PLAN VIVO

PV Nature

Important Plant Area Criteria

Guidance for Conservation Project's Eligibility (IPA Criteria)

Version 1.0

17 March 2026

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To register a conservation project under the Plan Vivo Biodiversity Standard (PV Nature), it must be demonstrated that the proposed project area meets at least one Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) criterion or two Important Plant Area (IPA) sub-criteria. This does not mean that the project area must already be designated as a KBA or IPA, but rather that it supports biodiversity attributes that could trigger the criteria.

This document provides guidance on applying the IPA criteria in relation to proposed PV Nature Conservation Projects. It covers the following aspects:

1. An overview of the IPA approach, its criteria, and its relevance to the PV Nature process
2. Steps to undertake an eligibility assessment, including
    a. Sources to screen for existing IPAs
    b. Available data and tools to assess against criterion A, which is the most likely to be used by PV Nature Projects
3. An example assessment in the context of a Project Idea Note (PIN) submission

This guidance should be used when preparing to submit a Prospective Project and Eligibility Questionnaire (PPQ) to confirm that your project meets PV Nature's eligibility requirements for conservation projects, as outlined in the PPQ template.

If you are confident that your project meets the IPA eligibility criteria, you may provide some of the required information (outlined in this document) at the eligibility check stage. However, at the Project Idea Note (PIN) stage, more detailed information, including supporting evidence, is required. Refer to the PV Nature PIN Template for further details.

1 Overview of Important Plant Areas

1.1 Background and criteria

The IPA program was established by Plantlife International to identify and protect a network of the best sites for plant conservation in the world (Anderson, 2002). Their identification is based on three globally consistent criteria: (A) threatened species, (B) exceptional botanical richness, and (C) threatened habitats. While each of these has associated sub-criteria, advisory thresholds, and guiding principles (Table 1), they have been designed to allow flexibility on the methods used for their application.

Table 1. Summary of the IPA criteria, sub-criteria and thresholds from Darbyshire et al., 2017

Sub-criterion	Threshold
(A) Threatened species	Site known, thought or inferred to contain:
A(i) Site contains one or more globally threatened species	≥1% of the global population AND/OR ≥5% of the national population OR the 5 "best sites" for that species nationally, whichever is most appropriate
A(ii) Site contains one or more regionally threatened species	≥5% of the national population, OR the 5 "best sites" for that species nationally, whichever is most appropriate
A(iii) Site contains one or more highly restricted endemic species that are potentially threatened	≥1% of the global population AND/OR ≥5%du of the national population, OR the 5 "best sites" for that species nationally, whichever is most appropriate
A(iv) Site contains one or more range restricted endemic species that are potentially threatened	As per A(iii)
(B) Botanical richness	
B(i) Site contains a high number of species within defined habitat or vegetation types	For each habitat or vegetation type: up to 10% of the national resource can be selected within the whole national IPA network OR the 5 best sites nationally, whichever is the most appropriate
B(ii) Site contains an exceptional number of species of high conservation importance	Site known to contain ≥3% of the selected national list of species of conservation importance OR the 15 richest sites nationally, whichever is most appropriate
B(iii) Site contains an exceptional number of socially, economically or culturally valuable species	
(C) Threatened habitat	Site known, thought or inferred to contain:
C(i) Site contains globally threatened or restricted habitat/vegetation type	≥5% of the national resource (area) of the threatened habitat type OR site is among the best quality examples required to collectively prioritise 20–60% of the national resource OR the 5 "best sites" for that habitat nationally, whichever is the most appropriate
C(ii) Site contains regionally threatened or restricted habitat/vegetation type	
C(iii) Site contains nationally threatened or restricted habitat/vegetation type,	≥10% of the national resource (area) of the threatened habitat type OR site is among the best quality examples required to collectively prioritise up to 20% of the

AND/OR habitats that have severely declined in extent nationally	national resource OR the 5 "best sites" for that habitat nationally, whichever is most appropriate

1.2 Relevance to PV Nature

The PV Biodiversity Standard has a stepwise process for projects to become registered to generate biodiversity certificates (PVBCs). This begins with the submission of a PIN which is reviewed by Plan Vivo to determine project eligibility before a Project Design Document (PDD) is developed.

For proposed conservation projects, the PIN requires an explanation of how the project meets the IPA sub-criteria. Plan Vivo allows multiple species to collectively trigger a single sub-criterion, and a single species may trigger more than one sub-criterion.

