

Project partner: Department of Biological, Geological and Environmental Sciences, University of Catania

Island

SICILY

Species name (Family)

Betula aetnensis Raf. (Betulaceae)

Common name

Betulla dell'Etna (Italian name), Bituddo, Vitudda (Sicilian names), Etnean birch (English name)

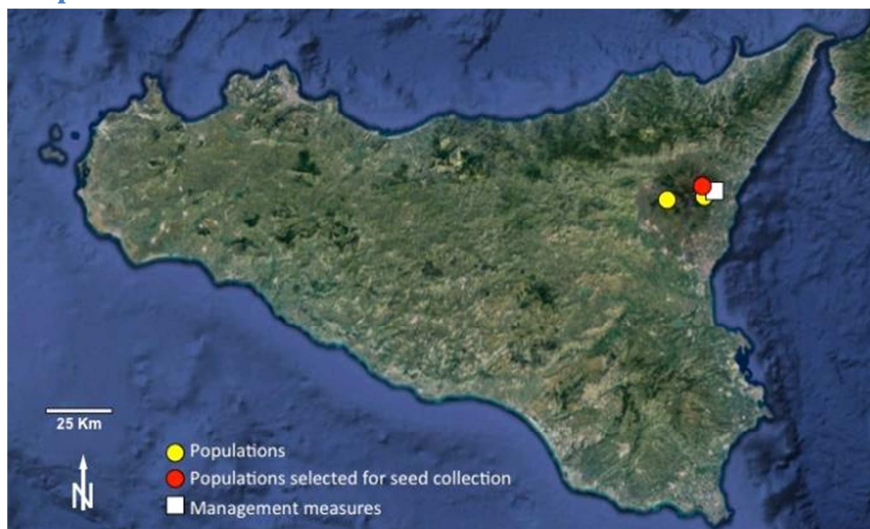
Plant description

- ✓ *Betula aetnensis* is a small to medium-sized tree or shrub, 4-15 m tall. Stem with whitish bark. Leaves deciduous with triangular or rhomboidal lamina.
- ✓ Flowers are monoecious; fruits are small brown conical nuts with wings 2-3 times wider than fruit. Male flowers bloom in late summer or autumn, remaining quiescent for all winter, the female one in spring with patent scales, Pollination is anemophilous. Fruits of *B. aetnensis* are winged nuts that promote wind dispersion.
- ✓ *B. aetnensis* typically forms small and floristically poor pioneer woodlands within the supra-Mediterranean bioclimatic belt with humid-subhumid ombrotypes. Optimal altitude is ranging from 1500 mt up to 2000 mt a.s.l.

Distribution

B. aetnensis is a narrow endemic plant from Mt. Etna, mostly localized on the north-eastern vent of the volcano. This species grows on initial volcanic soils, particularly rich in skeleton and with no or few litter, thus showing its remarkable pioneer role.

Map



Legal status

none.

Main threat(s) and conservation status

According to the IUCN Threats Classification Scheme (Version 3.2) the main threats in Sicily are:

- ✓ Threat 1.3 (Tourism & Recreation Areas)
- ✓ Threat 2.3.1 (Nomadic grazing)
- ✓ Threat 6.1 (Recreational Activities)
- ✓ Threat 8.2.2 (Problematic native species/diseases, e.g. some pathogens belonging to the Armillaria and Heterobasidion genera may cause radical necrosis and consequently death of the weakened individuals)

✓ Threat 10.1 (Volcanoes)

No IUCN status

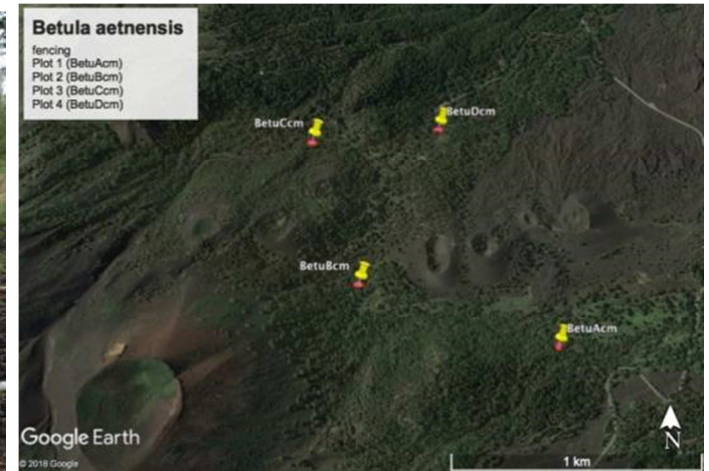
Conservation actions carried out in the CARE-MEDIFLORA project

- Seed collection.
- Four areas of about 400 sqm were fenced within the widest natural population of *Betula aetnensis* of Mt. Etna (altitude 1700-1900 mt a.s.l.).

Photos



Individual of *Betula aetnensis* (Mts. Sartorius, NE Etna) & Inflorescences (male) of *Betula aetnensis* (Mt. Galvarina, W Etna)



Betula aetnensis-dominated woodland (Mts. Sartorius, NE Etna) & Localization of the fenced areas of *Betula aetnensis* (NE Etna)



Fenced area with *Betula aetnensis*