Conserving Europe’s plant genetic resources
for use now and in the future
Contents

Editorial .......................................................................................................................... 3
Introducing PGR Forum ................................................................................................. 4
Why are crop wild relatives important? ........................................................................ 5
PGR Forum activities: in brief ....................................................................................... 6
PGR Forum participants ............................................................................................... 7
The PGR Forum logo ................................................................................................... 7
Assessing in situ conservation of Lupinus spp. in Spain through GIS
Mauricio Parra-Quijano, David Draper and José M. Iriondo ........................................... 8
Contact list .................................................................................................................. 10
Call for contributions .................................................................................................. 12
Welcome to Issue 1 of Crop wild relative. This inaugural newsletter is brought to you by the European Community funded project, European crop wild relative diversity assessment and conservation forum (PGR Forum).

Crop wild relative provides a medium to publicise information about the conservation and use of wild relatives of crop plants, including updates on the activities of PGR Forum. We anticipate that anyone with an interest in crop wild relatives, whether conservationist, breeder, taxonomist, policy-maker or educator will benefit from this publication, both by spreading news about their activities and by learning about other initiatives.

This introductory issue provides information about the aims and objectives of PGR Forum, explaining the rationale for the initiation of the project. It serves to highlight the importance of crop wild relatives as vital ecosystem components, as a source of nutrition from the wild, for their medicinal and cultural values, as well as a critical resource for the improvement of crops.

While the focus of PGR Forum is on the conservation of crop wild relatives in Europe, it is expected that the content of Crop wild relative will not be limited to the region. Common experiences can be shared and similar lessons learned, whether the focus of the research or news item is a taxon of socio-economic importance in Europe or elsewhere in the world. The scene is set with a feature article on the use of GIS analysis for planning in situ conservation of wild relatives of Lupinus in Spain, which highlights the need for specific attention to be paid to the inclusion and management of crop wild relative populations within existing protected areas.

We foresee that this publication will continue to be produced beyond the end date of PGR Forum (December 2005); therefore, we expect that this is the first of many more issues of Crop wild relative to come. Whatever profession or interest group you belong to, we would like to hear from you with your ideas for the content of future issues. You will find a call for contributions on page 12.

We look forward to your feedback and to your contributions.
Introducing PGR Forum

PGR Forum (European crop wild relative diversity assessment and conservation forum) is a Thematic Network funded under the EC Framework 5 Programme for Research, Key action 2 ‘Global change, climate and biodiversity’, 2.2.3 ‘Assessing and conserving biodiversity’. PGR Forum provides a platform for the assessment of taxonomic and genetic diversity of European crop wild relatives and the development of appropriate conservation methodologies.

The project brings together 23 partners from 21 countries: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Romania, Russia, and the United Kingdom, with the addition of partners representing IUCN -The World Conservation Union and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI). Advisory and Stakeholder Panels provide additional input and feedback on project activities and deliverables. A broad cross-section of the professional European PGR community is represented, and the project therefore provides a unique opportunity to enhance dialogue between national and regional crop wild relative conservationists, policy makers and end-users, and to promote discourse with the broader international stakeholder communities.

PGR Forum aims to build an information system providing access to European crop wild relative data. The database will include all socio-economically important species native to Europe and their wild relatives; including food, fodder and forage, medicinal plants, condiments, ornamentals, forestry species, as well as plants used for industrial purposes, such as oils and fibres. One of the primary outputs of PGR Forum will be a conservation gap analysis and recommendations for in situ and ex situ conservation of European crop wild relatives. The development of methodologies, particularly for in situ conservation is also a major component of the project.

PGR Forum’s work programme is implemented through a series of five inter-related work packages and associated workshops: 1) European crop wild relative assessment, 2) threat and conservation assessment, 3) in situ data management methodologies, 4) population management methodologies, and 5) genetic erosion and genetic pollution methodologies. An additional work package coordinates thematic network product dissemination and exploitation, and the final dissemination conference.

