

**From:** <[REDACTED]>  
**To:** <panel\_ea@legco.gov.hk>  
**Cc:** <pun\_tung\_ng@afcd.gov.hk>, <[REDACTED]>

---

**Date:** Thursday, November 29, 2018 09:58AM  
**Subject:** IUCN Redlist status updated for all world trees

History: → This message has been forwarded.

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Panel on Environmental Affairs

Dear Hon Members,

Please see the self- explanatory information herewith.

Earlier this year we brought the local illegal logging of incense trees to the attention of IUCN.

Local incense trees- Chinese Agarwood – Aquilaria Sinensis – have now been upgraded by IUCN to VU status – vulnerable to extinction in the wild.

Kind regards,

James Middleton

Chairman

<http://cleartheair.org.hk>

**[IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)**

Attachments:

IUCN-Redlist-Incense-Trees-Updated-Vulnerable-to-extinction-in-the-wild.pdf

The screenshot shows the IUCN Red List search results for 'aquilaria'. The search results are displayed in a grid view. The first three results are:

- Chinese Agarwood** (*Aquilaria sinensis*): Decreasing status, Global distribution.
- Agarwood** (*Aquilaria malaccensis*): Decreasing status, Global distribution.
- Dó bà nà** (*Aquilaria banaensis*): Unknown status, Global distribution.

The interface includes a search bar, navigation tabs (Grid, List, Map, Stats), and a sidebar with search filters.

<https://www.iucnredlist.org/search?query=aquilaria&searchType=species>

IUCN Redlist status November 2018

CR Critically Endangered

EN Endangered

VU Vulnerable

DD Data deficient



plantae – magnoliopsida Global

## Chinese Agarwood

*Aquilaria sinensis*

Decreasing [vu](#)

[View](#) plantae – magnoliopsida Global

## Agarwood

*Aquilaria malaccensis*

Decreasing [cr](#)

[View](#) plantae – magnoliopsida Global

## Dó bà nà

*Aquilaria banaensis*

Unknown [vu](#)

[View](#) plantae – magnoliopsida Global

## Aquilaria rostrata

Decreasing [cr](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Aquilaria beccariana**

Decreasing [vu](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Palisan**

*Aquilaria filaria*

Decreasing [vu](#)

Species

*plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Butlong-liitan**

*Aquilaria parvifolia*

Unknown [dd](#)

[View](#) *plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Aquilaria microcarpa**

Decreasing [en](#)

[View](#) *plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Binukat**

*Aquilaria brachyantha*

Unknown [dd](#)

[View](#) *plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Aquilaria citrinicarpa**

Unknown [dd](#)

[View](#) *plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Aquilaria khasiana**

Decreasing [cr](#)

[View](#) *plantae – magnoliopsida* Global

## **Karas bulu'**

*Aquilaria hirta*

Decreasing [vu](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Butlo**

*Aquilaria cumingiana*

Decreasing [vu](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Mangod**

*Aquilaria apiculata*

Unknown [dd](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Mountain Agarwood**

*Aquilaria rugosa*

Decreasing [vu](#)

[View](#) *plantae - magnoliopsida* Global

## **Agarwood**

*Aquilaria crassna*

Decreasing [cr](#)  
[View](#) plantae - magnoliopsidaGlobal

## Aquilaria subintegra

Unknown [dd](#)  
[View](#) plantae - magnoliopsidaGlobal

## Dó bầu

*Aquilaria baillonii*  
Unknown [dd](#)  
[View](#) plantae - magnoliopsidaGlobal

## Aquilaria yunnanensis

Stable [vu](#)  
[View](#) plantae - magnoliopsidaGlobal

## Makolan

*Aquilaria urdanetensis*  
Unknown [dd](#)

The screenshot shows the National Red List website interface. At the top, the browser address bar displays 'www.nationalredlist.org' and the page is zoomed to 120%. The National Red List logo is on the left, and a decorative banner with colorful spheres is on the right. A navigation menu includes 'Home', 'Support & Information', 'Database', 'Library', 'Network', and 'Contact Us'. A sidebar on the left lists taxonomic groups: Invertebrates, Amphibians, Birds, Fishes, Mammals, Non Vascular Plants, Vascular Plants, Reptiles, and Fungi & Lichens. The main content area features a world map where countries are shaded in three colors: light grey (No Red List Available), dark red (Red List Available), and bright red (Out of Date Red List). A 'Map Key' legend is located in the bottom right of the map area. Below the map, a text prompt reads: 'Select a taxon (above) to view published Red Lists globally. Click on a country for more information.' At the bottom, a large white button with red text says 'Search the Database'.

## IUCN Red List Categories

Full information about the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria is available on the [IUCN Red List website](#). The following provides a brief introduction to the Categories. Threatened Categories are highlighted in **bold** text:

- Extinct (EX) – no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died
- Extinct in the Wild (EW) – a taxon known to only survive in cultivation or as a naturalized population well outside of its past range.
- **Critically Endangered (CR) – a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Critically Endangered and is therefore facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.**
- **Endangered (EN) – a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Endangered and is therefore considered to be facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild.**
- **Vulnerable (VU) – a taxon that meets any of the criteria for Vulnerable and is therefore considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.**
- Near Threatened (NT) – a taxon that has been evaluated but does not currently meet the criteria to be qualified as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable but is close to qualifying or is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.
- Least Concern (LC) – a taxon has been evaluated and does not qualify for Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable or Near Threatened. This category covers widespread and abundant taxa.
- Data Deficient (DD) – a taxon is considered to be Data Deficient when there is inadequate information to make an assessment of its risk of extinction based. A taxon may be well studied, but appropriate data on abundance and/or distribution is lacking. This is not a threat category, but there is a possibility that future research will result in the taxon being classified within a threat category.
- Not Evaluated (NE) – a taxon that has not yet been evaluated against the criteria.

