



CAPEARGUS NEWS

## Collectors drive a spike in theft of indigenous plants in the Western Cape



*CONOPHYTUM ficiforme* is a small succulent plant that is native to South Africa, and southern Namibia. Picture: supplied

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### Cape Town - CapeNature says it has noted a worrying spike in the theft of indigenous plants in the province.

It said it has begun to notice that crimes relating to the theft of endangered indigenous plants in the province had begun to steadily increase, even under strict Covid-19 restrictions.

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CapeNature spokesperson Petro van Rhyn said while there were several reasons why the illegal trade had picked up recently, the most notable reasons pointed to the huge demand by plant collectors to own the naturally occurring plants, native to South Africa and Southern Namibia.

She said: "Another reason could be that there was recently a book written by world authorities on these indigenous plants, the *Conophytum* species, which was then translated – without the permission of the authors – into Chinese and made available. Unfortunately, the book highlights these plants and has caused the developing demand for the species."

Van Rhyn, however, added that prior to the coronavirus pandemic collectors would visit the country to collect for themselves illegally but, because of Covid-19 and restrictions put in place to curb the spread, collectors had been blocked from doing so.

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“This did allow for successful prosecutions and large fines. Now, with travel bans, locals are used to collecting plants, which are sent to the collectors without risk to collectors in other countries of being caught and prosecuted/costs incurred in South Africa,” said Van Rhyn.

Last week, police arrested 18 suspects for the possession of endangered species—flora *Conophytum Ficiforme*. One consignment confiscated by police was valued at R500 000.

Police spokesperson Captain FC van Wyk said: “Police arrested several suspects, in four unrelated cases, for the contravention of the Nature Conservation Act. The suspects were taken into police custody after they were found to be in possession of endangered indigenous plants known as the *Conophytum Ficiforme*.”

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“In the one incident, police were able to recover the plants said to be worth R500 000, after apprehending four suspects at the at Swawelskloof Farm, on the R43, in Worcester.”

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