Understanding and applying IPA criteria to proposed project areas is therefore particularly relevant to those in the following positions:

- Project: to apply IPA criteria to the proposed conservation project area as part of the PIN and PDD process, and design monitoring activities for tracking attributes (e.g. species or habitats) found to trigger the criteria.
- Technical Review Panel: to assess the correct application of IPA criteria within the PDD, and ensure any trigger IPA attributes are appropriately included in monitoring plans.

This guidance document focuses on conducting the eligibility stage, rather than designing monitoring measures in relation to IPA trigger attributes. It is anticipated that IPA criterion A will be the most commonly applied by proposed PV Nature Conservation Projects, and is therefore the main focus.

2 Applying Important Plant Area criteria to proposed PV Nature Conservation Projects

2.1 Step 1: Screen for existing IPAs

The first step is to confirm whether the proposed project area falls within an already designated IPA or potential IPA.

As of 2024, 76 countries had engaged with the IPA program (Kor, et al., 2024). However, unlike KBAs, there is no single central database which holds spatial information on identified IPAs. It is

therefore recommended that the following sources are referred to in this order to determine if the proposed project site already falls within an IPA.

- Map of countries which have identified or engaged with IPAs: https://www.plantlifeipa.org/about (Error! Reference source not found.)
  - Follow "Link to data" if available for the relevant country and download to compare to project location.
  - Plantlife maintains a GIS dataset of IPAs for specific countries listed on https://www.plantlifeipa.org/gisdata. These can be requested directly from global@plantlife.org.uk.
- Tropical Important Plant Areas (TIPAs) Explorer: https://tipas.kew.org/
  - TIPAs explorer provides access to detailed, downloadable fact sheets and spatial boundaries for each qualifying site recognised as part of the TIPAs programme.
- Systematic map from the *Global review of the Important Plant Areas approach* https://figshare.com/articles/dataset/Publications_from_Global_IPA_Review/24645360?file=43310670
  - Filter for relevant country to determine if it is associated with any IPA-related publications, these can then be reviewed to assess if the project falls within an IPA or potential IPA.
- If none of the above sources indicate that the country has undertaken an IPA assessment, a final check for IPA-related material since published can be done by using a search engine with the search term "Important Plant Area" AND "*relevant country*", and by emailing global@plantlife.org.uk directly.

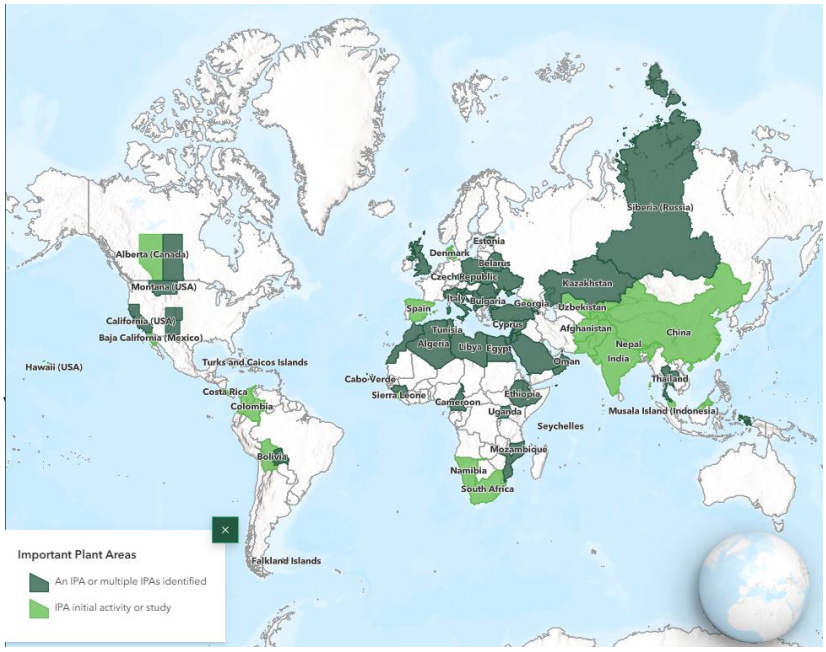

Figure 1. IPA status of countries around the world, as of 2025. Source: Plantlife International, 2025.

If the area has been identified as an IPA, check the year it was designated. If it is more than 8-12 years, then the site will require a reassessment. This is to ensure that the qualifying trigger biodiversity elements are still present and in sufficient abundance to trigger the IPA status.

If the project area was recently assessed, the PIN may state: "*The project area is a confirmed IPA site"* and include the year of assessment, a hyperlink to the IPA information if available, and any other relevant details.

