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## NEWS RELEASE

### For immediate release

# TOP 50 MEDITERRANEAN ISLAND PLANTS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

## ***World Conservation Union launches tool to save Mediterranean native plant diversity***

**Gland, Switzerland, 9 November 2005 (IUCN)** - Majorca, Ibiza, Sicily, Crete, Malta – for many, these islands conjure up images of dream holiday destinations. But the natural beauty that draws thousands of visitors to these islands every year is being fast eroded. Many of the close to 25,000 Mediterranean native plants that make the region one of the world's 34 biodiversity 'hotspots' are disappearing.

A new conservation tool *The Top 50 Mediterranean Island Plants*, launched yesterday by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) at the 14th meeting of the Barcelona Convention on Protection of the Mediterranean Sea, lays out a conservation strategy for species from the familiar hyacinth, carnation, and violet families, along with less known, intriguingly-named plants such as moon trefoil, Lefkara milkvetch, Troodos rockcress, and Casey's larkspur.

The handbook aims to reverse the decline of these natural treasures by helping policy makers in the respective countries take appropriate decisions to protect their natural heritage. It is available in English and French, and the factsheets covering islands where Spanish, Italian and Greek are spoken have been translated accordingly.

The Mediterranean basin contains nearly 5,000 islands ranging greatly in size, many of which are home to an exceptionally diverse flora. Nearly 25,000 species of flowering plants and ferns are native to the countries surrounding the basin and 60% of these are endemic (found nowhere else in the world).

Over the past few decades, intensive agriculture, infrastructure development, urbanization and mass tourism have wreaked havoc on natural habitats. Rapid population growth, climate change and the spread of alien invasive plants have also diminished many native species and many more are on the point of extinction.

Endemic species are often highly localized with a small number of individuals, making them particularly susceptible to extinction. Any major disturbance such as fire or construction work could wipe them out. The 'Top 50' presented in the book have been selected from these many rare and threatened species. It outlines why they are threatened, what is being done to protect them, and what more is needed to prevent them being lost forever.



The book emphasizes the need for on-site conservation rather than cultivation and reintroduction, as this is complicated and expensive. It is far more efficient to protect plants where they naturally occur and maintain “insurance” populations for worst-case scenarios. Only about 50% of the Top 50 species are found in protected areas and many of these areas are not being managed adequately.

“Protected areas are an important tool in conserving entire ecological communities, not just the Top 50 species,” says Bertrand de Montmollin, Chair of the Mediterranean Island Plant Specialist Group of IUCN's Species Survival Commission. “However, monitoring the conservation status of specific species can serve as an indicator for how well we are managing these areas.”

Many more species than those listed in the booklet need urgent conservation action. The Mediterranean Island Plant Specialist Group, together with partners and the IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, continues to identify threatened species in the region and propose further conservation action.

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SSC Mediterranean Island Plant Specialist Group visit:  
[www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/mipsg/index.htm](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/mipsg/index.htm)

Top 50 website: [www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/plants/Top50/](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/plants/Top50/)

Photos for media use are available at:  
[www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/plants/Top50/photo\\_gallery.html](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/plants/Top50/photo_gallery.html)