ABSTRACT

- Walker’s Manihot (Manihot walkerae) is an endangered species that is endemic to the Tamaulipan Thornscrub ecoregion, which includes portions of South Texas and northeastern Mexico.
- Our objective was to construct a habitat model for M. walkerae to identify areas that are potentially suitable for future reintroduction.
- The protected areas assessed for suitability in South Texas were Texas Park and Wildlife Department lands and tracts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s South Texas Refuge Complex.
- In Mexico, these areas included Natural Protected Areas (federal and state), Biosphere Reserves, Priority Territorial Regions, and Areas of Importance for Bird Conservation (AICAS).
- Several protected areas in Texas have high suitability values (>0.7) and could be used for reintroduction of M. walkerae in the future, such as portions of LRGV NWR.
- In Mexico however, no protected areas are found inside of predicted suitable habitat for Manihot walkerae.

INTRODUCTION

- Fig 1. Walker’s Manihot, Manihot walkerae Cronizat, is a federally endangered species endemic to the Tamaulipan Thornscrub ecoregion (TTE) in South Texas and northeastern Mexico.
- It is a perennial herbaceous plant of the spurge family characterized by its palmate five-lobed leaves, white flowers, and circular dentilhent fruits. It is related to Manihot esculenta, or Cassava.

QUESTION & HYPOTHESIS

- Question: Do the already established protected areas in Texas and Mexico have suitable habitat for Manihot walkerae?
- Hypothesis: We hypothesize that there are protected areas in Texas and Mexico with suitable habitat for Manihot walkerae.

METHODS

- Using MaxEnt, we input 19 rarefied occurrences for Manihot walkerae along with 14 not highly correlated biotic and abiotic environmental variables (Fig 2-4).
- 50 replicates were produced at a random test percentage of 30.
- The 50 replicates were visualized in ArcGIS and a consensus model was constructed using the raster calculator spatial analyst tool (Fig. 5).
- Protected areas assessed for suitability in South Texas were Texas Park and Wildlife Department lands (e.g., state parks and wildlife management areas) and tracts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s South Texas Refuge Complex.
- Mexico: Natural Protected Areas (federal and state), Biosphere Reserves, Priority Territorial Regions, and Areas of Importance for Bird Conservation (AICAS).
- Protected areas with high suitability values (>0.7) were considered suitable for the future reintroduction of M. walkerae.

RESULTS

- A consensus map displaying the potential suitable habitat for M. walkerae. Warm colors (red) denote highly suitable habitat while cold colors (blue) display unsuitable habitat. AUC: 0.93.
- Close up of suitability of protected areas in Texas. There are three protected areas with known M. walkerae populations that are shown to be highly suitable for this species in black circles.
- We found that in Texas the results support our hypothesis that established protected areas have suitable habitat for Manihot walkerae.
- In Mexico however, no established protected areas have suitable habitat for Manihot walkerae.

CONCLUSIONS/DISCUSSION

- The AUC for the consensus model 0.93 is close to 1 indicating that this map can be a reliable tool when looking for M. walkerae populations.
- The consensus model produced confirms that historical occurrences are found within predicted potential highly suitable areas. This excludes the northermost occurrence in Duval county.
- There are three protected areas in Texas with known M. walkerae occurrences that have highly suitable habitat.
- In Mexico the Laguna Madre Biosphere Reserve Borders Manihot walkerae suitable habitat (Fig 7).
- There is no protected area in Mexico with known Manihot walkerae populations with most occurring in private property.
- We recommend that mutual conservation agreements with private landowners where M. walkerae is found are made to protect this species in both Texas and Mexico.
- Given that in Mexico Manihot walkerae is not protected under the official standard NOM-059-SEMARNAT-2010 (NOM059) designating M. walkerae as endangered in Mexico is a priority.

FUTURE WORK

- Ongoing work is looking at the potential risk factor that land use/ land cover change has on this species.
- Areas that are depicted as highly suitable will be explored when searching for unknown populations.
- With concurrent studies being done on population dynamics, germination success of M. walkerae and species interactions, the objective is to contribute to the long-term conservation of M. walkerae.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The authors are thankful for the support from the Section 6 Texas Parks and Wildlife grant titled "Understanding the ecological and geographic distribution of Manihot walkerae.
- The authors would also like to thank the private landowners that gave us permission to look for and monitor Manihot walkerae inside of their property.
- The authors are also thankful for the support from the Presidential Graduate Research Assistantship and the Ruth and Katherine Dugger Scholarship.

REFERENCES


ATTACHMENT

- Picture by Zachary Johnson.