2.2 Step 2: Determine species likely to be present

To identify the plant and fungi species which have been previously recorded in the proposed project area, undertake an initial desk-based review. This should include, but not be limited to, the following sources:

- Global Biodiversity Information Facility
- Botanical Information and Ecology Network
- Relevant national databases with species occurrence records, including digitised herbaria records

All occurrences of plants and fungi falling within the proposed project area should be compiled in a list of *species with records in project area*, with duplicates deleted. While there is no formal guidance on the age of records that should be used for the IPA criteria, it is suggested that only data no older than 8-12 years is considered.

2.3 Step 3: Identify threatened species that may trigger IPA criterion A

To screen for IPA sub-criterion A(i), use the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species to determine if plant or fungi species potentially present in your project area are globally threated – categorised as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), or Vulnerable (VU).

This can be done through the following steps:

i. Search for the relevant country of the proposed project on the IUCN Red List
ii. Filter by taxonomy (Plantae and Fungi) and Red List Category (CR and EN and VU)
iii. Download range data for all species
iv. Clip downloaded range data by proposed project boundary to determine if any species ranges overlap – compile a list of these species as *potential IPA A(i) triggers*

The IUCN Red List holds information on the global population size, area of occupancy, and range for many species. This information will be required in Step 4 when evaluating if the proportion of a species at the site meets the IPA threshold.

In addition, the species list compiled in Step 2 (species with records in project area) should be reviewed against the IUCN Red List. This will capture any threatened species with occurrence records whose IUCN range data may be missing or incorrect. If any are found to be threatened, they should be added to the list of *potential IPA A(i) triggers*.

To screen for IPA sub-criterion A(ii), determine if your project area is located in a region with a Regional Red List or other regionally approved, peer-reviewed threat list of relevance. If so, apply the same steps as above to form a list of *potential IPA A(ii) triggers*. It is not anticipated that this sub-criterion will be widely applied in the Tropics.

2.4 Step 4: Identify endemic species that may trigger IPA criterion A

To screen for IPA sub-criteria A(iii) and A(iv), first determine if there is a published list of "Highly Restricted Endemic" (HRE) and/or "Range Restricted Endemic" (RRE) in the country or region within which the proposed project area is located. HRE is defined as a species with a total range of <100 km^2, RRE is defined as a species with a total range of <5,000 km^2 but >100 km^2. This differs from national endemics, which are based on political boundaries and are considered in Criterion B(ii).

The species list compiled in Step 2 should be reviewed against the list of endemic species to determine if any HRE or RRE species are likely to be within the project area.

If no such list exists, and species have not been assessed on the IUCN Red List, the following tools can be used to estimate the extent of occurrence (EOO) and area of occupancy (AOO) of species within the project area. This can act as a preliminary conservation assessments to determine if they can be considered to be HRE or RRE, subject to approval from the TRP. Tools include:

- Geospatial Conservation Assessment Tool (GeoCAT) – more suited to assessing individual species at a time, by pulling in data from sources such as GBIF and iNaturalist
- The ConR package: allows for large-scale multispecies analysis in R

Species from Step 2, which are endemic or likely to be endemic should be compiled into a list of *potential IPA A(iii) and A(iv) triggers.*

2.5 Step 5: Assess against IPA thresholds

The species in the lists compiled in the steps above should be assessed against IPA thresholds for the proposed project area. Thresholds are dependent on the sub-criteria under which they have been included.

An example of a species that may trigger IPA criterion A is given below.

Frailejón de Tunja (*Espeletia tunjana*) in the Colombian Andes

- Categorised as EN under the IUCN criterion B1ab(iii)
- Global population: unknown
- Estimated EOO: 351 km^2
- Applicable IPA sub-criteria under criterion A: A(i) and A(iv)
  This is because the species is globally threated and RRE

Evaluate against the relevant IPA thresholds:

- For A(i): Site known, thought or inferred to contain ≥1% of the global population AND/OR the 5 "best sites" for that species nationally, whichever is most appropriate.
- For A(iv): Site known, thought or inferred to contain ≥1% of the global population AND/OR ≥5% of the national population, OR the 5 "best sites" for that species nationally, whichever is most appropriate.

As the IUCN Red List does not include population data, global population may be inferred (e.g. from existing records and consultation with experts). Assuming that the number of occurrences on GBIF of 155 points is verified by relevant experts as a suitable inference point, to be potentially eligible under A(i), the PV Nature project area must regularly hold at least two individuals of *E. tunjana*.

