Strengths and potential pitfalls of hay-transfer for ecological restoration revealed by RAD-seq analysis in floodplain *Arabis* species

Hannes Dittberner[1], Christian Becker[2], Wen-Biao Jiao[3], Korbinian Schneeberger[3], Norbert Hölzel[4], Aurélien Tellier[5], Juliette de Meaux*[1]

Affiliations: [1]Institute of Botany, University of Cologne, 50674 Cologne, Germany; Cologne Center for Genomics, University of Cologne, 50931 Cologne, Germany; [3]Max-Planck-Institute for Plant Breeding Research, 50829 Cologne, Germany; [4]Institute of Landscape Ecology, University of Münster, 48149 Münster, Germany;[5]Center of Life and Food Sciences Weihenstephan, Technical University of Munich, 85354, Freising, Germany

*Corresponding Author E-mail: jdemeaux@uni-koeln.de

Abstract

Achieving high intraspecific genetic diversity is a critical goal in ecological restoration as it increases the adaptive potential and long-term resilience of populations. Thus, we investigated genetic diversity within and between pristine sites in a fossil floodplain and compared it to sites restored by hay-transfer between 1997 and 2014. RAD-seq genotyping revealed that the stenoecious flood-plain species *Arabis nemorensis* is co-occurring with individuals that, based on ploidy, ITS-sequencing and morphology, probably belong to the close relative *Arabis sagittata*, which has a documented preference for dry calcareous grasslands but has not been reported in

floodplain meadows. We show that hay-transfer maintains genetic diversity for both species.

Additionally, in *A. sagittata*, transfer from multiple genetically isolated pristine sites resulted in

restored sites with increased diversity and admixed local genotypes. In *A. nemorensis,* transfer

did not create novel admixture dynamics because genetic diversity between pristine sites was

less differentiated. Thus, the effects of hay-transfer on genetic diversity also depend on the

genetic makeup of the donor communities of each species, especially when local material is

mixed. Our results demonstrate the efficiency of hay-transfer for habitat restoration and

emphasize the importance of pre-restoration characterization of micro-geographic patterns of

intraspecific diversity of the community to guarantee that restoration practices reach their goal,

i.e. maximize the adaptive potential of the entire restored plant community. Overlooking these

patterns may alter the balance between species in the community. Additionally, our comparison

of summary statistics obtained from *de novo* and reference-based RAD-seq pipelines shows that

the genomic impact of restoration can be reliably monitored in species lacking prior genomic

knowledge.

Keywords

36   genetic diversity; RAD-seq; restoration genetics; hybridization; population structure; reference

37 genome

Introduction

Habitat degradation is an ever growing problem in our modern world, causing unprecedented loss of biodiversity and essential ecosystem services (Baillie, Hilton-Taylor, & Stuart, 2004). Thus, there is a growing demand for ecological restoration, i.e. measures assisting the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged or destroyed (Society for Ecological Restoration International Science & Policy Working Group, 2004). However, ecological restoration is a difficult process rarely leading to full ecosystem recovery (Benayas, Newton, Diaz, & Bullock, 2009). Thus, the young field of restoration ecology, which studies ecological processes in the light of restoration, is vital to improve restoration practices (Bullock, Aronson, Newton, Pywell, & Rey-Benayas, 2011; Roberts, Stone, & Sugden, 2009; Suding, 2011).

One of the main goals of ecological restoration is the recovery of biodiversity, including both species richness and intraspecific genetic diversity (henceforth called genetic diversity). Genetic diversity has generally positive effects on ecosystems (reviewed in Hughes, Inouye, Johnson, Underwood, & Vellend, 2008). For example, experimentally increasing the genetic diversity of *Solidago altissima* increased primary above-ground biomass productivity and arthropod diversity (Crutsinger et al., 2006). Genetic diversity also boosts resistance of populations to invasion and environmental fluctuations, presumably because it enhances the adaptive potential of populations (Reed & Frankham, 2003; Vrijenhoek, 1994). For example, high diversity experimental *Arabidopsis thaliana* populations showed higher resistance against invasion by *Senecio vulgaris* than low diversity populations (Scheepens, Rauschkolb, Ziegler, Schroth, & Bossdorf, 2017). Moreover, *Zoestra marina* populations with higher genetic diversity

showed increased biomass production, plant density and faunal abundance during an extremely

warm period (Reusch, Ehlers, Hämmerli, & Worm, 2005). Concordantly, restored populations of

Z. marina with increased genetic diversity showed longer plant survival, grew more rapidly and

provided enhanced ecosystem services, measured by increased primary productivity,

invertebrate density and nitrogen retention. This effect was stable in a range of environmental

conditions along a water-depth gradient (Reynolds, McGlathery, & Waycott, 2012). These

examples demonstrate the importance of genetic diversity for ecosystem function and stability

and hence the need to consider population genetics in the design and evaluation of restoration

practices, which is the focus of restoration genetics.

Restoration genetics can not only inform the planning of restoration efforts, e.g. by identifying

suitable source populations, but also help evaluating the success of restoration projects, e.g. by

monitoring genetic diversity in restored populations (Mijangos, Pacioni, Spencer, & Craig, 2015;

Williams, Nevill, & Krauss, 2014). In fact, studies comparing the level of genetic diversity in

pristine and restored populations frequently report limited success, with a reduction of genetic

diversity in restored populations. This decline in genetic diversity may be caused by genetic

bottlenecks in plant nurseries, biases introduced by seed harvesting strategies, founder effects

during recolonization and/or unreliable commercial seeds (reviewed in Mijangos, Pacioni,

Spencer, & Craig, 2015). By contrast, the transfer of seed-containing hay from pristine (donor)

to restoration (donee) sites, termed hay-transfer, is expected to limit the loss of genetic

diversity and maintain site-specific local adaption (Hufford & Mazer, 2003; Kiehl, Kirmer, &

Shaw, 2014). In addition, this method has the unique feature that it can, theoretically, restore

an entire community without altering the genetic composition of populations and thus is the

best method available for restoring entire ecosystems (Hölzel & Otte, 2003; Kiehl, Kirmer,

Donath, Rasran, & Hölzel, 2010). So far, however, there is no empirical support for the efficiency

of this practice (Bucharova et al., 2017), especially since many species maintain seed banks in

the soil. Indeed, the genetic diversity specific to the seed bank will not be sampled with the hay,

although it is known that it can contribute significantly to the maintenance of diversity (Tellier,

Laurent, Lainer, Pavlidis, & Stephan, 2011).

