

Illegal trade of wild orchids poses a serious risk to previously unthreatened species in Mexico

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In recent years illegal wildlife trade (IWT) has become more common for orchids in Mexican markets, especially in indigenous areas with high biodiversity. This activity constitutes a serious threat for populations subject to extraction, but studies on this subject only document species richness; little is known about sales volumes, species highly demand, vendor's socioeconomic profile, and factors determining incomes. These factors were studied in eight markets from Oaxaca, Mexico, where is practiced IWT for orchids. Here, most vendors were women over 25 years of age, with low schooling, speakers of an indigenous language. Fifty-six species were recorded at sell, but 97% of the total sales volume was concentrated in only eight orchids, whose prices were generally low. Price of an orchid was poorly related negatively with its abundance in the market. The demand for orchids was elastic, that is, it decreases when the price increases and vice versa. Mexican showy orchids previously not considered at risk are now threatened by IWT. We recommend a strategy that involves vendors into a sustainable management plan based on orchids highly demanded, but attending Mexican regulations as part of a policy designed to eradicate poverty in vendor's communities.