The project duration is 36 months, with a start date of November 1 2002, and is coordinated by the University of Birmingham, UK.

Project themes

In situ data management

A critical aspect of in situ conservation is data management, and the ability to exchange data in a standardised format. Standards for exchange of ex situ data already exist, but there is a need to develop standards for the collation, analysis and exchange of in situ data, both for genetic reserve and on farm conservation. PGR Forum’s objectives in this context are to:

- define appropriate in situ genetic conservation data types;
- design appropriate database structures and data visualisation tools;
- design in situ genetic conservation data management and analysis techniques;
- publish an in situ data management methodology.

Population management

PGR Forum will propose population management and monitoring methodologies appropriate for the in situ genetic conservation of crop wild relatives. Specifically, the forum is assessing:

- the minimum baseline information and standards required for generation of protected area management plans for population management of crop wild relatives;
- how existing management plans
can be adapted for the genetic conservation of crop wild relative populations;
• the most appropriate means of monitoring crop wild relative populations.

Genetic erosion and pollution assessment

Genetic erosion and pollution are major threats to the diversity of European crop wild relatives. PGR Forum is tackling the critical issue of how plant genetic erosion and pollution can be predicted and assessed. The forum will build upon and refine existing methodologies for the prediction of genetic erosion; however, there are currently no established methodologies for assessing plant genetic pollution. The threat of genetic pollution or introgression, either from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or from conventionally bred crops, to wild species has become an increasing risk to the in situ genetic conservation of crop wild relatives. PGR Forum’s objectives in this context are to:
• provide a forum to debate genetic erosion and pollution assessment and prediction for crop wild relatives;
• establish methodologies for the assessment and prediction of genetic erosion and pollution.

Threat and conservation assessment

PGR Forum will carry out threat assessments for the taxa listed in the European crop wild relative database using the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. Although some countries have published “Red Lists” of threatened species, the current lists do not adequately address European crop wild relatives and a more systematic approach is required. Existing in situ and ex situ conservation actions for the taxa will also be reviewed. This information will be used to help prioritise future conservation action for European crop wild relatives. Specifically, PGR Forum’s objectives in this context are to:
• assess threat for all or a selected subset of European crop wild relatives;
• review the in situ and ex situ conservation status of the taxa;
• conduct a gap analysis of conservation needs;
• produce a list of priority species for conservation action.

For more information about PGR Forum, visit http://www.pgrforum.org/ or contact the Project Officer, s.p.kell@bham.ac.uk

Why are crop wild relatives important?

Crop wild relatives may be defined as taxa related to species of direct socio-economic importance. Crop wild relatives are essential components of natural and semi-natural habitats, as well as agricultural systems, and are critical for maintaining ecosystem health. Their conservation and sustainable use is vital for improving agricultural production and increasing food security, as well as maintaining the environment.

“Europe is an important centre for crop wild relative diversity”

N.I. Vavilov realised the importance of crop wild relatives in the early years of the 20th century, particularly in their ability to exchange genes with the crops themselves. Crop wild relative germplasm (genetic material) has been utilised by humankind for thousands of years to improve the quality and yield of crops. Natural crosses between crops and their wild relatives have occurred since the beginnings of agriculture. Farmers have used traditional breeding methods for millennia, and more recently, plant breeders have utilised crop wild relative genes to improve a wide range of crops, including wheat (Triticum cereale), maize (Zea mays), rice (Oryza sativa), barley (Hordeum vulgare), potato (Solanum tuberosum), cassava (Manihot esculenta), and grain legumes such as Phaseolus, Vicia, Vigna, Lens, Lathyrus, and Cicer. Improvements include resistance to pests and diseases, and abiotic stresses, such as drought and salinity. Other uses include increased protein and vitamin content, and the improvement of medicinal plants and pharmaceuticals. In many countries, crop wild relatives are also harvested directly from the wild and are an important source of nutrition.