The field of restoration genetics has witnessed a major technological shift over recent years.

Restoration genetics studies have initially relied on microsatellites and AFLP markers and thus

provided a limited overview on patterns of genetic variation within and between restored or

pristine populations (reviewed in Mijangos et al., 2015). Now, genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS)

methods are beginning to be more broadly adopted (Gruenthal et al., 2014; Massatti, Doherty,

& Wood, 2018; O'Leary, Hollenbeck, Vega, Gold, & Portnoy, 2018; Torres-Martinez & Emery,

2016). These methods drastically reduce sequencing costs through strategies to sequence a

reduced portion of the genome, e.g. Restriction site Associated DNA-sequencing (RAD-seq)

(Elshire et al., 2011; Etter, Bassham, Hohenlohe, Johnson, & Cresko, 2011; Peterson, Weber,

Kay, Fisher, & Hoekstra, 2012). In contrast to previous methods (AFLP, microsatellites), GBS

approaches sample proportions of the genome that are sufficiently large to allow resolving

patterns of genetic diversity and spatial structure even at very local scale where overall levels of

genetic diversity are low (Bradbury et al., 2015; Jeffries et al., 2016; Reitzel, Herrera, Layden,

Martindale, & Shank, 2013). In principle, GBS approaches have a third major advantage: they

are well suited to unravel genetic diversity in non-model species without prior genomic

information. Yet, the accuracy of genotyping in the absence of a reliable reference genome has

been questioned (Shafer et al., 2016). Since target species in restoration projects rarely coincide

with species or genera with advanced prior genomic knowledge, it is important to assess

whenever possible, whether conclusions from RAD-seq-based restoration genetics studies

depend on the availability of a reference genome.

Flood-plain meadows are species-rich ecosystems, accommodating many endangered and

stenoecious species adapted to the variable moisture regime. Due to increased agricultural

land-use and river regulation a large proportion of flood-plain ecosystems are degraded and

have become a target for ecological restoration. Here, we use RAD-seq to evaluate whether

genetic diversity is maintained in flood-plain meadows restored by hay-transfer in the Upper

Rhine valley in Germany (Hölzel & Otte, 2003, Donath, Bissels, Hölzel, & Otte, 2007). We

focused on *Arabis nemorensis*, a stenoecious species typically restricted to flood-plain

meadows, and thus strongly endangered in Central Europe (Schnittler & Günther, 1999). *A.*

nemorensis is a short-lived, mostly biennial hemicryptophyte that is known to maintain a long-

lived soil seed bank (Hölzel & Otte, 2004). It is part of the *Arabis hirsuta* species aggregate,

which comprises several morphologically similar but ecologically diverse species, which diverged

about 1.2 million years ago (Karl & Koch, 2014).

We performed RAD-seq for over 130 plants collected across pristine and restored sites. This

dataset allows us to ask the following questions: i) what is the level of genetic diversity and

structuration of the pristine sites that served as source populations for restoration? ii) do

restored sites show a lower level of genetic diversity than the pristine sites? iii) how did

restoration affect the distribution of diversity within and among restored sites? iv) is the use of

a reference genome necessary to reliably characterize the impact of restoration on genetic

diversity? This work demonstrates that a thorough genetic analysis of source and restored sites

reveals the complex dynamics at stake in the restoration process. Through genetic analysis, we

reveal the unanticipated co-occurrence of *A. nemorensis* with *A. sagittata,* a morphologically

similar and closely related species from the *A. hirsuta* aggregate, which normally exhibits a

preference for drier habitats such as calcareous grasslands (Hand & Gregor, 2006). We further

show that restoration by hay-transfer has maintained and can even enhance local diversity. Our

analysis further shows that the use of a reference genome yields higher estimates of genetic

diversity, but does not affect the resolution of patterns of genetic variation within and between

sites, indicating that this approach can find broad applications in the field.

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The sampling area comprises the fossil, dyke-protected flood plain of the River Rhine near

Riedstadt in Hessen, Germany. The area is dominated by arable fields, but also contains

remnants of pristine flood meadow communities in low lying depressions that are submerged

by ascending groundwater during high floods of the River Rhine. Since ca. 20 years, new flood

meadow communities have been restored on ex-arable land using the transfer of green hay

from the pristine sites sampled in this study as donors to overcome significant dispersal

limitation (Hölzel & Otte, 2003). During this process, hay from different donor sites was placed

in distinct yet adjacent patches, making admixture possible. Since restoration is still ongoing,

restored sites differ in age (Table S1).

Figure 1: Overview map of studied sites
Each point on the map represents one site. The color of the points represents the type of the site, i.e.
whether it is pristine or restored. The purple square represents the area shown in the zoomed inset. All
sites, except site F are protected by a dyke.

