

Orchid Trade in Sri Lanka with Special Reference to *Vanda tessellata*

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Orchidaceae is one of the most strictly protected taxa as well as one of the most traded taxa around the world. Over 70% of CITES regulated species are orchids. There are 192 species of orchids belonging to 78 genera described from Sri Lanka and all species of this family are protected under the Fauna and Flora Protection (Amendment) Act No.22 of 2009. The National Red Data Book, (2012) lists 160 of those species as threatened. Research on the orchid trade in Sri Lanka is very scarce. Hence, the present study was conducted with the objective of obtaining detailed information on the orchid trade between 2007-2017. Data was gathered from the databases of Sri Lanka Customs, The Department of Wildlife Conservation, The Forest Department, National Plant Quarantine Division, legal action taken in courts, international websites, market surveys and interviews with individuals in Sri Lanka and in Thailand. CITES data from 2008-2017, indicates that Sri Lanka has imported 3,692,535 plants in 123 shipments from 4 countries. Of these 95.6% of those were from Thailand. Sri Lanka has exported 153,316 plants and 10 flower samples to 14 countries during the same period. Nearly 32% of these were to the Maldives. Legally imported quantity is 24.08% larger than the legally exported quantity. Information obtained by the authors showed that illegally imported quantities were 25% higher than the legally imported amounts. *Vanda tessellata* was the most heavily traded indigenous orchid species within and from Sri Lanka. Although the species of *V. tessellata* is protected by law, enforcement is very poor. Habitat of *Vanda tessellata* is mature and more specifically larger host tree species distributed in dry and intermediate forests, especially in North, North-Central and Eastern provinces. Those habitats are currently under severe pressures leading to their loss and degradation. Urgent conservation measures should be taken through habitat protection and scientific studies on population genetics of this species which has high floral polymorphism. For the protection of the threatened *V. tessellata* species, *ex-situ* conservation for uncommon varieties is recommended.

Keywords: *Vanda tessellata*, orchid trade, imports, exports, dry and intermediate forests, Sri Lanka