






Plant checklist for Table Mountain National Park and surrounding areas



Authors:

Anthony G. Rebelo^{1,2} 
 Patricia M. Holmes^{3,4} 
 Ronell R. Klopper^{5,6} 
 Dian Spear^{2,7,8} 
 Nicola J. van Wilgen^{4,7} 

Affiliations:

¹Threatened Species Research Unit, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Cape Town, South Africa

²Department of Biological Sciences, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

³Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology, Stellenbosch University, Matieland, South Africa

⁴Centre for Invasion Biology, School of Climate Studies, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

⁵Research and Scientific Services, Foundational Biodiversity Sciences, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Pretoria, South Africa

⁶H.G.W.J. Schweickerdt Herbarium, Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

⁷Cape Research Centre, South African National Parks, Cape Town, South Africa

⁸Centre for Sustainability Transitions, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

Checklists play a fundamental role in biodiversity conservation by facilitating species monitoring, conservation planning and biogeographical assessments. The Cape Peninsula, South Africa, has a unique combination of nutrient-poor soils in a winter rainfall region, characterised by mountainous and coastal areas, all of which contribute to high levels of plant endemism. The Table Mountain National Park is a core conservation area within this global biodiversity hotspot, encompassing approximately 250 km² of diverse vegetation types, ranging from Sandstone, Granite, Shale and Sand Fynbos, to Afrotemperate Forest, Renosterveld and Strandveld and covers roughly 50% of the Cape Peninsula. Historical land use and urbanisation have also introduced a wide diversity of non-native species. This study presents an updated checklist of the flora of the park and surrounding peninsula, incorporating recent taxonomic revisions and newly recorded species. The checklist was compiled using data from herbarium records, conservation agency databases, citizen science platforms and historical surveys. Nomenclature follows the South African National Plant Checklist as of March 2024. The resulting dataset comprises 2785 plant taxa, excluding cultivated and urban parkland species. Asteraceae (300 taxa), Fabaceae (210) and Poaceae (173) emerged as the richest families, with *Erica* (118 species) as the most speciose genus. A total of 437 non-native naturalised plant taxa were recorded, with Fabaceae, Poaceae and Myrtaceae among the most diverse families. Additionally, 261 species are currently classified as threatened, including 38 Critically Endangered taxa. The Table Mountain National Park flora stands out as being among the most diverse within the South African National Parks network.

Conservation implications: This updated checklist serves as a critical resource for conservation efforts, providing a baseline for future ecological research, climate change impact assessments, restoration initiatives and monitoring programmes. The data contribute to understanding species vulnerability and informing strategies for preserving the unique plant diversity of the Cape Peninsula.

Keywords: alien plants; Cape Town; diversity; Fynbos; hotspot; indigenous plants; iNaturalist; taxonomy.

Introduction

Checklists are a vital first step towards understanding, managing, conserving and exploring an area. Specifically, checklists allow a comparison of the area's biogeographical significance within a larger region, and its representation of the surrounding area for conservation planning, the identification of focal threatened species that require monitoring or perhaps action, and a prediction of future trajectories because of threats of climate change, continued habitat loss or invasive species (Droege, Cyr & Larivée 1998; Foxcroft et al. 2009; Pomoim et al. 2022; Rebelo et al. 2011b; Spear et al. 2023).

The Cape Peninsula comprises a mountain range along the south-western tip of Africa, where the topography, winter rainfall, surrounding ocean and nutrient-poor soils have given rise to a highly biodiverse landscape, with high levels of species endemism of both plants and invertebrates (Cowling, MacDonald & Simmons 1996). Within this landscape, the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) is one of the core endemic areas for the Cape Flora and is currently recognised as a

Corresponding author: Nicola Wilgen, nicola.bredenkamp@sanparks.org

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national park within a World Heritage Area in a global biodiversity hotspot (Myers et al. 2000). The park was established in 1998 to consolidate conservation-worthy land on the Cape Peninsula and covers around 250 km², roughly 50% of the Cape Peninsula. Previous lists recognise around 2285 plant species, including 158 endemics (Adamson & Salter 1950; Helme & Trinder-Smith 2006). The historical land-use and long history of urbanisation have also led to the introduction of a large number of non-native species (Macdonald et al. 1987; Spear et al. 2011).

