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AETFAT and the Threatened Plant Committee of IUCN

G. LL. LUCAS

Abstract

Lucas, G. Ll. (1976). AETFAT and the Threatened Plant Committee of IUCN. *Boissiera* 24: 443-446.

The author summarizes the composition, aims and functions of the "Threatened Plant Committee of IUCN". Especially he calls attention to the conservation problem in Africa and proposes the setting up of an internationally advised and run Tropical Garden.

Résumé

Lucas, G. Ll. (1976). L'AETFAT et le "Comité pour les plantes menacées d'extinction" de l'UICN. *Boissiera* 24: 443-446. En anglais.

L'auteur donne en résumé la composition, les buts et les fonctions du "Comité pour les plantes menacées" de l'UICN. Il souligne particulièrement le problème de conservation en Afrique et propose la création d'un Jardin tropical sous des auspices internationaux.

You have heard the present situation from Dr. Inga Hedberg and Mr. Katende (cf. their communications above) as to what has happened since Uppsala 1966. I hope I can build on what I feel is the pessimistic result, in a rather unusual way – but first I have two tasks to complete, both having a considerable influence on the future of African botany, each in an entirely different way. The first is closely related to Dr. Inga Hedberg's point – the awareness of Conservation problems and attempts at remedies, controls and evasions – let me explain. In February 1973 I attended a Conference in Washington where 81 governments met to draw up and sign what is now called "The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora" originally called "Wildlife". How does this affect us? Well, as originally drafted, if a species was listed on the appendices of the Convention then Herbarium material, spirit, and live plant material for research purposes would have needed the presentation of the appropriate export and/or import permits, also the material would be routinely searched by customs control. So that types etc. would not have to undergo such a threat, we had written into the Convention simple regulations so that we can carry on our exchange and loan systems between *bona fide* research workers and their establishments. The material will travel on a special customs declaration form.

Other major features of the draft convention were drawn up to fit animals and had to be modified to make them fit the plant kingdom – or when inappropriate to have them rewritten to cover the animals specifically.

But most strikingly it was our almost total lack of information on endangered species or groups that entered trade on a world-wide basis that made one feel totally inadequate to cope with the situation. The result is, that the convention covers endangered groups, but some are left out, and a host of "political" species have been added. By "political" I mean those included to please a government, not to ensure the survival of the plant — have a look at the list — I give no prizes for deciding which is which.

There were only a few botanists attending as advisors — so we did what we could — but the overriding lack of accurate information gave rise directly to my next point. The IUCN's mainly animal orientated Survival Service Commission requested a few botanists to make recommendations with regards to IUCN's plant responsibilities. This done, they set up in May, 1974, a sub-committee "The Threatened Plant Committee" and invited the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Professor J. Heslop-Harrison, to be its first Chairman and here I can do no better than quote a piece which shows how he sees the committee will be constructed.

"The Threatened Plant Committee will operate within the general framework of IUCN at Morges, Switzerland. It has a small secretariat based at Kew, and I will myself be acting as Chairman for the initial period. At present the substructure is being set up. This will involve three types of organization:

1. *Regional*. Throughout the world, botanists, horticulturists, ecologists and others with special interest in and knowledge of their regional floras are currently being asked to become associated with the work of the Committee, and to form regional subcommittees which will take special responsibility for identifying threats to floras, plant groups and individual species in their own areas. Part of their task will be to document adverse changes affecting floras and species, and to prepare recommendations for minimizing their effects through governmental or other action.

2. *Specialist groups*. To complement the work of the regional T.P.C. organization, panels are to be set up to handle the problems of special plant groups — for example, for the palms, orchids, and cycads. In part these groups will have a taxonomic basis, and specialists will be invited accordingly; but it is anticipated that panels will be formed to deal with more comprehensive categories, based upon ecology of life form. The succulents could form such a category.

3. *Institutional*. The third component in the T.P.C. will be made up of Botanic Gardens, University Departments, Research Institutes and other bodies which have the facilities and expertise to maintain plants in cultivation or in seed banks. Already the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN is organizing a world-wide network of plant genetic resource centres for the husbanding of cultivated species and some of their wild relatives. The aim now is to set up a complementary network to handle natural-source plant material not already covered by the activities of the FAO system.

From the foregoing, it will be obvious that the aims of the international T.P.C. are ambitious. They have to be, for the time is short. Everyone must by now have heard of the gloomy forecasts about the rate of plant extinctions around the world; even taking the most conservative estimates, we must certainly expect very heavy losses before the end of the present century. Of course some floras and

groups are at hazard more than others. In immediate danger are endemic floras of islands throughout the world, certain forest floras, and plants of special habitats threatened by new patterns of land use.”

The leaders of these regional specialist groups etc. will form the actual committee, whose functions can be summarized as follows:

1. The identification and definition of threats to the survival of individual species, of special groups and of whole floras throughout the world.
2. Documentation of such threats and their promulgation to the appropriate authority through IUCN.
3. Provision of advice on all aspects of conservation policies and conservation action to international, governmental and private agencies.
4. In support of the foregoing, to sponsor “trouble shooting” experts in the field, in coordination with regional sub-committees.
5. Initiation of special project work to deal with critical situations, and appropriate reference through the main committee to IUCN/WWF for funding.
6. Assisting in screening and deliberation upon conservation projects relating to plants received by IUCN from other agencies or individuals.
7. Assisting IUCN in its rôle in relation to UNEP and associated programmes in all matters concerning vegetation.
8. Liaising with FAO and other international agencies and programmes relative to the conservation of plants and plant communities.
9. Liaising with botanic gardens, universities and governmental or private agencies maintaining plant collections or seed banks whose services could be valuable in conserving germ plasm.
10. Initiation and coordination of public campaigns for plant conservation within the general framework of IUCN policy, and in collaboration with WWF.
11. Liaising with International Botanical Congresses and other assemblages where plant conservation is a topic of interest.
12. Assisting IUCN and WWF in their educational programmes in relation to the conservation of plant species and of habitats.

Already the first invitations are going out to form committees in North, Central and South America, Europe, etc. So to my final point: Africa is a great continent, it probably has more than its share of threatened plants. The IUCN and the Threatened Plant Committee need your cooperation. International Trade forms a very small part of the conservation problem in Africa as you have heard, it is habitat destruction that heads the list. We shall need accurate information on all threats so that appropriate pressures and persuasions can be used to ensure that the quality and richness of the African flora remains for future generations, preferably in the original habitat.

Now, this is why at the beginning I said I hoped we could build in a rather unusual way on the previously pessimistic situation. I believe with our joint expertise we can select areas on a species richness and/or aggregates of endangered species basis — they may or may not fit particular ecological types but on their

scientific value they will stand out and we can then argue on our terms the need for strong conservation measures to be taken to ensure the future of such plants.

If the more limitedly distributed species or those in particularly vulnerable habitats are to survive, now is the correct time to propose the setting up of an internationally advised and run (African) Tropical Garden. A garden beyond the strife of local politics and finances. A refuge if you like for threatened species as well as a centre for Tropical African Horticultural research.

Finally, do not wait to be asked to help with this work. If you have information please let the T.P.C. Secretariat at Kew know now!