

Executive Summary - Conservation of Mediterranean Island Plants: Strategy for Action

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With almost 5000 islands and islets, the Mediterranean comprises one of the largest group of islands in the world. The region is of high value to global biodiversity due to its wealth of species, relatively high rate of endemism, long history, and tolerance of all kinds of disruptions, as well as its role as a natural laboratory for evolutionary studies.

The continuous environmental pressure maintained by humans in the Mediterranean throughout history is now an inescapable component of all Mediterranean ecosystems. However, over the last few decades, major socio-economic changes have increased the negative impact of such human activity, mainly along the coasts. In this respect, the islands are extremely vulnerable, as their small size increases the effects of disruptions.

The lack of information on species distribution impedes any objective assessment of the current situation on the islands or islets. It is also difficult to plan conservation actions for species and habitats, as only very limited information on ecology, species biology or habitats exists. In addition, cryptograms and marine flora are still insufficiently documented, making it difficult to assess their conservation status.

Legal protective measures are few, and poorly enforced. In particular, protected areas are insufficient in number, and are often not, or only poorly, managed. It is therefore essential to implement an action program for the Mediterranean islands to protect their flora, habitats and landscapes within the framework of an overall strategy linking environmental protection, sustainable development, and benefits to local people.

The Mediterranean Island Plant Specialist Group (MIPSG) has defined an action program based on the following guidelines:

- to assess the conservation status of both the flora and vegetation of the Mediterranean islands;
- to improve and integrate current knowledge on the flora, habitats, threats, protected areas and people involved in conservation;
- to identify conservation priorities and develop appropriate strategies and tools, including Action Plans;
- to define, promote and support implementation of conservation Action Plans for species, habitats, sites or entire islands, or monitor results;
- to make tools specific to plant and habitat conservation on islands available to managers;
- to maintain a biodiversity monitoring network;
- to emphasize the importance of island ecosystems in development;
- to improve, synthesis and disseminate knowledge and information;
- to enhance awareness of decision-makers and the public.

The MIPSIG also recommends that:

- Mediterranean island conservation be included in priority global biodiversity conservation programs; sustainable development be taken into account, specifically in the fields of tourism and agriculture;
- biodiversity protection be included in local and regional land development policies;
- a network of protected areas be created, to optimize long-term conservation of biodiversity in Mediterranean islands.

This conservation strategy for island plants and habitats is intended to provide one of the basic components of an overall biodiversity conservation program covering the entire Mediterranean Basin, in order to guarantee sustainable development and to help combat existing or potential threats such as climate change and desertification. It is expected to assist nature conservation managers and decision-makers in building and implementing their conservation programs.

Reprinted from *Conservation of Mediterranean Island Plants: Strategy for Action*.