

## Genetic diversity of *Serianthes nelsonii* on Guam and Rota\*

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**Abstract**— *Serianthes nelsonii* Merr. is an endemic leguminous tree found in limestone forests of Guam and Rota in the Mariana Islands. It is an endangered species. Plant recovery efforts have focused on plant surveys, phenological studies, seed propagation, and field out-plantings. This study was conducted to understand the genetic structure of *S. nelsonii* populations on Guam and Rota for the conservation program utilizing genetically unique germplasm of the species. Samples were obtained from wild Rota trees, outplanted Rota trees, the lone Guam *S. nelsonii* mother tree and its seedlings. A genome-wide multiplexed inter-simple sequence repeat (ISSR) genotyping by sequencing (MIG-seq) analysis was used for single-nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) detection. The STRUCTURE analysis showed a clear genetic differentiation between plants from the two islands, between Rota wild trees and Rota out-planted tree populations, and among individuals from Rota out-planted trees. Lower genetic diversity in the Guam seedlings population was observed, which might have been due to the selfing of the Guam mother tree. This study provides the first genetic information on *S. nelsonii* in Guam and Rota. *In-situ* protection and *ex-situ* establishment of *S. nelsonii* populations should consider genetic data in developing a conservative management plan.

## Introduction

*Serianthes nelsonii* Merr. (Family: Fabaceae) is one of the largest endemic leguminous trees found on Guam and Rota in the Mariana Islands. Taxonomically, *S. nelsonii* is placed in the subfamily Mimosoideae, tribe Ingeae (Frosberg, 1960). The Legume Phylogeny Working Group (LPWG) recently classified the genus *Serianthes* in Fabaceae- Caesalpinioideae-mimosoid clade (2017). The record of the chromosome number of *Serianthes* was shown for *S. kanehirae* as  $2n=26$ .

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However, no chromosome number and ploidy level records are recorded for *S. nelsonii* (Goldblatt, 1981). Tree heights of over 20 m and trunk diameters of almost 2 m have been reported in Guam and Rota, with a record height of up to 36 m and diameters of nearly 2 m (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994). In Guam, *S. nelsonii* is called 'hâyun lågu,' meaning 'foreign tree' (Kanehira 1933) or 'tree from the north' (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994). In Rota, *S. nelsonii* is called 'tronkon guafi,' (Moore, 1981), meaning a fire tree, and very seldomly 'tronkon fia' (E. Hocog, personal communication).

Guam lies between 13.2°N and 13.7°N and between 144.6°E and 145.0°E and has an area of 549 km<sup>2</sup>, while Rota has an area of 85 km<sup>2</sup> and lies between 14.2°N/145.2°E, about 50 km northeast of Guam. *S. nelsonii* was placed on the endangered species list on March 1987 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is currently designated as a critically endangered plant by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1987; Wiles et al. 1996; Wiles & Williams 2017). Currently, *S. nelsonii* is found in a restricted habitat in primary limestone forest, with a few individuals also present in secondary forest. *Serianthes nelsonii* is believed to be a primarily self-pollinated plant. Possible means of cross-pollination and seed dispersal are unknown, although Marianas fruit bats, *Pteropus mariannus* Desmarest, occasionally feed on flowers of *S. nelsonii* and may assist in pollination. Commonly poor seed dispersal under natural conditions results in wild seedlings only under mother tree crowns (Wiles et al. 1996).

In Guam, six mature trees were recorded in the wild in the early 1970s, but only one adult tree is known to survive in 2019. Likewise, the number of wild trees of the Rota population has decreased from 121 in 1992 (Wiles et al. 1996) to 33 in 2014 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2016). A recovery plan for *S. nelsonii* was published in 1994. Among the requirements to down-list the species from “endangered” to “threatened” status is the goal to have two populations with 500 mature individuals on each island (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994). Some studies and efforts to prevent herbivore damage and determine the causes of low survival rates of seedlings and juveniles have been performed without genetic studies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2016; Marler & Cascasan 2015; Marler & Musser 2015). There are many examples of failed or ineffective conservation programs implemented without obtaining genetic information (Kaneko et al. 2013). Although Marler et al. (2015) suggested sudden seedling mortality might be caused by inbreeding depression, there was no genetic evidence of inbreeding depression in their report. For the plant recovery plan of *S. nelsonii*, genetic information is essential (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1994).