From previous monitoring of the sites we knew that populations of *Arabis* plants were not

present every year in all sites. Thus, we sampled in two consecutive years to maximize the

number of study sites. In the few sites sampled in both years, the genetic composition of the

samples was not markedly different across years, so samples from both years were bulked for

these sites (see Table S1, Figure S1). We harvested seeds from a total of 134 plants of *Arabis*

nemorensis/sagittata in nine sites named from A to I, in order of collection. The presence of *A.*

sagitata was not previously reported in these sites and was thus unexpected. Although some

individuals showed the reduced stem leaf density and shorter siliques typical of *A. sagittata*,

these phenotypic criteria were not always clearly distinguishable in the field, especially at the

end of the season when siliques matured, so that the presence of the two species has remained

overlooked in previous studies (Burmeier, Eckstein, Donath, & Otte, 2011). Species identity was

thus determined by post-hoc analysis, after the RAD-seq analysis revealed the presence of two

taxonomic units.

Four sites were sampled in pristine habitat (B, C, D and I) and five in restored habitat (A, E, F, G

and H, Figure 1, Table S2). In site A two distinct stands of plants separated by about 100 m were

sampled and were treated as sub-sites A-1 and A-2 throughout this study. To produce material

for DNA extraction, we stratified seeds on wet filter paper for 6 days at 4°C in darkness.

Afterwards we sowed seeds in soil (33% VM, 33% ED-73, 33% Seramis (clay granules)). After 4 to

6 weeks of growth in the greenhouse, we harvested about 200mg of leaf material from one

offspring of each wild parent (genotype). We homogenized freshly harvested leaf material using

a Precellys Evolution homogenizer (Bertin technologies) for 2x20 seconds at 6800 rpm. We

extracted DNA using the NucleoSpin Plant II Mini kit (Macherey-Nagel) following the

manufacturer's instructions. We verified DNA quality using gel-electrophoresis with a 0.8%

agarose gel. We measured DNA quantity using Qubit (broad-range kit) following manufacturer's

instructions.

Draft genome assembly & annotation

To facilitate genotype calling we assembled a draft genome for one *A. nemorensis* accession (ID

29). Library preparation and sequencing was done at the Cologne Center for Genomics. Details

about the sequencing, assembly and annotation of the genome are described in Document S1.

Briefly, three libraries with insert sizes of 280 bp, 3 kbp and 6 kbp, respectively, were created

and sequenced as 150 bp paired-end reads as part of an Illumina Hiseq 4000 lane for a total of

66 Gbp. We assembled reads using the *ALLPATHS-LG* assembler (Gnerre et al., 2011) with

default settings. To further scaffold the genome, we generated 2.9 Gbp of PacBio sequence

data. Library preparation and sequencing was done at the Max-Planck-Institute for Plant

Breeding Research (Cologne, Germany). We scaffolded the genome using *OPERA-LG* with

default settings (Gao, Bertrand, Chia, & Nagarajan, 2016). To achieve chromosome-level

assembly, we created a whole genome alignment with the *Arabis alpina* reference genome (Jiao

et al., 2017; Willing et al., 2015) and performed synthenic path assembly using the tool

Synmap2 (Haug-Baltzell, Stephens, Davey, Scheidegger, & Lyons, 2017) available at the *CoGe*

website (Lyons & Freeling, 2008). The pseudo-chromosomes had a total size of 192 Mbp and

were used for all following analyses. The size of the genome was estimated by flow-cytometry,

which was performed commercially at Plant Cytometry Services (Didam, Netherlands). The

estimated genome size was 274 Mbp. Thus, the assembly size was 70% of the genome size.

To detect and annotate Transposable elements (TE) we used the softwares RepeatModeler

(Smit & Hubley, 2008) and RepeatMasker (Smit, Hubley, & Green, 2013). Protein-coding genes

were annotated by integrating predictions of *ab initio* gene annotation tools and alignments of

homologous proteins. Three different tools including Augustus v3.2.3 (Stanke & Waack, 2003),

GlimmerHMM v3.0 (Majoros, Pertea, & Salzberg, 2004) and SNAP v2013 (Korf, 2004) were used

to predict the initial gene models. Protein sequences from *A. thaliana*, *A. lyrata* and *A. alpina*

(Arabidopsis Genome Initiative, 2000; Hu et al., 2011; Willing et al., 2015) were aligned to the

assembly by the tool Exonerate v2.2.0 (Slater & Birney, 2005). Then, the *ab initio* predictions

and protein alignment hits were further combined to build the consensus gene models by the

tool EVidenceModeler (EVM) v2012 (Haas et al., 2008). Finally, TE related genes in these models

were annotated by checking the TE annotation, blastp (Altschul, Gish, Miller, Myers, & Lipman,

1990) alignments with Plant TE related proteins and blastp alignments with *A. thaliana* proteins.

RAD-sequencing and SNP calling

We genotyped 134 samples using the original RAD-sequencing (RADseq) protocol (Etter et al.,

2011), with the following modifications (Document S1): i) we used the enzyme KpnI-HF (New

England Biolabs) for DNA digestion, ii) we ligated digested DNA with complementary adapters

containing one of ten different barcodes and a stretch of five random nucleotides, used for

post-hoc removal of PCR duplicates (Table S3), iii) we created 14 pools of 10 barcoded samples

each in equal amounts, iv) we used indexed reverse primers for amplification, described in

(Peterson, Weber, Kay, Fisher, & Hoekstra, 2012), to allow multiplexing of pools. Libraries were

sequenced on two Illumina HiSeq 4000 lanes with 2x150bp.

We used *FastQC* (Andrews, 2010) to quality-check the resulting reads. We trimmed adapters

and removed reads shorter than 100bp using *Cutadapt* (Martin, 2011). We removed PCR

duplicates based on a 5 bp stretch of random nucleotides at the end of the adapter, using the

clone_filter module of *Stacks* version 1.37 (Catchen, Hohenlohe, Bassham, Amores, & Cresko,

2013). We de-multiplexed samples using the *process_radtags* module from *Stacks*. We filtered

reads with ambiguous barcodes (allowed distance 2) and cut-sites, reads with uncalled bases

and low-quality reads (default threshold).