Europe is an important centre for crop wild relative diversity. Major crops such as oats (Avena sativa), sugar beet (Beta vulgaris), apple (Malus domestica), annual meadow grass (Festuca pratensis), and white clover (Trifolium repens), have wild relatives in Europe. Many minor crops have also been developed and domesticated in the region; such as amica (Arnica montana), asparagus (Asparagus officinalis), lettuce (Lactuca sativa), and sage (Salvia officinalis). Although it is acknowledged that populations of crop wild relatives throughout Europe are under threat from habitat alteration and loss, their conservation across the region has received relatively little systematic attention. There are a number of initiatives to inventory European crop wild relative species at the individual country level, but there has not been a coordinated effort focusing on the production of a comprehensive European catalogue. And while some European crop wild relative material is conserved ex situ, their conservation in situ has not been the subject of significant debate.

“Although it is acknowledged that populations of crop wild relatives throughout Europe are under threat from habitat alteration and loss, their conservation across the region has received relatively little systematic attention”
The activities of PGR Forum are centred around a series of five interrelated workshops. PGR Forum is a Thematic Network, which means that funding has been granted to hold meetings and workshops, during which presentations are given and concentrated discussion sessions take place. PGR Forum is tackling some new and unexplored areas, with the final goal being the development of methodologies for the conservation and sustainable use of wild relatives of crop plants. The diversity of professional expertise amongst the participants makes for some dynamic and productive brainstorming sessions, leading to a set of clear-cut resolutions at the end of each workshop, which are then reviewed and developed at subsequent meetings. In order to maintain a continuous dialogue between workshops, participants have an opportunity to discuss issues and make collaborative decisions via the project e-mailing list and web site bulletin board.

PGR Forum has held two workshops to date. Workshop 1, European crop wild relative assessment, the project’s inaugural meeting, was held in Véria, Greece in February 2003, in the foothills of the Olympus mountains. Hosted by the Greek Gene Bank based in Thessaloniki, the objectives of this workshop included:

- Agreement on a methodology for compiling a list of European crop wild relative taxa;

“PGR Forum is tackling some new and unexplored areas, with the final goal being the development of methodologies for the conservation and sustainable use of wild relatives of crop plants”

- Preliminary discussions regarding the minimum dataset required per taxon for their effective conservation;
- Initial investigation into data standards, sources of data, access and acquisition;
- Review of available data management tools;
- Exploration of existing European PGR projects, lessons learned, and opportunities for collaboration.

One of the major outcomes of this workshop was the decision to produce a preliminary list of European crop wild relative taxa through a process of data harmonisation between Mansfeld’s World Database of Agricultural and Horticultural Crops (http://mansfeld.ipk-gatersleben.de/) and Euro+Med PlantBase (http://www.euromed.org.uk/). This process has been assisted by two members of the project’s Advisory Board, Dr. Helmut Knüpffer (The Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research, Gatersleben, Germany) and Dr. Stephen Jury (University of Reading, UK). The initial “rough” list of taxa contains 23,072 records, which consists of 838 genera, 15,031 species, and 8,421 infra-specific taxa. Forestry and ornamental species have yet to be incorporated from other sources, which will clearly increase this number of taxa significantly. Further steps are also underway to refine this list through a process of harmonisation with Euro+Med PlantBase, which is continuously updated by a network of taxonomic experts, and by circulating the list to national focal points for review.

Building on the results of Workshop 1, the project’s second workshop, In Situ Data Management Methodologies, concentrated on the development of a conceptual model of a crop wild relative information system that will serve all user communities. The list of taxa, with associated nomenclatural and utilisation data, lies at the core of this system, with links to any number of ancillary data sources managed by other organisations. These data sources may for instance include information on distribution, habitats, threat status, detailed population data, breeding research, molecular data, and ex situ holdings. One such data source is EURISCO (European Internet Search Catalogue of ex situ PGR Accessions, http://eurisco.ecpgr.org/), established by the EC-funded project EPGRIS (European Plant Genetic Resources Information Infrastructure, http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/epgris/). In order to facilitate the exchange of data, PGR Forum will develop an XML schema (exchange mark-up language) for the core taxon database, and investigate other XML data sources that can be linked to.

