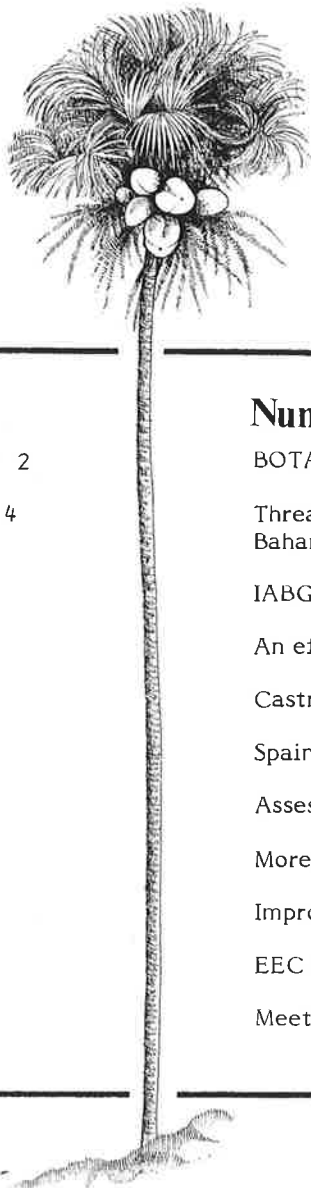


Threatened Plants NEWSLETTER



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CONSERVATION MONITORING CENTRE

INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE
AND NATURAL RESOURCES





Flower of *Erythrina*

Missouri botanist David Neall, who is currently researching at Waimea, is thrilled to be able to study the flower, which has never been properly seen and described before. This is because the *Erythrina* is endemic to only two locations in Cuba, which is the only place where it has ever flowered.

Spain

Professor Vernon Heywood, Chairman of the European Plants Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC), reports:

In June, the Director General of the Environment of the Spanish Government, Dr Conchita Saenz Lain, convened a meeting of Spanish botanists to produce a list of threatened plants for Spain, including the floristically rich Canary and Balearic Islands. The Spanish botanists will use the IUCN Red Data Book categories as criteria for the degree of threat and are taking the latest version of the IUCN list as the starting point which they will update and enlarge.

The meeting followed a suggestion made by IUCN, in particular through the newly formed SSC Specialist Group working together with the Conservation Monitoring Centre. It was organised in association with Professor César Gomez-Campo of the Universidad Politécnica in Madrid. A preliminary version of the list will be published in time for the IUCN General Assembly in Madrid, November 1984.

Assessing US Threatened Plants

In November 1983, the United States published its fourth comprehensive national assessment of native vascular plants that are or may be at risk, and so are candidates for legal protection: 2560 species, subspecies and varieties are included, and 58 more are considered extinct. About 8% of the continental flora and 40% of the Hawaiian flora are affected. The U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973 had required the Smithsonian Institution to prepare an initial report (House Document 94-51, 1975), which was revised as a book, Endangered and Threatened Plants of the United States by E.S. Ayensu and R.A. DeFilipps (1978). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which implements the federal act, built on and revised the two earlier listings of candidates in its first independent assessment in 1980 (Federal Register 45[242,IV]); see Endangered Spp. Tech. Bull. 6(1): 1, 4-5 (1981) and Garden 4(6): 2-3, 32 (1980). The fourth assessment, in 1983, revising about half the entries of 1980 and including 103 new candidates, was published as a supplement (Federal Register 48[229,II]); see Endangered Spp. Tech. Bull. 8(12): 1, 6-8 (1983). Over the years 1261 taxa have been dropped from candidacy for reasons other than extinction.

Work leading to the 1983 assessment was done by a mosaic of collaborators in heritage programs of the Nature Conservancy (which is private, although the programs are sometimes joint in state governments), in native plant societies, in universities, in state agencies, and in other federal agencies as well as in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has about 13 botanists (mostly in regional and field offices), in part working on plant assessment. The status report guidelines of M.S. Henifin et al. (pp. 261-282) in L.E. Morse and M.S. Henifin, Rare Plant Conservation (1981), are used to identify and organize the data.

