

Invasive species threaten Canary Islands

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The Canary Islands are reportedly being endangered by an invasion of foreign species that are overtaking the islands' unique plant and animal life.

Scientists for decades have found a new species or subspecies on the islands an average of once every six days, The New York Times reported. But now that unusual evolutionary habitat that fascinated Charles Darwin more than 100 years ago is being threatened.

Scientists say the problem started when the European Union abolished internal border checkpoints about 10 years ago.

"There is very potent legislation controlling what enters into Europe," Jose Luis Martin Esquivel, a regional government scientist said. "But there are very weak controls on what crosses the borders within Europe."

Government officials on the islands, located about 70 miles off the coast of southern Morocco, estimate invasive species have already cut the percentage of native plant species in half.

Domingo Berriel, director of the regional government's environmental protection agency, said the best way to manage the threat would be increasing the regional government's authority to monitor what comes across its borders.

"If we don't act soon," Berriel told The Times, "the consequences for our endemic species could be grave."

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