The TMNP consists mainly of Sandstone Fynbos, surrounded by Granite Fynbos and Shale Fynbos on the lower slopes, and a small section of Sand Fynbos on the flats. In addition, Afrotropical Forest occurs in the fire-sheltered kloofs, Renosterveld in the more arid north, and Strandveld along the coast (Rebelo et al. 2006). Peninsula Renosterveld and Cape Flats Sand Fynbos have largely been lost, but Peninsula Granite Fynbos is also categorised as a Critically Endangered veld type (Skowno et al. 2019). The area has been the focus of a review (Macdonald & Cowling 1996), as has the surrounding area of the City of Cape Town (Rebelo et al. 2011b). While historical checklists exist, these are largely out of date because of large numbers of new species and decades of taxonomic revisions. The latter complicates assessments of change in species abundance, threat status and the impact of conservation interventions. The purpose of updating the checklist was to obtain a comprehensive list of the endemic, threatened and non-native plant species, as a baseline for compiling trait data to investigate future trends and threats, for example, under climate change (Foden et al. 2018; Holmes, Stipinovich & Purves 2012).

Research methods and design

Detailed methodology for the compilation of the checklist can be found in Rebelo et al. (2025). In summary, the checklist was compiled during 2021–2022 for the TMNP and its representative area: the Cape Peninsula, effectively the area west of 18.50°E and south of 33.89°S. Most of the natural vegetation in this area is within the TMNP. The checklist covers higher plants: namely, ferns and lycophytes, gymnosperms and angiosperms. Red List data (October 2023) were obtained from SANBI (SANBI 2024a).

Species occurrence data were sourced from: (1) BODATSA; (2) Provincial conservation agency databases; (3) municipal agency databases; (4) SANParks databases, including CyberTracker and C-More records; (5) NGOs and universities [especially the Bolus Herbarium (BOL) and library at the Botany Department of the University of Cape Town; (6) Private conservancies, stewardship, reserve and other land owners; (7) Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers programme (CREW) and national programmes (especially important for Red List taxa); (8) The National Vegetation Mapping project (SANBI) and any relevé or plot data collected for mapping the communities or vegetation types within reserves; (9) Historical surveys: Protea Atlas

Project (SANBI) (Rebelo 1991), and specialised plot data collected for monitoring or surveillance within the reserve (e.g., Taylor 1983) and (10) iNaturalist data.

Nomenclature follows the South African National Plant Checklist as of March 2024 (SANBI 2024b). In the checklist for TMNP and the surrounding areas, families are arranged alphabetically within each major group, followed by genera and species (alphabetically) within each family. Synonyms and common names have not been included, nor have taxa that are extremely unlikely to be present; these can be obtained from the database, which has been uploaded to the SANParks Biodiversity Information System (<https://bims.sanparks.org/>).

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results

Some 3780 plant taxa were recorded in the TMNP area, but excluding those from gardens, urban parklands and marked as ‘planted’ on iNaturalist, resulted in 2785 plant taxa see Online appendix 1 for the full checklist. The richest family was Asteraceae with 300 taxa and 95 genera (Table 1). In addition, Fabaceae, Poaceae, Iridaceae, Cyperaceae, Ericaceae, Orchidaceae and Restionaceae had over 100 taxa. The Poaceae and Fabaceae additionally had over 25 genera. Two families with only one genus present in the TMNP area were in the top 20 most speciose families, namely the Ericaceae (*Erica*) and Oxalidaceae (*Oxalis*).

Erica, with 118 taxa, is the richest genus in the TMNP area, with *Aspalathus* and *Disa* having over 50 species (Table 1). Ericaceae (= *Erica*) contains by far the most endemic taxa at 38, while Fabaceae, Proteaceae and Polygalaceae also have more than 10 endemic species (Table 1). The following families had a single endemic species: Apiaceae, Celastraceae, Colchicaceae, Cytinaceae, Droseraceae, Hyacinthaceae, Lobeliaceae, Malvaceae, Menyanthaceae, Orchidaceae, Penaeaceae, Poaceae, Rosaceae, Santalaceae and Thymelaeaceae. The richest genera in terms of endemism are *Erica* (38 species, 32% endemism) and *Muraltia* (10 species, 36% endemism).

Herbs (1078) are the dominant growth form on the Cape Peninsula, followed by dwarf shrubs (607) and shrubs (590), although some taxa occur in several growth forms. These three growth forms account for 70% of the TMNP flora. Geophytes account for 17% and graminoids for 12%. Trees (70) account for only 2.5% of the flora on the Cape Peninsula, and succulents 5.4% (150 taxa).

Some 437 non-native taxa (naturalised and invasive flora) occur in the TMNP area and surrounds (Table 1). The Fabaceae, Poaceae and Myrtaceae feature prominently in the non-native flora. An unexpected result is the high number of *Melaleuca* (incl. *Callistemon*) species (20) in the Myrtaceae, which, with the Fabaceae (13 *Acacia* species, 11 *Trifolium*

TABLE 1: Largest families (of more than 30 taxa) and genera in the TMNP area with numbers of threatened (CR, EN, VU), endemic and non-native taxa (including extralimital taxa).

