

Safeguarding Hispaniola's threatened palms and conifers: New conservation plan unveiled

Port of Spain, 8 November 2024 – The Dominican Republic is home to some of the rarest and most remarkable plant species on the planet, many of which, approximately 2,000, are endemic to the island and exist nowhere else on Earth. These species not only represent the region's ecological heritage, but they also play a critical role in maintaining the health of local ecosystems. However, they are under increasing threat from habitat loss, climate change and human activity.

Recognising the urgency of preserving these species, a new conservation plan has been developed as part of the recently completed *Conservation Action Planning of Selected Threatened Conifers and Palm Species in the Dominican Republic* project, led by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in collaboration with Grupo Jaragua. This CEPF-supported initiative focused on conservation planning for 15 threatened conifers and palm species that are found within the La Selle - Bahoruco - Jaragua - Enriquillo Corridor, a biodiversity hotspot in the southern Dominican Republic.



Oviedo's Cherry Palm (Pseudophoenix ekmanii). One of the palm species targeted by the project. Dominican Republic. Credit: Yolanda León.

In developing this new conservation plan, the IUCN started by gathering all available data on each species, including herbarium collections from both national and international sources. IUCN and Grupo Jaragua built on this scientific foundation by convening two stakeholder workshops that brought together more than 50 biodiversity experts, representatives of government agencies and civil society organisations, and local community members. The first workshop, held in Santo Domingo, focused on IUCN Red List assessments of the targeted species. This was followed by a second workshop in Barahona, which specifically addressed conservation planning. These workshops also prompted open dialogue on the challenges in conserving the region's flora, such as the impacts of agriculture, tourism, mining, charcoal production and real estate development, and opportunities to circumvent them.

The newly developed plan outlines several key actions aimed at protecting threatened palm and conifer species in the La Selle - Bahoruco - Jaragua - Enriquillo corridor while benefiting resource users. These include engaging local communities to reduce the extraction of tree bark and prevent forest fires, preserving and researching existing trees and involving communities in reforestation efforts. The plan also emphasises educational campaigns to foster local pride in these species, promoting sustainable livelihoods through nature-based tourism and improving land management practices. Additionally, it calls for stronger enforcement of environmental laws and collaboration among local support groups to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of conservation activities.

With the plan now developed, stakeholders are determining the best strategies for its implementation, seeking not only to protect the corridor's endangered palm and conifer species but also to empower local communities for enhanced environmental stewardship.

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