Spotlight on Agriculture

Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training, Private Bag 13184, Windhoek

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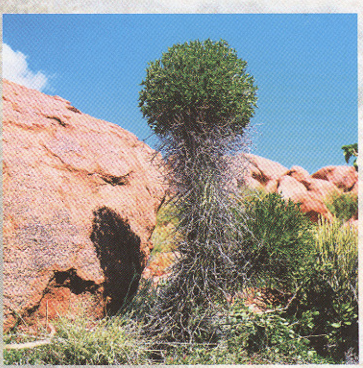
IMPORTANT PLANT AREAS IN NAMIBIA

On the Aurus Mountain in the Sperrgebiet (Photo: W Giess)

How did the concept of important plant areas come about?

The rate at which plant species and habitats are being lost through economic development, urbanisation and habitat destruction is increasing on a global scale. The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has the ultimate objective of halting this continuing loss of plant diversity. Target 5 of the Strategy is to ensure that, by 2010, at least 50% of the world's most important areas for plants are protected. The concept of *important plant areas* (IPAs) was first developed in Europe, in response to the GSPC, and later adapted to suit other parts of the world.



Euphorbia monteiroi on the Spitskoppe (Photo: H zur Strassen)

What are IPAs?

IPAs are defined as being the most important areas in the world for wild plant diversity, which can be protected and managed as specific sites. They are natural or semi-natural sites that contain –

- species of conservation concern, and/or
- a botanically rich habitat, species of special interest, or a unique or special habitat, and/or
- one or more threatened habitat types.

What are we doing about IPAs in Namibia?

In December 2004, a two-day workshop sponsored by the Southern African Botanical Diversity Network (SABONET) Project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, was held to identify the most important areas for plants in Namibia, using the opinions of experts in all botany-related disciplines. During the workshop a total of 40 areas were identified as preliminary IPAs

View from a mountain in south-western Namibia (Photo: S Loots)

Why do we need IPAs?

In the past, protected areas have been designed exclusively for the protection of animal species, and more specifically for large mammals. Until the recent proclamation of the Sperrgebiet National Park, no such area had been designed for the protection of plant biodiversity. Now, for the first time, a protected area in Namibia is focused on preserving plant biodiversity. Plants are one of the world's most important natural resources, and Namibia's plant diversity

- including its endemic, rare and threatened plants
- are not adequately represented in the current Protected Area Network.

Where are Namibia's preliminary IPAs?

The preliminary IPAs that were identified at the workshop are spread throughout the country, and vary greatly in size (Figure 1).

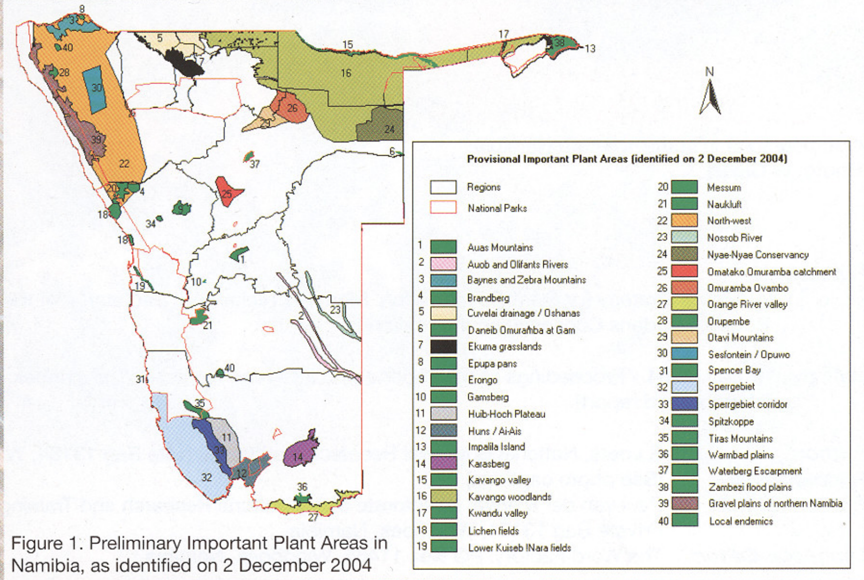


Figure 1. Preliminary Important Plant Areas in Namibia, as identified on 2 December 2004

Aloe ramosissima in the Sperrgebiet
(Photo: W Giess)

Where to from here?

In order to ensure that these preliminary IPAs are the most appropriate for Namibia, all the available data from the National Herbarium Specimen Database, the Tree Atlas Project and the Vegetation Mapping Section at the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) will be combined to constitute a relatively comprehensive set of data. These data are to be analysed in order to derive a second set of IPAs for Namibia. This second set will then be compared with the first set of IPAs to obtain a third and final set. The next step is to prioritise the latter IPAs according to available resources. Following that, the most important IPAs will be targeted for management and monitoring. It is hoped that, through efforts such as the Integrated Community-based Ecosystem Management Project, rural communities will be actively involved in protecting IPAs in their environments.

Lithops julii in south-eastern Namibia (Photo: C Nghidinwa)

Lapidaria margaretae in south-eastern Namibia
(Photo: C Nghidinwa)

Aloe pearsonii in south-western Namibia
(Photo: W Giess)

Adenia pechuelii in north-western Namibia
(Photo: W Giess)

Aloe erinacea on the Heioab Mountain in south western Namibia (Photo: S Loots)

References

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Author: S Loots, National Botanical Research Institute, Private Bag 13184, Windhoek, Namibia.
Photographs: (See photo captions)
Content Editor: Paul van der Merwe; Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training; Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry; Private Bag 13184, Windhoek, Namibia.
Language Editor: The Word Factory, PO Box 11465, Windhoek, Namibia.