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**From:** pun\_tung\_ng@afcd.gov.hk <pun\_tung\_ng@afcd.gov.hk>

**Sent:** Thursday, 12 July 2018 8:57 AM

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Cc:** mailbox@afcd.gov.hk

**Subject:** Re: HKG-wood-smuggling-center

- Dear Mr. Middleton,

Thank you for your email dated 5.7.2018, we would like to supplement our previous reply on 15.6.2018 about the Forestry Regulations (Cap 96A) (the Regulations). As we mentioned, no person shall, without lawful excuse, sell, offer for sale, or have in his possession or under his custody or control any portion of the protected plants under the Regulations. However, the Regulations does not apply to plants grown outside Hong Kong **or on any land held under a lease, licence or permit. In other words, the Regulations offer protection to plants growing on government land only.**

Therefore, for trees that are found on leased areas, they are protected by the tree preservation clause as stipulated, if any, in the land lease. For cases that involve illegal felling of incense trees, most criminals were in fact prosecuted under the Theft Ordinance (Cap 210) which imposes a heavier penalty (i.e. maximum 10-year imprisonment), and the Ordinance also applies to leased areas.

As explained, we note from the past cases that the illegally felled Incense Trees were mainly sold outside Hong Kong, we opined that inclusion of Incense Tree in the Forestry Regulations on the Cap 96A would not directly address the problem. Rather, we need to tackle the problem at its source, i.e. to strengthen enforcement against illegal harvest and to ensure its survival in the territory. To this end, AFCD has implemented the **Incense Tree Species Action Plan (SAP)** so that a series of measures have also been introduced or are being worked out as we explained in our previous reply. The SAP is now available on AFCD's website

([http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/con\\_flo/con\\_flo\\_con/con\\_flo\\_con.html](http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/con_flo/con_flo_con/con_flo_con.html)). Meanwhile,

we will continue to maintain a high production of seedlings and explore opportunities to extend the ex-situ planting of Incense Trees in other secure locations. Besides, we will **also keep in view the conservation status of Incense Tree by checking references including the IUCN red list, to review the effectiveness of the relevant legislation and regulations from time to time.**

Regards,  
Terence Ng  
Conservation Officer (Technical Services 1)  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
7/F Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices  
303 Cheung sha Wan Road  
Hong Kong

From: <[REDACTED]>  
To: <[pun\\_tung\\_ng@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:pun_tung_ng@afcd.gov.hk)>  
Cc: <[mailbox@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:mailbox@afcd.gov.hk)>  
Date: 06/07/2018 10:39  
Subject: RE: HKG-wood-smuggling-center

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IUCN is currently upgrading the Extinct danger status/vulnerable ALL the world trees  
The report will be issued in November  
**We are pretty sure the status of Aqu Sinensis will be elevated**

**From:** [pun\\_tung\\_ng@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:pun_tung_ng@afcd.gov.hk) <[pun\\_tung\\_ng@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:pun_tung_ng@afcd.gov.hk)>  
**Sent:** Friday, 6 July 2018 10:04 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [mailbox@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:mailbox@afcd.gov.hk)  
**Subject:** Re: HKG-wood-smuggling-center

Dear Mr. Middleton,

Thank you for your emails dated 5.7.2018 which were duly received. We shall provide our reply as soon as possible. Thank you.

Regards,  
Terence Ng  
Conservation Officer (Technical Services 1)  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
7/F Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices  
303 Cheung sha Wan Road  
Hong Kong

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## The Trees That Gave Hong Kong Its Name Are Nearing Extinction Because of Illegal Logging



Ho Pui-han inspects an incense tree in Hong Kong's New Territories on March 27, 2016

Mark Rivett-Carnac

By [Mark Rivett-Carnac / Hong Kong](#)

April 15, 2016

Ho Pui-han followed a marker left by poachers into the forest behind the Tsz Shan Monastery in Hong Kong. The sign was easy to miss. Just a white circle and arrow painted on a palm-sized stone. Inside the dense woods the signals were more brazen. Pink, yellow and blue plastic ribbons hanging from branches led Ho up muddy banks and over rocky streams. The poachers she tracked don't trade in tusks or pelts. They hunt incense trees, which are prized for their fragrant resin.

Ho has committed her weekends for the past five years to investigating tips from villagers about poacher activity in the lush territories and islands that surround Hong Kong's dense urban area. She founded an [organization](#) to save the trees last year, but by now, she says, almost all of Hong Kong's oldest and largest incense trees have been felled. As smugglers raze younger trees, she fears the natural stock will be pushed near extinction like it has just across the border in mainland China.

For centuries, the resinous wood inside incense trees, agarwood, has been prized in East Asian religions, art and geomancy. But a recent surge in [demand](#) has raised the price of the internationally protected wood so drastically that it is sometimes worth more than its weight in gold. This temptation has drawn illegal loggers into Hong Kong, where the threat is not only [environmental](#) but also cultural.

Hong Kong's history is rooted in incense trees. Cultivation began around the turn of the first millennium and the trees have long been a staple of traditional *fung shui* forests — woodlands preserved near rural settlements for good fortune. The island eventually became a hub for the wood's export and earned it the name Hong Kong, which translates as Fragrant Harbor. To this day, agarwood features in joss sticks, prayer beads and sculptures, while its oil is distilled for perfume.



A marker left by poachers shows the way to incense trees in Hong Kong's rural New Territories on March 27, 2016

Mark Rivett-Carnac

Ironically, the wood so coveted by [humans](#) is the product of a defense mechanism designed to protect the tree. *Aquilaria sinensis*, as the species in the region is technically known, secretes resin when wounded to suppress the spread of fungi and isolate decay in damaged areas. Years of saturation turn the pale yellow wood into a rich red and infuse it with a sweet aroma.

Nature's schedule is too sluggish for a regular harvest — only a small percentage of trees will ever produce agarwood in the wild, so poachers stimulate production by chopping into a tree's base or drilling into its trunk. This alone can be fatal, but if a tree survives, poachers will return to hack the tree into portable segments and then scrape away the soft outer flesh to reveal veins of dense agarwood within. If nothing else, the work is hardscrabble. Teams will set up camps deep within Hong Kong's forests, far from the view of hikers and rangers, bringing enough supplies for what can be a long endeavor. Ho pointed to possible evidence of these camps along the trail behind the monastery: an empty bottle of water from a mainland brand, a plastic bucket, a glove and muddy clothes.