The structure and precise components of the CWR information system rests on an analysis of user requirements. A survey of stakeholder needs is therefore being undertaken via the PGR Forum participants, while internal working groups will continue to investigate potential data sources and data standards.

A further component of the project is the formulation of taxon case studies, which will be presented via the project web site. These case studies will serve to illustrate the potential of the CWR information system. In addition, a methodology for assigning conservation priority to each taxon in the core database is to be proposed.

Planning is underway for the next two workshops, Population Management Methodologies and Genetic Erosion and Pollution Assessment Methodologies, which will take place during 2004.

For further information about PGR Forum activities, visit http://www.pgrforum.org/ or contact the Project Officer, s.p.kell@bham.ac.uk.
PGR Forum participants

PGR Forum involves national and regional partner institutes from 21 countries across Europe, with the addition of partners representing IPGRI (International Plant Genetic Resources Institute) and IUCN - The World Conservation Union. Advisory and Stakeholder Panels representing a number of further national, European and international organisations provide additional input and feedback on project activities and deliverables. PGR Forum collaborates closely with other European projects, including EPGRIS (European Plant Genetic Resources Information Infrastructure) (http://www.ecpgr.cgiar.org/epgris/) and Euro+Med PlantBase (http://www.euromed.org.uk/).

Collaborating institutes

- Bureau des Ressources Génétiques, France
- Centre for Genetic Resources, The Netherlands
- Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences
- European Association for Research on Plant Breeding, Germany
- European Commission
- European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity, France
- Gembloux Agricultural University, Belgium
- Genebank of Suceava, Romania
- German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture
- Greek Gene Bank
- Institute for Agrobotany, Hungary
- Institute of Botany, Lithuania
- Instituto Nacional de Investigación Agrária e das Pescas, Portugal
- Instituto Sperimentale per la Frutticoltura, Italy
- International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
- IUCN-The World Conservation Union
- National Centre for Plant Genetic Resources, Poland
- N.I.Vavilov Research Institute of Plant Industry, Russia
- Nordic Gene Bank, Sweden
- Norwegian Crop Research Institute
- Planta Europa, United Kingdom
- Research Institute for Crop Production, Czech Republic
- Research Institute of Plant Production, Slovak Republic
- The Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research, Germany
- Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Spain
- University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
- University of Helsinki, Finland
- University of Latvia
- University of Reading, United Kingdom

Above: Participants at the PGR Forum Workshop, 'In Situ Data Management Methodologies, Prague, Czech Republic. Andy Jarvis, representing IPGRI, presents a paper on tools for spatial analysis of PGR distribution.

The PGR Forum logo

The project logo represents the wild ancestor of the olive, *Olea Europaea* subsp. *oleaster*. Olives have been cultivated in Europe and the Mediterranean for centuries and are extremely important for the regional economy. The wild olive grows in maquis and woodland throughout the Mediterranean region, and is distinguished from the cultivated form by its shrubby habit, spiny stems, smaller leaves and small bitter fruits. In many countries, wild olives are sparse or even rare. The plant is therefore a potent symbol both as a highly important genetic resource and as a species of conservation concern.

The logo was designed and produced by Margaret Chamberlain and Ian Dicks, graphic designers and illustrators.
Assessing in situ conservation of Lupinus spp. in Spain through GIS

Mauricio Parra-Quijano¹, David Draper² and José M. Iriondo³

¹ Departamento de Biología Vegetal, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria, E-28040 Madrid, Spain
² Museu Nacional de História Natural, Laboratório e Jardim Botânico da Universidade de Lisboa, Rua da Escola Politécnica nº 58 1250-102 Lisboa, Portugal
³ Departamento de Biología Vegetal, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria, E-28040 Madrid, Spain

The genus Lupinus (Fabaceae) is comprised of approximately 200 to 500 species (Abdel-Kader and Randall, 1999), distributed all around the world. Only four species have been domesticated, three of which are native to the Mediterranean region. In Spain six native species occur: Lupinus albus, Lupinus luteus, Lupinus angustifolius, Lupinus hispanicus, Lupinus consentinii and Lupinus micranthus (Castroviejo and Pascual, 1999). The first three species can be found both as crops and in the wild, while the others are crop wild relatives.

