

Cultivating Chinese orchids could conserve wild species

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An orchid market in China showing the great variety of colourful flowers for sale. Credit: Bangor University

Asking people who want to buy orchids about their preferences when choosing which plants to buy has revealed that many unknowingly buy wild, possibly endangered orchids, when they would be just as happy to buy commercially grown plants that meet their preferences for colour and price.

Working in two very different locations in China, Xishuangbanna, a sparsely populated rural area in southwest China, and Hong Kong, a densely populated metropolis, researchers found that consumer preference was not driving demand for wild or rare [orchids](#) in Chinese flower markets.

The information can be used to devise strategies to conserve wild orchids in the highly-threatened Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot.

As Dr. Freya St John of Bangor University explains: "In this case, what we found was that [consumers](#) just want cheap colourful flowers, and would be just as happy buying cultivated plants. The markets have wild plants for sale not because that's what the consumer wants, but because some traders find this the easiest way to supply the [market](#) with cheap colourful plants. The best way to conserve wild orchids might be to strengthen enforcement of existing regulations to prevent wild [plants](#) being sold, and support legal businesses selling sustainable commercially grown orchids."

Dr. Amy Hinsley, of the Oxford Martin Programme on the Illegal Wildlife Trade at the University of Oxford said:

"The wildlife trade is complex and is not a single entity or market—in some cases consumer demand for unsustainably-sourced wild products is the problem, but in other cases the supply is driving the trade. Studies like this are important because without knowing what drives an illegal market, there is no way we can know how to address it."

Dr. Sophie Williams, who initiated this research while working at Bangor University said: "I'm really pleased that this work is now published and that I continue to contribute to conservation science."

More information: Sophie J. Williams et al. Using consumer preferences to characterise the trade of wild-collected ornamental orchids in China, *Conservation Letters* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/conl.12569](https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12569)

Provided by Bangor University

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