

Parsing conservation information on cycad species

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A recently published article on cycad conservation data was conceived, compiled, analyzed, and written in Palawan, Philippines and Guam. *Cycas micronesica* from Guam (left) and *Cycas wadei* from Palawan Province (right) are two of the endangered cycad species included in the database. Credit: Thomas Marler

Human activity continues to threaten the world's terrestrial flora. Extensive formal compilations of information and data have become useful for understanding these global threats. The International Union

for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources has spearheaded one of these endeavors with the inception and curation of The Red List of Threatened Species. This massive evolving storehouse of information can be accessed and probed for statistics that improve contemporary knowledge about the conservation status of various plant groups.

The results of an endeavor to more fully understand the status of the world's cycad genera and species appeared in the December 2015 issue of the international science journal *Tropical Conservation Science*. The empirical exercise was conducted by Paris Marler from the Centre for Sustainability in Palawan, Philippines and Thomas Marler from the University of Guam.

The approach uncovered 337 cycad entries into The Red List, and the taxonomic validity of these entries was checked against the most recently published authoritative description of cycad species. This exercise verified 303 accepted described taxa that had been entered into The Red List database. The analysis of various facets of the database revealed no canonical description of the [conservation](#) metrics that fit the entire group of 303 species. For example, the ten described cycad genera exhibited different proportions of species within each of The Red List threat categories. Similarly, The Red List criteria used to validate threat status differed among the various genera.

Attempts to use collective analyses of endangered species, such as The Red List, for decision-making in conservation approaches have received some criticisms in recent years. The authors contend that these robust databases are highly useful for ad hoc deconstructions such as those described in the *Tropical Conservation Science* article. For example, the exercise illuminated which [cycad species](#) have not been adequately evaluated for threat status. Moreover, the contemporary database was useful for predicting which genera or geographic regions will reveal the most change in threat status in the future.

That the research was conducted on the islands of Palawan and Guam added some relevance to the endeavor, as both islands are home to endangered *Cycas* [species](#). The article is an example an exercise that leads to a greater understanding of the world's biodiversity crisis.

Provided by University of Guam

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