For reference-based genotyping, we mapped reads using *BWA* (Li & Durbin, 2009) with default

settings. We filtered mapped reads using *SAMtools* (Li et al., 2009) and custom python scripts

using the following criteria to remove reads: mapping quality < 30, number soft-clipped bases >

30; reads were unpaired; mates mapped on different chromosomes; mate mapping distance >

700. The proportion of mapped reads varied slightly among species, with a mean of 48% for *A.*

nemorensis, 43% for hybrids and 42% for *A. sagittata* (Table S4). We called genotypes using

SAMtools mpileup and *VarScan2* (Koboldt et al., 2012) with the following options: base quality >

20; re-calculation of base quality on the fly (-E option); read depth > 14; strand filter de-

activated; SNP calling p-value < 0.01. We filtered genotyped loci using *VCFtools* (Danecek et al.,

2011) and custom python scripts removing loci with missing data in more than 5% of individuals

and loci in masked (repetitive) regions. We clustered contiguous loci spaced less than 100 bp

apart into RAD-regions. Regions with excessively low or high coverage are likely results of allele

dropout or paralogous mapping, respectively. Thus, we removed regions fulfilling one of the

following criteria: mean coverage of the region greater than twice the overall mean coverage;

mean coverage of the region smaller than a third of the overall mean coverage; region

maximum coverage greater than twice the mean maximal coverage over all regions; region

shorter than 250bp; region longer than 1300bp.

After depth filtering, we still found loci with a high frequency of heterozygotes (up to 100%),

which is unlikely in highly selfing species. Notably, in over 90% of these loci only one of the two

homozygous genotypes was observed. Moreover, these highly heterozygous loci clustered in

high density on single RAD-fragments. Thus, these loci likely resulted from paralogous mapping,

which passed the depth filter due to sequencing depth variation among RAD-regions. Therefore,

we removed RAD-regions containing loci with a frequency of heterozygotes greater than 20%.

This threshold was picked to limit the impact of noise from mapping artifacts while still allowing

for reasonable levels of heterozygosity, since some low- level outcrossing likely occurs. From the

resulting genotype dataset, we extracted single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) using

VCFtools (Danecek et al., 2011).

For *de-novo*-genotyping we used the *Stacks* 2.2 *denovo_map.pl* pipeline (Catchen et al., 2013).

The aim of the de-novo analysis was to test whether one would reach similar results and

conclusions without the use of a reference genome. Thus, we performed this analysis without

knowledge about the two species (since we gained this from the reference-based analysis) and

ran *Stacks* for all samples combined. As recommended by the authors of the tool (Rochette &

Catchen, 2017), we first used a subset of 15 representative genotypes to tune the parameters (-

M and -n) of the algorithm, which control the number of mismatches between stacks within (M)

and between (n) individuals. We varied M and n from 1 to 9. For each set of parameters, we

analysed the number of loci shared between 80% of the samples. This measure peaked at the

value six for M and n. Thus, we used this value for both parameters for the full analysis. We ran

the *denovo_map.pl* pipeline using 0.01 as the p-value threshold for calling genotypes and SNPs,

and otherwise default options. We used the *populations* program to create a VCF-file for further

analysis using the following filters: 5% maximum missing data per locus; 20% maximum

observed heterozygosity per locus; locus must be present in all sites.

Population genetics statistics

We did all statistical analysis using R version 3.4.4 (R Development Core Team, 2008) and

provide a supplemental R Markdown file (Document S2). The following packages were used for

plotting: *ggplot2* (Wickham, 2009), *ggmap* (Kahle & Wickham, 2013), *ggthemes* (Arnold et al.,

2017), *ggsn* (Baquero, 2017) and *heatmap3* (Zhao, Guo, Sheng, & Shyr, 2015). We performed all

analysis for the reference-based and the *de-novo*-based dataset and compared the results. We

used the *vcfR* package (Knaus & Grünwald, 2017) to load VCF-files into R and make the SNP data

available for processing with other libraries. Based on our annotation we determined whether

SNPs are in coding regions and whether they are synonymous or non-synonymous using the

PopGenome package (Pfeifer, Wittelsbuerger, Li, & Handsaker, 2018). We performed principal

component analysis (PCA) of SNP data for all samples using the *adegenet* package (Jombart et

al., 2016). Missing data was scaled to the mean for PCA.

Based on the first principal component most individuals (83%) could be assigned to one of two

distinct taxonomic groups. We used molecular methods to assign species labels to the two

taxonomic groups. We sequenced the internal transcribed spacer (ITS) sequence of nine

individuals, three from the first (left) and five from the second (right) cluster and one located

between the clusters (Table S5). Primers for amplification were taken from (Mummenhoff,

Franzke, & Koch, 1997). We used the sequences as input to the taxonomy tool of the *Brassibase*

website (Kiefer et al., 2014). As a complementary approach, we downloaded the 612 bp long

reference ITS sequences of all species in the *Arabis hirsuta* group from Brassibase (Kiefer et al.,

2014). Using the software Seaview (Gouy, Guindon, & Gascuel, 2010), we aligned these

sequences to the ITS sequences of our samples using the MUSCLE algorithm (Edgar, 2004)

(Document S3) and created a phylogeny using PhyML (Guindon & Gascuel, 2003) with default

settings. The ITS sequence does not allow distinction between *A. sagittata* and *A. hirsuta*. Yet,

the species can be distinguished based on ploidy as *A. sagittata* is diploid and *A. hirsuta*

tetraploid (Karl & Koch, 2014). Leaf samples were therefore collected from twelve individuals

(seven putative *A. sagittata/A. hirsuta*, two putative *A. nemorensis*, three putative hybrids;

Table S6) and their relative DNA content per cell (in comparison to a company-internal standard

(*Vinca minor*)) determined by Plant Cytometry Services (Didam, Netherlands). Additionally, we

included one sample from each of two independent *Arabis hirsuta* populations sampled in 2016

in Bavaria (see Table S2). We inferred the ploidy of our samples by comparing relative DNA

content: individuals of the same ploidy should have similar DNA content, tetraploids should

have twice the DNA content of diploids.

