

Tbilisi Botanic Garden (TBG), the oldest Caucasian botanic institution, and its strategy for plant conservation

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Georgia as home of more than 4000 species of vascular plants, many thousands of bryophytes, fungi, microorganisms and animals, is an integral part of the Caucasus, one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots on Earth: biodiversity of this region is being lost at an alarming rate. As a consequence of such situation there is urgent need for maintenance of phytodiversity through implementation of the International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation within the framework of national priorities, targets and facilities.

More than 3500 species, infraspecific taxa and cultivars of introduced and native plants are grown in TBG. Among them over 1000 species are trees and shrubs; about 500 species and cultivars are outdoor herbaceous plants; nearly 700 species of tropic and subtropic origin are cultivated in greenhouse conditions.

Besides traditional introduction of exotic and native plants in TBG in the 1970s special living collection of rare and endangered Georgian and Caucasian plants was established. To date it includes more than 100 species of RDB of Georgia and about 270 species of rare and endangered plants of the Caucasus. Enlargement of these collections are in progress.

In 2003 first attempts have been undertaken to introduce about 200 individuals of 19 species of orchids including rare *Cephalanthera caucasica* and *Ophris oestriifera* subsp. *oestriifera*, for their outdoor cultivation in TBG. A number of rare and endangered species are represented in the Collection of medicinal plants including in total more than 300 species, mainly native. Some individuals and small groups of RDB species, viz. *Acer ibericum*, *Amygdalus georgica*, *Astragalus caucasicus*, *Celtis caucasica*, *C. glabrata*, and some others) are grown in the area occupied by natural vegetation (>>50 ha).