



PLANTLIFE

IDENTIFYING AND PROTECTING THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT PLANT AREAS



This guide provides information on Plantlife International's *Important Plant Area (IPA)* programme, and its contribution to the CBD Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. It describes how *Important Plant Areas* are identified around the world, how they can be protected and the materials that are available to assist this process. This guide has been made possible by the financial support of the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation.



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- The Mediterranean - coordinated and supported by IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation
- South east Asia - coordinated by the Philippines National Museum and supported by the European Union
- Southern Africa - coordinated and supported by SABONET, the Southern African Botanical Diversity Network

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Plantlife International

Plantlife International is a charity dedicated exclusively to conserving all forms of plant life in their natural habitats, in the UK, Europe and across the world. We act directly to stop common wild plants becoming rare in the wild, to rescue wild plants on the brink of extinction, and to protect sites of exceptional botanical importance. The charity carries out practical conservation work, influences relevant policy and legislation, involves its members in many aspects of its work, and collaborates widely to promote the cause of wild plant conservation.

Plantlife International hosts the secretariat for Planta Europa, the network of organisations working for plant conservation across Europe. Plantlife International and IUCN – The World Conservation Union have been named Lead Partners by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to help facilitate the achievement of target 5 of the CBD Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.



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Plantlife International's Vision: *A world in which wild plants are valued – now and for the future.*

Plantlife International's Goal: *To halt the loss of wild plant diversity.*

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Important Plant Areas are the most important places in the world for wild plant diversity

In 2002, all those countries that have ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. This strategy includes 16 global targets for plant conservation to be achieved by 2010. It contributes to the World Summit on Sustainable Development target to significantly halt the decline in biodiversity by 2010. Target 5 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation is 'Protection of 50% of the most important areas for plant diversity assured'. Plantlife International and IUCN – The World Conservation Union have been named Lead Partners by the CBD to help facilitate the achievement of this target.

Plantlife International coordinates the *Important Plant Area* (IPA) programme, which aims to identify and protect a network of the best sites for plant conservation throughout the world. This programme supports the implementation of Target 5. *Important Plant Areas* are defined as the most important places in the world for wild plant diversity that can be protected and managed as specific sites. They are identified according to scientific criteria, agreed by consensus within the global botanical community and based on the presence of threatened species, endemics, botanical richness and threatened habitats. By the end of 2004, over 100 countries had expressed an interest in taking part in the programme, IPA teams from 15 countries had begun national projects, while over 30 countries from three world regions had taken part in regional IPA workshops as the first step towards setting up national projects.

The ultimate aim of the IPA programme is to ensure the long-term protection of IPAs. Methods available for protection range from using existing legislation more effectively; influencing policy development; integrating IPAs into planning processes and other institutional frameworks; building the capacity of natural resource managers to manage and conserve plants and plant diversity; and

developing and transferring best practise on the sustainable utilisation of plants and plant products. Ensuring protection of IPAs will require the use and development of these methods, according to their appropriateness to local and national situations.

Why develop an IPA programme?

The world's plant diversity is disappearing at an alarming rate: through destructive development of natural resources, over consumption, climate change and the spread of invasive species. As primary producers and the providers of ecosystem infrastructure, products and services, plants are fundamental to life on earth, and their conservation is an imperative. The IPA programme aims to help address these issues by focussing conservation efforts on the most important sites for wild plants, and providing a framework for protection, research and policy implementation for plant conservation, inside and outside protected areas. The programme provides opportunities for decision makers and scientists to work more closely together to develop conservation policy and the institutional capacity needed for improving plant conservation within and between countries.

Why are IPAs different from other Protected Areas?

'IPA' is not an official designation. IPAs are sites that are selected scientifically using criteria that encourage the use of the most up-to-date data available, supported by expert scientific judgement. Unlike many site assessment processes, IPA selection criteria encompass all of the plant and fungal kingdoms (vascular plants, bryophytes, lichens and fungi). In addition to the more traditional consideration of the presence of threatened species and habitats, the criteria also consider the presence of exceptional botanical richness. Sites, rather than whole regions, that are suitable for protection and management as discrete entities are selected as IPAs. The data collected are used to inform and underpin other conservation programmes rather than to compete with them.

