Longevity of the diaspore bank of the episodic moss *Physcomitrium eurystomum* Sendtn.

Des A. Callaghan^a, Heinjo During^b, Rafael Medina^c and Handong Yang^d

^aBryophyte Surveys Ltd, Almondsbury, UK; ^bUtrecht University, Utrecht, The Netherlands, ^cComplutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain; ^dEnvironmental Change Research Centre, University College London, London, UK.

Correspondence to: Des Callaghan, Bryophyte Surveys Ltd, 10 The Scop, Almondsbury, BS32 4DU, UK. E-mail: des.callaghan@outlook.com

Abstract

Introduction: *Physcomitrium eurystomum* is rare in Europe and threatened with extinction. This study investigates the longevity of its diaspore bank at Langmere, Norfolk, UK.

Methods:

Key results and conclusions:

Keywords: Funariaceae, lead-210, DNA barcoding, sediment core, germination trial.

Introduction

[Introductory paragraph on diaspore banks to add]

Physcomitrium eurystomum Sendtn. has a broad geographic range, including parts of Africa, Asia, Australasia and Europe. Whilst it is widespread in Europe, it is generally rare and is undergoing a decline, and as such it is included as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of bryophytes (Hodgetts et al. 2019). It is also rare and undergoing a decline in Britain, and is categorised as 'Endangered' on the national IUCN Red List (Callaghan submitted), being confined to SE England, where only five sites were found to be occupied during a recent national survey (Callaghan et al. 2020). The diaspore bank appears to be a fundamental aspect of the ecology of this species, but is virtually unstudied. It is an episodic species, typically occupying the summer draw-down zone of exposed mud around freshwater wetlands, completing its full life-cycle rapidly during the summer and autumn period, before water levels rise and inundate its habitat for the winter period. The aim of this study is to investigate the diaspore bank of *P. eurystomum*, in its potential longevity in natural habitat.

Methods

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Study site

Langmere (52°27'40"N, 0°48'19"E), Norfolk, UK, comprises a natural freshwater wetland of three small basins, with water supplied to them by rainfall and from a groundwater aquifer located in the underlying chalk. In response to seasonal changes in the aquifer, the water level of each basin fluctuates substantially. The periodic inundation zone of the basins support a number of rare and unusual plants, including *P. eurystomum*. The moss was discovered here, new for Britain, in 1961 by B.F.T. Ducker (Ducker and Warburg 1961). The site is owned and managed as a nature reserve by Norfolk Wildlife Trust and became legally protected for its nature conservation in interest in 1954, via its inclusion within the East Wretham Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Sampling of sediment layers

In October 2019, when all three basins of Langmere were dry, three soil cores immediately adjacent to each other were extracted from the centre of the main basin, using an Eijkelcamp 04.17.01.C split tube sampler (Eijkelcamp, Giesbeek, The Netherlands). Each contained a continuous and undisturbed soil core of 5 cm diameter, ranging from the soil surface to a depth of 40 cm. At the time of extraction from the ground, each core was dry throughout its length. On the following day, each core was split into 40 soil samples, each sample comprising a 1 cm depth sediment layer of 19.6 cm³. For one of the cores, 10 cm³ of soil was extracted from each sample and was sent to University College London (UCL) for dating (see below). All remaining samples were sent to the University of Utrecht for germination trials (see below).

Dating of sediment layers

Dating of sediment layers was undertaken at the Environmental Radiometric Facility at UCL by an analysis of radionuclides, including Americium-241 (²⁴¹Am; half-life = 470 yr), Cesium-137 (¹³⁷Cs; half-life = 30 yr), Lead-210 (²¹⁰Pb; half-life = 22.3 yr) and Radium-226 (²²⁶Ra; half-life = 1600 yr). Analysis was by direct gamma assay, using an ORTEC HPGe GWL series well-type coaxial low background intrinsic germanium detector. Lead-210 was determined via its gamma emissions at 46.5keV, and ²²⁶Ra by the 295keV and 352keV gamma rays emitted by its daughter isotope ²¹⁴Pb following three weeks of storage in sealed containers to allow radioactive equilibration. Cesium-137 and ²⁴¹Am were measured by their emissions at 662keV and 59.5keV, respectively (Appleby et al. 1986). The absolute efficiencies of the detector were determined using calibrated sources and sediment samples of known activity. Corrections were made for the effect of self-absorption of low energy gamma rays within the sample (Appleby et al. 1992).

