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Ferns and lycopods are a group of vascular plants that produce spores for reproduction, rather than using seeds and flowers like many other plants. They provide essential ecosystem services, such as preventing soil erosion, removing pollutants from the environment, taking in carbon from the atmosphere and providing shelter for small animals, such as insects or rodents. They also colonise disturbed habitats, following forest fires for example, enabling more species to inhabit the area. European hotspots of fern and lycopod species are the Macaronesian Islands, Corsica and several mountainous areas in Europe.

“It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these ancient plants, and regional and national conservation action is urgently needed to improve their status across Europe,” says Jean-Christophe Vié, Deputy Director, IUCN Global Species Programme. “Protected areas, such as the Natura 2000 sites, must ensure better protection for these species, and their habitats must be restored, especially in aquatic areas and wetlands affected by pollution, canalisation and drainage. A recently established monitoring programme will highlight population trends, and inform future actions to ensure the long-term survival of ferns and lycopods in Europe.”

More than 20 experts participated in the two-year assessment project, which was partially funded by the European Commission LIFE funding instrument.

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About The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

[The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™](#) (or The IUCN Red List) is an invaluable resource to guide conservation action and policy decisions. It is a health check for our planet – a Barometer of Life. It is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant, animal and fungi species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as 'threatened'.

The IUCN Red List is not just a register of names and associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions. The IUCN Red List is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, [www.iucn.org](#)