The conservation of these crop wild relatives should preferably be carried out in situ, as this approach allows for their evolution within their ecological framework. In this context, it is important to know which populations occur in protected areas and whether they are subjected to some kind of active protection. In Spain, the Sites of Community Importance (SCI) from Natura 2000 (92/43/EEC Directive) group all kinds of protected areas, including those without administrative management. At present, protected areas do not take into account crop wild relative populations, unless they belong to an endangered species. As Lupinus species are not included in the Spanish Red Lists (VV.AA., 2000), they are not being considered in current conservation policies.

In this paper, we show how geographic information systems (GIS) can help to assess the possibilities of conserving crop wild relatives in protected areas. We used six Lupinus species as a model in the GIS assessment of crop wild relatives in Spain to answer the following questions: How many SCIs contain Lupinus species? How many Lupinus species are conserved in these SCIs? Which Lupinus populations are close to SCIs? Which SCIs should be studied more thoroughly to improve Lupinus conservation?

### METHODOLOGY

**Gathering information**

Data on the geographic location of Lupinus populations in Spain was compiled from various sources. Initially, we used passport information from CRF-INIA (Centro de Recursos Filogenéticos-Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria, Spain) and ausPGRIS (Australian Plant Genetic Resources Information System) seedbank accessions. In addition, Lupinus georeferenced data from herbarium specimens of the Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid (Spain) and from the ANTHOS project database (Spain) were collected. Thus, we compiled a total of 2501 records.

**Layers and data management**

Using the collected information, we created dot maps of the species occurrence. We then superimposed a UTM 1x1 km grid on the Lupinus dot maps in order to produce a UTM 1x1 km Lupinus distribution map (Fig. 1-A). The same procedure was followed to obtain a UTM 10x10 km Lupinus distribution map (Fig. 1-B). An SCI layer from Natura 2000 network (Spanish Ministry of Environment, 2002) (Fig. 1-C), was used to represent areas subjected to some degree of protection. For geographical reference we used a layer with the regions considered in Flora Iberica (Fig. 1-D).

We used MapInfo GIS software to find matches between the Lupinus UTM layers and the SCI map. Thus, we identified Lupinus populations occurring within protected areas and those occurring outside but less than 14.1 km (the maximum distance in a 10x10 km square) from their limits. In order to detect the latter, we selected populations which did not match with an SCI.
at the UTM 1x1 km grid level but did match with an SCI at the UTM 10x10 km grid level (Fig. 2). Finally, we classified the protected areas by the number of Lupinus species that they contained and the number of Lupinus species occurring nearby.

RESULTS

Georeferenced data included 519 records of Lupinus albus, 1257 records of L. angustifolius, 19 records of L. consentinii, 346 records of L. hispanicus, 316 records of L. luteus and 44 records of L. micranthus. The most common species was L. angustifolius with 50% of the data and the rarest species was L. consentinii with 2% of the data.

"a third of the Lupinus populations are potentially protected, although most SCIs do not presently provide effective protection due to a lack of specific management"

A map with the match between Lupinus locations at the UTM 1x1 km grid level and SCIs is shown in Figure 3. The colour of each SCI indicates the number of Lupinus species it holds. The total number of Lupinus populations occurring within SCIs was 743, equivalent to 30% of the records. This indicates that a third of the Lupinus populations are potentially protected, although most SCIs do not presently provide effective protection due to a lack of specific management. The least-favoured species is L. consentinii with only two populations occurring within SCIs (10% of the total L. consentinii records) whereas the most-favoured species is L. hispanicus with 174 populations (50% of the total L. hispanicus records).

