Thrixspermum congestum

Conservation status

Australia: Not Listed
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Northern Territory: Vulnerable
Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976

Description

Thrixspermum congestum is an epiphytic orchid forming small clumps. The stems are sparsely branched, flattened to 15 cm long. There are 6-15 leaves per plant, leathery, often yellowish green. The inflorescence grows to 10 cm long, and is erect and wiry. The flowers open together, are about 15 mm across, cream or white, and fragrant. The flowers last about one day and are produced in sporadic groups.

Flowering: February.

Distribution

This species is known from Queensland, the Northern Territory (NT) and New Guinea. In the Northern Territory, there are specimen records from only two localities, on Melville Island, with unvouchered records from a further six sites (four from Bathurst Is and two from Melville Is).

NT conservation reserves where reported: None.

Ecology

This species grows in lowland rainforests and also on mangroves. It is usually found in humid, airy situations, often in exposed positions on small branches.
Threatening processes

It shares similar threats to other plant species restricted to evergreen, spring-fed rainforest on the Tiwi Islands. As an epiphyte with a small population and restricted distribution, this species is susceptible to stochastic events, in particular cyclones. In common with other wet rainforest species, it is likely to be vulnerable to the indirect effects of land use intensification mooted for some parts of its range. These effects include lowered ground water levels and reduced discharge of springs with a consequent drying out of its wet rainforest habitat. This may also result in loss of habitat though a mixture of grassy weed invasion of forest margins and increased fire. As an orchid, pressure from horticultural collectors may be a threat.

Its limited distribution has been established through extensive surveys on the Tiwi Island between 1998-2014 and its rainforest habitat has been well sampled2,3,4,5, providing some confidence that its apparent restriction is accurate. However, there is an element of data deficiency with this species as flowers are recorded as lasting only approximately 10 hours and plants epiphytic plants in tall trees may be difficult to locate.

Conservation objectives and management

A Recovery Plan for the threatened plants of the Tiwi Islands was released in 2007, and many actions have been implemented3,6.

Research into the status and extent of the population, and the impacts of possible threatening factors, is required. A monitoring program should be established for at least representative localities.

Living material has been collected for the Darwin Botanic Gardens. Availability of stock commercially may protect species from horticultural harvesting and stochastic events.

References