We conducted all population genetic analysis separately for the two species. Individuals, which

were not assigned to any species, were likely interspecific hybrids and excluded from further

analysis. We used the *pegas* library to calculate within-site genetic diversity (Nei's π; average

pairwise nucleotide differences) for each site (Paradis, Jombart, Schliep, Potts, & Winter, 2016),

excluding sites with less than two individuals per respective species. To scale the estimates of π,

we divided the average number of pairwise nucleotide differences among samples by the total

number of successfully genotyped bases, excluding all bases which failed any of our previously

described genotype filters (missing data, region heterozygosity, region depth and length). For

the de-novo pipeline we extracted the total number of genotyped bases from *Stacks* output. We

calculated correlation coefficients between reference-based and *de-novo*-based π estimates

using Pearson's method. We calculated pairwise F_{ST} (Nei, 1987) and genetic distance (Cavalli-

Sforza & Edwards, 1967) between all pairs of sites using the *hierfstat* package (Goudet &

Jombart, 2015). Negative F_{ST} values were set to zero. Differences of genetic distance and F_{ST}

among pristine and restored sites were tested using a Wilcoxon-rank-sum-test on pairwise

distance matrices. We tested for correlation between the distance matrices of the reference

and *de novo* datasets using a Mantel test with 10000 permutations.

Admixture analysis

For ADMIXTURE analysis (Alexander, Novembre, & Lange, 2009), we converted VCF-files to bed-

files using PLINK (Purcell, 2009; Purcell et al., 2007). First, we conducted ADMIXTURE analysis

for all samples combined for K=1 to K=10 (reference-pipeline only). Then for each of the species

and pipeline (reference/*de novo*), we ran ADMIXTURE analysis for K=2 to K=10, with 10

iterations of cross-validation each. Before plotting, we normalized clusters across runs using

CLUMPAK (Kopelman, Mayzel, Jakobsson, Rosenberg, & Mayrose, 2015). We created plots using

a custom R-script.

Results

RAD-sequencing uncovers two hybridizing species

Unless otherwise stated, all described results were obtained using the reference-based pipeline.

We genotyped 134 individuals from 10 sites – 4 pristine and 6 restored (Figure 1) – yielding 3.6

Mb of sequence of which 32,880 single nucleotide positions were polymorphic (SNPs). Only 20%

of SNPs were in coding regions, 40% and 56% of which were synonymous and non-synonymous,

respectively (4% unassigned). To visualize patterns of genetic diversity across sites, we

conducted principal component analysis (PCA) for all individuals (Figure 2, top). Almost 80% of

the total genetic variation was explained by the first principal component, which separated

most individuals into two clearly defined clusters, likely representing taxonomic units. To

determine species identity, we performed phylogenetic analysis of the ITS region of nine

individuals (Table S5) using two different methods (see methods), which gave the same results.

We confirmed that one taxonomic unit was *A. nemorensis* (Figure S2-3). The ITS region of

individuals from the other taxonomic unit was identical to that of *A. sagittata* and *A. hirsuta,* a

sequence that differs by at least 3 nucleotides from all other ITS sequences of known species of

the complex (Figure S3-4). Yet, these sibling species can be distinguished based on ploidy, as *A.*

hirsuta is tetraploid and *A. sagittata* diploid (Karl & Koch, 2014). Since all twelve tested samples

from the Rhine populations had the same genome size, which was half of that of the two *A.*

hirsuta samples (Table S6), we conclude that the second cluster most likely corresponds to the

diploid species *A. sagittata*. Average genetic distance (d_{XY}) between *A. nemorensis* and *A.*

sagittata was 8.1e-03, i.e. 8 fixed SNP differences for 1000 bp.

Twenty-three individuals showed a positioning along the first PC that was intermediate between

the two clusters, suggesting they were interspecific hybrids. Most of these hybrids were closer

to *A. sagittata* on the first PC. Since F1-hybrids should be located exactly in the middle between

the two species, this suggests that they are somewhat fertile and preferentially back-cross with

A. sagittata. Laboratory observations have shown that hybrids are indeed fertile (Dittberner,

personal observation). Additionally, in an ADMIXTURE analysis of all samples with K=2, most

hybrids showed ancestry over 50% from *A. sagittata*, as expected from preferential back-

crossing to this parent (Figure S5).

Overall our sample was composed of 31% *A. nemorensis*, 52% *A. sagittata* and 17% hybrids. The

species composition differed among sites (Figure 2, bottom). *A. nemorensis* was present in 7

sites (3 pristine, 4 restored), *A. sagittata* in 9 sites (3 pristine, 6 restored) and hybrids in 6 sites

(3 pristine, 3 restored). Notably, the pristine site D was dominated by hybrids with over 56%.

Figure 2: Presence of two hybridizing *Arabis* species in study sites.
Top) Plot of the first two principal components (PC) of genetic variation based on the reference-based
pipeline. Colors distinguish the different sites, which are labeled with letters of the corresponding color.
Site labels are in the centroid of the respective site (with offset to avoid overlaps). Values in brackets in
the axis labels show the amount of variance explained by each PC. Note that the first PC explains about
80% of the total variation and splits most individuals into two clearly defined clusters. The two clusters
along PC1 correspond to two distinct species, identified here as *Arabis nemorensis (left)* and most
probably *Arabis sagittata (right)*. Species identity is indicated by text labels below the plot. Points in
between the two clusters are likely natural interspecific hybrids. The dashed lines show the thresholds
used for distinction between species and hybrids throughout this study. Middle) Plot showing the same
analysis as above but based on the de-novo-pipeline. Bottom) Stacked barplot showing the distribution

370 of species among the study sites. Population labels are colored by type: darkgreen = pristine, lightgreen =
371 restored. Species are distributed heterogeneously among sites.

