

African Plants

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Taxonomy

Scientific Name **Conophytum phoenicium**
S.A.Hammer

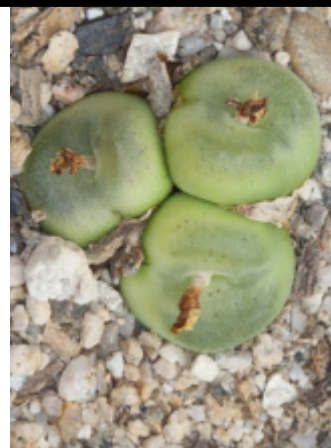
Higher Classification
Family Dicotyledons
AIZOACEAE

National Status

Status and Criteria **Critically Endangered A2ac**
Assessment Date 2020/02/06

Assessor(s) A.J. Young & L. von Staden

Justification Field observations indicate a significant population reduction within three generations. Although the population data is very uncertain, it is suspected that it has declined by around 80%. Recent attempts to locate this species in the wild have failed. The reasons for the population reduction are not understood, are suspected to be related to habitat degradation. It is not known whether threats have ceased, and the current population trend is not known. The last field observations were of extremely small, isolated groups of plants occurring within a few square meters or less. It is



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therefore possible that it may be overlooked, and it is not suspected to be extinct, but further field surveys, particularly in years of good rainfall are needed. Given the substantial declines experienced this species is listed as Critically Endangered under criterion A.

Distribution

Endemism	South African endemic
Provincial distribution	Northern Cape
Range	Richtersveld near Umdaus, north of Steinkopf.

Habitat and Ecology

Major system	Terrestrial
Major habitats	Umdaus Mountains Succulent Shrubland
Description	Quartz flats.

Threats

Part of the population was lost to road construction in the 1990s (Hammer 2002), and there has been further sporadic impacts from mining exploration on the habitat. This however does not explain the extensive population decline observed over the past 20-25 years which is likely due to degradation and trampling of quartz flats by livestock. The area is part of communally owned rangelands. There is a potential threat from illegal collection as the taxon is popular with growers. However the cryptic nature of the plants affords it substantial protection.

Population

This species is known from a single subpopulation that was estimated to consist of several thousand plants in the 1990s (Hammer 2002). It has however not been observed in its habitat for several years, despite many field visits to the immediate area. The population appears to have

declined significantly, but the reasons are not known. The last two observations of this species in the wild were of extremely small, localized clumps of fewer than 50 individuals. It is possible that a few other, overlooked small clumps of plants exist. It is therefore difficult to determine the size of the remaining wild population, which is possibly very small, perhaps less than 500 mature individuals. Due to the uncertainty around population size estimates, it is difficult to infer the extent of the population reduction. It is suspected to be at least 50%, but is probably as much as 80-90%. *C. phoenicium* is a relatively short-lived species (generation length of only a few years), but the decline occurred over a very short time frame, within three generations. The current population trend is unknown.

Population trend Unknown

Assessment History

Taxon assessed	Status and Criteria	Citation/Red List version
Conophytum phoenicium S.A.Hammer	CR A2ac	2017.1
Conophytum phoenicium S.A.Hammer	VU D2	Raimondo et al. (2009)
Conophytum phoenicium S.A.Hammer	VU D2	Victor (2002)
Conophytum phoenicium S.A.Hammer	Rare	Hilton-Taylor (1996)

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Citation

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2020. Conophytum phoenicium
S.A.Hammer. National
Assessment: Red List of South
African Plants version 2020.1.
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