Even when smugglers are spotted, they tend to slip away. "By the time the police come they would have gone," says [C.Y. Jim](#), a professor of geography at the University of Hong Kong. "The border control does not have the means to detect the agarwood."

Like Ho, Jim has been tracking the destruction of the wild incense-tree population. He studied official records and found that, in 2013, the Hong Kong government logged 96 theft cases, registered the damage of 168 trees and recovered 133 kg of wood. For these crimes, 41 people were arrested and 21 successfully prosecuted. But these figures underestimate the true extent of destruction, Jim says. Multiplying the recorded number of felled trees by five renders a better estimate, he believes.

The illegal loggers who descend on Hong Kong are thought to be just the front lines of criminal syndicates that supply an active agarwood black market. Business is good. Gerard McGuirk, a sales director at [Asia Plantation Capital](#), says the industry is worth at least \$6 billion, with illegal trades exceeding aboveboard sales. This volume is not surprising considering a kilogram of agarwood can fetch about \$13,000, McGuirk says, with reports of the highest-grade wood selling for upwards of \$120,000 a kilogram. Sculptures and bracelets made from the best wood, what is known as "sinking quality" because it is too dense to float, have been valued around \$1 million. But the journey to payday is not without risk.

In general, destroying any tree on government land is an offense punishable by a year in prison and a \$3,200 fine, according to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. In some specific cases, officials can also charge poachers with theft, which carries a maximum penalty of 10-year imprisonment.



The remains of an incense tree, thought to be felled and gouged by poachers in Hong Kong on March 27, 2016  
Mark Rivett-Carnac

To replenish stocks while punishing felling, the department said it has planted about 10,000 seedlings a year around country parks since 2009. Ho and Jim remain skeptical of this program. Both asked how a sapling could replace a century-old tree. And both pointed out that the incense tree is still not on the local list of protected



species, despite being designated as worthy of regulation in the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#).

“It seems the government isn’t taking this issue seriously,” Ho says, so she brought her campaign into the halls of power. She rallied a dozen village leaders, environmental activists and concerned citizens to address an environmental-affairs panel held in Hong Kong’s Legislative Council in March. They were each given three minutes to speak, just enough time to describe how only a handful of incense trees still stand in forests where hundreds used to grow, some for four generations. “It pains me,” one man said, “because they were left by our ancestors.”

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Mark Zuckerberg Slammed After Failing to Show for Grilling by Global Lawmakers

When asked how the government planned to protect the remaining trees, Under Secretary for the Environment Christine Loh said a detailed paper on the law-enforcement situation would be submitted in two months, adding that it was “not appropriate to make promises at this stage.”

Back in the forest behind the monastery, the hum of late-afternoon prayers floated onto the path where Ho stood. More markers lay ahead, but she had found enough evidence of poaching. Branches left to rot. Lobotomized tree trunks riddled with drill holes. Pits where full trees once stood now filled with dead leaves. More than enough to add this area to the list of more than 200 others sites where she has recorded poaching.

**Write to** Mark Rivett-Carnac at [mark.rivett-carnac@timeasia.com](mailto:mark.rivett-carnac@timeasia.com).



Thursday July 5, 2018

[Coconuts](#) Hong Kong

## Hong Kong's Luxury Timber Problem: Major stockpiles, minor prosecutions

By [Shaun Turton](#) and [Mandy Zheng](#) Jul. 4, 2018

Hong Kong has a timber-trafficking problem.

Held in 50 cargo containers at secure sites, a stockpile of more than 1,200 tons of seized tropical hardwood attests to the city's role as a major conduit for timber smugglers on route to China.

And while its storage is causing severe financial implications for the city, its size has only continued to grow, as tropical forests around the world are logged to meet demand from the mainland's multi-billion dollar luxury furniture industry.

So far this year, the Customs Department has intercepted four major shipments of rosewood — a label referring to a wide array of slow-growing, richly-hued hardwood species — and one massive load of red sandalwood, a timber so valuable it's known as "red gold."

The sheer amount of confiscated endangered wood — both types are protected under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) — set Hong Kong apart, said Dave Gehl, a program director at the Environmental Investigation Agency.

"We can't think too many other countries around the world that have seized as much rosewood as Hong Kong has," said Gehl, discussing this year's busts.



Pictures of three

rosewood consignments seized in 2018. Including 29.2 tons of Honduras rosewood shipped from Guatemala (top left); 26 tons of rosewood shipped from Thailand (bottom left) 23.8 tons of Honduras rosewood shipped from Honduras (right). This month another consignment, some 29 tons of Guatemalan rosewood, was also intercepted in a shipment from Honduras.

The seizures, the most recent just last week, already represent more than twice the amount captured in 2017, weigh some 118 tons, and are valued at HK\$17 million (US\$2.1 million).

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, which is responsible for following up cases involving endangered species, expected as much.

In December, as it sought a recommendation from the Endangered Species Advisory Committee (ESAC) on how to dispose of its growing stockpile, the AFCD acknowledged that “rapidly rising demand” for precious tropical hardwoods had led to “serious concerns” about the unregulated and illegal timber trade.

In its [submission to the committee](#), it wrote that while the department would “stay alert,” it expected “more timber seizures of wood logs in the future.”

Environmental groups, though, say more could be done to deter timber traffickers from turning the city’s free port — long known as a wildlife smuggling hub — into what one report dubbed a “golden route” to China.

One major obstacle, say activists, is that trafficking in endangered species does not fall under the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance.

As such, instead of being handed to the police, cases fall to customs and the AFCD, which have more limited investigative powers and resources to combat what are often transnational syndicates responsible for the trade.

Another challenge is that punishments for CITES trafficking violations, [despite being recently strengthened by the government](#), seem to provide little deterrence.

This is because prosecutions, if they do happen, overwhelmingly focus on mules, leaving the networks behind major shipments untouched, according to ADM Capital Foundation (ADMCF), which has reviewed more than 160 cases involved endangered plant and animal life.