Figure 4-A shows a map with matches between Lupinus locations and SCIs. Just 1.47% of the existing SCIs (blue-coloured) matched with Lupinus locations at the UTM 1x1 km grid level. However, 21.6% of SCIs (red-coloured) matched with Lupinus locations only at the UTM 10x10 km grid level, indicating the presence of Lupinus populations within a 14.1 km distance. These SCIs were then classified by the number of different Lupinus species occurring within a 14.1 km distance (Fig. 4-B). Red and orange-coloured SCIs have a significant number of Lupinus species populations nearby. Field studies should be carried out to determine if these Lupinus species also occur within the SCIs (even though there are no current records). These SCIs represent only 1% of the total SCIs with populations within a 14.1 km distance from their border and 0.17% of the total SCIs. Should these populations be worth conserving, even if not present within the SCIs, specific proposals could be made to protected area managers to encompass these Lupinus populations within their management plans.

REFERENCES


Steering Committee

Dr Nigel Maxted (Project Coordinator; Work packages 1 and 6 Joint Coordinator)
School of Biosciences
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 121 414 5571
Fax: +44 121 414 5925
Email: nigel.maxted@dipl.piex.com

Dr Brian Ford-Lloyd (Deputy Project Coordinator; Work package 5 Joint Coordinator)
School of Biosciences
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 121 414 5565
Fax: +44 121 414 5925
Email: b.ford-lloyd@kham.ac.uk

Ms Shelagh Kell (Project Officer, Work packages 1 and 6 Joint Coordinator)
School of Biosciences
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 121 244 4452
Fax: +44 121 244 4452
Email: s.p.kell@bham.ac.uk

Dr Frank Begemann (Work package 3 Joint Coordinator)
German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture (ZADI)
Information Centre for Biological Diversity (IBV)
Villichgasse 17, D-53177 Bonn
Germany
Tel: +49 5542 98 1214
Fax: +49 5542 98 1213
Email: f.begemann@zadi.de

Ms Sónia Dias (Work package 5 Joint Coordinator)
Genebank-Genetics, Department of Genetic Resources and Breeding
Estação Agronómica Nacional
Instituto Nacional de Investigação Agrária e das Pescas (INAP)
2784-505 Ceilas
Portugal
Tel: +351 21 440 3688
Fax: +351 21 441 6011
Email: sordil@net.sapo.pt

Mr Craig Hilton-Taylor (Work package 2 Joint Coordinator)
Red List Programme
IUCN - The World Conservation Union
219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1223 277066
Fax: +44 1223 277045
Email: craig.hilton-taylor@usc-uk.org

Prof José Iriondo (Work package 4 Coordinator)
Dpto. Biología Vegetal. EUIA Agrícola
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Ciudad Universitaria s/n, E-28040 Madrid
Spain
Tel: +34 913365435
Fax: +34 913365066
Email: iriondo@ccupm.upm.es

Advisory Board and Stakeholder Panel

Mr Luigi Guarino
Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Private Mail Bag, Suva
Fiji
Tel: +679 337 0733 Ext. 217
Fax: +679 337 0021
Email: luigi@spc.int

Dr Karl Hammer
European Association for Research on Plant Breeding
University of Kassel, FB 11: Ecological Agricultural Sciences
Nordbahnhofstr. 1a, D-37213 Witzenhausen
Germany
Tel: +49 5642 96 1214
Fax: +49 5642 96 1213
Email: khammer@wiz.uni-kassel.de

Prof Vsevolod Heywood
Centre for Plant Diversity & Systematics
School of Plant Sciences
University of Reading
Whiteknights, PO Box 221
Reading, Berkshire RG6 6AS
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 118 378 8169
Fax: +44 118 378 8160
Email: v.h.heywood@reading.ac.uk, vheywood@blinternet.com

Dr Toby Hodgkin
Genetic Resources Science and Technology Group
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
IPGRI Headquarters, Via dei Tre Denari 472/a
00057 Maccarese (Fiumicino)
Italy
Tel: +39 06 61979661
Fax: +39 06 61979662
Email: l Hodgkin@cgiar.org