No reduction of genetic diversity in restored sites

We computed species-specific estimates of genetic diversity within each site, excluding hybrid

genotypes. The *A. nemorensis* dataset consisted of 2746 SNPs. Levels of genetic diversity (π)

varied up to two-fold among sites, ranging from 6.6e-05 in A-2 to 1.4e-04 in A-1 (Figure 3, left;

Table S7). Total diversity was 1.5e-04. However, pristine and restored sites did not differ

significantly in their level of diversity (mean difference= +10% in restored; W = 4, p = 1).

The *A. sagittata* dataset consisted of 6366 SNPs. Total genetic diversity in *A. sagittata* was about

three times as high as in *A. nemorensis*. Yet, in contrast to *A. nemorensis*, genetic diversity

differed strongly among sites, ranging from 1.03e-06 in site I to 4.26e-04 in site E (Figure 3,

right; Table S7). Notably, genetic diversity was low in two of three pristine sites. In contrast, we

found high levels of diversity in all restored sites, except site F. However, the overall difference

between pristine and restored sites was not significant (mean difference= +163% in restored

sites; W=13, p=0.14).

Since hybridization potentially enables gene flow between the two species we also compared

levels of genetic diversity for both species combined, including the hybrids. Overall genetic

diversity increased by an order of magnitude and mixed sites were more diverse than mostly

pure sites, as would be expected (Figure S6). Again, restored sites did not show significantly

different levels of genetic diversity from pristine sites (mean difference= +22%; W=13, p=0.91).

Figure 3: No reduction in genetic diversity in restored sites
Barplot of average pairwise genetic diversity (π) within each site of each species. Bar-color indicates the type of site.

Restoration reduces population structure and facilitates recombination

To quantify the degree of population structure, we estimated genetic distance and differentiation (F_{ST}) among all pairs of sites (Table S8). Genetic distance among *A. nemorensis* sites ranged from 0.03 to 0.31 and F_{ST} estimates from 0 to 0.5 (Figure 4, A+C). Population structure was slightly more pronounced among pristine sites than restored sites: Mean genetic distance was 0.26 among pristine sites and 0.13 among restored sites (W=17, p=0.047); mean F_{ST} was 0.37 among pristine sites and 0.25 among restored sites (W=14, p=0.26).

In *A. sagittata*, genetic distance ranged from 0.32 to 0.34 and F_{ST} estimates from 0 to 0.91 (Figure 4, B+D). The difference in population structure between pristine and restored sites was stronger than in *A. nemorensis*: mean genetic distance was 0.33 among pristine sites and 0.12 among restored sites (W=45, p=0.002); mean F_{ST} was 0.81 among pristine sites and 0.2 among restored sites (W=43, p=0.015).

Figure 4: Overall strong population structure with signatures of admixture in restored sites
This panel shows different measurements of population structure of each species. A-D) Heatmaps showing pairwise comparisons between all sites of genetic distance (Cavalli-Sforza chord distance) and FST, respectively. Values of the respective variable are indicated by tile color, corresponding to the color scale in the top-left corner of each heatmap. Sites were clustered based on the respective variable, as indicated by the dendrograms. Colors of text labels and bars next to the grid indicate the type of the site (same color scheme as Figure 3).

Reduced differentiation among restored sites suggests that genetic material of pristine sites was

mixed in restored sites. To visualize this in more detail, we conducted ADMIXTURE analysis for

each species. This analysis assumes a given number (K) of genetic clusters (ancestral

populations) and assigns cluster ancestry proportions to each individual, allowing for mixed

ancestry. For *A. sagittata*, K=6 was estimated as the optimal value (Figure 5). Up to K=4, the

three pristine sites consisted of three distinct genetic clusters, which were mixed in all but one

of the restored sites. For higher values of K, pristine population B consisted of two clusters, with

pure and admixed individuals in equal proportions, in agreement with the higher genetic

diversity observed at this site. All individuals from other pristine sites had pure ancestry from a

single cluster per population.

For *A. nemorensis*, K=7 was estimated as the optimal value for clustering (Figure 5). In contrast

to *A. sagittata*, we found individuals with different or mixed ancestry within populations of *A.*

nemorensis, even at low values of K, indicating more genetic mixture than in *A. sagittata*. Since

genetic structure was less pronounced for *A. nemorensis*, the restoration procedure did not

impact the genetic distribution of this species, by contrast with *A. sagittata*.

Figure 5: Increased impact of genetic admixture of pristine sites in _A. sagittata_
The figures shows a comparison of ADMIXTURE results for both species. The top panels show the cross-
validation (CV) error for all tested values of K. The following panels show the ancestry proportions of
each cluster for each individual for all values of K until the first minimum of the CV-error curve. The
numbers on the right represent the value of K. Site labels are colored according to the type of the site:
light-green = restored, dark-green = pristine.

De-novo- and reference-based summary statistics reach the same conclusion

Finally, we tested whether a reference genome is required to determine the impact of restoration on genetic diversity by comparing results from a reference-based and a *de novo* pipeline. We found that estimates of genetic diversity, genetic distance or F_{ST} yielded by the two methods were highly correlated, with all correlation coefficients being greater than 0.95 (maximum $p < 0.001$, Figure 6). However, we observed that estimates of genetic diversity generated without a reference genome were deflated, especially for high diversity sites (Figure 6), by a median factor of 0.83 for *A. nemorensis* and 0.36 for *A. sagittata*. Estimates of genetic distance were underestimated by a median factor of 0.61 in both species. Interestingly, however, both pipelines yielded almost identical estimates of F_{ST} (median factor of 0.93) and revealed a very similar extent of admixture between sites (Figures S7-8). Moreover, the presence of the two species and their hybrids was detected with both methods (Figure 2 middle). We concluded that, in this study, the use of a reference genome was not required to determine the impact of restoration on genetic diversity. Since the two pipelines coincide, we could further conclude that the distribution of variation in two species and across pristine and restored sites reported above is not the result of possible mapping biases to the reference genome.