A case in point is a record seizure in October 2015. The 1,000-ton haul of Malagasy rosewood, valued [at HK\\$40 million \(US\\$5 million\) by customs](#), was found aboard a cargo vessel then named the Min Feng and bound for a Chinese state-owned company.



The Min Feng photographed off the coast of Madagascar in late January 2015. Picture: Twitter via Kasahy Mahitsy @KasahyMahitsy,

Several key details of the bust, including links to Hong Kong-registered shipping firms, [have been published](#) by *Reuters*, and additional information has been passed to *Coconuts HK*. No one, however, has been held accountable.

In a recent email to *Coconuts HK*, the ACFD declared that the case was closed, saying “no prosecution was initiated” as “the actual consignee could not be identified.”

Alex Hofford, a wildlife campaigner with WildAid Hong Kong, said that settling for another “wildlife crime cold case” was not good enough.

“The shocking fact that this case relating to a record seizure of a million kilos of rosewood has been shut without a single prosecution demonstrates exactly why Hong Kong’s Security Bureau needs to urgently place our endangered species law under the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance,” he told *Coconuts HK*.

“Wildlife crime is the third-largest transnational organized crime after human and dangerous drugs smuggling, so it’s time the Hong Kong government took the matter seriously.”

***Click on the story map below to see the route used for 2015’s record rosewood seizure and learn more about the city’s role in illegal timber trafficking ([full screen Story Map here](#))***

### **China’s Hongmu industry and Hong Kong’s ‘Golden Route’**

For more than a decade, environmentalists have recorded the devastation wrought on tropical forests by [China’s soaring demand for rosewood](#), driven by the popularity of reproduction

Ming and Qing Dynasty furniture, known as Hongmu, single [pieces of which can fetch up to US\\$1 million](#).

Steeped in high-level corruption and violence, the logging trade that feeds Chinese factories was previously centered in Southeast and East Asia though, in recent years, has increasingly engulfed countries in Africa and Latin America as traders look further afield as stocks dwindle.

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 5 July 2018 11:07 AM  
**To:** 'pun\_tung\_ng@afcd.gov.hk' <pun\_tung\_ng@afcd.gov.hk>  
**Cc:** 'dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk' <dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk>; 'mailbox@afcd.gov.hk' <mailbox@afcd.gov.hk>  
**Subject:** RE: Aquilaria sinensis Cap96A

I still await a reply to my [query](#)

**From:** [pun\\_tung\\_ng@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:pun_tung_ng@afcd.gov.hk) <[pun\\_tung\\_ng@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:pun_tung_ng@afcd.gov.hk)>  
**Sent:** Friday, 15 June 2018 10:07 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk); [mailbox@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:mailbox@afcd.gov.hk)  
**Subject:** Re: Aquilaria sinensis Cap96A

Dear Mr. Middleton,

Thank you for your concern about the protection of Incense Tree in Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, Incense Tree is protected under the Forests and Countryside Ordinance (Cap. 96). Under this ordinance, any person who unlawfully fells or damages any Incense Tree on Government land is liable to a maximum penalty of \$25,000 fine and one-year imprisonment.

To enhance the efforts to deter illegal harvesting of Incense Tree and to ensure its survival in the territory, AFCD has drafted a Species Action Plan (SAP) for Incense Tree in which a series of conservation measures is being implemented. Under the SAP for Incense Tree, AFCD has established a special task force to conduct risk-based patrols so that extra efforts could be allocated to black spots of illegal tree harvesting. Surveillance of important specimens at strategic locations has been enhanced by deploying Infrared Sensor Camera Trap in the countryside. Joint

operations between AFCD and the Police have also been enhanced, and both departments have strengthened collaboration with the residents living in the vicinity of Incense Tree to enhance intelligence exchange and facilitate early detection of illegal activities. Metallic tree guards and mesh fences have also been installed to provide a secured barrier against felling/vandalism of selected large and mature specimens. Other measures include boundary control, enhanced communication with relevant Mainland authorities, replanting in the countryside, scientific studies, long-term monitoring, as well as publicity and education.

As shown in past cases, Incense Trees were mainly sold outside Hong Kong. Inclusion of Incense Tree in the Forestry Regulations to Cap.96 (i.e. to prohibit any person from selling, offering for sale, or having in his possession or under his custody or control Incense Trees or any portion of the species) would not directly address the problem. Nevertheless, we will review the effectiveness of the relevant legislation and regulations from time to time and take necessary actions if needed.

Thank you again for your concern.

Regards,  
Terence Ng  
Conservation Officer (Technical Services 1)  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
7/F Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices  
303 Cheung sha Wan Road  
Hong Kong

From: [REDACTED]  
To: <[dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk](mailto:dafcoffice@afcd.gov.hk)>  
Date: 08/06/2018 11:41  
Subject: Aquilaria sinensis Cap96A

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Dear Sir

We recently made a submission to the Environment Panel on incense trees?

They are nigh extinct in China and are being poached here.

**When will AFCD get around to placing Aqu.sinensis on the Cap96A protected list before they are extinct here?**

We are aware of CITES so no need for a reply on that.

We are aware the tree is currently 'Vulnerable' under IUCN.

IUCN currently has a study underway on Aqu Sinensis since their last evaluation was 20 years ago and we expect IUCN to upgrade the tree status above Vulnerable.

**Surely leased areas with protected trees should also be covered by the law, not just**

country parks?

Yours faithfully,  
James Middleton  
Chairman

<http://cleartheair.org.hk>





Hardwoods (Rosewood sp.) lying on the quayside in Maroantsetra. Collected illegally from the region of Masoala National Park, north east Madagascar. Picture: © naturepl.com / Nick Garbutt / WWF

Responding to the crisis, which has pushed rare tree species to the brink of extinction, countries in 2016 moved the vast majority of rosewood species under CITES trade protections.

The trafficking, however, has continued. And when it comes to endangered tree species logged or transported illegally, the shipping routes to the Chinese market often lead through Hong Kong's container terminals, the world's fifth-busiest, processing the equivalent of 20 million containers per year.

