



Our Blog: Plants and other Stories



#PROTECT

HALTING THE ILLEGAL SUCCULENT PLANT TRADE: SECURING COMMUNITY SUPPORT

APR 22, 2023 | WRITTEN BY CHRISTINE ROETS, WILDERNESS
FOUNDATION AFRICA. PHOTOS BY MALINDA GARDINER, LEANDRA
KNOETZE AND LOVEGREEN COMMUNICATIONS



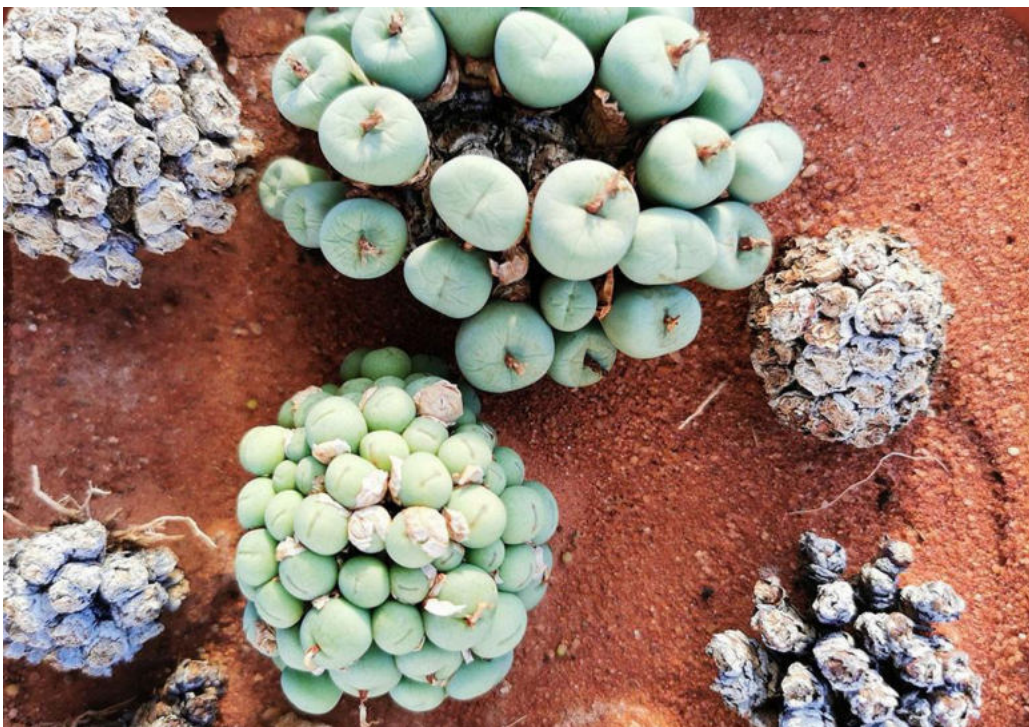
Above: Critically Endangered *Conophytum bruynsii*. Photo
by Leandra Knoetze

South Africa has a rich and unique diversity of flora, particularly
succulents, with almost half of the world's estimated 10 000
species of succulent plants (4 337 species) found in our country.

The illegal trading of plants for ornamental purposes has become a world-wide problem. Since March 2019, South Africa has experienced a significant increase in incidences of illegal harvesting of succulents to support this trade. As of December 2022 over 414 000 illegally harvested plants have been confiscated.

If the rate of poaching continues, it is very likely that further species will become extinct in the wild.

One of these genera of plants in danger are the *Conophytums*, many listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List.



Above: Confiscated succulents. Photo by LoveGreen Communications

Responding to the crisis

During 2021, South Africa's government conservation agencies and NGO partners drafted a National Response Strategy and Action Plan to address the illegal trade in South African succulent flora.

On 11 March 2022 the plan was endorsed by Ministers and Members of Executive Councils for implementation within government agencies and partners.



Through the financial support from [IUCN Save Our Species](#) and co-funded by the [European Union, Wilderness Foundation Africa](#), in collaboration with [SANBI](#), [BotSoc](#) and CSA, developed a project based on the key actions identified in the National Response Strategy. This project is now being implemented to pilot emergency conservation interventions for succulent species in the [Succulent Karoo Biome of South Africa](#).

This year-long project is working to help improve enforcement efforts, engage with community members in developing response actions and set up ex-situ conservation collections for *Conophytum* succulent material to support future recovery efforts.



Above: Critically Endangered *Conophytum crateriforme* is now likely extinct in the wild. Photo by Leandra Knoetze

The project is progressing well with the following achieved to date:

- The first draft report is completed of all available in-situ technologies that could be piloted in remote locations in the Succulent Karoo to improve the protection of wild populations of succulent plants.
- Ex-situ plant material collections are underway.
- Five workshops have been held with a total of 90 community representatives and other stakeholders in the focus area to develop a draft anti-poaching and communications strategy in response to succulent plant poaching.
- A draft report has been completed summarising illegal plant-poaching trends and recommend processes that can support investigators conducting ongoing succulent plant-poaching investigations in the Namaqualand region.
- A first draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) have also been completed following an analysis of succulent plant-poaching arrests and the flow of information within law enforcement agencies.



On-the-ground changes

Already tangible progress has been made in the overall effort to act against the illegal trade of succulent plants. The series of workshops that were held with community members from key villages and towns in the area has resulted in improved awareness

of the situation and secured positive local responses to resolve the issue.

This project has also brought together partners and stakeholders from the conservation agencies, NGOs and law enforcement structures in a more coordinated way. Progress with the range of support activities and a better understanding of technology that can help in the field has provided the necessary motivation to all role players to effectively tackle this problem.

The critical actions undertaken in this project will help ensure extinctions of key threatened species are avoided and that reintroductions of populations of these species can be done to ensure long term (10-20 year) increases in the populations.



Top left: Community representatives at the Kamiesberg workshop doing group work as they develop the communication strategy. Bottom left: Community input gathered at a workshop held in the Kamiesberg to design a locally driven communication strategy, using the Participan method. Right: Community representatives in discussion on how best to address the succulent plant-poaching issue. Photos by Malinda Gardiner

through IUCN Save our Species. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Wilderness Foundation Africa and do not necessarily reflect the views of IUCN or the European Union.



Guy Harris on April 27, 2023 at 11:26 am



Thanks to all the professionals and volunteers involved in replanting confiscated plants!



JOIN BOTSOC

Know, grow, protect and enjoy South Africa's indigenous plants.

JOIN NOW



FOLLOW **@BOTSOCSA** ON INSTAGRAM





[BECOME A MEMBER](#)

[DONATE](#)

LEAVE A BEQUEST

VOLUNTEER

Copyright 2020-2024 www.botanicalsociety.org.za. All rights reserved. | 003-394 NPO |

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | Created with care by [LoveGreen](#)