Dr Stephen Jury
School of Plant Sciences
University of Reading
Whiteknights, PO Box 221
Reading, Berkshire RG6 6AS
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 118 378 8169
Fax: +44 118 378 8160
Email: s.l.jury@reading.ac.uk

Dr Helmut Knüppfer
The Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research
Corrensstrasse 3, D-06466, Gatersleben
Germany
Tel: +49 39482 5283
Fax: +49 39482 5155
Email: knuppfer@ipk-gatersleben.de

Dr Dominique Richard
European Topic Centre on Nature Protection and Biodiversity
Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle
57, rue Cuvier, 75231 Paris Cedex 05
France
Tel: +33 1 40 79 38 70
Fax: +33 1 40 79 38 87
Email: drichard@mnhn.fr

Dr Kell Kristiansen
(Work package 2 Joint Coordinator)
Department of Horticulture
Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences
Kristinebergvej 10, 5792 Årølev
Denmark
Tel: +45 63 90 42 45
Fax: +45 63 90 43 94
Email: kell.kristiansen@agrsci.dk

Ms Brigitte Laiiberté
(Work package 6 Joint Coordinator)
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
Via dei Tre Denari 472/a, 00057 Rome
Italy
Tel: +39 06 611 8244
Fax: +39 06 6197 9661
Email: b.laiiberte@cgiar.org

Ms Sabine Roscher
(Workpackage 3 Joint Coordinator)
German Centre for Documentation and Information in Agriculture
Villichgasse 17, D-53177 Bonn
Germany
Tel: +49 228 9548 212
Fax: +49 228 9548 220
Email: roscher@zadi.de, sabroscher@web.de

Mr Stelios Samaras
(Workpackage 1 Joint Coordinator)
Agricultural Research, Greek Gene Bank Centre of Makedonia and Thraki
57001 Thermi-Thessaliotikí
Greece
Tel: +30 2 31 0471544
Fax: +30 2 31 0471209
Email: kkgggb@otenet.gr

Dr Martin Sharman
EC Research DG, DI-2 Biodiversity and Global Change
Rue du Luxembourg 46, 2/74, 1040 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 285 97 98
Fax: +32 2 209 57 35
Email: martin.sharman@cec.eu.int

Dr Jane Smart
Planta Europa c/o Plantlife International
14 Rolleston Street
Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 1DX
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 20 7808 0115
Fax: +44 20 7730 8377
Email: jane.smart@plantlife.org.uk

Dr Wendy Strahm
IUCN Species Survival Programme
Rue Mauverney, 28, CH-1196 Gland
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 999 0157
Fax: +41 22 999 0015
Email: was@hq.iucn.org

Dr Theo van Hintum
DLO Foundation
Centre for Genetic Resources
Wageningen University and Research Centre
P.O. Box 16, 6700 AA Wageningen
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 317 477078
Fax: +31 317 418094
Email: theo.vanhintum@wur.nl
Project partners

Mr Asmund Asdal
Norwegian Crop Research Institute
Division Landvik, 4890 Grimstad
Norway
Tel: +47 37257700
Fax: +47 37257710
Email: asmund.asdal@plantefforsk.no

Prof Jean-Pierre Baudoin
Laboratory of Tropical Crop Husbandry and Horticulture
Gembloqu Agricultural University
2, Passage des Déportés, B 5030 Gembloqu
Belgium
Tel: +32 81 622112
Fax: +32 81 614544
Email: baudoin.ipj@iaspgx.ac.be

Dr Daniela Benedikova
Gene Bank
Research Institute of Plant Production
Bratislavsku cesta 122, 921 68 Piešťany
Slovak Republic
Tel: +421 33 77 22 311
Fax: +421 33 77 28 311
Email: benedikova@vurv.sk

Mr Dag Terje Endresen
Nordic Gene Bank
P O Box 41, SE-230 53 Alnarp
Sweden
Tel: +46 40 53 66 50
Fax: +46 40 53 66 54
Email: dagterje@ngb.se