Several investigative reports have identified the city as an important transit point for illicit wood shipments from [Indonesia](#) (2004), [Thailand](#) (2010) and [Mozambique](#) (2013), to [Laos](#) (2014), [Cambodia](#) (2015) and [Madagascar](#) (2017).

An analysis of seizure records by *Coconuts HK* identified several more countries from which precious timber has been shipped, or transited, to Hong Kong (*see map below*).

The city's port is a "stepping stone" to the mainland, where customs "paperwork can be manipulated," Guangdong-based logistics firms told EIA investigators, according to a 2014 report.

A TRAFFIC survey of Chinese timber traders published last year, meanwhile, labeled Hong Kong "one of the most important" smuggling ports, where "goods with irregular documentation are unlikely to be inspected" and from which wood could be "smuggled to Guangdong province".

The preference for routing through Hong Kong really took off after 2013, when mainland authorities began better enforcing CITES trade controls, according to Gehl, who, in a recent phone interview, said the trend appears to have continued.

"Within the past couple of months, we've had conversations with some traders in the Chinese mainland who have said that there is still Madagascar rosewood [and] they're still getting stocks in from Hong Kong. That was confirmed by at least three separate traders. That indicates Hong Kong is still being used," Gehl said.

***Click on the map markers below to view timber shipments linked to Hong Kong (click marker again to deselect).***

According to the Customs Department's own figures, it made 168 log-related seizures between 2013 and the end of 2017, comprising some 1,366 tons of timber.

An analysis of seizure reports by *Coconuts HK*, places the value of rosewood and red sandalwood confiscated by Hong Kong since 2013 at almost HK\$193 million (US\$24 million).

Given [it's widely estimated that just 10 percent of trafficked flora and fauna is detected](#), the amount passing through Hong Kong's port is likely much greater.

Indeed, the current stockpile held by the AFCD would be significantly larger if not for the work of authorities abroad. In the past five years, major hauls of rosewood headed for Hong Kong have been seized in [Panama](#), [Kenya](#), [Mauritius](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Thailand](#), and [Singapore](#).

The latter, discovered in March 2014, was the largest rosewood bust in history — some 3,200 tons illegally imported from Madagascar. The case, eventually, yielded a high-level conviction, with a [Singaporean businessman jailed last year](#).

Singapore received a CITES commendation for the prosecution.

Hong Kong's AFCD, meanwhile, says it has shared information about its record-breaking seizure with Madagascar, Tanzania, mainland China, and the CITES Secretariat: "For their follow up as appropriate."

*Coconuts HK* is awaiting a further response from the government regarding the scale of this year's seizures and its plans to tackle the trade.

### **Wildlife trafficking prosecutions**

For more than a year, ADM Capital Foundation (ADMCF) has monitored court hearings and searched records to piece together a snapshot of wildlife trafficking through Hong Kong.

Their findings, yet to be released, paint a picture of a vast trade that blurs the lines between legal imports and illegal trafficking and which is often closely tied to organized crime.



A general view of the container port of Hong Kong, Kwai Chung, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China, 17 December 2014. PICTURE ALEX HOFFORD

The punishments for trafficking, meanwhile, were found to be "consistently lenient."

In about 80 percent of the more than 160 cases ADMCF reviewed, prosecutions focused on mules or carriers (mostly those with ivory), rather than networks. Details for convictions about timber seizures were even more scarce.

Information on just three wood-related prosecutions was available for the past three years, despite three rosewood and 40 suspected sandalwood seizures in that time frame.

One example was a HK\$4,000 (about US\$510) fine meted out for an attempt to traffic 10 tons of red sandalwood from India through Hong Kong in 2015, the year India banned trade in the precious species. The wood, hidden in a 20-foot container marked "flower pots," was worth HK\$6.6 million (about US\$841,000), the government estimated.

Another was a case concluded in May that saw a driver, Ho Ka-wai, handed an eight-month jail sentence for “conspiracy to export un-manifested cargo” related to 680 kilograms of red sandalwood.

The 30-year-old was caught late at night in November 2016 delivering the load of timber to a waiting group of men in a speedboat in Tseung Kwan O. His co-conspirators escaped to the waters of mainland China.

On May 30, after a retrial, the judge dismissed two CITES-related charges against Ho, ruling it wasn't proved that he knew he was carrying endangered species, a type of plausible deniability defence that ADMCF found had been used repeatedly to beat wildlife trafficking accusations.

The circumstances of his arrest fit into a broader trend with red sandalwood, which appears to be shipped into Hong Kong in containers, then smuggled to Guangdong province in small vessels.

***To view the dates and locations of suspected red sandalwood seizures, place your cursor over points on the map below.***

The pattern suggests Hong Kong is used as a “staging post” for cross-border timber smuggling, said Sam Inglis, Environmental Research Manager at ADMCF.

Authorities foiled more than 22 attempts to spirit sandalwood from Hong Kong's coast to the mainland between 2013 to 2017. It's a smuggler's run that, in at least one case, has been [linked to the Sun Yee On triad group](#), members of which were arrested in February after two years of running a cross-border trafficking operation.

“It is possible that these groups maybe storing the wood locally and breaking it down into smaller batches that are easier to smuggle in cars and boats,” Inglis said.

“Given the volumes of wildlife and wood being seized from containers, it's concerning that we are not seeing the perpetrators behind these organized smuggling networks being prosecuted.”

### **No easy options**

While Hong Kong and other countries have moved to deter ivory traders by publicly destroying confiscated stocks, the approach for seized timber has varied around the world. What constitutes best practice, is still debated.

In a move lauded by some environmental groups but called “wasteful” by critics, Belize in 2013 [burned some US\\$450,000 worth of rosewood](#) to send an “unmistakable message” to illegal loggers and traders. Countries including [Thailand](#) and [Mauritius](#) have repatriated illegal timber to its country of shipment.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, came under criticism last year when it [proposed to auction its stockpile of wood seized on route to Hong Kong](#). The plan, plagued by corruption allegations, prompted the circulation of falsified CITES permits in China, giving weight to

fears that selling seized wood ultimately puts the timber back in the hands of dodgy traders and fuels the illegal trade.



