

The *Polylepis* forests of the South American Andes



Polylepis

The genus *Polylepis* belongs to the rose family (Rosaceae) and is found along the South American Andes from Venezuela to Argentina. There are 28 species of *Polylepis*, all of which are evergreen shrubs or trees well adapted to the cold climate of the high mountains.

Photos:

- 1 Some *Polylepis* species occur at elevations where no other tree species survive. These include *Polylepis subsericans*, which can be found in Peru up to almost 5000 m (picture top right). The species planted in front of our Alpine house are, with the exception of *Polylepis australis*, not hardy and therefore only visible in the summer months.

Photo: M. Kessler

- 2 A striking feature of all *Polylepis* species is their thick, peeling bark. It protects older trees against the effects of fire, but seedlings and younger plants are not fire-resistant. Fire has been widely used by humans to manage the landscapes in the Andean highlands for centuries. Photo: L. Köhler

- 3 The destruction of many *Polylepis* stands has led to their current fragmented distribution of small populations. Due to their unique flora and fauna, these highly endangered forests are considered ecosystems in need of protection. Photo: D. Hertel



Experimental Botanical Garden

More information

