ITALY

The seeds of the future

by Enrico Genovesi









During an excursion to the Apuan Alps in Tuscany, botanists monitor native plant species to assess the state of their health in order to identify particular conservation needs and any possible threats.



THE GERMPLASM BANK THAT CONSERVES SEEDS

- "Germplasm" is the genetic resource of every plant species, which together make up biodiversity.
- The germplasm banks are "seed banks" that store the genetic makeup of endangered species.
- In Italy alone, out of a total of 7634 recorded plant species, 1020 are at risk.
- One of Italy's most important conservation centres is the University of Pisa's Seed Bank that stores thousands of seeds from hundreds of species.
- First dehydrated then stored in refrigerated cells (usually at -20°C) the seeds can survive for decades, safeguarding biodiversity into the future.





Samples of plant species native to Tuscany are collected during an excursion to the Apuan Alps. The samples will then be studied in the laboratory.





The germplasm bank is a "seed bank" that conserves genetic makeup and plant species at risk of extinction or threatened by climate change and environmental transformations caused by human activity and the agribusiness models of multinational corporations.

In Italy alone, out of a total of 7634 recorded species, 1020 are endangered. A network of 17 such banks is working to conserve the seeds of endangered spontaneous plants. These include the University of Pisa's Seed Bank that stores thousands of seeds of hundreds of species. Their identification, collection, analysis and conservation makes it possible to preserve biological varieties for decades, thereby safeguarding biodiversity.

This photojournalism project tells the stories of plant species in Tuscany, including endangered wild spontaneous plants, as well as the entire work process of the Pisa Seed Bank, from dehydration to packaging to conservation.





The study of some species can also involve germination and replanting experiments.







In the laboratory, some seed samples are ready to be studied and conserved.





Botanists prepare Agar in special capsules suitable for germinating seeds in the laboratory. Agar is a culture substrate made from freeze-dried algae that can simulate the conditions of a natural soil.





Studies are conducted on herbarium specimens of species collected in the same year.





Seed samples collected for study and conservation.

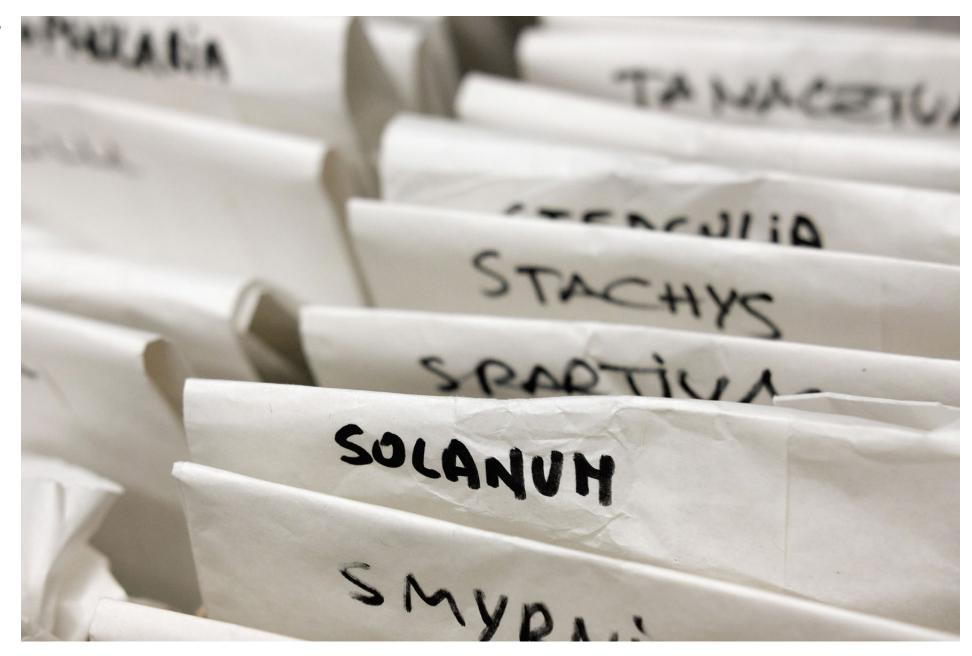




Plant species that have been collected and dried in the laboratory between newspaper sheets are ready for the seeds to be retrieved. The seeds samples will first be catalogued and then studied and conserved.







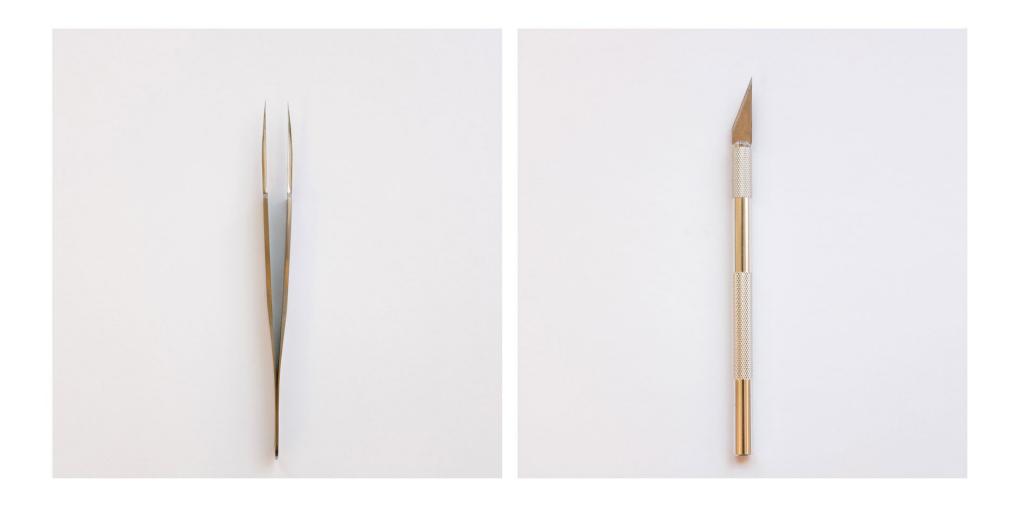
Seed samples collected for study and conservation.