A picture of some of the seized rosewood held by HK authorities. Photo: supplied

Such are the problems confronting Hong Kong — and several other countries — as they consider what to do with their mounting stockpiles.

The ESAC last December discussed four options that are, in principle, advised by the CITES secretariat — returning the timber to its place of origin, auctioning it to raise money for CITES conservation work, using it for non-commercial purposes, or destroying it.

Each poses challenges, particularly with regards to the wood from Madagascar, which is currently [pushing to sell its own stockpiles of seized wood](#) to ostensibly fund forest protection, and wants to receive revenue from the auction of its timber seized overseas.

Given Madagascar's struggles to curb illegal logging, Hong Kong has been advised against repatriating the Malagasy wood, and [the ESAC members are split on the alternatives](#), according to the minutes of the December meeting.

The preferred option, “non-commercial uses” — such as using the wood for public works, historical building restoration, or educational and cultural purposes — was seized upon by several members, who pressed to use the timber for projects ranging from art pieces to the restoration of a 16-story wooden pagoda in China's Sichuan province.

That approach, however, is not viable on a large scale. Though at least some of the stockpile will be [used to make “non-profit” traditional furniture by university artisans](#), according to the *SCMP*, only four percent of the stockpile was judged suitable for non-commercial uses.

Alex Hofford, of WildAid, told *Coconuts HK* that timber should be “immediately destroyed” to prevent it re-entering the legal market. The AFCD proposed destruction — which would see the wood dumped in a landfill, as incineration was deemed too costly — as the “last resort.”

“It's a very big challenge,” Chen Hin Keong, a timber trade program leader for TRAFFIC, said of the conundrum around the seized stockpiles.

Keong, who is currently working on developing guidelines for timber stockpile management in Eastern Africa, said establishing a set of protocols was “tricky” given all the potential problems, though it was crucial to start having discussions about the topic.

He said, in his view, it would be preferable to make use of the money for long underfunded conservation projects, though added that even funding and organizing an acceptable auction, one that didn’t benefit unscrupulous traders and fuel demand, would be a costly challenge.

One option, he noted, would be fining major timber traffickers, and using the cash to pay for the process. That, he added, would be dependent on actually catching them first.

“At the end of the day, someone has to foot the bill,” he said.

**From:** <[REDACTED]>  
**To:** <panel\_ea@legco.gov.hk>

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**Date:** Friday, November 30, 2018 06:20AM  
**Subject:** IUCN upgrades incense trees to VULNERABLE to extinction status

History: [➔](#) This message has been forwarded.

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<https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/32382/2817115>

**Attachments:**

IUCN.UK.2018-2.RLTS.T32382A2817115.en.1.pdf

## *Aquilaria sinensis*, Chinese Agarwood

Assessment by: Harvey-Brown, Y.



View on [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)

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## Taxonomy

Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family
Plantae	Tracheophyta	Magnoliopsida	Malvales	Thymelaeaceae

**Taxon Name:** *Aquilaria sinensis* (Lour.) Spreng.

### Synonym(s):

- *Agallochum sinense* (Lour.) Kuntze
- *Agallochum grandiflorum* (Benth.) Kuntze
- *Aquilaria chinensis* Spreng.
- *Aquilaria grandiflora* Benth.
- *Aquilaria malaccensis* Benth.
- *Aquilaria ophispermum* Poir.
- *Ophispermum sinense* Lour.

### Common Name(s):

- English: Chinese Agarwood, Chinese Eaglewood

## Assessment Information

**Red List Category & Criteria:** Vulnerable A2a [ver 3.1](#)

**Year Published:** 2018

**Date Assessed:** March 15, 2018

### Justification:

*Aquilaria sinensis* is a tree endemic to China. The species has been heavily exploited for its fragrant resin-filled heartwood known as agarwood, which has resulted in declines of at least 30% in the past 10 years. It is assumed that the population was either stable or declining prior to the last 10 years, leading to at least a 30% decline over the last three generations of this species. We have therefore assessed this species here as Vulnerable. Although this species is increasingly planted in cultivation, the cultivated (non-wild) population is therefore currently increasing. It is hoped that this may in the future mitigate the trend of decline in wild populations, however, more evidence to support this is needed. It is recommended that *in situ* conservation measures are taken to conserve remaining wild *Aquilaria sinensis* trees.

### Previously Published Red List Assessments

1998 – Vulnerable (VU)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.1998.RLTS.T32382A9694394.en>

1998 – Vulnerable (V)

