

Plants

[Red List statistics methodology](#)

[Summary of recent changes Glossary](#)

[National Red List categories](#)

[Assessment](#)

[Guidelines for EIAs](#)

Browse

- [Genera: A](#)
- [Genera: B](#)
- [Genera: C](#)
- [Genera: D](#)
- [Genera: E](#)
- [Genera: F](#)
- [Genera: G](#)
- [Genera: H](#)
- [Genera: I](#)
- [Genera: J](#)
- [Genera: K](#)
- [Genera: L](#)
- [Genera: M](#)
- [Genera: N](#)
- [Genera: O](#)
- [Genera: P](#)
- [Genera: Q](#)
- [Genera: R](#)
- [Genera: S](#)
- [Genera: T](#)
- [Genera: U](#)
- [Genera: V](#)
- [Genera: W](#)
- [Genera: X](#)
- [Genera: Y](#)
- [Genera: Z](#)

[Home](#) >> [Genera: H](#) >> [Genus: Haworthiopsis](#)

Umathithibala

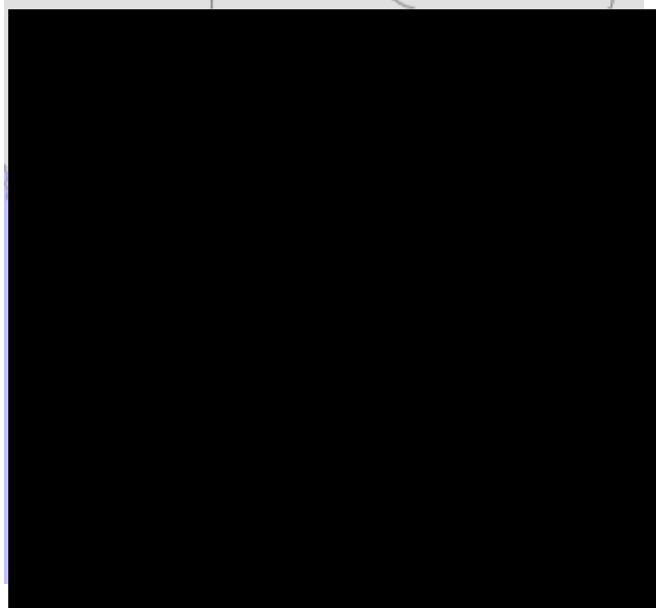
Taxonomy

Scientific Name	Haworthiopsis limifolia (Marloth) G.D.Rowley
Higher Classification	Monocotyledons
Family	ASPHODELACEAE
Common Names	Isihlalakahle (z), Omathithibala (z), Umathithibala (z)

National Status

Status and Criteria	Vulnerable A2d
Assessment Date	2014/03/17
Assessor(s)	V.L. Williams, D. Raimondo, N.R. Crouch, A.B. Cunningham, C.R. Scott-Shaw, M. Lötter & A.M. Ngwenya

Justification This species is very popular in the medicinal plant trade and remains the preferred 'mathithibala' species, despite the existence of substitute species and being cultivated by healers and traders. The long-term protection of the plants in the wild, even in protected sites, is thus not assured. Large numbers of mature plants have been removed from the wild and over 30% reduction in the last 60 years is a reasonable estimate of its decline in South Africa. Presence in Mozambique is uncertain, and is possibly highly localized and close to the South



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African and Swaziland borders. It is heavily harvested in Swaziland, hence we also estimate a 30% decline globally.

Distribution

Endemism	Not endemic to South Africa
Provincial distribution	KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga
Range	From Hectorspruit, Barberton and Mtubatuba through the Swaziland Lebombo Mountains. Probably Mozambique.

Habitat and Ecology

Major system	Terrestrial
Major habitats	Zululand Lowveld, Southern Lebombo Bushveld, Swaziland Sour Bushveld, Kaalrug Mountain Bushveld, Barberton Montane Grassland
Description	Elevated grasslands along the tops of hills and ridges, often camouflaged amongst small stones and clumps of grass.