One of the greenhouses at the Botanical Gardens in Pisa, where the Germplasm Bank is housed. The University Botanical Garden in Pisa is the oldest in Italy.





Tools in the laboratory.





During an excursion to the Apuan Alps in Tuscany, botanists monitor native plant species to assess the state of their health in order to identify particular conservation needs and any possible threats.





The temperature gauge on the refrigeration and storage cells where the seeds are stored and can remain potentially viable for decades.





In the Bank's laboratories studies are conducted on the germination process of native plant species at risk of extinction. Germination in the laboratory takes place in special Agar-based capsules. Agar is a culture substrate made from freeze-dried algae that simulates the conditions of natural soil.











Seed samples collected for study and conservation.





In the laboratory, the collected species are sieved in order to collect the seeds.

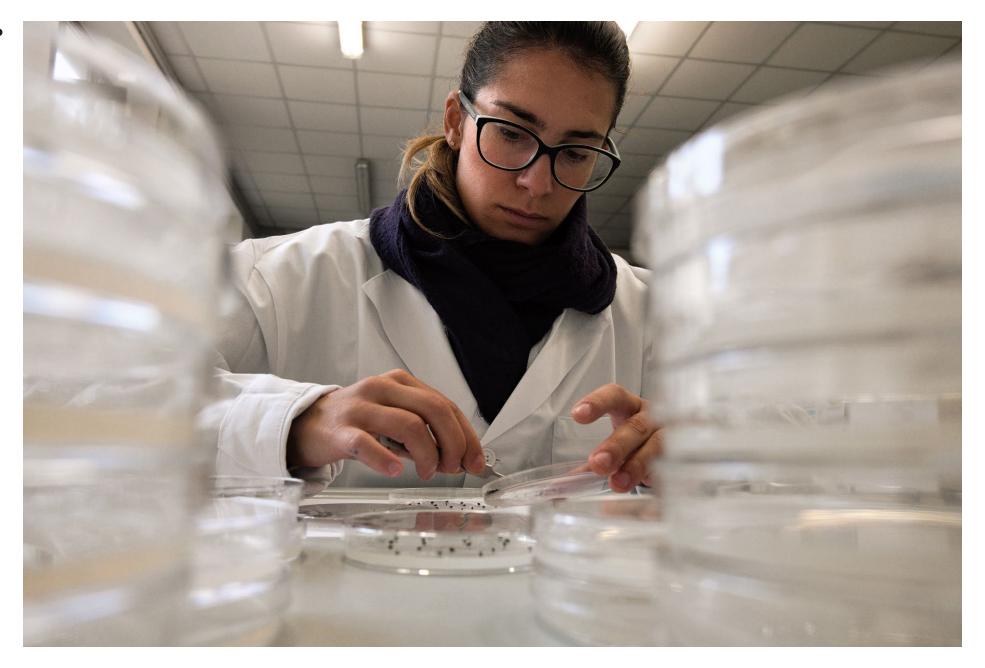






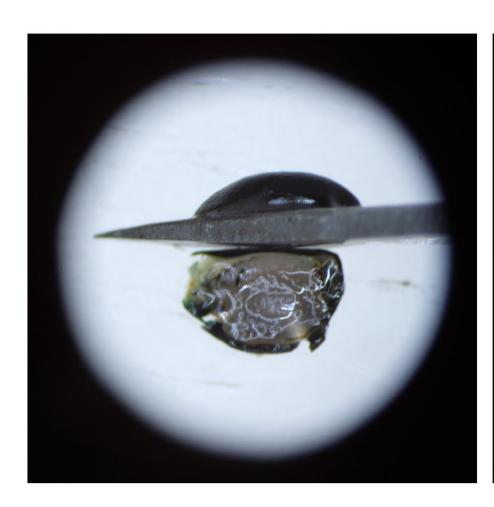
Studies are conducted on herbarium samples of species collected in the same year. This particular specimen is a sample of Aquilegia Bertolonii, a rare plant species native to the Apuan Alps.

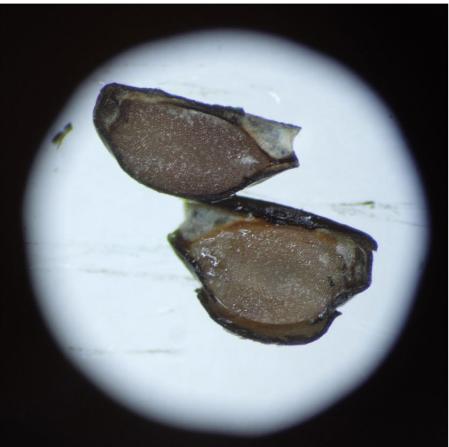




In the Bank's laboratories studies are conducted on the germination process of native plant species at risk of extinction. Germination in the laboratory takes place in special Agar-based capsules. Agar is a culture substrate made from freeze-dried algae that simulates the conditions of natural soil.







Seed samples are observed and studied to assess the state of their health.





Seed samples of some species native to the Tuscany region are packed in heat-sealed airtight containers for their conservation.





A quantity of selected seeds is ready to undergo germination tests in the laboratory. Treatments in different temperature conditions will allow the identification of those with the best germination response.