IPAs and existing conservation programmes

IPAs provide specific plant data that can support legislation and conservation programmes on global, regional and national scales including the implementation of national biodiversity strategies and actions plans.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the CBD Global Plant Conservation Strategy: **Target 5** of the Global Strategy says 'Protection of 50% of the world's most important areas for plant diversity assured by 2010'. IPAs also contribute to Global Strategy targets 2, 4, 7, 13, 15 and 16 on threat assessment, conserving ecological regions, *in-situ* conservation of species, sustainable livelihoods from plants and capacity building. IPAs also help to implement **CBD Articles 6, 7, 8** on biodiversity strategies and *in-situ* conservation, and **Articles 12 & 13** on national and international cooperation, and contribute to the CBD work programme on Protected Areas

IUCN global programmes: IPAs are a stated priority of the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Global Plant Conservation Programme and IUCN Parks for Life Programme **Articles 4.3.5** and **4.3.6**

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance: IPAs will help to identify Ramsar sites which qualify under the new (group A and B) criteria for threatened species and ecological communities

IPA regional coordination and national teams

A wide range of experience is needed to identify and protect *Important Plant Areas*. The creation of national IPA teams who are coordinated on a regional basis has been central to the implementation of IPA projects to date.

For example, Plantlife International holds the IPA Secretariat for the IPA project in central and eastern Europe and undertakes regional coordination, with a coordinator based in Slovakia. The Secretariat provides technical information, training, support and advice for the seven partner countries. Each country undertaking a project has a lead institution with a nominated national IPA coordinator, who is responsible for running the project and liaising with the IPA Secretariat. The national coordinators work with a team of experts, which represent all relevant stakeholders and

disciplines: vascular plant specialists, bryologists, mycologists, lichenologists, vegetation biologists, protected area managers, policy makers, representatives of government and non government organisations, academic institutes and botanical gardens.

Preliminary workshops in southern Africa and south east Asia are developing similar structures with the initial regional workshop coordination being led by organisations in South Africa and the Philippines respectively.

IPA definitions and methodology

An *Important Plant Area* (IPA) is a natural or semi-natural site exhibiting exceptional botanical richness and/or supporting an outstanding assemblage of rare, threatened and/or endemic plant species and/or vegetation of high botanic value.

IPAs are identified according to three specific criteria that can be applied globally, the presence of: A - threatened species; B - botanical richness; C - threatened habitats (see box). To qualify as an *Important Plant Area*, a site needs to satisfy one or more of the criteria, i.e. a site can qualify if it satisfies either criterion A or B or C or any combination of the criteria.

Criterion A

The site holds significant populations of one or more species that are of global or regional conservation concern.

Criterion B

The site has an exceptionally rich flora in a regional context in relation to its biogeographic zone.

Criterion C

The site is an outstanding example of a habitat or vegetation type of global or regional plant conservation and botanical importance.

As the IPA programme becomes increasingly global, these criteria are being elaborated for use within different world regions.

It is acknowledged that there are variations in both the plant life and the plant data available throughout the world and that it will be necessary to adapt and develop criteria lists to take into account these differences. The process of regional criteria development is therefore essential, and in time, as knowledge and data availability improve, the application of criteria will become easier. However, this should not stop the process of IPA identification and protection happening now, based on what is already known.

This process of elaboration has been completed most extensively in Europe and the results have informed the discussions in the Mediterranean, south east Asia and southern Africa that took place in 2003 and 2004. A summary of the discussions regarding further elaboration of criteria is included in the table overleaf. These criteria are a useful starting point for regional IPA criteria discussion, but consideration of the criteria is an ongoing process and it is envisaged that they will be further developed as more regional and national workshops take place.

The detailed IPA Site Selection Manual for Europe is available from the IPA Secretariat in English, Spanish, Russian and French (summary), or downloaded from the Plantlife International website: www.plantlife.org.uk

Principles of applying criteria to identify IPAs

- IPAs are the most important sites for plants in any country in a regional context – identification and protection of these sites is the ultimate goal.
- Countries should work within existing criteria as far as possible using the information and tools available, as this will ensure international harmonisation and a good standard of IPAs.
- Criteria and thresholds may need to be adapted to take account of variation between countries, whilst remaining faithful to the ultimate goal. Adaptation should be on a regional basis where possible.
- The development of regionally applicable species and habitat lists for use in the IPA project is encouraged. These lists should be peer-reviewed and published as soon as possible.

- The approach to using criteria should be pragmatic and flexible – to allow countries to make optimum use of the knowledge and resources available to them; the approaches used should be transparent and published.
- The selection of sites should be consistent and justifiable, based as far as possible on good scientific data, quantifiable population and area thresholds.
- Recognised expert judgement can and should be used to support IPA identification.
- The process of criteria development is dynamic and will be further informed as work progresses around the world.
- The aim of the IPA project is to identify and protect a comprehensive network of IPAs in each country, however, the number, size and range of IPA sites within each country is a national decision based on the criteria and the knowledge, resources and experience of national IPA experts.



