

Executive Summary - Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan: Cactus

The often bizarre growth-forms and attractive flowers of cacti and other succulents have promoted widespread interest in this group of plants and horticultural popularity worldwide. Succulent plants are also of great ecological and economic significance, particularly in arid and semi-arid parts of the world. Although the definition of succulence as applied to plants is constantly under debate, about 10,000 plant species are generally recognised as succulent, within thirty plant families.

Of these succulent plant species, an estimated 2000 species are threatened with global extinction in the wild, and many more are regionally or nationally threatened. Habitat destruction is the major threat, and in common with other horticulturally desirable plant groups, over-collection for international trade remains a significant problem. The Cactus and Succulent Plants Action Plan provides an excellent reference for the current state of succulent populations, threats, and conservation; a source of ideas for conservation actions; and direction for funding plant conservation work. Conservationists, scientists, government officials, protected area managers, educators, and grant awarding bodies alike should find this document helpful in their work to conserve global and local flora. The contributors to this Action Plan encourage collaborative work among these interested parties.

The objective of this Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan, as for other SSC Action Plans produced by members of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN-The World Conservation Union, is to bring together current information, never before compiled, on the population status, threats, and conservation of this group of important plants from around the world. From this summary of the current situation, priorities for conservation action have been highlighted and recommended in the final section of this book.

The publication comprises four chapters and a series of annexes that provide readers with concise information on the current status of populations of cactus and succulent populations. The extensive bibliography provides a comprehensive source of further information on cacti and succulent species. The Plan begins with an overview of the distribution, diversity, threats, and status of eight main taxonomic groups of cacti and succulents: Agavaceae, Aizoaceae, Aloaceae, Asclepiadaceae, Cactaceae, Crassulaceae, Euphorbiaceae, and Portulacaceae. Chapter 1 thus provides an overview of the main taxonomic groups of succulent plants written by experts who specialise in the study of these particular plant families. Some of these groups are of great economic importance, many in the ornamental trade industry, and others, such as the Agavaceae, in the fibre and food industries.

Chapter 2 of the Action Plan describes and reviews existing conservation measures for succulent plants around the world with information on legislation, controlling the trade and *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation. The intention of this chapter is to highlight successful conservation activities which can be used as models elsewhere and also to highlight priorities for further action. It is particularly important in reviewing

international conservation measures to show how succulent plant conservation needs can be linked into broader conservation initiatives and frameworks for biodiversity conservation.

Action for succulent plant conservation must take place primarily at the national and local levels and be implemented as far as possible by in-country agencies and local experts. This is accepted throughout the Action Plan, and Chapter 3 of the Plan, the regional accounts, has been largely prepared by experts within the regions concerned. Chapter 3 concentrates on the regions of the world which have the major concentrations of succulent plants.

Chapter 4 of the Action Plan brings together the priority action proposals for succulent plants around the world. Implementing these proposals will save the maximum diversity of succulents based on our present knowledge. Conservation actions are aimed at taxonomic, regional, and a more general policy levels. These recommendations call for, among other things, local participation in species and habitat conservation, GIS mapping and overlays of centres of diversity with protected areas and *ex situ* collections, amendments to CITES listings, population studies, and further establishment of protected areas.

The SSC Cactus and Succulent Specialist Group calls for:

- Field research to support understanding of the taxonomy and conservation status of succulent plants,
- Increased *in situ* protection for succulent plant species through the development of protected area networks,
- Coordinated *ex situ* protection of threatened succulent species to support the conservation of species in their natural habitats wherever possible,
- Effective national legislation of all threatened succulent plant species,
- Effective trade controls for all wild succulent plant species threatened by exploitation for international commerce,
- Education on the value of succulent plants, and the need for conservation and sustainable use.