The contribution of botanic gardens to *ex situ* conservation through seed banking

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**Abstract**

Target 8 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation calls for ‘at least 75 per cent of threatened plant species in *ex situ* collections, preferably in the country of origin, and at least 20 per cent available for recovery and restoration programmes by 2020’.

Botanic gardens make a significant contribution to *ex situ* conservation of wild species with more than a third of plant species represented in botanic gardens collections. These collections are a combination of living collection and seed banked material. Seed banking can provide an efficient form of conservation for wild plant genetic diversity.

Information from Botanic Gardens Conservation International’s (BGCI) databases (GardenSearch, PlantSearch, ThreatSearch and GlobalTreeSearch) has been analysed as well as survey data to report on global, regional and national seed banking trends.

Information from BGCI’s databases indicates that there are at least 350 seed banking botanic gardens throughout the world, with 226 of these 350 being part of Botanic Gardens Conservation International’s (BGCI) Global Garden Network. There are at least 350 seed banking botanic gardens throughout the world, with 226 of these 350 being part of Botanic Gardens Conservation International’s (BGCI) Global Garden Network. The global network consists of a diverse group of botanic gardens and other botanical institutions that are contributing to the conservation of wild plant genetic resources through seed banking.

This study suggests that institutions are increasingly conserving plant species via seed banking. However the majority of species in the collections held at these institutions are not threatened with extinction. This disjunction between species that are threatened and those conserved in seed banks needs to be addressed. Data from BGCI’s databases can be used to enable prioritisation of threatened plant species for collection and conservation in seed banks. Further recommendations for botanic gardens involved in seed conservation are presented.

**Keywords:**
Seed banking, GSPC, *ex situ* conservation, Conservation assessments, Botanic gardens

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**1. Introduction**

The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) was adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002 and updated in 2010. The strategy provides the overall framework for plant conservation at the global and national level and consists of 16 output-oriented targets. Target 8 of the GSPC calls for ‘at least 75 per cent of threatened plant species in *ex situ* collections, preferably in the country of origin, and at least 20 per cent available for recovery and restoration programmes by 2020’ (CBD, 2010). A number of countries have developed national responses to the GSPC including Mexico, Brazil and China, while others are implementing them through their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and many mention the GSPC in their National Reports to the CBD.

Botanic gardens (including arboreta and associated research facilities) are one of the main institutions involved in *ex situ* conservation of wild species with 30% of known plant diversity accounting for 105,634 species held in the world’s botanic gardens (Mounce et al., 2017). These collections can consist of whole plants, seed or tissue cultures.

Collections conserved as seed are referred to as ‘seed banked’. Seed banking as a form of conservation has traditionally been used for crop species. However, over the past two decades an increasing number of botanic gardens and other botanical institutions are establishing seed banks for the purpose of wild plant conservation (Lupton et al., 2017; Gautier, 2004; Fahey, 2013).
Botanic garden seed banks are also involved in the conservation of wild species that are related to crop species. An example of this is the ‘Adapting Agriculture to Climate Change’ project (2011–2020) (Dempewolf et al., 2014). Through this project the Global Crop Diversity Trust (GCDT) is currently working with Royal Botanic Garden (RBG) Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank Partnership (MSBP) on securing the primary and secondary genepool members of 29 of the world’s major crops.

Seed banking involves collecting seeds from wild plants, drying and storing them in cool conditions. In order for seed collections to be of conservation value certain protocols must be adopted. The MSBP has developed seed conservation standards which represent current best practice for long term conservation of orthodox seeds (MSBP, 2015). The seed collections are then available and can be used as required for research, reintroduction, or restoration (Cochrane, 2007; Hardwick et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2016). Seed banks provide insurance against threats to plants in situ including habitat loss and degradation, introduction of alien species, over-exploitation, pollution, disease and climate change. Seed banking is increasingly being used as a method of conservation for a variety of reasons:

- Estimated to cost as little as 1% of in situ conservation
- Can represent a range of genetic diversity if harvested from a population of individuals
- Can be stored in a relatively small space
- Seeds of many species can survive for hundreds of years in conditions of low humidity and low temperature (Li and Prichard, 2009)

Many botanic gardens are contributing to the achievement of Target 8 through seed banking wild species (CBD, 2009) (Williams and Sharrock, 2010). A variety of targets have been developed by institutions and networks at the global, regional and national levels (Table 1). In mega diverse Brazil, a recent feasibility analysis concluded that by seed banking 1500 species between 2016 and 2020 Target 8 could be met and would be economically feasible (Teixido, 2017).

Monitoring progress towards Target 8 at a global scale has previously been problematic due to the limited information on which species are being conserved where, and which of these are represented in genebanks that are conserved local plant diversity at either the national or regional level.

Within the botanic garden community are some of the world’s largest and most sophisticated seed banks that work at global and national levels. For example Royal Botanic Gardens RBG Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank in the United Kingdom, the Germplasm Bank of Wild Species (GBOWS) in China and RBG Sydney’s PlantBank in Australia but, equally importantly, a wide network of small scale but very effective seed banks are conserving local plant diversity.

Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) has for the past 30 years been collating information from its network of botanic gardens. BGCI’s website (http://www.bgci.org) currently hosts four open access databases namely GardenSearch, PlantSearch, ThreatSearch and GlobalTreeSearch. These databases provide useful tools for plant conservation, aiding the effort of botanic gardens to measure progress, identify gaps and prioritise plants for conservation action. The data contained in these four databases have been analysed along with in-depth data gathered from BGCI’s network of botanic gardens related to seed banking activities.

Below, a review of the progress being made by the botanic garden community in achieving Target 8 of the GSPC and report on global, regional and national seed banking trends is presented. Recommendations for botanic gardens conserving plant species through seed banking programs are highlighted.

Table 1
Examples of global, regional and national level seed bank targets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target 2020 targets</th>
<th>Main implementer</th>
<th>Facilitators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Double the number of threatened species in seed banks</td>
<td>BGCI’s Global Seed Conservation Challenge (GSSC)</td>
<td>200 GSSC member botanic gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>400 IUCN red listed species in 2015</td>
<td>RBG Kew’s MSBP</td>
<td>MSB Partnership institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>25% of the world’s bankable species conserved</td>
<td>The Alpine Seed Conservation and Research Network</td>
<td>5 plant science institutions in 4 countries (France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria)</td>
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<td><strong>Regional – Multi country</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>500 vascular plant species</td>
<td>Korea National Arboretum</td>
<td>12 botanic garden and plant conservation institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Müller et al., 2017)</td>
<td>Australian Seed Bank Partnership</td>
<td>71 organisations including botanic gardens, nature reserves and universities</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>60% of Korea’s native plant species (Choi et al., 2017)</td>
<td>Germplasm Bank of Wild Species Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences</td>
<td>Conservation organisations, botanic gardens and seed banks</td>
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<tr>
<td>75% of Australia’s threatened species (excluding orchids)</td>
<td>The Dahlem seed bank at the Botanic Garden and Botanical Museum Berlin</td>
<td>Conservation organisations, botanic gardens and seed banks</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Australian Seed Bank Partnership, 2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td>75% threatened plant species Botanischer Garten &amp;</td>
<td>California Plant Rescue Project</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Regional – Sub country</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>100% of the California flora (Meyer, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td>75% of the regions threatened species conserved in seed banks or living collections New England Wildflower Society (2017)</td>
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دریافت فوری
متن کامل مقاله
امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
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