There are few genetic analysis methodologies available for species with minimal populations and population sizes similar to *S. nelsonii*. To overcome this problem, we conducted genome-wide single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) detection using “multiplexed inter-simple sequence repeat (ISSR) genotyping by sequencing” (MIG-seq) (Suyama & Matsuki 2015). This method is a microsatellite-associated DNA sequencing technique. ISSRs are amplified by multiplex polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using MIG-seq primers designed to anneal to the 3' ends of repetitive motifs, including two bases of anchor sequences. Suyama & Matsuki (2015) have shown that the MIG-seq method is applicable for low-quality DNA and when there are fewer markers in ecological and conservation genetic studies, including genetic differentiation among individual plants and populations. For example, Kusuma (2019) successfully applied the MIG-seq method for seedling selection for *ex situ* conservation of critically endangered tree species, *Vatica bantamensis* (Hassk.) Benth & Hook. ex Miq. in Indonesia. Similarly, Sakaguchi et al. (2020) used the MIG-seq method to reveal the phylogenetic origin of *Magnolia pseudokobus*, extinct in the wild, as being conspecific with *M. kobus* and suggested to name *M. kobus* f. *pseudokobus*, which was generated by a spontaneous mutation. MIG-seq was also used successfully to obtain historical genetic information from museum collections having deteriorated DNA materials (Strijk et al., 2020; Eguchi et al., 2020).

The present study was conducted to assess the genetic similarity or dissimilarity of *S. nelsonii* populations on Guam and Rota using the MIG-seq method.

## Materials and Methods

### SAMPLE COLLECTION

Leaves of *S. nelsonii* were sampled from both Guam and Rota for DNA extraction (Fig. 1). In Guam, samples were collected from the one known remaining mature tree (labeled as 'Guam mother tree') and 11 seedlings within 30 m of the mother tree (labeled as 'Guam seedlings') in Ritidian (13.65°N/144.86°E) in December 2016 (Fig. 1A). The Guam mother tree seedlings originated from the tree given that broader natural seed dispersal doesn't occur. The Guam mother tree was treated as one population in our genetic analysis. Leaf samples were collected in Rota in January 2017 (Fig. 1B). There were nine wild mature plants (labeled as 'Rota wild trees'), including one tree in I Chego/Saligai, two trees in Guayaungan/Sisiao, and six trees in Ca'an.

Additionally, leaf samples of 11 out-planted trees in Rota were collected from eight trees at Talo and three trees at As Igua (labeled as 'Rota out-planted trees'). Parents of 'Rota out-planted trees' were located at either the Guayaungan area or Isang near private property near the Guayaungan area (J. Manglona, unpublished data). Table 1 summarizes sampling locations of *S. nelsonii* population on Guam and Rota. The phenological stage of each out-planted tree in Rota is classified as either mature or immature. For the genetic analysis, collected leaves from individual trees at each site were placed in a labeled small paper bag. All paper bags were placed in a sealed plastic bag with silica gel before DNA extraction.

