

Workshop 5

Poster presentation

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The 'Top 50' — Mediterranean Island Plants

A selection of species at the brink of extinction, and what is needed to conserve them.

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The 'Top 50' campaign is an idea developed by the Plant Conservation Committee of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of IUCN—the World Conservation Union, which noted that plant species facing extinction usually do not receive the same level of attention as other more charismatic species like whales or gorillas. To raise the profile, the SSC plant programme is developing a series of booklets (as well as CD-ROMs and a website) containing profiles of 50 Critically Endangered plant species from either major taxonomic groups of plants, or else plants from certain regions of the world. Each profile, illustrated with a photograph or drawing, will include a description of the plant as well as information on conservation status, distribution, habitat and ecology, economic and cultural value, threats, reasons for decline, actions underway, and conservation action needed to help save the species. The booklet, written in simple, non-technical language, is aimed at decision-makers, conservation practitioners and the general public to inform and raise awareness about the many plant species which are at the brink of extinction and what actions are needed to conserve them. The project also aims to catalyse on-the-ground conservation action for the species which have been identified as critically threatened.

The IUCN/SSC Mediterranean Island Plant Specialist Group has developed the pilot project for the 'Top 50' campaign. Composed of 32 members, the Specialist Group developed a short list of 200 threatened species from Mediterranean Islands, and over the past year has been compiling data on 50 of the most critically threatened plants unique to the Mediterranean Islands. The Mediterranean has one of the world's largest groups of islands: almost 5,000 islands and islets. The region is of high value to global biodiversity due to its wealth of species, relatively high rate of endemism, long history, tolerance of all kinds of disruptions, and role as a natural laboratory for evolutionary studies. It was identified by IUCN and WWF as a major 'Centre of Plant Diversity', and Conservation International recognised it as one of the 25 'Hotspots' – the richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on Earth.

As well as highlighting species close to extinction, field projects will ensure these 'Top 50' species do not go extinct, beginning with projects in Corsica, the Balearic Islands, and Crete supported by the MAVA Foundation. Although primarily aimed at conserving four 'Top 50' species, it is hoped these will catalyze projects for other high-priority species. The Mediterranean 'Top 50' project will serve as a model and catalyst for other SSC Plant Specialist Groups to implement similar campaigns in other regions. These lists can serve as 'scorecards' or indicators of how well conservation goals are achieved.