Figure 6: De-novo- and reference-based summary statistics are highly correlated.
Plots show the correlation of summary statistics based on the reference-based and the de-novo-based
pipeline. Line and dot colors represent the species. Each dot represents one individual. Lines represent a
linear fit through the dots and the gray shadows indicate the error of the fit. The dashed line represents
a hypothetical 1:1 relationship of the variables. Correlation-coefficients (Pearson's product-moment
correlation) are indicated as colored text corresponding to the species. Stars indicate the level of the
coefficient: **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Discussion

A reference-genome is not required to characterize the impact of restoration

While RAD-seq and related methods are a cheap tool to acquire genotype information across

the genome without need for a reference genome (Elshire et al., 2011; Etter et al., 2011;

Peterson et al., 2012), the reliability of *de novo* assembly pipelines has been questioned (Shafer

et al., 2016). The availability of a reference genome allowed us to ask whether reference-based

read mapping pipelines yielded distinct conclusions from a pipeline based on *de novo* read

assembly. Conversely, this also allowed testing whether the use of an *A. nemorensis* reference

genome to map *A. sagittata* samples could have biased our conclusions. The results from both

pipelines were highly correlated. Thus, comparative analysis of sites was reliable with both

pipelines. However, the *de-novo*-pipeline (*Stacks*, Catchen et al., 2013) underestimated the

amount of genetic diversity compared to the reference-based pipeline. This is in contrast to a

previous study comparing different RAD-seq pipelines (Shafer et al., 2016), where *Stacks*

produced slightly inflated estimates compared to reference-based pipelines. However, in the

same study, other de novo pipelines produced substantially lower estimates of genetic diversity

(Shafer et al., 2016). Thus, the magnitude of genetic diversity estimates might depend on the

study system and pipelines/parameters used, and caution is advised when comparing these

estimates across studies.

In contrast, both pipelines agreed for analyses comparing diversity between species or sites (e.g.

F_{ST}, ADMIXTURE). Thus, we conclude that RAD-seq is an efficient tool to characterize the

distribution of diversity, even in the absence of a reference genome. We therefore hope that

this study will pave the way for exploring how species, with diverse life-history and

uncharacterized genomes, will be maintained after hay transfer or how modalities of hay

transfer affects not only single species but the balance between multiple species in the

community.

First documented presence of *A. sagittata* in floodplain meadow habitat

We detected two independent genetic clusters. Based on ITS sequences, ecological preference

and morphological descriptors, the first one appears to represent *bona fide A. nemorensis*

individuals. Taxonomic boundaries in the *Arabis hirsuta* clade can be tenuous, yet ITS sequence

differences between the two clusters strongly suggests that they belong to distinct species (Karl

& Koch, 2014). ITS sequences, ploidy level and morphological evidence collectively indicated

that individuals in the second genetic cluster are likely to belong to *Arabis sagittata*. Species

barriers are often incomplete, and patterns of divergence between closely related species of the

same genus can be strongly intertwined. Population genomics approaches and wider sampling

will be needed to consolidate our understanding of the *A. sagittata* taxonomic group and its

historical relationship with the *A. nemorensis* taxon. It is indeed possible that gene flow

between the species is ancient and not restricted to the Rhine population. Population genomics

can indeed yield detailed view on the process and history of speciation in plant genera (see e.g.

Novikova et al., 2016).

We did not anticipate the presence of the *A. sagittata* in flood-plain habitats because it is

predominantly found in warm and dry habitats (Hand & Gregor, 2006). However, agricultural

land-use and flood regulation have considerably modified the flood-plain ecosystem: flooding is

contained by a dyke and the ground water level has decreased (Hölzel & Otte, 2001). Man-made

modifications of the environment can change selection regimes and facilitate the establishment

of non-native species (Byers, 2002; Crooks, Chang, & Ruiz, 2011; Fukasawa, Miyashita,

Hashimoto, Tatara, & Abe, 2013; Tyrrell & Byers, 2007). Thus, it is possible that *A. sagittata*

migrated into the flood-plain ecosystem after human river regulation decreased the frequency

and severity of flooding. We want to stress that the species co-occurred both in pristine and

restored sites. Thus, the contact between the species was not caused by the restoration efforts.

In fact, we observed that *A. sagittata* is more frequent than *A. nemorensis* in our sample, which

raises the concern that this species may be in the process of displacing *A. nemorensis*. This trend

could be enhanced by climate change, which may lead to conditions that further favor the xero-

thermophylic *A. sagittata*. Additionally, if *A. sagittata* is often mistaken for *A. nemorensis* in

flora reports on flood-plain environments, the remaining *A. nemorensis* population in Central

Europe might be even smaller than is currently assumed.

The parallel transfer of two sympatric relatives shows that hay transfer maintains genetic

diversity

Hay-transfer has proven to be a particularly successful method for establishing new populations

of target species in ecological restoration across a variety of herbaceous vegetation types

(Coiffait-Gombault, Buisson, & Dutoit, 2011; Hölzel & Otte, 2003; Kiehl et al., 2010; Kiehl &

Wagner, 2006; Török et al., 2012). Furthermore, hay-transfer is often seen as the gold standard

to preserve local levels of genetic diversity and adaptation (Vander Mijnsbrugge, Bischoff, &

Smith, 2010). The latter is probably the main reason, why it is increasingly used in in ecological

restoration (Kiehl et al., 2014). The aim of this study was to characterize the level of diversity in

the pristine source sites and document the impact of hay-transfer on the genetic diversity in

restored sites. Although our initial plan was to focus on *A. nemorensis*, a typical representative

of species-rich floodplain meadows, the unanticipated presence of *A. sagittata* in our sample

allowed us to compare the genetic effects of restoration by hay-transfer on the two species.

