

## Armenia's important plant areas

**Anna Asatryan (Armenia, PCT 2003)** focused on the development of an Important Plant Areas programme for Armenia during her project at Kew. After returning to Armenia she continued to develop the programme with the support of [The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation](#). Subsequently she led two project teams set up to identify and protect Important Plant Areas within the country.

Anna describes the work she and her colleagues have been undertaking:

The Important Plant Area (IPA) programme aims to identify and protect a network of the best sites for plant conservation, identified using globally consistent criteria.

In the first project, 26 sites were listed as priority sites and a provisional listing of candidate sites was developed, mainly corresponding to criteria A (threatened species) and C (threatened habitats). Because of data deficiencies, we met some difficulties regarding criterion B (botanical richness), and we wanted to continue with further identification of IPAs, focusing on floristic richness. During the next project (booster), we focused on identifying floristic richness through botanical data collection and analysing and preparing check-lists of indicator species for each habitat type. The other goals of the project were to organise some field seminars in different regions of Armenia involving local conservationists as well as publishing and disseminating related materials in the form of a leaflet and posters.

Selecting botanically rich sites within the each main habitat type we have tried to encompass the diversity of plant communities of different classification units (i.e. formations, associations) as widely as possible.

The main idea of the seminars was to introduce the IPA programme to those involved in plant conservation at a local level, to show them some of the IPAs in their area, to teach them the basics of botanical research and plant conservation (when needed) and to involve them in further monitoring of the sites. We also wanted to provide them with some initial equipment for collecting herbarium specimens – frames (herbarium folders).

The first field seminar (June 2006) was organized in the village Nerkin Hund in the far south of Armenia, about 40 km from Kapan town, far from the main road in the forest area of Shikahokh Reserve. This location was chosen because it is in one of the most interesting ecosystems in Armenia – relict plane grove formed with *Platanus orientalis*, which is listed in the Red Data books of Armenia and former USSR.

Another 4-day event was organized in the north of Armenia (July 2006), involving staff from Sevan and Dilijan National Parks as well as the director of Sevan Botanic Garden (i.e. people who are at the forefront of conservation of local flora).

## Outcomes

1. Check lists for each habitat type have been prepared and will be kept updated.
2. 17 IPAs have been selected within the category of botanically rich sites. They are divided into 2 groups: sites representing one habitat type (11) and those representing 2 or more habitat types (6). The

selected sites encompass Armenia's main habitats and a large number of vegetation classification subcategories. Other new sites can be identified within this category (data deficient areas need to be filled).

3. The IPA studies in Armenia should be continued with further emphasis on other groups of plants, fungi and lichens.

4. Ten of the selected sites have a management level described as 'poor' or 'no management'. Future activities will be aimed to attract attention of government bodies to the management problems of these sites and to promote work with local conservationists/ communities.

5. Four mini-posters (A3+ format) and a leaflet have been produced. The posters show some of the most endangered species and habitats. Two Red Data listed iris species (*I. lycotis* and *I. elegantissima*) are collected commercially for sale in April-May and no actions are being undertaken to stop this. (*I. elegantissima* is one of the species selected for the WUC campaign (see below), organised by Planta Europa). Two posters are devoted to the target IPAs: relict plane grove (*Platanus orientalis* is also selected for WUC) and Artanish peninsula in Sevan National Park. The leaflet introduces the IPAs programme and this project in Armenian and English.

#### **'Wake up Call for Plants in Europe'**

Some of the project materials (data, photos) are being used in the Planta Europa ([www.plantaeuropa.org](http://www.plantaeuropa.org)) campaign 'Wake up Call for Plants in Europe' (WUC) in which Armenia participates. I am coordinating the campaign activities in Armenia. In particular, all the species chosen for the campaign by the panel of local experts are among those represented in the selected IPAs and some are of the most endangered. The results of the vote will be announced to coincide with the Planta Europa Conference and the message taken to the European Environment Ministers meeting in Belgrade in October.

Since last year Armenia has been involved in a 2-year long project, supported by CEPF, to produce the Red Data Book of Caucasus. All the candidate plant species for the Red Data Book are being assessed in accordance with the new IUCN criteria. The governmental programme on the new updated Red Data Book of Armenia is also currently underway. These will give us a completely new and updated red list for plants by next year. These data are essential for the final selection of the IPAs under the criterion A. So, our future activities regarding IPA studies in Armenia will be to review the selected sites and add new ones in accordance with adequate data on the rare species. Other groups of plants as well as fungi and lichens will be involved as well.

The two projects supported were:

2<sup>nd</sup> Rufford Small Grant, 'Research and Conservation of Rare and Threatened Plant Communities of Armenia', duration 17 months (26.10.2003 -30.03.2005) and Booster grant 'Contributing to the identification of important plant areas in Armenia through the selection of the Botanical Richness sites' 12 months (25.04.2006 -20.04.2007).