

**SOUTH AFRICA**

# Cape biodiversity risk: 9 arrested for illegal trade in rare succulents

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BY TIMESLIVE



A blow has been dealt against the illegal trade in SA's rare *Conophytum* succulent species.

**Image:** SAPS

Nine suspects have been nabbed for illegal trade in a rare and slow-growing species of succulents.

Officers from the Springbok and Kuils River stock theft and endangered species units made the arrests on Thursday during a joint buy-and-bust operation in Elsie's River in the Western Cape, said police spokesperson Lt-Col Sergio Kock.

Police confiscated 3,500 *Conophytum achabense* plants worth about R200,000 and *Conophytum Fredericea* plants with an estimated street value of R150,000.

Police also confiscated two vehicles and five cellphones allegedly used in the commission of the crime.

All nine suspects are from Springbok, in the Northern Cape, and were charged with dealing/collecting/transporting and illegal possession of protected plants.

The suspects are due to appear in the Goodwood magistrate's court soon, said Kock. The investigation continues.

According to SA's National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi), there has been a rapid increase in demand for *Conophytum* wild collected plants coming from Asia since early 2019.

Sanbi said: "There is a very active illegal succulent plant trade affecting this genus and other unique succulent species.

"A total of 13 *Conophytum* species listed in 2016 as Least Concerned have been uplisted to Vulnerable or Endangered and a further 12 have been listed as Critically Endangered for the first time."

The *Conophytum achabense* species "is extremely rare in the wild and is known to be exploited, used or traded. The localities of remaining populations need to be protected to avoid further exploitation, which is likely to drive it to extinction."

## TimesLIVE



### Putin lays wreath to honor armed forces

Russian President Vladimir Putin paid laid the wreath outside the Kremlin wall on Wednesday (February 23) as part of celebrations for Defender of the Fatherland Day - an annual holiday celebrating the armed forces.





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