Germination from sediment layers

Diaspore germination trials were undertaken in a growth chamber at Utrecht University (The Netherlands). Each soil sample was spread over sterilised sand in 8 x 8 cm transparent plastic containers with lids, and sprayed with demineralized water, as necessary, to maintain a moist soil surface. Light was provided at 200 μ mol m⁻² s⁻¹ (16 h light, 8 h darkness) and temperature kept at 20-22°C. The trial lasted for 628 days (29 November 2019 – 18 August 2021). Vascular plants were removed from germination boxes as they arose, to avoid competition.

DNA barcoding

Physcomitrium eurystomum can only be identified with certainty when mature sporophytes are present. To help confirm the identity of plants that did not produce sporophytes during the growth trial, DNA barcoding of samples was undertaken, and the results compared with voucher specimens of *P. eurystomum* and from other Funariaceae previously sequenced.. DNA was extracted with the commercial kit NucleoSpin Plant II Mini (Macherey-Nagel, Düren, Germany) following the instructions provided by the manufacturer (PL1 as lysis buffer). Considering the hybrid origin of the species, different *loci* were targeted in both the plastid and nuclear genomes by PCR. Within the plastid genome, two *loci* were targeted: *psbA-trnH* and *trnL-F*, while within the nuclear compartment, we sequenced two flanking regions associated to the genes 4780 and 7379 used in the Targeted Enrichment capture approach described in Medina et al. (2019). The primers used for the nuclear *loci* were newly designed by Matt Johnson and Nikisha Patel: 4780F = ATGGACGGCGCACTTGTTA; 4780R = CTTGTAACGTCGCTTCAGATTTT; 7379F = TCACGTTGGACCATGTGACG; and 7379R = CGTTCAAACGCCTCTCATTG.

Polymerase Chain Reactions (PCRs) were conducted in final volumes of 50 µL, with 0.15 µL of GoTaq DNA polymerase (Promega, Madison WI, USA), 1 µL of 10 µM dNTP mix, 1 µL of each primer (10 µM) and 1 µL of DNA extract. The thermal cycler was programmed with a hot start denaturation step of 5 min at 94°C, followed by 30 cycles of denaturation (1 min, 94°C), annealing (1 min, 50°C) and extension (1 min, 70°C), ended by a final extension step of 10 min. Amplification products were visualized in 1% agarose gels, cleaned used the ExoSAP-IT protocol (USB-Affymetrix, Cleveland OH, USA), and sent for sequencing to Macrogen through the EZ-sequencing service. Contigs were generated using Geneious (Kearse et al. 2012; http://www.geneious.com), keeping track of all double peaks shown in both reads of each sequence of the nuclear *loci* using the standard IUPAC ambiguous

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nucleotide letters in the consensus sequence, and then compared visually on PhyDe (Müller et al. 2006; <u>http://www.phyde.de</u>).

Results

Dating of sediment layers

Total ²¹⁰Pb activity reaches equilibrium depth with supported ²¹⁰Pb activity at a depth of ca. 12 cm (Table 1; Figure 1a). Unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activities, calculated by subtracting ²²⁶Ra activity (as supported ²¹⁰Pb) from total ²¹⁰Pb activity, decline overall irregularly with depth (Table 1; Figure 1b). The maximum unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activity is beneath the surface sediments, suggesting an increase in sedimentation rates in recent years. Unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activities from 1.5 to 3.5 cm decline more or less exponentially with depth, implying relatively stable sedimentation rates. A dip in unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activity at 5.5 cm (Table 1) suggests an increased sedimentation rate at that depth. From 6.5 to 11.5 cm unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activities show little net decline with depth, suggesting an increase trend in sedimentation rates from deep to shallow sediments.