The selection of "best sites" should only be applied if population data cannot be inferred. This is generally based on expert consensus. To be potentially eligible under A(iv), the PV Nature project area must be located within one of the two extant locations mapped on the species IUCN Red List geographic range.

2.6 Step 6: Confirm the presence of the species in project area

Adequate recent evidence, no older than 8-12 years, is required to confirm that the IPA trigger species are present at or beyond the threshold within the proposed project area.

All sources must be referenced in the justification. In addition to the public databases used in Steps 1 and 2, acceptable data sources include:

- Recently collected field data by suitably qualified botanists
- Peer-reviewed papers
- Knowledge from Indigenous Peoples and local community members (IP&LC)* who are familiar with the area

- Personal communications with experts and researchers who are familiar with the species and/or area in question

*Note: Local knowledge plays a vital role in understanding species. To ensure consistency in taxonomy and accuracy, this knowledge can be complemented by validation from species experts. Personal communications must provide contact details for verification by the Technical Review Panel (TRP), in accordance with GDPR.

A minimum of one species triggering two or more sub-criteria, or multiple species triggering at least one sub-criterion, is needed to qualify a proposed site as an IPA. Where possible, listing multiple species that trigger the IPA criteria increases PV Nature and site eligibility chances. Currently, projects are not required to submit their areas for IPA status assessment. However, when resources permit, the submitted information may contribute to future IPA designation and conservation efforts, which PV Nature will likely consider in the future.

3 Example assessment

The table below shows a worked example of species information categorised with the required level of detail and evidence to support proof of eligibility for IPA Criterion A on Threatened Species, across multiple sub-criteria. This table should be included in the annex of the PIN template and will undergo review and approval by the TRP.

NB: The project and its site population are fictional.

Project A covers a 1,500 ha area in the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu state, India, with high altitude montane grassland and forest habitats. Historic populations of Naikotta (Elaeocarpus recurvatus) have been confirmed by recent field surveys, with 52 mature individuals recorded (Project Survey Report, 2025). In addition, surveys found individuals of Utleria salicifolia, which was thought to be locally extinct in the area.

Project A passes the conservation eligibility requirement because it meets the population thresholds for two species under sub-criterion A(i) for an IPA. Taxonomy and threat status follow the 2024 IUCN Red List.

Species	IUCN Red List Status and reference	Relevant IPA sub-criteria	Threshold required	Global population size (mature individuals)	Site population size	% of global population size at project area	Year of recent confirmation of species presence at the site	IPA A(i) sub-criteria met	Reference/ Justification
Naikotta *Elaeocarpus recurvatus* Corner	EN (A2c) EOO: 7,211km^2 (Amitha Bachan & Devika, 2024)	A(i)	≥1% of global population AND/OR ≥5% of national population OR the 5 "best sites"	4,000	52	1.3%	2025, based on botanical surveys and field inventory undertaken for the project	Yes	Project site is in an area with historic records of this species (GBIF, 2025). A field survey was undertaken in 2025 by a suitably qualified botanist, with 52 individuals recorded. See attached Project Survey Report.

Utleria salicifolia	CR (B2ab(ii,iii)) EOO: unknown (Ved, D., Saha, D., Ravikumar, K. & Haridasan, K., 2015)	A(i)	≥1% of global population AND/OR ≥5% of national population OR the 5 "best sites"	Unknown. Three to four subpopulations recorded from Annamalai Hills and one from Palani Hills.	3	NA	2025, based on botanical surveys and field inventory undertaken for the project	Yes	A field survey undertaken in 2025 recorded 3 mature individuals of this species in an area where it was thought to be extinct. This is just one of c.5 known subpopulations of the species, therefore meeting the threshold for one of the "best sites" nationally for the species. See attached Project Survey Report for survey results and expert consultation undertaken.

4 Key references

Anderson, S. 2002. Identifying important plant areas: a site selection manual for Europe, and a basis for developing guidelines for other regions of the world, London, Plantlife International – *first published guidance on IPA identification, with a focus on Europe.*

Darbyshire, I., Anderson, S., Asatryan, A., Byfield, A., Cheek, M., Clubbe, C., Ghrabi, Z., Harris, T., Heatubun, C. D. & Kalema, J. 2017. Important Plant Areas: revised selection criteria for a global approach to plant conservation. Biodiversity and Conservation – *updated IPA guidance, which should be referred to for eligibility checks of proposed PV Nature Projects*.

Plantlife International, 2025. Global IPA Map. Available at: https://www.plantlifeipa.org/about. Accessed 23rd October 2025.