Family	Genera	Taxa	Threatened taxa	Endemic taxa	Non-native taxa	> 30 taxa	> 1 endemic taxa	> 4 non-native taxa
Asteraceae	95	300	14	-	31	<i>Senecio</i> (42)	<i>Helichrysum</i> (2)	-
Fabaceae	41	210	30	15	54	<i>Aspalathus</i> (59)	<i>Aspalathus</i> (7), <i>Indigofera</i> (3), <i>Liparia</i> (3)	<i>Acacia</i> (13), <i>Trifolium</i> (11), <i>Vicia</i> (7)
Poaceae	64	173	6	-	50	-	-	<i>Paspalum</i> (5), <i>Phalaris</i> (5)
Iridaceae	24	147	20	9	-	<i>Moraea</i> (31)	<i>Gladiolus</i> (4), <i>Geissorhiza</i> (2)	-
Cyperaceae	23	134	12	6	-	<i>Ficinia</i> (38)	<i>Ficinia</i> (3), <i>Schoenus</i> (2)	-
Ericaceae	1	117	22	38	-	<i>Erica</i> (117)	<i>Erica</i> (38)	-
Orchidaceae	14	116	16	-	-	<i>Disa</i> (53)	-	-
Restionaceae	13	114	19	5	-	<i>Restio</i> (42)	<i>Thamnochortus</i> (2)	-
Aizoaceae	20	80	17	6	-	-	<i>Lampranthus</i> (3), <i>Ruschia</i> (2)	-
Scrophulariaceae	22	67	-	3	5	-	-	-
Proteaceae	10	60	17	13	16	-	<i>Serruria</i> (7), <i>Leucadendron</i> (3)	<i>Protea</i> (8)
Apiaceae	19	46	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rosaceae	8	45	4	13	-	<i>Cliffortia</i> (29)	<i>Rubus</i> (5)	-
Hyacinthaceae	4	44	8	-	-	-	-	-
Myrtaceae	8	39	-	-	39	-	-	<i>Melaleuca</i> (19), <i>Eucalyptus</i> (10)
Brassicaceae	12	38	-	5	-	-	<i>Heliophila</i> (4)	-
Oxalidaceae	1	38	-	-	-	<i>Oxalis</i> (38)	-	-
Crassulaceae	4	37	-	-	-	<i>Crassula</i> (33)	-	-
Polygalaceae	2	36	7	10	-	-	<i>Muraltia</i> (10)	<i>Rumex</i> (5)
Santalaceae	3	36	-	-	-	<i>Thesium</i> (32)	-	-
Geraniaceae	2	34	-	-	-	-	-	-
Asphodelaceae	6	32	-	-	-	-	-	-
Campanulaceae	5	32	-	7	-	-	<i>Roella</i> (6)	-
Thymelaeaceae	4	32	6	-	-	-	-	-

Note: This Table displays the number of genera with number of taxa.

species), make the top three non-native genera. Among Cape Flora species, the widely cultivated genus *Protea*, with large wild populations and hybrids with local species (termed Frankenflora) is a particular problem.

Some nine taxa are globally extinct (two are extinct in the wild, although they have been re-established at Tokai Park), and another 261 species are threatened with extinction (i.e., Critically Endangered: 38, Endangered: 88 or Vulnerable: 135). A further 74 species are Near Threatened. Some 41 species are data deficient, nine of which have uncertain and as yet undetermined localities within the area, the remainder requiring taxonomic reappraisal. Thus, 385 of the 3087 (12%) taxa of conservation concern in the Cape Flora (Manning & Goldblatt 2012) can be found in the TMNP area. The Fabaceae and Ericaceae have the most threatened species, with Iridaceae, Proteaceae, Restionaceae and Aizoaceae each having more than 15 threatened taxa (Table 1).

Discussion

The Cape Peninsula has an extremely species-rich flora, which is expected for this global hotspot. The average number of species per unit area on the Cape Peninsula (and in Table Mountain National Park) far outnumbers that of other parks except Bontebok NP, where the number of species per unit area is affected by the small area of the park (Table 2). Furthermore, Cape Town is the extinction capital of

the planet (Rebello et al. 2011a). It is thus no surprise that many species now extinct are documented to have occurred in the TMNP area.

The richest families are very similar to those of the Cape Flora (Manning & Goldblatt 2012), except that Poaceae, Restionaceae and Orchidaceae are richer in the TMNP area. The families with the most endemic species have a lower proportion of endemics than the Cape Flora (Manning & Goldblatt 2012), where most species in the typical Fynbos families and genera are endemic.