### DNA EXTRACTION AND ANALYSIS

According to the manufacturer's protocol, total DNA was extracted from silica-gel-dried leaf samples using the QIAGEN DNeasy Plant Mini kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany). Multiplexed inter-simple sequence repeat (ISSR) genotyping by sequencing (MIG-seq) was used for single-nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) detection according to the procedure by Suyama & Matsuki (2015). Approximately 12.5 pM of the library was used for sequencing on an Illumina MiSeq Sequencer (Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA), using a MiSeq Reagent Kit v3 (150 cycles, Illumina). Low-quality reads and primer sequence reads were removed from the raw sequencing data using the FASTX toolkit ([http://hanno.nlab.cshl.edu/fastx\\_toolkit/](http://hanno.nlab.cshl.edu/fastx_toolkit/)) and TagDust (Lassmann et al. 2009). All remaining reads were trimmed to 63 bases. Before the *de novo* assay, samples with fewer than 50,000 reads were removed, and 32 samples were used for SNP detection. SNPs were called using Stacks1.48 (Catchen et al. 2013). The minimum depth option for creating a stack was set to 3 (-m 3), and default settings for other options were used. Four parameters of Populations in Stacks were used to select SNPs for population analysis. The parameters were set for minimum percentage of samples in a population (-r 0.75), minimum number of population in a locus (-p 1), minimum minor allele frequency (-min\_maf 0.04), and maximum observed heterozygosity (-max\_obs\_het 0.6).

The  $F_{IS}$  value for each SNP within each population was calculated using Populations. SNPs with  $F_{IS}$  values less than -0.75 or more than 0.75 were removed to exclude SNPs that might be located on the organelle genome and rich in null alleles. Pairwise  $R^2$  values for each SNP pair were calculated by Hplovview 4.1 (Barrett et al. 2005), and if a value was higher than 0.5, an SNP locus with a lower genotyping rate was removed to exclude linkage between SNPs. The number of polymorphic SNPs and the genetic diversity indices, observed heterozygosity ( $H_O$ ), expected heterozygosity ( $H_E$ ), and fixation index ( $F_{IS}$ ) were also calculated using Populations in Stacks.

Population genetic structure was estimated by admixture analysis using the software Structure 2.3.4. (Pritchard et al. 2000). The allele frequency correlation and ancestry admixture models were used on the complete set of data containing all four populations. Under this model, it is assumed that the  $K$  populations represented in our sample have each undergone independent drift away from the hypothetical "ancestral" population. The estimated  $F$  values were also calculated. For all analyses, 100,000 burn-in steps and 100,000 replicates were used with at least ten replicates for values of  $K$

