



The Top 50 Mediterranean Island Plants

Viola ucriana

Latin name: *Viola ucriana* Erben & Raimondo
Common name: Viola di Ucria (Italian)
Family: Violaceae (violet family)
Status: CRITICALLY ENDANGERED (CR)

Where is it found?

This perennial plant is only found on Mt. Pizzuta, near Palermo in north-western Sicily, growing at an altitude of 800-1,300 m. The only known population extends over two localities covering a total area of 0.2 km². The exact number of individuals is not yet known.

This little violet grows on eroded, sunny calcareous mountain slopes where rock outcrops or gravel substrates are sometimes covered by a garrigue vegetation characterized by the heath *Erica multiflora*, or more steppic vegetation dominated by the tall grass "Diss" (*Ampelodesmos mauritanicus*).

How to recognise it

This perennial, evergreen herbaceous violet is partially hairy with greyish green leaves which are either heart- or sometimes inversely egg-shaped. The upper leaves are somewhat elongated while the lower leaves are gathered together at the base, forming a cushion. The flowers are yellow with a straight or slightly curved, yellowish-green spur. The species usually flowers between April and June.

Interesting facts

This species only reproduces by seed. There are over 400 species of violets (*Viola* spp.) in the world, with more than 90 found in Europe. Taxonomic opinion on the species in Sicily has been divided, with some botanists "lumping" this species into the more common species *Viola nebrodensis*. However it is now generally recognised that *Viola nebrodensis* is divided into three separate species with localized distribution: *Viola ucriana* Erben & Raimondo (Pizzuta Mt.), *Viola tineorum* Erben & Raimondo (Rocca Busambra), and *Viola nebrodensis* Presl (Madonie Mts.).

Why is it threatened?

This species has been categorized CR (Critically Endangered) according to IUCN Red List Criteria B1ab(ii,iii,v)+2ab(ii,iii,v). This is due to the extremely restricted area in which the single population is found, and the fact that the area, quality of habitat, and number of individuals are predicted to decline.

The area where *Viola ucriana* persists is often subject to fire due to human activities, and these periodic summer fires pose a major threat to the conservation of this species. Forestry plantations of exotic conifers and other species are changing the ecological conditions of its habitat, and any human action could exterminate the one remaining population.

What is being done to protect it?



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Legally: This species is included in Red Lists at different levels (regional, national and international), either as part of the taxon *Viola nebrodensis* or as a variety of the latter. However, it is not protected by any particular law or convention.

In situ: The entire area where it is found is included in the "Monte Pizzuta, Costa del Carpineto, Moarda" SCI (Site of Community Importance). However, only the Mt. Pizzuta site is part of "Serre della Pizzuta" Nature Reserve.

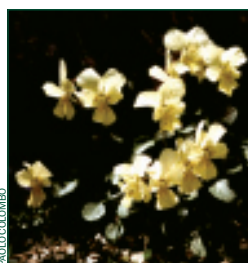
Ex situ: Seeds are conserved in the germplasm bank of the Department of Botanical Science, Palermo University, and cultivated in the Botanical Garden of Palermo.

What conservation actions are needed?

It is important to immediately stop forestry plantations in the species' habitat to limit the ecological transformation of the area. A protection scheme against fire is needed for the relevant sites. Ideally the entire population should be included in the Nature Reserve.

Scientific coordination

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