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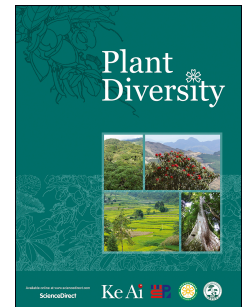
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Plant conservation in Australia: current directions and future challenges

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Abstract

Australia is a large, old and flat island continent that became isolated following the breakup of the Gondwanan super continent. After more than 40-50M years of independent evolution, approx. 600,000-700,000 species now call Australia home. More than 21,000 of these species are plants, with at least 84% of these being endemic. Plant taxa are protected, conserved and managed under a range of legislation at the State- and Territory-level as well as Federally for matters of national significance. This can create issues of misalignment among threatened species lists but generally there is co-operation among conservation agencies to reduce misalignments and to manage species irrespective of jurisdictional borders. Despite significant investment in programs designed to assist the recovery of Australian biodiversity, threatened plants in particular appear to be continuing to decline. This can be attributed to a range of factors including major threatening processes associated with habitat loss and invasive species, lack of public awareness of the cultural and socio-economic value of plant conservation, and our relatively poor understanding of basic species taxonomy and biology, especially for those species that have specific interactions with pollinators, symbionts and herbivores. A recent shift in Federally-based conservation programs has been to identify 30 key plant species for recovery through the setting of measurable targets, improving the support provided to recovery teams and encouraging industry, business and philanthropy to support conservation actions.

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