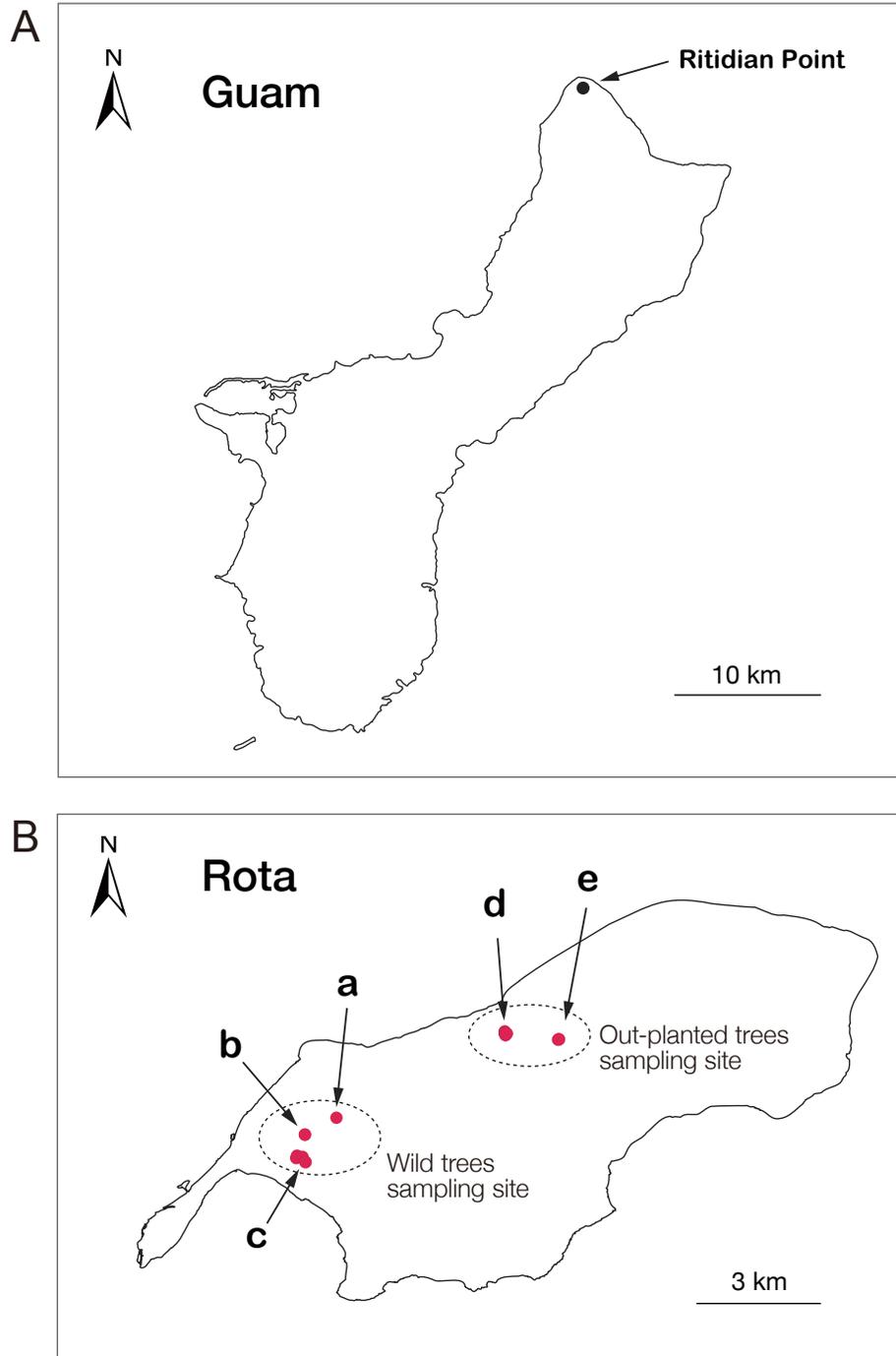


Figure 1. Sampling sites for *Serianthes nelsonii* in this study. A. Sampling site of the *S. nelsonii* mother tree and seedlings in Ritidian, Guam. Seedlings were found under the mother plant. B. Sampling sites of *S. nelsonii* on Rota indicating three mature plant sites (a. I Chego/Saligai; b. Guayaungan/Sisiao; and c. Ca'an) and two out-planting sites (d. Talo and e. As Igua).

Table 1. Location of *Serianthes nelsonii* population of the genetic study in Guam and Rota.

Population	Location	Plant No.	Latitude	Longitude	Elevation (m)
<b><u>Guam:</u></b>					
Mother tree	Ritidian Point	Guam 01	13.649°N	144.863°E	155
Seedlings	Ritidian Point	Guam 02-12	13.649°N	144.863°E	155
<b><u>Rota:</u></b>					
Wild trees	a. I Chego/Saligai	Rota 12	14.150°N	145.165°E	296
		Rota 13	14.146°N	145.160°E	339
	b. Guayaungan/Sisiao	Rota 14	14.146°N	145.160°E	339
		Rota 15	14.143°N	145.158°E	289
	c. Ca'an	Rota 16	14.143°N	145.158°E	287
		Rota 17	14.143°N	145.158°E	285
		Rota 18	14.143°N	145.159°E	295
		Rota 19	14.142°N	145.160°E	281
		Rota 20	14.142°N	145.160°E	277
		Out-planted	d. Talo	Rota 05 M <sup>z</sup>	14.170°N
Rota 07 M	14.170°N			145.206°E	114
Rota 01 I	14.170°N			145.206°E	110
Rota 02 I	14.170°N			145.206°E	111
Rota 03 I	14.170°N			145.206°E	112
Rota 04 I	14.170°N			145.206°E	113
Rota 06 I	14.170°N			145.206°E	114
Rota 08 I	14.170°N			145.207°E	111
e. As Igua	Rota 09 M		14.169°N	145.216°E	166
	Rota 10 M		14.169°N	145.217°E	165
	Rota 11 M		14.169°N	145.217°E	166

