

# Rare & Endangered Plant Highlight

## ***WELWITSCHIA MIRABILIS***

***Welwitschia mirabilis* grows in isolated communities the Namib Desert s from central Namibia and southern Angola. The plants are seldom found far from the coast, and the distribution coincides with fog. Although the plant is not endangered, it is protected by law.**



**Rainfall in this area is erratic and extremely low; often, years pass with no rainfall. *Welwitschia* leaves are formed so that it waters its own roots by collecting fog condensation and the leaf surfaces have numerous stomata (microscopic pores) through which condensation is absorbed. *Welwitschia* also has a long taproot, allowing it to reach water deep underground. Another interesting adaptation is *Welwitschia*'s cork-like bark, possibly the result of thousands of years of exposure to grass fires so common in savanna regions. Antelope and rhinoceros chew *Welwitschia* leaves for hydration during times of drought. The cone of the female plant was used as food for people in earlier times; it was eaten raw or baked in hot ashes. The plant's common name is *onyanga*, which means "onion of the desert."**