

# **SERAPIAS PEREZ-CHISCANOI: LEGAL PROTECTION AND DISTRIBUTION**

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## **Samenvatting**

We doen verslag van de bescherming van de bedreigde orchidee *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* in Spanje. Hoewel er nogal wat nieuwe populaties zijn gevonden, waardoor de verspreiding flink is toegenomen, moeten we constateren dat de regionale overheid onvoldoende aandacht geeft aan de feitelijke bescherming van deze kwetsbare soort. Er is geen enkel microreservaat (LIC) voor vastgesteld, 16 populaties (70%) zijn nog onbeschermd, er wordt geen beheer gevoerd en het beschermingsplan is niet geraadpleegd bij de planning van wegwerkzaamheden in het verspreidingsgebied. De vernietiging van vele individuen had makkelijk kunnen worden voorkomen, als bijvoorbeeld de wegverbreding slechts enkele meters was verlegd. We hopen oprecht dat de regionale overheid voortaan haar verantwoordelijkheid voor zeldzame en beschermde soorten serieus neemt en dat technici rekening houden met de bekende locaties van de groene tongorchis (en andere bedreigde soorten) bij het plannen van verdere bouwwerkzaamheden.

## **Summary**

We report on the conservation of the threatened orchid *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* in Spain. Although quite a lot of new populations that considerably extended its distribution have been found, we have to conclude that the regional government does not pay sufficient attention to the actual protection of this vulnerable species. No single micro-reserve (LIC) for the orchid has been established, sixteen populations (70%) are still unprotected, no management is being carried out, and the protection plan has not been consulted during the planning of road construction works in its distribution area. The destruction of many individuals could easily have been avoided, for example, if the widening of the roads had been diverted by only a few meters. We sincerely hope that from now on the regional government seriously will take its responsibility for its rare and endangered species and that engineers take into account the known locations of the green tongue-orchid (and other threatened species) during the planning of further construction work.

## **Zusammenfassung**

Wir berichten über die Verwaltung der bedrohten Orchidee *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* in Spanien. Obwohl ziemlich viele neue Populationen entdeckt worden sind - wodurch die Verbreitung ordentlich zugenommen hat - müssen wir feststellen, dass die regionale Behörde dem eigentlichen Schutz dieser verwundbaren Art ungenügend Aufmerksamkeit widmet. Es ist kein einziges Mikroreservat gegründet worden, 16 Populationen (70%) sind noch ungeschützt, es ist kein Kurs festgelegt worden und der Schutzplan ist bei dem Entwurf von Straßenbauarbeiten im Verbreitungsgebiet nicht zu Rate gezogen. Der Vernichtung vieler Individuen hätte leicht vorgebeugt werden können, wenn zum Beispiel die Straßenverbreiterung nur einige Meter anders hingelegt worden wäre. Wir hoffen aufrichtig, dass die regionale Behörde fortan ihre Verantwortung für seltene und geschützte

Arten ernst nimmt und dass Techniker die bekannten Standorte dieser Orchidee (und anderer bedrohten Arten) beim Planen weiterer Bauarbeiten berücksichtigen.

## Resumen

Nosotros realizamos un informe sobre la conservación de la orquídea amenazada *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* en España. Aunque muchas poblaciones nuevas han sido encontradas lo cual extiende su distribución considerablemente, hemos concluido que el gobierno regional no ha dado la suficiente atención a la protección actual de esta vulnerable especie. Ni una sola medida de preservación tipo micro-reserva (LIC) ha sido implementada, 16 poblaciones (70%) están todavía sin proteger, ningún tipo de medida ha sido tomada, y el plan de protección no fue consultado durante la planificación de la construcción de unas carreteras en el área de distribución de la especie. La destrucción de muchos individuos pudo haber sido evitada fácilmente, por ejemplo, si el ensanchamiento de las carreteras hubiese sido desviado por solo unos metros. Esperamos sinceramente que desde ahora el gobierno regional asuma seriamente su responsabilidad sobre esta especie rara y en peligro de extinción y que los ingenieros tomen en cuenta los lugares conocidos de la orquídea *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* (y otras especies en peligro) a la hora de realizar nuevos planes de construcción.

## Introduction

In Eurorchis 16, Venhuis et al. (2004a) reported on the endangered Spanish green tongue-orchid, *Serapias perez-chiscanoi*. They concluded that a species conservation plan urgently needs to be set up to prevent extinction in the near future, due to the alarming rate at which the orchid disappears. Furthermore, Venhuis et al. (2004b) concluded in Plant Talk that knowledge of the ecology and distribution is important for its conservation, but that the role of the regional government is just as important. In this report, we would like to demonstrate just how true this is.