<sup>z</sup> Phenological stage of out-planted trees: M=mature, I=immature.

ranging from 1 to 8, where  $K$  is the number of genotypic groups. The optimal  $K$  was chosen using the delta $K$  method (Evanno et al. 2005) with Structure Harvester (Earl & vonHoldt, 2012). “STRUCTURE” is the robust clustering method in population genetics, especially for mixed-ploidy populations (Stift et al., 2019). It was the best method for *S. nelsonii* lacking any information on ploidy level.

## Results

### GENETIC DIVERSITY

The total and the average number of reads obtained from 32 individuals were 3,272,264 and 102,258, respectively. Table 2 presents the results of the genetic study of two populations of *S. nelsonii* in Guam and two populations from Rota. The total of 178 SNPs was detected for all four populations after SNP selections. The number of polymorphic SNPs ( $S$ ) within populations ranged from 40 to 67 in Guam and 130 to 148 in Rota (Table 2).

The observed ( $H_O$ ) and the expected ( $H_E$ ) heterozygosity of the “Rota wild trees” (RWT) population were higher than those of the “Guam seedlings” (GST) population ( $t=-4.95218$ ,  $p < 0.0001$  for  $H_O$  and  $t=-4.8931$ ,  $p < 0.0001$  for  $H_E$ ). Similarly, the heterozygosity was greater with the “Rota out-planted trees” (ROT) population than the GST population ( $t=-6.09925$ ,  $p < 0.0001$  for  $H_O$  and  $t=-6.20368$ ,  $p < 0.0001$  for  $H_E$ ). The  $H_O$  and  $H_E$  between RWT and ROT populations were not significantly different ( $t= -1.16523$ ,  $p= 0.1224$  for  $H_O$ , and  $t= -1.30453$ ,  $p= 0.0964$  for  $H_E$ ). Although population genetic diversity indices were calculated for the “Guam mother tree” (GMT), the indices should be considered to represent inner-individual genetic diversities of the tree, since this population site consisted of only one individual and do not apply to basic population genetic theories.

### GENETIC STRUCTURE

From the results of admixture analysis, the number of genetic clusters  $K=2$  was most supported, and  $K=5$  was the secondary supported value to our data based on the delta $K$  method (Evanno et al. 2005). For every  $K$ , a small amount of admixture from other ancestries was observed in the ‘Guam mother tree’ (Fig. 2). For  $K=2$ , most of the individuals in both Guam and Rota showed single but clearly different ancestries. When  $K=3$ , both the RWT population and ROT population were dominated by single ancestries. For  $K=4$  or 5, while the RWT population had one dominant ancestry, the ROT population was divided into two clusters with different ancestry. Individuals from Talo showed admixed ancestry, but trees from As Igua showed a single ancestry. For all numbers of clusters ( $K$ ),  $F$  values of the major cluster of Guam (yellow; 0.579-0.599) were higher than the  $F$  values of the clusters of Rota (purple, 0.187-0.342; green, 0.308-0.378; grey, 0.393-0.400) except blue (0.879).

