
Scientists: 30% of Cactus Species at Risk of Extinction

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Researchers from the British universities of Cambridge and Exeter studied the threat of extinction for 1,478 out of the 1,480 known species of cactus, concluding that the plants are the fifth taxonomic group of plants in most danger.

The largest number of endangered species was located in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul and in northern Uruguay's Artigas province.

The major threats to cactuses, according to the researchers, are the expansion of land use for agriculture and aquaculture, industrial use of cactuses and residential and commercial sprawl in areas where the plants live.

Barbara Goettsch and her team found that cactuses are a group of plants "culturally meaningful" for diverse communities.

Their most common habitat includes arid regions in the Americas, and cactuses have been used for thousands of years for food, medicinal purposes and to create ornaments.

Despite environmental pressures in regions where cactuses proliferate, the species has not attracted much attention from environmentalists, the scientists said.

The study warned that the processes that could lead to the extinction of many plant species were not yet well understood.

Scientists have only evaluated the risks faced by 19,373 species out of some 300,000 known species, the researchers said.
