Threatened species of the Northern Territory

Small-leaved clematis

Clematis decipiens

Conservation status

Australia: Not listed
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Vulnerable
Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

Clematis decipiens is a dioecious woody climber, to 5 m high. It resembles *C. microphylla*, but the leaves have 12-15 leaflets. Leaflets are narrow-ovate to lanceolate, entire or deeply three-sect, becoming glabrous with age. Flowers in axillary and terminal panicles. Tepals pale green to creamy white. The small achenes are light brown, glabrous or sparsely hairy, compressed-ovoid with corky margins. The awns are 1.5–3.5 cm long[1].

Flowering: July–October.

Distribution

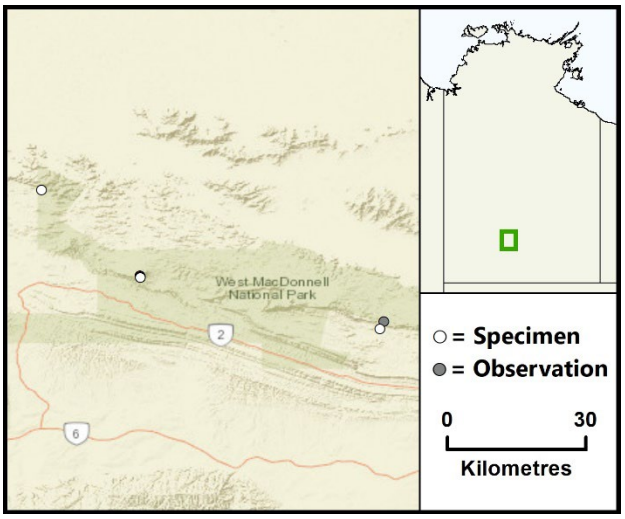
Clematis decipiens is known in the Northern Territory (NT) from three sites in the West MacDonnell Ranges: headwaters of the Ellery Creek catchment, Mt Zeil and Mt Sonder. The subpopulations at each of these sites are very small, occupying no more than 0.5-1 hectare each. The size of the NT population unknown, but is estimated to be <1 000 mature individuals. The West MacDonnell Ranges is well surveyed and it is considered unlikely that additional populations occur.

Credit: D. Albrecht

This species is, however, widespread in south-eastern Australia (Victoria,

New South Wales, Queensland, the south-east corner of South Australia and also on the Bass Strait Islands)[1].

NT conservation reserves where reported: West MacDonnell/Tjoritja National Park.



Caption: Known locations of the Small-leaved Clematis in the NT (nrmaps.nt.gov.au)

Ecology and life-history

This species is intrinsically rare in the NT. It is restricted to shaded, deep, sheltered gully heads below cliffs in the West MacDonnell Ranges where the microclimate is relatively mesic. Typically, soils are shallow and the surrounding vegetation is very dense[2]. Throughout its continental range, the species usually occurs in dryland forests and woodlands, but also in wetter sub-coastal forests[1]. Very little is known about the population dynamics and reproductive biology of the NT population.

Threatening processes

There are no known extant threats to the NT population of *Clematis decipiens*. Given its small size and restricted distribution, the population is vulnerable to the effects of stochastic processes such as disease. Currently, its habitat is largely weed free, however invasion by Buffel Grass would represent a significant threat to the NT population, especially if the sites become more fire prone. The species is potentially threatened by hotter temperatures and altered rainfall associated with climate change.

Conservation objectives and management

The most important management objective for this species at present is the maintenance of habitat integrity. This requires monitoring of weed (especially Buffel Grass) infestation in and around the sites. Quantification of the population size and mapping of its extent would also be useful. Investigation of seed bank dynamics and germination requirements would be useful for predicting this species' response to changing climate and/or habitat parameters.

References

[1] Eichler, H.J. and Jeanes J.A. 2007. Ranunculaceae. Flora of Australia Volume 2 p. 461. ABRS/CSIRO Melbourne, Australia.

[2] White, M., Albrecht, D., Duguid, A., Latz, P., and Hamilton, M. 2000. Plant species and sites of botanical significance in the southern bioregions of the Northern Territory. Volume 1: significant vascular plants. A report to the Australian Heritage Commission. (Arid Lands Environment Centre, Alice Springs.)