## Geographic Range

### Range Description:



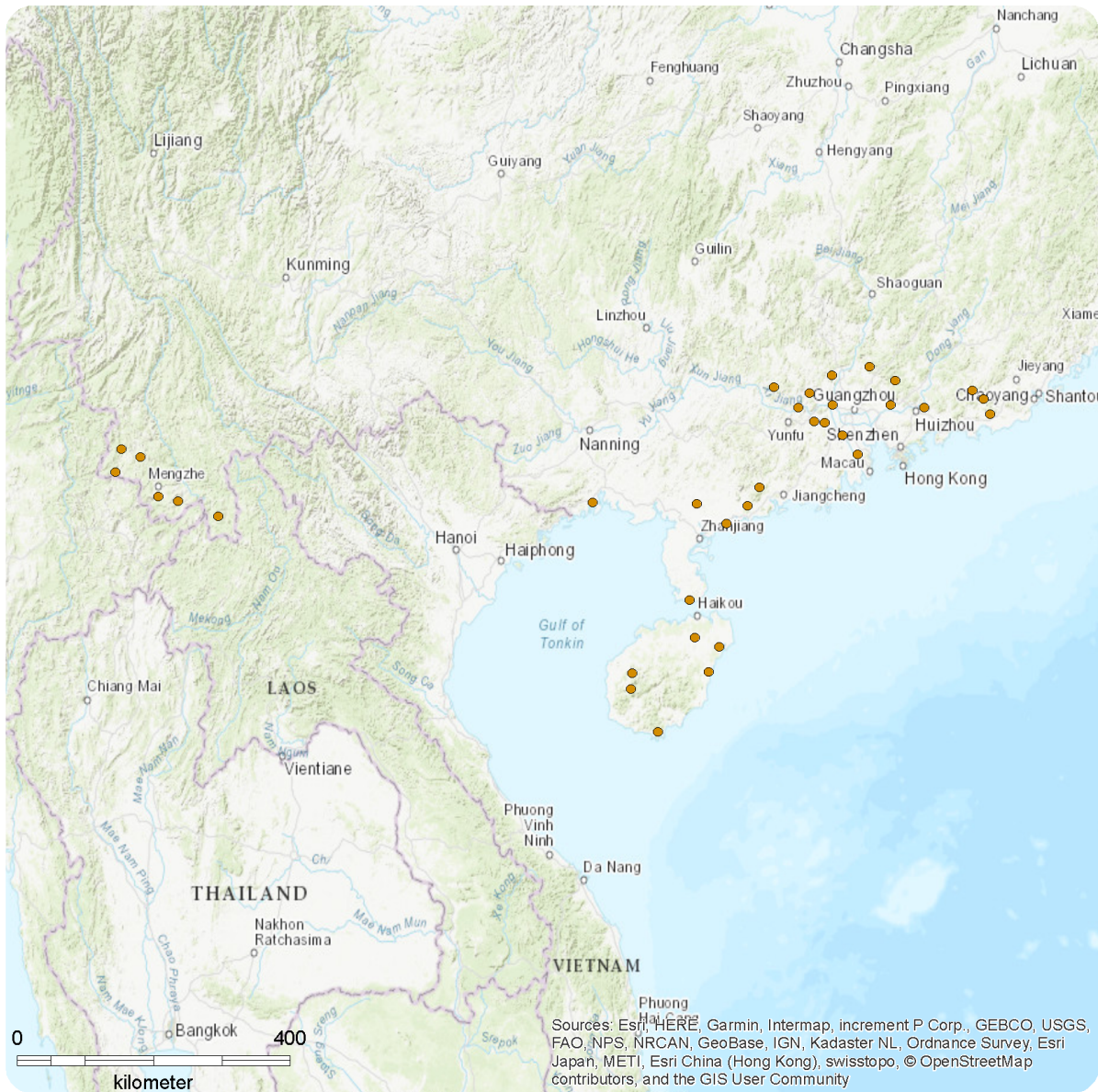
*Aquilaria sinensis* is endemic to China where it occurs in Fujian, Hainan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan provinces (Zhengyi *et al.* 1994-2013; Lee and Mohamed 2016). The estimated extent of occurrence (EOO) of this species is 530,906 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Country Occurrence:**

**Native:** China (Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan); Hong Kong

# Distribution Map

*Aquilaria sinensis*

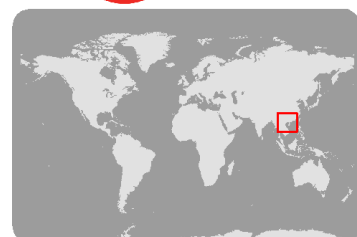


## Range

- Extant (resident)

Compiled by:

China CITES office



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply any official endorsement, acceptance or opinion by IUCN.



## Population

Population decline of *Aquilaria sinensis* has been caused by a number of factors. The wild species is targeted for agarwood harvesting as they have a higher market value than cultivated sources. When individuals reach a certain age, populations are inoculated to induce agarwood production, which adversely affects population growth. Lastly, the species is targeted by pests and diseases particularly seeding wilt and leaf-rollers (China Scientific Authority for CITES pers. comm 2018).

In Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region long-term harvesting of agarwood has led to a population decline in the species and local extinction at some localities (although a small proportion may be due to natural factors). In Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region there are estimated to be over 103 mature individuals, 43 young trees and 3,857 seedlings (China Scientific Authority for CITES pers. comm 2018). The largest wild population of the species is now in Hainan province, where local felling has not ceased, even in nature reserves. It has been conservatively estimated that the size of the wild populations here has fallen by 30% in the past ten years (China Scientific Authority for CITES pers. comm 2018). It is likely that other populations across the species range in China have suffered similar rates of decline. It is assumed that the population was either stable or declining prior to the last 10 years, leading to at least a 30% decline over the last three generations of this species.

**Current Population Trend:** Decreasing

## Habitat and Ecology (see Appendix for additional information)

*Aquilaria sinensis* is a tree that can reach 15 m, which is found in lowland forests, sunny slopes and along roadsides (Leidy and Strahan 2010). *Aquilaria* spp. have been observed to have a low natural regeneration and to be slow growing (CITES 2015).

**Systems:** Terrestrial

## Use and Trade

*Aquilaria sinensis* has been wild-harvested and cultivated for use in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in the Dongguan region of Guangdong province as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, where it became a regional specialty. Since 2007, the Chinese agarwood market has rapidly expanded, with the price of agarwood increasing more than tenfold between 2007 and 2011. To help meet this demand *A. sinensis* has been cultivated in plantations in Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Yunnan and Fujian provinces. The total area of new plantations from 2006 to 2010 was 5,245 hectares with an estimated 1,500–3,000 trees planted per hectare. Liu *et al.* 2013 estimate that over 20 million *A. sinensis* trees are being cultivated in Hainan, Guangdong and Yunnan provinces. There has also been a diversification of the agarwood market with agarwood products now including; tea, oil, alcohol, bracelets, herbal products, powders, ointments and incense. In the province of Fujian, agarwood is mainly used for creating wood-carved handicrafts, with waste material utilised for producing spices. In the first half of 2011, Putian city in Fujian used an estimated 2.75 tonnes of agarwood, earning revenues of c. RMB 26.75 million. Chinese agarwood products, mostly in the form of Chinese herbal medicine and wood, are exported to Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and the United States. However due to the increasing demand for agarwood in China's domestic market, exports of *A. sinensis* products have decreased from 107 kg in 2010 to 58.6 kg in 2013. There has also been a significant increase in the amount of agarwood imported into China (Yin *et al.* 2016). The increasing profitability of the domestic agarwood market has fuelled illegal felling and