Dr Fabrizio Grassi
Istituto Sperimentale per la Frutticoltura
Via Fioranello 52, 00134 Roma
Italy
Tel: +39 0679348194
Fax: +39 0679341630
Email: fgrassi@mclink.it

Ms Petra Engel
Instituto Sperimentale per la Frutticoltura
Via di Fioranello 52, 00134 Rome
Italy
Tel: +39 0679348169
Fax: +39 0679341630
Email: blue.planet.earth@gmx.net

Dr Doug Evans
EEA-European Topic Centre on Nature Protection & Biodiversity
Topic Centre on Nature Protection & Biodiversity
Cuvier
Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle
57, rue Cuvier, F-75231 Paris cedex 05
France
Tel: +33 1 40 79 38 70
Fax: +33 1 40 79 38 67
Email: evans@rmnh.fr

Dr Samy Gajji
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
Via dei Tre Denari 472/a
00057 Maccarese, Roma
Italy
Tel: +39 066118235
Fax: +39 0661979661
Email: s.gajji@cgiar.org

Prof Juha Helenius
Department of Applied Biology
University of Helsinki, Helsinki
Finland
Tel: +358 9 191 58568
Fax: +358 9 191 58572
Email: helenius@mappi.helsinki.fi

Dr Liszti Holly
Institute for Agrobotany
Kúlsó mezo 15, 2766 Tájpszele
Hungary
Tel: +36 53 380 08 09
Fax: +36 53 380 07 2
Email: tholly@agrobot.cat.hu

Dr Juozas Labokas
Institute of Botany
Zaliuju ezeru 49, 2021 Vilnius
Lithuania
Tel: +370 5 2729630
Fax: +370 5 2729950/2784332
Email: labokas@botanika.lt/joseph@takas.lt

Dr Martine Mitteau
Bureau des Ressources Géniqes
16 rue Claude Bernard, F-75231 Paris cedex 05
France
Tel: +33 1 4 44 08 72 69
Fax: +33 1 4 44 08 72 63
Email: martine.mitteau@inapg.inra.fr

Dr Wieslaw Podyma
Plant Breeding and Acclimatization Institute
National Centre for Plant Genetic Resources
Radziszow, 05-870 Blonie
Poland
Tel: +48 22 7253611
Fax: +48 22 7254174
Email: w.podyma@ihar.edu.pl

Dr Bert Visser
Centre for Genetic Resources
Drouwendaalsesteeg 1, 6708 PB Wageningen
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 317 477184
Fax: +31 317 419934
Email: bert.visser@wur.nl

Dr Doug Evans
EEA-European Topic Centre on Nature Protection & Biodiversity
Topic Centre on Nature Protection & Biodiversity
Cuvier
Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle
57, rue Cuvier, F-75231 Paris cedex 05
France
Tel: +33 1 40 79 38 70
Fax: +33 1 40 79 38 67
Email: evans@rmnh.fr

Dr Samy Gajji
International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
Via dei Tre Denari 472/a
00057 Maccarese, Roma
Italy
Tel: +39 066118235
Fax: +39 0661979661
Email: s.gajji@cgiar.org

Prof Isaac Rashal
Institute of Biology
University of Latvia
Miera Str. 3, Salaspils, LV-2169
Latvia
Tel: +371 7945435
Fax: +371 7944906
Email: izaks@email.lubi.edu.lv

Mr Andrew Jarvis
IPGRI Regional Office for the Americas
Cali AA6713
Colombia
Tel: +57 2 445 0000 Ext. 3682
Fax: +57 2 445 0096
Email: a.jarvis@cgiar.org

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Above: Luigi Guarino, Plant Genetic Resources Advisor, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and Advisor to PGR Forum presents “Spatial analysis methodologies for PGR data and the development of conservation strategies for crop wild relatives” at the workshop, In Situ Data Management Methodologies, Prague, Czech Republic.