

# A Botanical Garden for the protection and conservation of East Mediterranean plants



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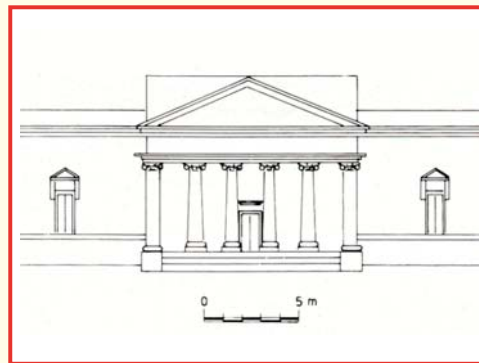


## ABSTRACT

In 1994, the European cross-border cooperation programme known as Interreg II was launched. The Puglia Regional authorities started a specific Italy-Albania programme, with action in several fields, including Measure 3.2, entitled "Study Centre for the protection and conservation of Mediterranean plants, with the establishment of a botanical garden". Many Italian and Albanian Institutions were involved in the project, and the Department of Biology of the University of Lecce set up a new Botanical Garden.

Since then, many other projects have been implemented, in order to consolidate the Garden and protect regional flora. The most recent project is "CERATONIA", implemented under European Programme Interreg III, which aims to complete the infrastructure of the Garden, open it up to the public and contribute to regional biodiversity conservation, as part of the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In the next few years the Botanical Garden of Lecce will join with other Mediterranean gardens and develop research and conservation projects and programmes at national and international level.



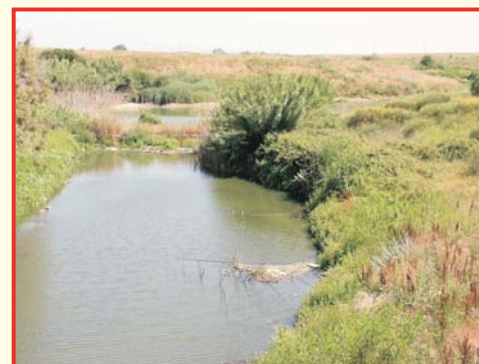
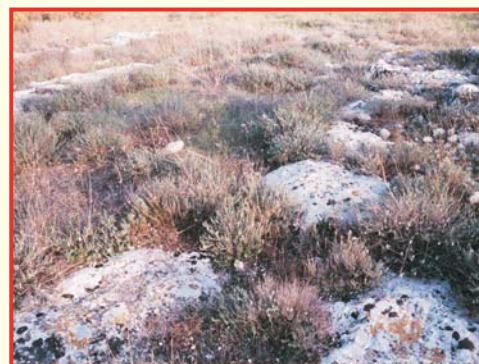
## ORIGINS

During the 19th century, Agriculture Societies were established in every province of the Kingdom of Naples, and a Botanical Garden was created in Lecce. Initially, the Botanical Garden was managed by P. Manni and O. G. Costa, but the most important developments took place under Gaetano Stella. He improved the layout and appearance of the Garden and, under his direction, it was enlarged to approximately 3.5 hectares; fine buildings were erected to shelter tropical plants during winter.

The existing collections were also enriched: the plant catalogue of the Garden, published in 1857, listed 570 taxa and more than 100 varieties of fruit trees. In the early 20th century, the Garden was destroyed and administrative offices were built in its place.

## THE GARDEN TODAY

The present Botanical Garden was founded in 1994, covering an area of about 2.5 hectares within the "Ecotekne" university campus. The area has an irregular shape and is delimited by a metal fence and exotic species. The Garden contains several collections of ornamental hydrophytes, shade-houses for sciophilous and bryophyte species, and a rock-garden with cactuses and rocky plants. Currently, the main activity of the Garden is managing live collections of structural species – those which provide habitats for Salento flora – and the propagation of Mediterranean scrub plants for environmental restoration. There are various collections in progress, used for education and ecological studies, and species are propagated for subsequent reintroduction into natural habitats and *ex situ* conservation of rare, critical and endangered entities.



## STUDY CENTRE FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN FLORA

### C.I.P. INTERREG II

Interreg II is a European Union programme which aims to enhance cooperation between two neighbouring regions. The Puglia Region, together with Albania, started a specific programme, based on *ex situ* conservation of Mediterranean species and field surveys of natural habitats and threatened species, involving the establishment of a permanent Study Centre.

The University of the Salento played an important role in this project. The activities included: collecting and propagation of rare and/or threatened species and agricultural genetic resources, acquisition of the site of the new Garden, construction of facilities, studies of plant vulnerability, habitat surveys, accessioning of collected plants, dissemination of collected data.



## CROSS-BORDER ORGANISATION FOR CONSERVATION OF ENDEMIC RARITIES

### C.I.P. INTERREG III

The project entails the creation of a cross-border organisation whose purpose is the conservation of rare and endemic species.

This organisation will initially include Italy and Albania, but will subsequently be extended to other eastern Mediterranean countries. The new Botanical complex Garden will be completed as part of the "CERATONIA" project (EU programme Interreg III).

The planned new layout of the garden will include three main areas: near the entrance is the most obviously "structured", which will be of an ornamental character; another area reproduces agricultural and semi-natural landscapes; the third area, furthest from the entrance, will be wild and will be a nature reserve. A path system will be set up and signboards installed for visitors. Teaching activities will begin when the Garden's infrastructure is complete.

Inside the new Garden a phytoremediation system with three basins has been set up which will allow wastewaters to be used for irrigation.

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