trading of *A. sinensis*. From 2006 to the first half of 2011, Guangdong Customs discovered 211 cases of illegal smuggling. However, according to Yin *et al.* (2016) the illegal logging and trading of *A. sinensis* has been effectively controlled since 2013 due to united efforts between the State Forestry Administration and the General Customs Administration of China. Although all *Aquilaria* spp. are listed on Appendix II of CITES scientifically robust methods to identify trade products are scarce. A reliable genus-level microscopic identification method for dried agarwood, however, has been developed (Gasson *et al.* 2011); this method is based on the identification of ‘islands of included phloem’ a diagnostic character found in the wood of all species of *Aquilaria* and those of a closely related genus, *Gyrinops*, in the same family. Although not species specific, this method enables the detection of counterfeit agarwood when traded as dried wood products; see also Leon and Lin (2017) for further identification guidance of the living tree and counterfeit trade items. Additional authentication research is needed for ‘agarwood’ items traded in other forms such as granules, essential oils etc and for these, effective regulation and monitoring of the genus in trade remains extremely difficult (Soeharto *et al.* 2016).

The illegal harvesting of *Aquilaria sinensis* in Guangdong is often indiscriminate with harvesters felling trees in order to search for infected (i.e. resinous) wood; this has been a major cause of population decline (AFCD 2013). Successful conservation efforts within Hong Kong have led to a healthy population of *A. sinensis*, however due to previous over-exploitation of this species in mainland China there has been increased cross-border poaching and, due to the destructive nature of harvesting agarwood, this is having a detrimental effect on the Hong Kong populations too (Jim 2015). Illegal harvesting of *A. sinensis* in Hong Kong has been reported in different regions including Sai Kung, Sha Tin, Sha Tau Kok, Tai Po, Lantau, Lamma and Hong Kong island and has led to increasing enforcement actions from the Hong Kong authorities; between 2010 and 2013 a total of 79 prosecutions were made (AFCD 2013). In some areas where illegal harvesting takes place enforcement authorities have begun to spray trees with anti-fungal spray in order to suppress the tree from producing the agarwood resin (AFCD 2013). Conservation efforts to increase the *A. sinensis* population in Hong Kong has included the planting of an estimated 49,110 seedlings between 2009 and 2013 (AFCD 2013).

In mainland China, *A. sinensis* has also been widely planted with over 2.5 million trees across five southern provinces covering an area of 3,500 hectares. Originally established using wild-harvested seeds, this extensive planting programme has more recently also used plantation-grown seeds (Yuan and Wei 2011). The Institute of Medicinal Plant Development (part of the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences) has subsequently researched and introduced a new technique that stimulates the production of the resin in the heartwood of this species ensuring the production of high-yielding agarwood; this approach has been adopted in these plantation trees and widely applied across China (Yuan and Wei 2011).

Analysis of CITES Trade Data between 1996 and 2015 using importer-reported figures found relatively limited trade occurring of *A. sinensis*. The top three commodities exported were derivatives, dried plants and medicine (TRAFFIC 2017).

## **Threats (see Appendix for additional information)**

The few remaining subpopulations of *Aquilaria sinensis* have been targeted and illegally felled. Extensive felling in recent times have resulted in *A. sinensis* numbers being greatly depleted (Yin *et al.* 2016).

## **Conservation Actions (see Appendix for additional information)**

Dongguan Botanical Garden has established an *ex situ* conservation programme for the species using material sourced from several provinces including Hainan, Guangxi, Yunnan and Guangdong (Yin *et al.* 2016). The species is recorded to be grown in nine *ex situ* collections worldwide (BGCI PlantSearch 2017). The species was assessed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List in 1998 (IUCN 1998), and in 1999 was listed in the second-class category of the National List of Local Protected Flora issued by the Chinese Government (Yin *et al.* 2016). The species is listed as VU A2ac on the Threatened Species List of China's Higher Plants (Qin *et al.* 2017). Since 2005 all species in the genus *Aquilaria* have been listed on Appendix II of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) It is recommended that *in situ* measures are taken to conserve remaining wild *A. sinensis* trees.

## Credits

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## External Resources

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# Appendix

## Habitats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Habitat	Season	Suitability	Major Importance?
1. Forest -> 1.6. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland	Resident	Suitable	Yes

## Threats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Threat	Timing	Scope	Severity	Impact Score
5. Biological resource use -> 5.3. Logging & wood harvesting -> 5.3.1. Intentional use: (subsistence/small scale) [harvest]	Ongoing	-	-	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality 2. Species Stresses -> 2.2. Species disturbance		
5. Biological resource use -> 5.3. Logging & wood harvesting -> 5.3.2. Intentional use: (large scale) [harvest]	Ongoing	-	-	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality 2. Species Stresses -> 2.2. Species disturbance		

## Conservation Actions in Place

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Conservation Actions in Place
In-Place Species Management
Subject to ex-situ conservation: Yes
In-Place Education
Included in international legislation: Yes
Subject to any international management/trade controls: Yes

## Conservation Actions Needed

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Conservation Actions Needed
1. Land/water protection -> 1.1. Site/area protection
2. Land/water management -> 2.3. Habitat & natural process restoration
3. Species management -> 3.1. Species management -> 3.1.1. Harvest management



<b>Conservation Actions Needed</b>
3. Species management -> 3.1. Species management -> 3.1.2. Trade management
3. Species management -> 3.4. Ex-situ conservation -> 3.4.2. Genome resource bank

## Research Needed

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

<b>Research Needed</b>
2. Conservation Planning -> 2.1. Species Action/Recovery Plan
3. Monitoring -> 3.1. Population trends
3. Monitoring -> 3.2. Harvest level trends
3. Monitoring -> 3.3. Trade trends

## Additional Data Fields

<b>Distribution</b>
Estimated extent of occurrence (EOO) (km <sup>2</sup> ): 530906
Number of Locations: 70
<b>Habitats and Ecology</b>
Generation Length (years): 50-100

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