

THE IUCN/WWF PLANT CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

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In March 1984 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) launched a major campaign to raise US\$4-5 million over two years to support an international plant conservation programme. Building on the successes of the Tropical Forest Campaign and Programme, the Plants Programme, designed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), includes an extensive strategic component aimed at promoting plant conservation more widely, as well as field projects to save threatened plants and communities.

The Programme aims to strengthen the growing public awareness of the need for conservation, and in particular to focus attention on the importance of plants and plant communities to human welfare, as sources of food, medicines and products for energy and industry. Audio-visual presentations and a popular book on plant conservation by Anthony Huxley, entitled "Green Inheritance", are among the products designed to help achieve this. IUCN/WWF are also providing support to a substantial youth education programme in India.

A major objective of the Plants Programme is to help conserve plant genetic resources, including wild relatives of crops and 'primitive' cultivars, to ensure sufficient genetic diversity is available for future use in breeding programmes. IUCN/WWF are working closely with the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources (IBPGR), which already has much experience with *ex situ* conservation. A number of projects are aimed at conserving plant genetic resources *in situ*. Inventories for biosphere reserves are being prepared for parts of tropical Latin America as a pilot study, aimed at developing guidelines on how to ensure a protected area system adequately conserves plant genetic resources.

The conservation of medicinal plants is an urgent priority, so the Plants Programme includes a number of projects to set up reserves to protect plants as sources of benefit to local people (e.g. Madagascar), or to catalogue medicinal

plants in existing protected areas (e.g. Gunung Leuser, Indonesia).

A major part of the Plants Programme is the development of the conservation role of botanic gardens. The work of IUCN's Botanic Gardens Conservation Coordinating Body, which links over 250 botanic gardens around the world, will be expanded with the ultimate aim of ensuring that all species deemed to be in need of *ex situ* conservation are represented in collections. A Botanic Gardens Conservation Strategy, one of 15 books and major reports being prepared under the Programme, will set out the role of gardens and encourage them to have conservation as one of their main functions.

Besides projects that tackle the major issues there are many field projects to conserve plants and their habitats in selected countries. Since the sums of money that WWF can raise are small in relation to the problem, IUCN/WWF decided at an early stage to focus attention on a few priority areas. Many countries selected are in the tropics, reflecting the far greater botanical diversity and the enormous threats to natural vegetation there. For example, in Sarawak and Irian Jaya the emphasis is on providing support for developing the protected area system, and in Sri Lanka support will be given for preparing and implementing a management plan for the Sinharaja Forest. Island floras are another priority in the Programme. A project aimed at rescuing the critically threatened flora of Mauritius has already begun, and another is being planned for the Juan Fernandez Islands.

Effective conservation not only requires accurate information on which to base conservation decisions, but also an informed public who are aware of the problems and are keen to be actively involved with conservation. The production of a series of popular illustrated booklets including rare and threatened plants, by the Taiwan Provincial Department of Education, is an excellent basis to encourage public interest in the rich flora of the island of Taiwan. IUCN/WWF hope that in the future there may be opportunities to help build on these initiatives.

References

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