## Discussion

### GENETIC DIFFERENTIATION AMONG POPULATIONS

According to the STRUCTURE analysis, *Serianthes nelsonii* plants examined from Guam and Rota were genetically differentiated by different parental ancestries. Further, the STRUCTURE analysis indicated genetic diversity between the RWT population and the ROT population ( $K=3$  to 5 in Fig. 2). Although RWT had one dominant ancestry, the ROT showed several ancestries, some of which were unique ones not found in RWT. Parent(s) of ROT died, perhaps due to several tropical storms, and they were not from the mature RWT population examined in this study. The result implies that the ROT population inherited genetic materials from “lost” parent tree(s), which had different genetic clusters from the existing RWT population. The RWT population was comprised

Table 2. Genetic variation of *Serianthes nelsonii* in Guam and Rota.<sup>Z</sup>

Population	$N$	$N'$	SNP	$S$	Private	Variant positions		
						$H_O$	$H_E$	$F_{IS}$
<b>Guam:</b>								
Mother tree	1	1	178	40	0	0.213	0.106	0.000
Seedlings	11	10.3	178	67	17	0.125	0.142	0.056
<b>Rota:</b>								
Wild trees	9	8.2	178	130	18	0.230	0.239	0.060
Out-planted trees	11	10.2	178	148	30	0.255	0.266	0.054

<sup>Z</sup>  $N$  = number of plants in a population;  $N'$  = mean number of genotyped individuals; SNP = total number of SNPs detected;  $S$  = number of polymorphic SNPs; Private = number of private SNPs within a population;  $H_O$  = observed heterozygosity;  $H_E$  = expected heterozygosity;  $F_{IS}$  = fixation index.

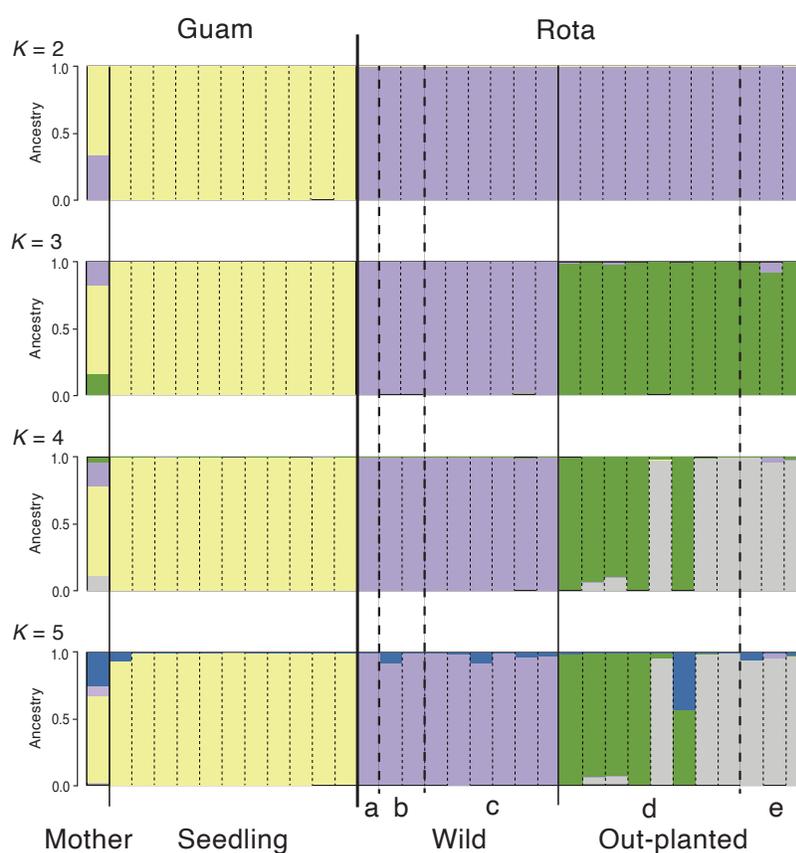


Fig. 2. Individual-based genetic structure elucidated by admixture analysis (STRUCTURE) and distributions of genetic ancestry when the number of clusters ranged from  $K = 2$  to 5. Each bar represents an individual of *Serianthes nelsonii* in the study. Different colors represent different genetic ancestry groups. The y-axis aids in estimating the percentage of each genetic ancestry group within an individual. Abbreviations of Rota population indicate sampled locations: a. I Chego/Saligai; b. Guayaungan/Sisiao; c. Ca'an; d. Talo; and e. As Igua.

of a homogenous genetic composition, and suggests that individuals in this population are possibly descendants of one or fewer genetically similar ancestors that once lived in the vicinity. Most ROT showed one dominant cluster within an individual plant, indicated by either green or grey in Fig. 2.