Compared to the Cape Flora (Manning & Goldblatt 2012), the TMNP area has a slightly lower occurrence of shrubs and subshrubs (54% for the Cape Flora), and more graminoids (8%), but herbs are very much richer (18%; as annuals and perennials), with trees making up the same proportion of the flora. Comparative data for succulents in the Cape Flora are not available. The top four genera largely mirror the pattern for the Cape Flora in terms of species richness. However, *Disa* is richer; the prominent Cape genera *Agathosma*, *Pelargonium* and *Phyllica* are not in the top 10 for the TMNP, and *Thesium* is well represented in the park (Manning & Goldblatt 2012).

The high number of alien species, while concerning, is well documented (e.g. Cheney et al. 2018), with most species well controlled by the clearing programme in the park. Alien Fabaceae are widespread, but only occur at

TABLE 2: The number of species and/or terminal taxa documented from each national park within the SANParks network, with numbers standardised per 100 hectares (ha) for comparison. References for the checklists providing the number of species in each park are detailed in the last column.

National Park	SANParks internal database, 2024		Number of species	Average species per area (100 ha)	Reference for number of plant species
	Park size at time of publication (ha)	Area Size 2024 (ha)			
Addo Elephant	70 641	162 620	581	0.8	Johnson et al. (1999) (The sample was likely collected over an area smaller than the full size of the park)
Agulhas	Not yet proclaimed	26 075	> 1750	~6.7 based on the study area	Cowling and Holmes (1992)
Augrabies Falls	20 160	54 876	364	1.8	Zietsman and Bezuidenhout (1999)
Bontebok	3389	3390	650	19.2	Kraaij (2011)
Camdeboo	19 052	19 533	336	1.8	SANParks (2013)
Garden Route	160 327	160 327	2069	1.3	SANParks (2020)
Golden Gate	32 810	32 811	823	2.5	Daemane et al. (2010)
Kalahari Gemsbok	900 265	962 027	625	0.1	Van Rooyen et al. (1988)
Karoo	75 248	88 494	864	1.1	Rubin et al. (2001)
Kruger	1 908 196	1 909 736	almost 2000	0.1	SANParks (2018)
Mapungubwe	19 810	19 810	> 510	2.6	SANParks (2025a)
Marakele	66 873	66 873	765	1.1	SANParks (2025b)
Meerkat	31 991	135 392	223	0.7	SANParks (2022)
Mokala	28 616	33 710	> 420	1.5	Bezuidenhout et al. (2015)
Mountain Zebra	24 482	28 086	680	2.8	Pond et al. (2002)
Namaqua	148 784	166 229	629	0.4	Adams et al. (2015)
Richtersveld	181 196	181 196	> 1077	0.6	van Wyk et al. 2024
Table Mountain	21 781	21 781	2785	12.8	This checklist, Online appendix 1
Tankwa Karoo	144 178	166 393	730	0.5	Steyn et al. (2013)
West Coast	24 348	32 071	482	2.0	Heydenrych (1995)

Note: Please see the full reference list of this article: <https://doi.org/10.4102/koedoe.v67i1.1855> for more information. ha, hectares.

high density in a few areas, and following fires, after which their removal is prioritised (Cheney et al. 2021). Grasses are not included in many of the mapping exercises, as they are notoriously hard to identify, but alien grasses tend to be confined to disturbed areas (Table Mountain management, pers. comm.).

This checklist of the flora of the Cape Peninsula has a number of immediate practical applications. The list, along with plant trait information, is being used for assessing the vulnerability of the flora of Table Mountain National Park to climate change. Sub-sets of the list are also being used to prioritise species for inclusion in the restoration of particular habitat types.

Conclusion

A number of species lists have been published for the Cape Peninsula previously. The current list has around 500 more species than included on previous lists (e.g. Adamson & Salter 1950). The main reason for this increase is the inclusion in our list of alien taxa on the peninsula that are known to have naturalised. Taxonomic changes may also have resulted in minor changes to the number of species recorded (e.g. where species have been lumped and split). Inclusion of these taxonomic updates is critical to improve prioritisation and reporting on species representation and conservation.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

N.J.v.W. and A.G.R. conceived of the presented idea. All authors attended a workshop on the suggested species listing process. A.G.R. and P.M.H. consolidated available data in consultation with N.J.v.W. to find additional sources. R.R.K., P.M.H. and A.G.R. worked together to correctly assign taxonomy. R.R.K., D.S. and N.J.v.W. cleaned the list for publication and conducted analysis on the list contents. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available in Online appendix 1 and will also be made available through the SANParks Biodiversity Information Management System: <https://bims.sanparks.org/>

Disclaimer

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