## Legal protection

The green tongue-orchid predominantly occurs in Extremadura and its regional government therefore has a great responsibility in protecting the species. Since 2000, the regional government has financed a study to identify and select sites with important concentrations of rare, endemic and threatened plants or plant communities. At least 109 zones are in the process of being declared legally protected areas, under the denomination of Scientifically Interesting Sites (Lugares de Interés Científico; LIC's), which are part of the Extremaduran legal micro-reserve network. A total area of about 1500 hectares is included in this network, of which 60 % is private land. However, after consulting all Extremaduran protected sites that are incorporated in RENPEX (Red de Espacios Naturales Protegidos de EXtremadura) and LIC's published in the beginning of 2005, we conclude that only seven populations of *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* are being protected. Three populations are incorporated in RENPEX: the population near Obando, near Casas de Don Pedro and near Navalvillar de Pela. The populations near Almonte and Valdecaballeros are protected as LIC's. Two more populations can be found in Parque Natural de Cornalvo, which is protected since 1989 as one of the six Extremaduran ZEC's (Zona Especial de Conservación). One of these two is

the smallest population of all, containing only four plants, while the second one near the tail of Embalse de Cornalvo comprises about 250 individuals. For no other population a special LIC has been established, and all currently protected populations are simply fortunately occurring within earlier designated areas. For three populations, the Extremaduran government in 2003 had the intention to incorporate them in the micro-reserve network: the large population near Trujillanos, the large population near Aljucén and the thriving population near Valdecaballeros. To this date, this has not happened. In the Extremaduran regional list of endangered species that was published in 2001, *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* was categorised as “en peligro de extinción” (i.e., in danger of extinction). For species belonging to this category, the regional government is obliged to set up a protection plan to prevent extinction. A protection plan is not yet available, but after a field study in 2003, we presented an extensive report under the name “Estudio sobre *Serapias perez-chiscanoi* en Extremadura: censo, diagnóstico y directrices para un plan de recuperación”, to the Extremaduran government. This report contains a list of all known sites with detailed maps, identification of possible threats and suggestions for conservation and management for each population.

### **Destroyed populations**

In the spring of 2006, we revisited most populations of *S. perez-chiscanoi* in Extremadura. During our visit, we found that the most northeastern population in the Guadiana river basin, near the village of Valdecaballeros, had been destroyed entirely, whereas another near Palazuelo had been halved. Both populations were situated in a road verge and were (partly) destroyed as a consequence of road construction works. The population near Palazuelo was unprotected, but the population near Valdecaballeros belonged to one of the three that had been planned to be incorporated in the micro-reserve network! In the protection plan, the Valdecaballeros population had been placed third on the “priority for conservation list” for the following reasons: 1) many juvenile, young plants were found, suggesting good demographic viability, 2) it was the most northeastern population in the Guadiana river basin, 3) it occurred on a very small area (approximately 8m<sup>2</sup>), and 4) the adjacent road made it vulnerable to human disturbance. It is very unfortunate that already after such a short time, the government appeared to be unable to conserve this small but thriving population. It is furthermore important to realise that sixteen other populations are still unprotected and that some of them are in equally vulnerable locations, such as road verges and the edges of agricultural fields.

### **New populations**

Besides our disappointing observations, we fortunately also received some good news. The regional government has recently initiated an inventory of Extremaduran orchids in order to establish their distribution, abundance and identify threats. The purpose of this study is to designate micro-reserves to ensure the protection of these orchids. This inventory immediately resulted in several newly discovered populations. Within the margins of the Guadiana river basin, populations near Casas de Don Pedro, Navalvillar de Pela, Embalse de Proserpina, a second near Valverde de Mérida and another near Valdecaballeros were found and populations near Valdebótoa and Villar del Rey that were presumed extinct were

rediscovered (Sanchez, pers. comm., 2006 & Gentil Cabrilla, pers. comm., 2005). Also five important discoveries were made outside the Guadiana river basin: two populations were found in the southern part of Extremadura near Zafra, and three more were found northwards near Zarza la Mayor, Sierra de Fuentes and one along the Almonte streamlet, all situated in the Tagus river basin (Sanchez, pers. comm., 2006, Gentil Cabrilla, pers. comm., 2006 & Durán Oliva, 2006). Another major discovery in the Tagus river basin is a population near Belvis de la Jara (Sanchez, pers. comm.). This is the first population eastwards of Extremadura found in the Comunidad of Castilla y La Mancha. Adding the new, and subtracting the destroyed sites, the number of known populations is now twenty-three.



Known and legally protected  
populations of *S. perez-chiscanoi*  
in 2006

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