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Orchid conservation in China

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Conservation measures for wild orchids come in various forms. At the national level, the ability to understand the extent and patterns of threat, as well as to implement appropriate policies to address specific threats, is critical to the effective protection of orchids and other biota in any region. China is an orchid-rich country, with 1,761 species (including subspecies and varieties) recorded in the 2023 *Checklist of Plant Species in China*. The country has conducted Red List assessments for its entire flora, using the IUCN Red List criteria, twice in the past decade. In 2015, 653 (42%) of the 1,538 Chinese orchids assessed were categorised as threatened with extinction. In the 2020 re-assessment, 687 (46%) of the 1,499 species assessed were threatened with extinction, with one species listed as extinct. Habitat loss and deterioration are the dominant threats identified in both assessments, which is not surprising considering the country's rapid economic development over the past three decades. About 54% of the threatened orchids are protected in national or provincial nature reserves. However, over-exploitation as a threat was assigned to only 15 Chinese orchids (2.3%), a gross underestimation of this threat. About 350 species (25 %) of Chinese orchids are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and 191 Chinese orchids were traded using wild-collected plants. Prior to the release of the revised Key Protected Wild Plants List (KPWPL) in 2021, wild orchids growing outside of national nature preserves had no legal protection. Currently, seven genera traded mostly for medicinal and horticultural purposes are among the orchids listed on the KPWPL. Most are in the class II protection category, which allows the trade of wild-sourced plant materials but requires permission and a license. Despite these new regulations, achieving sustainable use has been, and will continue to be, the most difficult challenge for orchid conservation in China.

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