

Conservation News

IUCN Species Survival Commission Wild Tulip Specialist Group established

In April 2024, the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) established a new Wild Tulip Specialist Group. This new group will help raise the profile of non-tree plant conservation and highlight the need for conservation in often overlooked regions such as Central Asia.

This international group of scientists, practitioners and science communicators will assess, plan and act for the conservation of tulip species. The group will strive to assess all wild tulip species for the IUCN Red List, plan and implement projects to alleviate threats and monitor wild populations, build networks and partnerships to ensure effective ex situ collections, build and share capacity, and develop communication pieces to engage with local communities, the public and policy makers.

There are an estimated 90–100 species of tulips distributed across the semi-deserts, steppes, grasslands and mountain meadows of large parts of temperate Eurasia, from western China and Mongolia to the Balkans, with a single species in Iberia and north Africa. The majority of species occur in two diversity hotspots, with one centred on western Iran, Turkey and the Caucasus, and the other in Central Asia, where over 60% of species occur. Currently > 50% of wild tulips assessed on the IUCN Red List are categorized as threatened, with many others Near Threatened or unassessed. Research has shown that climate change and other anthropogenic stressors such as livestock overgrazing, mining, urbanization, overcollection and illegal trade threaten many tulip populations.

The Wild Tulip Specialist Group will focus on the entire distribution of wild tulips, encompassing a range of cultures, ecosystems and varying amounts of previous research. The group proposes to use its combined expertise to build an evidence base to inform decision-making and science-based conservation for wild tulips. The group is diverse both geographically and technically, with 35 members from 14 countries (Albania, Azerbaijan, Denmark, Finland, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, the Netherlands, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, the UK and Uzbekistan). Addressing global, regional and local challenges to conserve wild tulips will require innovative and diverse perspectives, knowledge and skills. The new group will also collaborate with other SSC taxonomic, national and species-based groups, and invites researchers, practitioners and communication experts with a passion for wild tulips, particularly those from the Caucasus, Türkiye, Iran and China, to contact us for further information on engaging with this new community of experts.

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