

# Plant Genetic Resources Newsletter

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biodiversity and a downturn in the quality of life. This reviewer, unfortunately, has to agree with this assessment. There is something foreboding as well as frightening about the sprawling urban mess of millions of human inhabitants that some of the megacities have been reduced to, including the reviewer's home city, Bombay. Is it because of this, the high concentration of humans in restricted space, that one perceives the destruction of biodiversity signaling one's own painful extermination in a matter of time? For too long biodiversity destruction has been allowed to proceed for the sake of urban development and industrialization, such as the felling of virgin forests, shooting of tigers to extinction, the slaughter of whales, or the poaching of rhinos. In the past, nature has always cut down to size any single species which has tried to dominate the earth. Witness what happened to the dinosaurs! So far, the species *Homo sapiens* has multiplied its own numbers at the expense of other biota, and nature is sure to extract a heavy price for this arrogance at some time in the future.

In conclusion, this book is recommended to all those who would like to know more about the status of conservation, utilization and development of resources other than those of our major crops, which already have a fair share of books

devoted to their cause. There are some very good papers in the book. Maintaining their tradition of specialized publications, CAB International is to be thanked for bringing it out. However, because of the highly specialized nature of its contents the book is likely to attract a limited readership. The publishers, therefore, deserve our sincere thanks and appreciation of worthy efforts, albeit uncertain financial returns. There is one thing, though, which keeps niggling at the back of this reviewer's mind; a book on biodiversity should have included at least a few good photographs of samples of species in the text and a more colourful cover. There are some illustrations, diagrams and graphs in the book, but this reviewer reaffirms that some good, sharp pictures could have provided the book with considerable more punch and impacted directly one of the principal target readers: the skeptics and those who do not believe in the need for biodiversity conservation. After all, isn't a picture worth a thousand words?

**Ardeshir B. Damania**  
Genetic Resources Consultant  
Bombay, India

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### **Genetic resources: a practical guide to their conservation**

by Daniel Querol

1996. Hardback or paperback. ISBN 1 85649 204 4. \$55 or \$22.50. Zed Books, London/Third World Network, Penang, Malaysia

"This book – maybe disordered, somehow outdated, with hard to find references and examples from everywhere – reflects the problems and advantages of scientific work in the Third World, where we must think and act simultaneously in many fields if we want to remain human." (p. 2 of Preface).

Science, including technical manuals, always has (geo)political dimensions. This axiom is particularly timely in discussions about increasingly valued crop genetic resources. In this book, the point is often explored simplistically and didactically. Based on a Spanish-language manual first developed in Mexico in 1984, the book may be a useful introductory text for more conventional forms of *ex situ* conservation and for those with limited commands of English. The book continues in the revolutionary zeal of such legendary figures in the field as Erna Bennett but at a time when the science, politics and economics of crop genetic resources are becoming exponentially more complex.

The most problematic aspect of this book is the lack of a clear analytical framework for recognizing the diversity of social interests in, needs for and technical objectives in genetic conservation. A superficial discussion of the politics of international genetic resources and ownership questions further obscures basic technical concepts. The manual

progresses through chapters on documentation, storage and characterization but the discussions are very brief. The outline of *in situ* conservation is particularly superficial and out of date. There is no serious discussion of attempting to collect in a range of ecogeographical conditions.

Querol's goals are exemplary and the manual is an important contribution to the growing number of technical courses world-wide. But reductions of complex human goals and technical options, under the auspices of being introductory and accessible to non-scientists, run the risk of limiting the effectiveness of badly need conservation and discouraging students from exploring less obvious and symmetrical relationships between people, politics and genetic resources. And it is these perspectives that will be increasingly the key to solving new problems and making conservation more effective and equitable.

**Dr. G.B. Ingram**  
Landscape Ecology GIS Laboratory  
The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

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