IPA Selection Criteria			
CRITERION	DESCRIPTION	THRESHOLD	NOTES
A(i) (threatened species)	Site contains globally threatened species	All sites known, though or inferred to contain 5% or more of the national population can be selected, or the 5 ¹ 'best' sites, whichever is the most appropriate. ¹ (In exceptional cases, for example where there are less than 10 sites in the entire country or there are between 5-10 large populations of a species, up to 10 sites can be selected) (Populations must be viable or there is a hope that they can be returned to viability through conservation measures)	Species listed as 'threatened' * on IUCN global red lists
A(ii) (threatened species)	Site contains regionally threatened species		Species listed as 'threatened' * on regional IUCN red lists or regionally approved lists
A(iii) (threatened species)	Site contains national endemic species with demonstrable threat not covered by A(i) or A(ii)		Species listed as national endemic (on any recognised list or publication) and 'threatened' * on national red lists
A(iv) (threatened species)	Site contains near endemic/restricted range species with demonstrable threat not covered by A(i) or A(ii)		Species listed as near endemic/restricted range (on any recognised list or publication) and 'threatened' * on national red lists
B (botanical richness)	Site contains high number of species within a range of defined habitat or vegetation type	Up to 10% of the national resource (area) of each habitat or vegetation type, or 5 ² best sites; whichever is the most appropriate. ² (In exceptional cases, for example there are between 5 and 10 exceptionally rich sites for a particular habitat, up to 10 sites can be selected for each level 2 habitat type)	Species richness can be based on a nationally created list of indicator species developed for each habitat or vegetation type. For example characteristic species and/or endemic species and/or nationally rare and scarce species (where the endemic and rare and scarce species are numerous and/or are characteristic for the habitat) Defined habitat or vegetation type taken from or based upon a regionally accepted classification
C (threatened habitat or vegetation type)	Site contains threatened habitat or vegetation type	All sites known, though or inferred to contain 5% or more of the national resource (area) of priority threatened habitats can be selected, or a total of 20-60% of the national resource, whichever is the most appropriate.	Threatened habitats or vegetation taken from a regionally recognised list.

*Criterion A, threatened species must be listed as **Critically Endangered (CR)**, **Endangered (EN)** or **Vulnerable (VU)** using the new IUCN criteria, or **Extinct/Endangered (Ex/E)**, **Endangered (E)** or **Vulnerable (V)** using the original IUCN categories

Guiding principles for the development and application of criteria

A – threatened species

- Where the officially recognised lists are not up-to-date or where national Red Lists do not exist it is acceptable, in the first instance, to rely on other data to identify criterion A species. These species should be agreed regionally, peer reviewed and published as soon as is practically possible.
- For many Criterion A species there will be very few sites. However, for populous or dispersed species it is appropriate to make a selection of the best areas to target protection rather than identifying 50-100 sites for one species.
- Populations at the core and edge of the regional range should be included in the IPA network and the genetic variability of the population should be taken into account where this is necessary to conserve biodiversity.

B – botanical richness

- Indicator check-lists can include species from all taxonomic groups but should not include ruderals or invasive species, to ensure that the species used are truly indicative of the habitat or vegetation type.
- Where no suitable list of habitats or vegetation types exists it is acceptable, in the first instance, to work with expert knowledge to identify sites of exceptional botanical richness.
- Where appropriate the principle of complementarity should be followed when using criterion B e.g. selecting a range of IPAs that contains the greatest number of different species, rather than 5 rich sites that contain the same range of species.

Criterion C – threatened habitats

- The threshold for criterion C is based on area in order to preserve the largest continuous extents of each habitat; however land management history and species diversity can also be considered
- The degree of threat to the habitat and the need for protection can also be taken into account.

Data collation tools for IPAs

To help the collection, analysis and use of IPA data, Plantlife International has developed an *Important Plant Areas* database, which is available to all partners in the IPA programme. This database is supplemented by a questionnaire. At present both these tools are tailored for the IPA project in Europe but they will be developed to assist IPA identification and protection world-wide as the programme grows.

The IPA database is web-based, and holds information on the location of sites, the species and habitats contained by those sites, and information on threats, land-use and management in relation to each site. Partners in the IPA programme can enter and view their data online, and download their data into Microsoft Access for analysis. Fact sheets with basic information on each site are available for wider distribution. Making IPA data easily available to all stakeholders is a critically important aspect of the IPA programme. Data can be analysed easily to provide reports and statistics that can be used to improve biodiversity conservation at every level, from specific site and species management plans to the development of nature conservation policy and legislation.

Protection and management of IPAs

The ultimate aim of the IPA programme is to ensure that the sites identified as being important for plants are adequately protected and managed to allow the continued existence of those plants and habitats. Following IPA identification it is intended that each national IPA team will undertake an assessment of existing management regimes and threats to IPAs, and develop a conservation strategy for their IPA network with appropriate stakeholders. The strategies and their associated action plans will aim to integrate IPAs into national institutional frameworks for nature conservation and natural resource management. A future publication will deal with the more detailed aspects of protection of IPAs.



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