

PRIORITISATION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTIVATED PLANTS – A NEW APPROACH*Mercy Morris¹, John David², Tim Upson³ & Mike Buffin⁴***ABSTRACT**

In this paper, the case for the conservation of plants that have arisen in cultivation is provided and the mechanisms for extinction discussed, with examples. The approach to cultivated plant conservation over the past 30 years is reviewed and a basis for revising that approach explained. A new, far more comprehensive and rigorous method for prioritisation is proposed. This has been developed for the Plant Heritage Threatened Plants Project.

INTRODUCTION

The need for the conservation of wild species is commonly accepted; that of plants and animals that have been selected by man, less so. It is evident, therefore, that a great deal of effort has been put into the methods used to establish the level of threat to wild species which is then used to concentrate effort on action to conserve them. The literature on threat assessment for wild species is extensive (IUCN, 2001) and the methods used to compile lists of threatened plants globally, regionally and nationally are detailed in Red Data books. The Growing Heritage Action Plan (RHS & NCCPG, 2007) observed that as it is not possible, or even desirable, to conserve every cultivar, ways need to be found to evaluate, prioritise and decide what should be conserved. The Action Plan identified two key actions arising from this. First, that the criteria for prioritisation of cultivated plants needs to be agreed and second, that there is a need for a Red Data Book equivalent for cultivated plants to be produced. Since the publication of the Action Plan, Plant Heritage (then the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens, NCCPG), the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the National Trust (NT) and Cambridge University Botanic Garden (CUBG) have been working together on developing new protocols to address these key actions. These protocols need to be far more rigorous than has been the case in the past

1. Mercy Morris is Plant Conservation Officer for Plant Heritage.
Address: 12 Home Farm, Lowley Park, Guildford, Surrey, GU7 1HS.
Email: mercym@plantheritage.org.uk

2. John David is Chief Scientist at the Royal Horticultural Society and the corresponding author for this paper.
Address: RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey, GU24 0QB.
Email: johndavid@rhs.org.uk

3. Tim Upson is Curator of Cambridge University Botanic Garden, and Vice-Chair of the Plant Heritage Plant Conservation Committee.
Address: 1 Brookside, Cambridge, CB2 1JE.
Email: tuc20@cam.ac.uk

4. Mike Buffin is Gardens and Parks Advisor for the National Trust with responsibility for plant conservation and chairs the Plant Heritage Plant Conservation Committee.
Address: 3 Eldon Close, Kings Sombourne, Stockbridge, Hants, SO20 6NW.
Email: mike.buffin@nationaltrust.org.uk