Important Plant Areas (IPA)

Definition

Globally important sites for the conservation of plants.

Description

An Important Plant Area (IPA) is a natural or semi-natural site exhibiting exceptional botanical richness and/or supporting an outstanding assemblage of rare, threatened and/or endemic plant species and/or vegetation of high botanic value. [1] In describing IPAs, the word plant encompasses algae, fungi, lichens, liverworts, mosses, and wild vascular plants. The IPAs were conceived in 1995 at the first Planta Europa conference held in Hyères, France. It builds on WWF and IUCN's Centres of Plant Diversity project (1994), which identified large regions of botanical importance. [2] The IPA programme is a site-based approach for the conservation of plants at a national level, and forms a subset of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) around the world. Currently, IPA projects are being implemented in over 70 countries (2014) to achieve Target 5 of Global Strategy for plant conservation agreed under the Convention of Biological Diversity by governments in 2010. [3] Target 5 aims to ensure protection of 75% of the world's most important areas for plant diversity by 2020 under effective management. [4]

Supported by

Plantlife International, in collaboration with many national entities in each participating country.

Year of creation

1995

Coverage

Global in extent

Criteria

The IPA approach uses three main globally consistent criteria, promoted by Plantlife International, to identify and protect a network of the best sites/areas for plant conservation. Each site needs to satisfy one or more of the following criteria [1]:

- **Presence of threatened species**: the site holds significant populations (5% or more of the national population or the 5 best sites) of one or more species that are of global or regional conservation concern (species listed as threatened on IUCN global or regional Red List or other regionally approved lists; species listed as endemic/near endemic/restricted range and threatened on national red lists).
- **Species richness:** The site has exceptionally rich flora in a regional context in relation to its biogeographic zone (contains high number of species within a range of defined habitat or vegetation type – up to 10% of the national resource (area) of each habitat or vegetation type, or 5 best sites).
- **Threatened habitats:** The site is an outstanding example of a habitat type of global or regional importance (contains threatened habitat or vegetation type taken from a regionally recognised list – 5% or more of the national resource (area) of priority threatened habitats or a total of 20-60% of the national resource).

These global criteria are similar to those forKBAs. As one of the subsets, a number of KBAs are therefore being identified on the basis of their priority for plant conservation using the above criteria.
A set of European criteria have also been developed along with methodologies and thresholds for identifying areas as IPAs within Europe, and a number of IPA projects are developing world-wide with more specific sets of criteria and thresholds. [3]

Management

The designation of a site as an IPA is not associated with any management prescription. Many of the IPAs identified are already contained either fully or partially within other protected areas systems. The ownership and management systems of the IPAs that lie outside of protected areas vary greatly. Plantlife International and its partners engage with landowners, regional and national government to ensure adequate protection and management of these sites.

Business relevance

Legal and compliance - The sites identified as IPAs often do not have any legal recognition and protection unless they are part of other legally protected areas. IPAs are not usually included by name in standards and certification schemes, but these typically include requirements relating more broadly to the umbrella concept of KBAs which encompasses IPAs. For examples of standards and certification schemes which refer to KBAs, please visit the KBA factsheet.

Biodiversity importance - The IPAs are areas of biodiversity importance identified on the basis of both high vulnerability and irreplaceability of plant species. They are identified at the site-scale, and are therefore highly relevant for business for mitigating and avoiding risk from biodiversity loss and identifying opportunities associated with biodiversity conservation.

Socio-cultural values - The identification of IPAs is not based on any socio-cultural values. However, as the ownership and management of the IPAs varies widely, human presence and intervention is possible within these areas.

References & website

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Field of wild crocus (Crocus veluchensis) in the Pirin mountains IPA, Bulgaria.
Ronald Wilfred Jansen/Shutterstock.com

Category:

Biodiversity designations

Related pages

- Alliance for Zero Extinction sites (AZE) (Areas)
- Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) (Areas)
- Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) (Areas)
- Centres of Plant Diversity (CPD) (Areas)

Links

- Plantlife International

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