

RED IS FOR RARE AND ENDANGERED FERNKLOOF FLOWERS

Rare and endangered – these are the magic words that inspire botanical enthusiasts the world over. To find and to protect species threatened with extinction is their ultimate aim.

At the Hermanus Flower and Eco Fair held at the Fernkloof Nature Reserve every Spring there are hundreds of floral specimens on display, a special few sporting a large red dot on the label. The dot signals that the flower is Rare, Endangered or of serious concern, according to the conservation status given it by the recently published Red List of South African Plants 2009. The list was researched and drawn up by the South African Biodiversity Institute's Threatened Species Programme task force, which has been working on the entire country's floral population for the last seven years.

A limited number of copies of The Red List of South African Plants 2009 book with its eye-catching cover picture of the red *Romulea sabulosa* (satynblom) was published in February of this year – limited for a very valid reason. The 700-page list covering 20,456 plants appears now on the Sanbi website and will be updated every six months. Nearly 5 000 species are of conservation concern and are given detailed assessments.

Critically Endangered (CR) status has been accorded to three species in the Hermanus area. They are: *Erica hermani*, with its dainty purple flowers on a small compact bush, grows only in Fernkloof; it flowers in February; *Erica capillaris*, white/pink flowers on a small and insignificant plant, is hopefully still alive and well inside the fenced-off and protected wetland area of the golf course estate . It was rediscovered there before the fairways took over after being missing in that area for 40 years; it flowers October to January; *Mimetes palustris* , the smallest member of the genus which grows only on the Hermanus mountains, was last seen several years ago after fire. It is unlikely that any of these would be on display at flower show time.

Erica hermani



Erica capillaris



Mimetes palustris



Some of the ‘specials’ often on show (of the more than 100 species of conservation concern in the area) are:

Rare: *Sonderothamnus speciosus* with its unusual pink flowers on long silvery stems is a Spring-flowering beauty;

Endangered (EN): *Protea angustata* with its cryptically concealed green flower tucked into its ground level narrow leaves entices mice pollinators with its yeasty scent.



Sonderothamnus speciosus

Otholobium thomii, a blue pea flower seen mainly after fire, should still be flowering beside the rocky Klipspringer paths.

Vulnerable (VU): Mountain dahlia, *Liparia splendens*, orange gold, is a tasty delicacy for the local buck population.

Conservation find of 2010 on a mountainside farm in the Hemel and Aarde valley was a large stand of *Erica jasminiflora*, thought to be almost extinct in



the wild. As this erica, with its dainty long pink tube ending in broad white lobes, flowers in November and again in February and March, there is a small possibility of an early bloom. It would certainly take pride of place on the display table!

There are a number of further status symbols in this all-embracing list, ranging from EX (Extinct); EW (Extinct in the Wild); CR PE (Critically Endangered Possibly Extinct); CR (Critically Endangered); NT (Near Threatened) and Declining. The majority of species have an LC status which means Least Concern in the sense that they are not threatened at this time.

Domitilla Raimondo, Threatened Plant Programme Manager for SANBI and chief editor of the Red List 2009, says that South Africa is one of 17 ‘megadiverse’ countries which collectively hold 70% of the world’s plant species diversity. Furthermore it is the first among these countries to comprehensively assess the status of its entire flora.

Not only will the assessments be used for conservation work in South Africa, but they will also be used internationally to report on the status of the world’s biodiversity.

The South African Red List contribution will more than double the number of plant species currently included in the Global Red List of Species.

The Global list is currently receiving an assessment of all South Africa’s endemic plant species via the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Species Programme in Cambridge. Endemic’ is a word quite often bandied about by persons not quite ‘with’ the correct meaning of the word and its application to various botanical strata.



Erica galpinii

For instance, there are seven families endemic to the Cape Floral Kingdom, which means they grow nowhere else in the world. Six of those families grow in Fernkloof but they are not endemic to that area, but to the entire Cape. They are Grubbiaceae, Penaeaceae, Bruniaceae, Lanariaceae, Stilbaceae, Roridulaceae.

However there are certain species which grow only in Fernkloof and nowhere else.

They are endemic to the area. These are *Erica hermani* (assessed as Critically Endangered), *Erica viscaria subsp. pustulata* (VU) and *Otholobium drewae*. The beautiful pink Cliff Lily *Gladiolus carmineus* (VU) is endemic to Fernkloof and surrounding areas, as is the yellow *Erica galpinii* (EN) and pink *Sonderothamnus speciosus* (Rare). And so the list goes on and on.

The Hermanus Herbarium, run by the local botanical society in the Reserve is the home of 1600 montane and coastal species – more than in the entire United Kingdom.

The Herbarium has for many years been accorded international status HER. Volunteers comb the mountains, especially after fire, for new additions or a re-discovery of a specie thought to be extinct.

FOR WHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD CAN YOU FIND SO MANY SPECIAL FLOWERS IN SUCH A SMALL SPECIAL PLACE?

Geraldine Gardiner

Photos: Christine Wakfer

Pat Miller

Gladiolus carmineus