The U.S. law provides two categories for protection: 'endangered' and the less severe 'threatened'. The 1975 and 1978 assessments provisionally placed each taxon in one or the other category; 'endangered' was interpreted similarly to Endangered as used by IUCN,

while 'threatened' included the IUCN Vulnerable (V) and Rare (R). The experience of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since 1975 in evaluating the candidates resulted in a shift in emphasis from degree of threat to degree of knowledge and documentation, finding that threat can be better judged with more intensive subsequent work. Its assessments used category 1 when there is substantial information on file to support proposing the taxon as 'endangered' or 'threatened' (i.e. E or V), and category 2 when information is insufficient but suggests the taxon is at risk (with IUCN Red Data Book categories such taxa would be R, I [Indeterminate], or K [Insufficiently Known]). Subcategories are made (by asterisk) for taxa possibly extinct (*) or extinct in the wild (**). Of the 2560 candidate taxa in the 1983 assessment, 214 plants are considered possibly extinct, and 816 in category 1 have been found to be in need of prompt proposal for listing as 'endangered' or 'threatened' (i.e. E or V) species. Survey work is needed most for the 186 'possibly extinct' taxa in category 1 (131 of which are from Hawaii), and for the 1568 taxa in category 2. The areas with the most candidates are: Hawaii, 793; California, 658; Florida, 190; Oregon, 132; Texas, 113; Utah, 105; and Puerto Rico, 100.

In addition to the two categories for candidate taxa, the Service uses a category 3 for taxa no longer being considered for protection. Subcategory 3A is for taxa extinct both in the wild and in cultivation; Extinct (Ex) in the IUCN system includes taxa surviving only in cultivation - 62 U.S. plants fit the IUCN definition. Subcategory 3B is for taxonomic synonyms, as well as hybrids and forms, which do not qualify for protection under U.S. law; 260 named taxa have been placed here since 1975, 71 of them in 1983. Assessment work in the United States is done without the benefit of a national Flora (although there are several good regional Floras), but with two independent national checklists (1980 and 1982) that are not yet definitive. The forthcoming Guide to the Hawaiian flora could considerably alter our concepts, for example. The need for continuing taxonomic work and for a definitive national Flora is demonstrated by the fact that 6.7% of the 3879 taxa now or formerly candidates are in subcategory 3B. Subcategory 3C is for taxa now considered more common than before or without foreseeable threats; the equivalent

IUCN category is 'neither rare nor threatened' (nt); 1001 U.S. taxa have been placed here. With 25.8% of the 3879 taxa here, the value of continued field work is apparent.

Legal protection for taxa by proposed and then final listings in the Federal Register is continuing as well, although at a slower pace than assessment work. By April 1984, 72 native (and 2 foreign) plant taxa were listed under the federal law, while 26 native plants (and 1 foreign) were proposed for listing. Even with these low numbers, there are about as many native U.S. plants protected as native U.S. birds, and twice as many native plants as native mammals protected by the law.

Bruce MacBryde
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Washington, D.C.

More US Plants Protected

As the previous article explains, only a tiny fraction of the many threatened species in the United States have yet received protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Act states that no activity funded by any Federal Authority shall jeopardize a species officially determined as 'endangered' or 'threatened'. Although it does not stop anyone picking the flowers or even digging up a 'listed' plant (unless it is on federal land), it provides a powerful means of habitat preservation to prevent, for example, a road or hydroelectric scheme obliterating the plant site.

Following the publication of the 1983 threatened plants assessment, described above by Bruce MacBryde, several plants have been formally listed under the Act.

How good to see the Arizona Agave, Agave arizonica, finally receiving protection. According to one source, only three plants of it now survive in the wild. An attractive succulent, it has pale yellow jar-shaped flowers borne on a stem that can reach up to 3.6 m in height. It was proposed for listing in 1983 because of low numbers, small range, slow reproductive rate and the continuing