

A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR *EX SITU* CONSERVATION OF NATIVE PLANTS IN ITALY THROUGH RIBES, THE ITALIAN SEED BANK NETWORK

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International agreements dealing with biodiversity conservation, such as the Convention on biological diversity (CBD), the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC), the European Plant Conservation Strategy (EPCS), and Count down 2010 (CD2010), remark the need for strong *ex situ* actions to be undertaken by member countries as a complement to in situ initiatives. As member to said agreements, Italy has accepted, inter alia, to include 60% of threatened plant species in accessible *ex situ* collections by 2010 (target viii of GSPC).

The most authoritative list of threatened plant species in Italy includes 1020 units at specific and infraspecific level (Biondi et al. 2005): based on this estimate, 612 species must be put under *ex situ* conservation programmes in order to achieve target viii.

In December 2005, 18 Italian institutions involved in *ex situ* initiatives signed the statute of the Italian network of seed bank for the *ex situ* conservation of native plant species, formally established as a no-profit organization.

Among RIBES members are Botanic Gardens run by Universities or by local governments, Natural History Museums, National Parks and private enterprises, distributed on the whole national territory, including the main islands Sardinia and Sicily, offering a nation-wide coverage of the territory and a wide array of scientific and professional capacity encompassing systematic botany, plant ecology, plant physiology, collection management, long-term seed storage, etc.

Through its members, furthermore, RIBES has strong links with international projects dealing with *ex situ* conservation, such as ENSCONET (European Native Seed Conservation Network) and GENMEDOC (inter-regional network of mediterranean seed banks).

A quick survey of the members' holding showed that a) 36% of threatened species are already stored in seed banks, and b) the extra 24% needed to achieve target viii could be collected and properly stored by 2010. The results of the survey were presented to the Ministry of Environment, focal point for the CBD and related policies, with a proposal to assume formal responsibility for the achievement of target viii.

As a further commitment to a national strategy, RIBES is considering the opportunity to join WWF-Italia as *ex situ* partner for the conservation in the alpine and mediterranean ecoregion, with the specific task of fulfilling objective 1.6 of the Biodiversity Vision (Bulgarini et al., 2006).

REFERENCES

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