The ¹³⁷Cs activity versus depth profile (Figure 1c; Table 2) shows similar values between 3.5 and 6.5 cm and a peak between 1.5 and 2.5 cm, which might be derived from the fallout of the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons with the maximum level in 1963 and the 1986 Chernobyl accident fallout, respectively. Low ²⁴¹Am activities were detected in disconnected samples, which are not sufficient for dating (Table 2).

Use of the CIC (constant initial concentration) model was precluded by the non-monotonic variation in unsupported ²¹⁰Pb activities. ²¹⁰Pb chronologies were calculated using the CRS (constant rate of ²¹⁰Pb supply) dating model (Appleby 2001). The CRS model places 1963 and 1986 between 4.5 and 5.5 cm and between 1.5 and 2.5 cm, respectively, suggesting that Langmere was affected by the 1986 fallout from the Chernobyl accident. The CRS dating model suggests that since the 1890s, sedimentation rates increased significantly during the 1930s and 1950s, but have otherwise remained relatively stable (Figure 2; Table 1).

DNA barcoding

[Rafa to add text]

Germination from sediment layers

Frequent and rapid germination of *P. eurystomum* occurred in many of the soil samples, and subsequent production of sporophytes occurred commonly (Figure 3). Figure 4 shows the germination of shoots of the species from the different sediment layers of the three soil cores. Results indicate that viable spores of *P. eurystomum* at Langmere are highly concentrated in the upper 20 cm of soil, but also occur lower down, including at the maximum depth sampled (i.e. 39-40 cm). When considering the sediment layer at 10-11 cm depth is $121 (\pm 26)$ years old, the results suggest that spores of *P. eurystomum* retain high viability for over a century, and that some spores may remain viable for several centuries.

Discussion

[To be completed]

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following for various kind help and support: John Birks (University of Bergen), Emily Dimsey (Norfolk Wildlife Trust), Ash Murray (Norfolk Wildlife Trust), Jonathan Preston (Norfolk Wildlife Trust) and Neil Rose (University College London).

Funding

Funding for the sediment dating was provided by The British Bryological Society.

Notes on contributors

Des Callaghan is a consultant bryologist operating under Bryophyte Surveys Ltd, working throughout Britain and further afield. His research is focused on threatened species, taxonomy and conservation ecology.

Heinjo During is a retired plant ecologist and bryologist of the Ecology and Biodiversity Group of Utrecht University.

Rafael Medina is assistant professor in the Department of Biology of Augustana College (Illinois, USA). His main research interest is bryophyte systematics.

Handong Yang is a Principal Research Fellow working at University College London. His main research interest is environmental pollution and sediment dating....

ORCID

Des A. Callaghan http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0415-1493

Rafael Medina https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5629-1503

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Table 1. ²¹⁰ Pb	concentrations	and chronology in	the sediment of	core taken in	October 2019 from	n Langmere,	Norfolk.	Values are show	vn to three
significant figu	ures.								

