Caucasian Elm

Zelkova carpinifolia

Other Names: Caucasian Zelkova, Dzelkva, Dzelkva gradolistnaia
Family: Ulmaceae
Natural Range: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Turkey

IUCN Conservation Status

Vulnerable (VU)

Zelkova carpinifolia is a relict tree from the Tertiary era native to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Iran and Turkey. Studies have suggested that between 6000 and 5500 yr BP, *Zelkova* forests were widespread in the Transcaucasian region but today there are two main populations: the eastern Hyrcanian region and the western Colchic region, with a few isolated occurrences outside these areas. Recent studies have shown that there is a significant genetic difference between the two main populations of this species suggesting an ancient separation.

Zelkova carpinifolia is a light demanding canopy tree growing generally on moist, humus-rich soils usually between 100 and 600m. Unlike some of the other species in this genus *Z. carpinifolia* reproduces easily from self-sown seeds.

The major threats to this species are deforestation for agricultural land and extensive logging. *Z. carpinifolia* timber is very valuable, famous for its visual attractiveness, lightness, flexibility and rot-resistance. Furthermore, due to mild climatic conditions and scenic beauty, some areas are heavily affected by increased tourism, road construction and urbanisation. It is due to these threats that in 2018, the species was reassessed as Vulnerable for the IUCN Red List, having previously been assessed as Near Threatened.

Some nature reserves and natural parks have been created in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iran but the high pressure on the forests continue to increase. New field surveys are needed, especially in conservation priority areas.

In 2013, the GTC published a global action plan for the conservation of *Zelkova* species. This highlighted that *Z. carpinifolia* is a very popular species in botanic gardens worldwide but representatives are lacking in countries of its origin. New well documented collections should be established and large scale genetic studies should be carried out. Well-coordinated specialist groups should be created in order to act regionally and to develop a long term *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation strategy.

The Global Trees Campaign was a partnership between Fauna & Flora International and Botanic Gardens Conservation International.