Threats

The main threats to this species are medicinal plant harvesting, collection of mature individuals from the wild by succulent collectors. While var. *limifolia* is the only one of the varieties to have been observed and positively identified in the muthi markets, one cannot rule out that the other varieties are not there since the markets aren't surveyed on a regular basis by experts and it is possible that the other varieties occur there sporadically. *H. limifolia* is noticeably present in the various muthi markets around the country. Cunningham (1988) estimated that 93 bags of *Haworthiopsis* spp. and the substitute *Aristaloe aristata* were sold annually by 54 herb-traders in the Durban markets. Fifty-five percent of herb-traders nominated *H. limifolia* as becoming scarce (ranked sixth after *Ocotea bullata*), 45% of urban herbalists nominated it as scarce (ranked seventh), and 55% of rural herbalists declared it scarce (ranked seventh). Cunningham (1988) classified *H. limifolia* as 'vulnerable and declining' - i.e. vulnerable to over-exploitation and the populations are subject to localized over-exploitation and appear to be declining outside of conserved areas. Williams (2007)

recorded it being traded in 34% of Witwatersrand muthi shops in 1994 and also sold by 5% of the Faraday Street market traders in 2001 - all in moderate quantities. Mander (1998) identified *H. limifolia* as the seventh most important species in trade in KwaZulu-Natal and extrapolated that 22.5 tonnes (479 000 individual plants) was moving through the Durban markets annually - this figure is likely to be wrong, since it is doubtful that there are that many mature plants in the wild (N.R. Crouch, pers. comm., 2008) (this figure may, however, include individuals from substituted species). However, it is known that whole subpopulations have been removed - partly because the plants are small enough to be able to remove an entire subpopulation (N.R. Crouch, pers. comm., 2008). Users generally favour larger, older plants, hence it is probable that varieties like var. *gigantea* are more popular and sought after since it can reach up to 23cm in diameter. It is suspected that subpopulations in Swaziland are more heavily harvested than those in KwaZulu-Natal, following which they are transported to Johannesburg to meet the urban demand (N.R. Crouch, pers. comm., 2008). Large declines were observed and/or suspected in the Barberton area, however it is still present in the Vryheid and Mkuze mountain ranges. It also still occurs in Itala, but the subpopulation size is not large. There is anecdotal evidence that *H. limifolia* is harvested in Mozambique (Mander 1998), but this would have to be confirmed with evidence of its actual occurrence in Mozambique. The varieties *limifolia* and *gigantea* are the most popular, and when in short supply are substituted with other *Haworthiopsis* species, e.g. *H. attenuata*, *H. coarctata* and *H. fasciata*, and *Aristaloe aristata* (Smith et al. 1997; Crouch et al. 1999). Despite being substituted with other species and being cultivated by healers and traders, *H. limifolia* remains the preferred 'mathithibala' species and the long term protection of the plants in the wild, even in protected sites, is not assured (Crouch et al. 1999). A >30% reduction in the last 60 years is thus a reasonable estimate of its decline. Additional threats to var. *arcana*: The site is readily accessible as a result of the construction of a cell phone tower and associated access roads, which also may have led to the loss of part of the population in the past. The EOO and AOO are <0.0025 km², and the total population size at its only known locality is estimated to be 4000-5000 mature individuals. Var. *gigantea* has only one known subpopulation, and the type locality of var. *glaucophylla* is

quite accurately described in the literature, and is being targeted by succulent collectors. There is only one known subpopulation at one location, but the total population size is unknown.

Population

Population trend Decreasing

Notes

Haworthiopsis limifolia var. ubomboensis is a recognised variety of *H. limifolia*. It was not included in this assessment because so far it has only been recorded in one locality in Swaziland, and Swaziland is not part of the South African assessment.

Assessment History

Taxon assessed	Status and Criteria	Citation/Red List version
Haworthiopsis limifolia (Marloth) G.D.Rowley	VU A2d	2014.1
Haworthia limifolia Marloth	VU A2d	Raimondo et al. (2009)
Haworthia limifolia Marloth	VU	Scott-Shaw (1999)
Haworthia limifolia Marloth var. gigantea M.B.Bayer	Vulnerable	Hilton-Taylor (1996)
Haworthia limifolia Marloth var. limifolia	Vulnerable	Hilton-Taylor (1996)

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Citation

Williams, V.L., Raimondo, D., Crouch, N.R., Cunningham, A.B., Scott-Shaw, C.R., Lötter, M. & Ngwenya, A.M. 2014. *Haworthiopsis limifolia* (Marloth) G.D.Rowley. National Assessment: Red List of South African Plants version 2020.1. Accessed on 2021/11/23

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