

Financial crisis hits world's largest seed bank

By [Global Research](#)

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The Millennium Seed Bank in Britain – a sort of Noah's Ark for plants – is under threat due to a lack of funding caused by the credit crunch.

The world's largest plant conservation project opened in 2000 and was meant to gather seeds from every flowering plant on the planet and keep them stored for future generations.

"We are, if you like, the real world bank," said Paul Smith, Head of the Millennium Seed Bank. "Countries choose to store their seeds with us. So the seed which is sitting in the vault from South Africa doesn't belong to us – just like in your high street bank – it belongs to the government of South Africa, and they can choose how that seed is used. Maybe they want a long-term account; maybe they want a current account."

The bank already hosts 10 per cent of the world's plant species. But just as it is counting its success, the global financial crisis has arrived to threaten the bank's future.

Managers have been unable to secure the next 100 million pounds needed to reach its 2020 target of ensuring safe storage for a quarter of the world's total flowering plant species.

Worried botanists have put together a team to lobby government departments, funding bodies and wealthy people.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't lose sleep over it because of course we're in unknown territory when it comes to the financial situation," Smith said. "We don't know if this recession is going to get worse, we don't know how that will impact on the general public, as well as trust funds and potential sources of income for this project."

Dried, sorted and stored the seeds await the day that scientists hope will never come – extinction of their species. At least six plant species that are kept here are already believed to have died out.

Three vanished after plant experts collected seeds for the seed bank, the other three had already died out by 2000 but a handful of seeds were saved.

"It's vital to conserve the species that we have before they disappear," Seed Conservation Assistant Angie Gardener said.

The temperature at the sanctuary of the Millennium Seed Bank is minus 20 degrees Celsius. The seeds need to be kept cold in order to preserve them.

But the cooling of the global economy is threatening to freeze the whole project. All it takes is 2,000 pounds to save one seed, and with at least four species of plants vanishing every

year, conservationists believe this is an excellent value.

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