



Global  
Conservation  
Consortium

**Rhododendron**



**GCC**

## About the Global Conservation Consortium for *Rhododendron*

The Global Conservation Consortium for *Rhododendron* brings together the world's *Rhododendron* experts, conservationists, and the botanic garden community to ensure that no wild species of *Rhododendron* becomes extinct.

*Rhododendron* is the most diverse genus in the heath and heather family (Ericaceae) comprising over 1100 species.

It is found growing wild across the Northern hemisphere and as far south as northern Australia, and grows in the mountains of southwest China, the Himalaya and southeast Asia where it forms an important part of montane ecosystems.

The Global Conservation Consortia are coordinated by BGCI. Contact us [ggc@bgci.org](mailto:ggc@bgci.org).



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## Rhododendron

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For questions or more information, or if you are interested in learning more about current GCC for *Rhododendron* activities please contact [Alan Elliott](#), GCC for *Rhododendron* Coordinator.

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## Rhododendron

### Diversity

*Rhododendron* species underpin livelihoods in regions where they protect watersheds and stabilise steep mountain slopes in the areas where some of the most significant river systems in Asia begin.

Their two centres of diversity are in east Himalaya and mountains of southwest China and in southeast Asia.

They exhibit an astonishing array of morphological and ecological diversity, thriving in the subtropical montane forests of southeast Asia, to high alpine habitats of the Himalaya, and the temperate forests of North America.






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### Culture

Rhododendron taxa are of significant horticultural value, with their impressive and beautiful blooms utilised in public and private garden spaces.



The natural diversity of Rhododendron has led to the development of over 20 thousand registered cultivated varieties. In their homelands they are utilised in everything from firewood to traditional medicine.

*Rh. arboreum* is the national flower of Nepal. In India *Rh. campanulatum* is the state flower of Himachal Pradesh, with *Rh. arboreum* the state flower for Uttarakhand and Nagaland and in the USA, *Rh. macrophyllum* and *Rh. maximum* are state flowers of Washington and West Virginia respectively.



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### Coordinated Action

Despite their ecological and cultural value, many *Rhododendron* species are under threat of extinction. Threats including habitat destruction, climate change, modification of natural systems, pests, and diseases are all impacting *Rhododendron* populations around the world.

Species identified as at risk of extinction require conservation action to ensure that they not only survive but are also resilient to the threats they face. This entails protection of threatened wild populations of plants in their natural habitats, and *ex situ* conservation in botanic gardens and seed banks.

As *Rhododendron* are considered “exceptional species” they require highly curated and maintained *ex situ* conservation with high levels of genetic diversity. *Rhododendron* are in urgent need of a coordinated, global effort to preserve species and populations efficiently and effectively both in their native habitats and in *ex situ* collections.



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## Rhododendron

### Operational Regions

#### North America and Greenland

There are around 30 *Rhododendron* taxa in North America and Greenland. Most are widespread and not currently considered threatened, although several southeastern US azalea species are. The most threatened of these the Critically Endangered *Rhododendron chapmanii*, which is a priority species for the GCC for *Rhododendron*, with Atlanta Botanical Garden leading conservation action for it. *Rhododendron flammeum* is assessed as Vulnerable, while updates to other species assessments are in progress.

#### Europe, Western Asia and Caucasus

There are about 20 taxa of *Rhododendron* in Europe, Western Asia and the Caucasus. *Rhododendron kotschyi* (previously assessed as *R. myrtifolium*) is currently classified as Endangered, as is *Rh. ponticum* subsp. *baeticum*.

#### South Asia and China

The centre of Diversity for temperate *Rhododendron* species is the Eastern Himalaya, and Southwestern China. There are approximately 374 threatened *Rhododendron* species in China and South Asia. Of those at least 20 are Critically Endangered, with one only known from a single mature individual. *Rh. liboense* has been the subject of a safe guarding project in Sichuan through the Global Trees Campaign, supported by Fondation Franklinia. *Rh. macabeanum* and *Rh. wattii* are being actively conserved in projects led by the Botanical Society of India.

#### Southeast Asia

This regions is center of diversity for species belonging to Section *Vireya*, with 398 described taxa, and likely further undescribed diversity that will likely be facing severe conservation threats. There are about 190 species considered to be of conservation concern and 12 considered to be Critically Endangered. Recent surveys have failed to find *Rhododendron retrorsipilum* and *Rh. loezringii* leading to the real possibility that these species are extinct, as neither have ever been cultivated. Critically Endangered *Rh. monkoboense* and *Rh. tuhanense* from Sabah are a current priority with conservation action being led by Kinabalu Parks and supported by Fondation Franklinia.

#### Northeast Asia

There are approximately 150 *Rhododendron* taxa occurring in Northeast Asia. Around 24 species are considered of conservation concern. 4 taxa are considered Critically Endangered, all endemic to Japan.