Sample	Depth	Dry mass	Total ²¹⁰ Pb	Supported	Unsupported	Cumulative	Chronology		Sedimentation rate			
	(cm)	(g cm⁻²)	(Bq Kg⁻¹) (SE)	²¹⁰ Pb (Bq Kg ⁻¹) (SE)	²¹⁰ Pb (Bq Kg⁻¹) (SE)	unsupported ²¹⁰ Pb (Bq Kg ⁻¹) (SE)	Date (AD)	Age (yr) (SE)	g cm ⁻² yr ⁻¹	cm yr ⁻¹	± %	
A01	0–1	0.489	177 (15.6)	23.4 (3.85)	154 (16.1)	880 (71.2)	2013	6 (3)	0.090	0.093	10.3	
A02	1–2	1.46	193 (19.6)	28.4 (4.76)	165 (20.1)	2430 (182)	1999	20 (3)	0.0548	0.054	11.8	
A03	2–3	2.50	116 (15.2)	28.1 (3.97)	87.4 (15.7)	3700 (275)	1981	38 (4)	0.0581	0.051	23.5	
A04	3–4	3.73	57.5 (5.92)	36.5 (1.82)	20.9 (6.19)	4270 (321)	1967	52 (6)	0.158	0.125	36.2	
A05	4–5	5.04	40.9 (6.46)	31.0 (1.98)	9.88 (6.76)	4460 (331)	1961	58 (7)	0.274	0.21	72.1	
A06	5–6	6.34	38.4 (4.76)	36.9 (1.53)	1.46 (5.00)	4520 (341)	1957	62 (7)	0.356	0.276	93.3	
A07	6–7	7.62	51.8 (6.42)	36.5 (1.98)	15.3 (6.72)	4600 (349)	1955	64 (8)	0.150	0.116	49.7	
A08	7–8	8.92	51.6 (5.85)	37.8 (1.82)	13.8 (6.13)	4790 (359)	1946	73 (9)	0.124	0.095	52.7	
A09	8–9	10.2	40.2 (5.04)	34.1 (1.54)	6.18 (5.27)	4910 (367)	1938	81 (11)	0.213	0.165	91.1	
A10	9–10	11.5	46.0 (6.23)	31.1 (1.55)	14.9 (6.42)	5040 (374)	1926	93 (13)	0.0621	0.048	58.3	
A11	10–11	12.8	39.6 (4.75)	27.4 (1.44)	12.2 (4.96)	5210 (383)	1898	121 (26)	0.0316	0.025	64.6	
A12	11–12	14.0	46.8 (5.41)	31.2 (1.46)	15.6 (5.60)	5380 (388)						
A13	12–13	15.3	18.9 (9.37)	29.3 (1.41)	-10.4 (9.48)							

Sample	Depth (cm)	¹³⁷ Cs (Bq Kg ⁻¹) (SE)	²⁴¹ Am (Bq Kg ⁻¹) (SE)
A01	0–1	45.0 (3.56)	0
A02	1–2	50.3 (4.37)	3.24 (1.64)
A03	2–3	50.8 (3.86)	0
A04	3–4	24.8 (1.39)	0
A05	4–5	22.6 (1.54)	0
A06	5–6	24.8 (1.15)	0
A07	6–7	25.2 (1.59)	0
A08	7–8	21.3 (1.32)	1.24 (0.61)
A09	8–9	18.0 (1.05)	0
A10	9–10	15.9 (1.01)	0
A11	10–11	12.9 (0.93)	0
A12	11–12	12.4 (0.90)	0
A13	12–13	9.45 (0.83)	0

Table 2. Artificial fallout radionuclide concentrations in the sediment core taken in October 2019 from Langmere, Norfolk. Values are shown to three significant figures.

Figure captions

Figure 1. Fallout radionuclide concentrations in sediment core taken from Langmere, Norfolk, showing (a) total ²¹⁰Pb, (b) unsupported ²¹⁰Pb, and (c) ¹³⁷Cs and ²⁴¹Am concentrations versus depth.

Figure 2. Radiometric chronology of sediment core taken from Langmere, Norfolk, showing the CRS model ²¹⁰Pb dates and sedimentation rates. The solid line indicates ages and the dashed line shows sedimentation rates.

Figure 3. Shoots and sporophytes of *Physcomitrium eurystomum* arising from the germination trial of one of the soil samples.

Figure 4. Germination of shoots of *Physcomitrium eurystomum* from different sediment layers of three soil cores taken from Langmere, Norfolk. Abundance is categorised as (1) <10 shoots, (2) 10–100 shoots and (3) >100 shoots.



