to bring this in as a case study to support crop wild relative conservation planning guidance materials. (KSR #42)

ii. IUCN PCC and Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG) members published an article in May 2020 on 'Strengthening Sustainable International Trade in Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Updates from the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES and potential future directions', focusing on the developments at CITES CoP18 in 2019 (https://abc.herbalgram.org/site/SPageNavigator/CoP18_Sustainability.html). A wider process has been developed in the CITES context to explore voluntary certification standards (VCS) and how these can assist in the implementation of CITES requirements for Appendix II listed medicinal and aromatic plants, linked to both the practical case study in the project in Nepal, as well as in preparation for the post CITES CoP18 Plants Committee meeting. In 2020, a direct contribution was made to the CITES Secretariat document prepared for the Plants Committee on the implementation of Decisions 18.300 - 18.303 Trade in medicinal and aromatic plant species. The Plants Committee being delayed, CITES Secretariat will convene an Intersessional Working Group on the implementation of the Decision, which IUCN PCC will participate in (<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/pc/25/Documents/E-PC25-30.pdf>). TRAFFIC, IUCN MPSG and other partners were in the final stages of the UK Government-funded project in Nepal on piloting FairWild certification of CITES Appendix II listed *Nardostachys grandiflora* (syn. *Nardostachys jatamansi*; <https://www.traffic.org/news/succeeding-with-cites-new-project-aims-to-promote-sustainable-wild-jatamansi-trade-from-nepal/>). In the CBD context, the report on the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation 2011–2020 was launched alongside Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 in September 2020 by the CBD Secretariat. This Global Plant Conservation report includes a range of relevant elements concerning TRAFFIC work, including the FairWild implementation, CITES non-detriment findings (NDFs), under Targets 11 and 12 (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-95-en-hr.pdf>). (KSR #26)

iii. A new Strategy has been developed in alignment with the new post-2020 framework. We worked to get CBD Global Strategy for Plant Conservation focal points from a selection of countries to make interventions at the CBD Subsidiary Body of Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) for the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation to be maintained in the post-2020 framework. Work will be ongoing until the new Global Biodiversity Framework is adopted at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD (CBD COP15). (KSR #26)

Research activities

i. Hotspot regions to list Alliance for Zero Extinction sites for plants: work initiated in South Africa and Colombia, but KBA national coordinator groups still need to be established in the remaining countries. (KSR #22)

ii. Hotspot regions where possible to identify KBAs: work initiated in South Africa and Colombia, but KBA national coordinator groups still need to be established in the remaining countries. (KSR #22)

Act

Conservation actions

i. Each plant Specialist Group was asked to appoint a focal person on Sustainable Use.

In-depth discussions about the ways forward for the coordinated efforts around the use and trade issues took place during the SSC Leaders' Meeting in Abu Dhabi in 2019. As a follow up, discussions started with the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi) on further alignment of targets for the next quadrennium, collaboration with IUCN SSC PCC and the establishment of the Plants Use Group, using the vehicle of SULi. (KSR #36)

ii. As a member of the FairWild partner organisation, IUCN PCC contributed to further development of FairWild Standard implementation and further development of the scope of the Standard, including consultation to adapt the FairWild Standard for fungi, together with the IUCN Fungi Conservation Committee. COVID-19 impacts and uncertainty, combined with the practical difficulties in scheduling audits for new operations, meant that few new companies were in a position to formally join FairWild in 2020 and some companies were forced to exit due to business disruption; however, despite this, three new brand manufacturers and one trader joined, resulting in a total of 34 formal participants at the end of 2020. Overall, in 2020, eight FairWild risk analyses were completed by the IUCN MPSG. By the end of 2020, 24 wild-harvested plant species were FairWild certified, with 34 companies formally engaged with the FairWild value chains; FairWild plant products and ingredients have been sourced from 11 countries and a FairWild pre-audit completed in China, as well as Nepal. FairWild implementation projects were ongoing in a selection of countries, including in the non-certification context. This included a Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund-supported project in Cameroon (on *Prunus africana*), a Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund-supported initiative in Kazakhstan (on *Glycyrrhiza* spp.), a UK

Government Darwin Initiative project in Nepal (see below), and in Malawi (Mulanje Cedar and associated Non-Timber Forest Products). A prototype tool 'Wild Plants for Wildlife' has been developed by TRAFFIC and GIZ, with the focus on the potential for matchmaking between producer and buyer companies, with the focus on high conservation value sourcing areas in Namibia's KAZA region. South Africa was in the process of piloting the FairWild standard to develop a legislated biodiversity management plan for five medicinal plants in the eastern parts of South Africa. In terms of recognition, in June 2020, FairWild Foundation became the recipient of Nutrition Business Journal's 2020 'Stewardship and Sustainability' award, recognised for the role in ensuring the sustainable management of wild plant populations and the economic sustainability of the people who rely on them. To wrap up the year, in December 2020, shoppers were urged to support responsibly sourced wild plant products at Christmas by looking for FairWild label, recommending steps for consumers to take to identify wild plants in everyday products and select sustainably produced ones (<https://www.traffic.org/news/shoppers-urged-to-support-responsibly-sourced-wild-plant-products-this-christmas/>). A publication, *The Invisible Trade: Wild plants and you in the time of COVID-19*, was published in June 2020, following the previous brief on the topic in April 2020 (for the World Health Day). The references and the topic concerning the increased use of herbal ingredients and products as prevention and treatment of COVID-19 were included in a range of other publications and presentations, including, for example, in a Food and Agriculture Organization-TRAFFIC workshop supported by IUCN PCC (September 2020). In 2020, a range of governments expressed their support for the use of plant

ingredients as prevention and treatment of COVID-19 (e.g. China through traditional Chinese medicine prescriptions, Turkmenistan for Liquorice root, etc.), including through requiring clearer efficacy against clinical trial rules (e.g. in South Africa). As previously, few conversations occur concerning the sustainability of those resources into the future and agreeing on the importance of sustainable wild harvesting/trade practices. The focus on the risks of illicit trade were also covered in an article on 'Controlling the invisible trade: wild plant resources and their sustainability' for the World Customs Organisation newsletter in 2020. (KSR #36)

Network

Capacity building

i. Specialist Groups were supported to achieve the assessments committed to in the IUCN Species Strategic Plan. (KSR #1)

Synergy

i. A survey was circulated to all plant Specialist Groups/Red List Authorities before the Abu Dhabi meeting which asked questions about current links to botanic gardens and gathered responses on which groups were interested in establishing stronger partnerships with botanic gardens and what kind of partnership would be most beneficial. These results have been shared with the Plants and Fungi Conservation Coordinator for action in the next quadrennium. (KSR #29)

ii. A Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) PlantSearch records match was carried out for the Freshwater Plant Specialist Group and Palm Specialist Group to identify gardens with important collections that could be potential hosts or provide support. Discussions were initiated with the Freshwater Plant Specialist Group for duplication of *ex situ* collections for this group at Singapore Botanic Gardens. (KSR #29)

Communicate

Communication

i. Guideline for including species in Mapping Biodiversity Prioritisations, site prioritisation, and conservation planning: guidance has been written and included in the Global Species Action Plan that countries will use to implement their post-2020 biodiversity targets. (KSR #6)

Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 5/5

Assess	4	
Plan	5	
Act	2	
Network	3	
Communicate	1	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 6, 11, 22, 26, 29, 36, 42

KSR: Key Species Result