In Guam, 11 individuals from the seedlings (GST site) were nearly all homogenous with one dominant cluster (yellow in Fig. 2), which is also a dominant genetic segment in the Guam mother tree (GMT). Although the GMT showed an admixture of several ancestries, some of which are also shown in trees from Rota, the Guam seedlings did not maintain genetic diversities found in the mother tree. The high value of  $F$  of the Guam dominant component (yellow) also supported this assumption because a higher  $F$  value points to genetic drift that may cause loss of genetic diversity with a reduction of population size (Falush et al. 2003).

The genetic diversity within the GMT is not maintained in individuals of the GST population. Instead, seedlings only carried one type of genetic component found in the GMT, which was not found in the two Rota populations. Although Guam and Rota share a cluster at  $K=2-5$ , a historical mechanism is unknown. Further study is needed to increase understanding of the genetic population structure of *S. nelsonii* on Guam and Rota. DNA data from more specimens, including herbarium collections and any other heretofore unknown wild plants should be included.

#### DECLINING GENETIC DIVERSITY

In Rota, a rapid decrease from 121 to 33 trees over 20 years and a reduction of the distribution range were reported in 2016 (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). A rapid decrease in the population size of the species has caused a strong genetic drift, a process of relentless loss of genetic variation (Kliman et al. 2008). Further, inbreeding decreases heterozygosity, and the rate of loss is much faster with smaller populations than larger populations (Ellstrand & Elam 1993). Recurrent viable seed production by the sole *S. nelsonii* on Guam assumes that this tree is self-pollinating. Self-pollination may reduce the heterozygosity in the Guam mother tree's offspring.

The observed and expected heterozygosity ( $H_o$  and  $H_e$ ) of both RWT and ROT populations were higher than those of the GST population (Table 2). The numbers of polymorphic sites and private SNPs of two Rota populations were also greater than the GST population. The lower genetic diversity of the GST population is possibly the result of the selfing of the GMT since there were no other mature trees found in Guam in the vicinity of the seedling population site. The 17 private SNPs obtained within the GST population might suggest unknown adult trees in the wild; however, it is improbable based on our intensive field surveys and no reports from previous studies. We assume that the 17 private SNPs were due to missing data in the MIG-seq. It is possible that these 17 private SNPs could also be found in the Guam mother tree if we could have obtained more data via MIG-seq analysis.

Population extinctions and decreases in population sizes may account for the low genetic diversity. It is hypothesized that genetic diversity increases with larger population size (Hague and Routman 2016; Hansen and Wesche 2006). Because Rota has a larger habitat area and a greater number of wild individuals than Guam, Rota populations showed higher genetic diversities. However, a rapid decrease in population size on both islands would cause the decline of genetic diversity. The expected heterozygosity is much lower for selfing plants and endemic plants than both outcrossing plants and widespread plants (Hamrick and Godt 1990).

In summary, this study demonstrates genetic variation among all populations of *S. nelsonii* in Guam and Rota. *Ex situ* establishment of these endangered plant populations will require conservation management to control the gene flow between island populations. Additional genetic studies are needed to advance the understanding of the biodiversity in *S. nelsonii* populations. There is an urgent need to obtain DNA data from available herbarium specimens and search for other mature plants hidden in the forests in Guam and Rota to better define the genetic population structure of *S. nelsonii* in the Marianas.

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