



Global
Conservation
Consortium

Whitebeams, Rowans
and Service Trees



About the Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees

Sorbus is a taxonomically complex genus, comprising the whitebeams, rowans, and service trees. It contains approximately 250 species, found primarily across the temperate northern hemisphere, with many species planted beyond their natural ranges.



The Global Conservation Consortia are coordinated by BGCI. Contact us ggc@bgci.org.



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About *Sorbus*

Though familiar across many landscapes, the evolutionary significance of the group is often overlooked.



An intricate web of hybridization, polyploidy and apomixis, has resulted in significant genetic diversification within the group, particularly in Eurasia, where some species are represented by only a handful of mature individuals.

Understanding their evolutionary origins and breeding systems is crucial to effectively conserve genetic diversity within the group, and indeed to allow these evolutionary processes to continue, particularly in light of the current climate and extinction crises.



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For questions or more information, or if you are interested in learning more about current GCC for Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees activities please contact [Rosie Anderson](#) or [Dan Crowley](#) GCC for Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees Coordinators.

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Culture

The group includes several highly ornamental trees, with various species noted for both foliage and fruit. Their relatively modest stature, coupled with tolerance of challenging growing conditions has seen them become a popular choice for urban and amenity use. In both wild and urban environments they are an important food source for birds.





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Habitat and Threats

Sorbus species often inhabit cliffs and mountainsides, while some occur in lowland pockets of ancient woodlands. Amongst the *Sorbus* native to Britain and Ireland, all but seven are threatened with extinction.

According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, 18 are Critically Endangered, with 16 of these represented by less than 50 mature individuals in the wild. Many of the most threatened species exist in severely restricted populations, heightening their vulnerability to external threats.



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Habitat and Threats

Across Europe, the main pressures on *Sorbus* species are driven by quarrying, grazing, succession to tall woodland, deforestation and selective forestry. As such, many populations are restricted to rocky cliffs, where they are sheltered from grazing animals and competition for light.

Changes in climate are likely to have an increased impact on such marginal habitats and exacerbate threats from pests and diseases.



In addition, the challenge of accurate identification, particularly within polyploid taxa, may also contribute to inadvertent mis-management.



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Conservation

To address the ongoing conservation needs of *Sorbus*, a coordinated approach is required.



With an initial focus on threatened species in the UK and Ireland, The Global Conservation Consortium for Whitebeams, Rowans and Service Trees will adopt an integrated approach to conserve these trees *in situ* and *ex situ*, while raising awareness of their significance.