Several years after restoration, we did not find a significant difference in genetic diversity

between pristine and restored sites for either of the two species. Thus, the hay-transfer method

can restore populations with levels of diversity indistinguishable from the source populations in

the long-term. Our findings are in agreement with studies on population life-stage structure and

dynamics comparing pristine and restored sites of *A. nemorensis/A. sagittata* in the same region

(Burmeier et al., 2011). This outcome is particularly remarkable given that *A. nemorensis* has a

long-term seed bank, with up to 25,000 germinable seeds*m^{-2}, which was not transferred to

restored sites (Burmeier et al., 2011). Although species for which the genetic diversity present in

the seed bank tends to differ more strongly from the above ground diversity may fare

differently after hay-transfer, we note that populations restored with alternative methods, e.g.

spontaneous recolonization (Vandepitte et al., 2012) or propagated seed mixtures (Espeland et

al., 2017; Fant, Holmstrom, Sirkin, Etterson, & Masi, 2008), both excluded the seed bank and

revealed a reduction of diversity (Mijangos et al., 2015). Thus, hay-transfer might be superior to

other restoration methods not only in restoration success (Hölzel & Otte, 2003; Kiehl et al.,

2010) but also in transferring genetic diversity.

The modalities of habitat restoration can modify the relative adaptive potential of species

in the ecosystem

Genetic diversity was low in *A. nemorensis* and *A. sagittata,* compared to other outcrossing or

selfing Brassicaceae species (Mattila, Tyrmi, Pyhäjärvi, & Savolainen, 2017; Onge, Källman,

Slotte, Lascoux, & Palmé, 2011). In fact, genetic distance between species was only on the order

of magnitude as diversity found within populations of *Arabidopsis lyrata* (Mattila et al., 2017).

Genetic diversity within our species was similar to that reported for *Arabis alpina* populations in

Scandinavia (Laenen et al., 2018). As in our study, these populations are selfing and located on

the margin of the species' range (Jalas & Suominen, 1994), two factors often coinciding with

lower levels of genetic diversity. Since populations with low genetic diversity may suffer from

increased genetic load and decreased adaptive potential, the transfer of non-local material is

often envisaged to preserve endangered species (Breed, Stead, Ottewell, Gardner, & Lowe,

2013; Weeks et al., 2011). This approach is however controversial. Strategies that introduce

non-local seeds can decrease population fitness either by introducing maladapted genotypes

(Crémieux, Bischoff, Müller-Schärer, & Steinger, 2010; McKay, Christian, Harrison, & Rice, 2005)

or by causing outbreeding depression (Frankham et al., 2011). As a compromise, a strategy of

mixing regional seeds was recently proposed (Bucharova et al., 2018). Our results show that this

strategy was unintentionally implemented in the examined restoration effort: ADMXITURE

analysis showed that pristine *A. sagittata* sites are dominated by one or two ancestral groups,

with very low genetic diversity within each group. Yet, in some of the restored sites, admixture

of low diversity *A. sagittata* groups took place, leading to a strong increase in genetic diversity

and decrease in population structure. ADMIXTURE analysis also revealed that this led to genetic

recombination between distinct haplotypes in *A. sagittata,* possibly increasing the adaptive

potential of restored sites in this species. Increased genetic connectivity between populations

has indeed been shown to help maintain or even increase genetic diversity in the long term

(DiLeo, Rico, Boehmer, & Wagner, 2017). Fitness assays of recombined *A. sagittata* genotypes

are needed to verify whether this local admixture has reinforced the establishment of this

species in restored floodplain meadows.

Interestingly, we find less pronounced population structure in pristine sites of *A. nemorensis*

than in *A. sagittata*, suggesting a comparatively higher level of gene flow. The restoration of this

species is therefore less likely to benefit from post-transfer admixture. More so, our results

suggest that it is possible that *A. nemorensis* is at increased disadvantage in restored habitats, if

admixture and resulting recombination were to favor the emergence of more competitive

genotypes in *A. sagittata*.

The coexistence of these species in the Rhine floodplain ecosystem will be further impacted by

the ongoing hybridization dynamic that our analysis uncovers for the first time in this system

and which occurred independently of the restoration effort. *A. nemorensis* could receive alleles

conferring drought-adaptation from the xero-thermophilic *A. sagittata* that may enhance its

ability to cope with increased drought exposure in its habitat. The genomic composition of the

hybrids, however, also indicates that hybrids back-cross preferentially with *A. sagittata*. Gene-

flow from *A. nemorensis* could facilitate adaptation of *A. sagittata* to the flood-plain

environment. Such adaptive introgressions could also potentially accelerate the extinction of *A.*

nemorensis. While hybridization is common in plants (Mallet, Besansky, & Hahn, 2016), well

documented cases of adaptive introgression are rare and require elaborate experiments

(Goulet, Roda, & Hopkins, 2017; Suarez-Gonzalez, Lexer, & Cronk, 2018). Such experiments are

now warranted to determine the impact of hybridization in this sympatric species complex.

Conclusions

Clearly, genetic analysis helps with species identification as sibling species can be difficult to

distinguish morphologically even for specialists. A unique feature of hay-transfer restoration

approaches is that the whole plant community can be transplanted. It is therefore particularly

important to determine the composition of the source populations to limit the spread of non-

target species (Bickford et al., 2007). Our study demonstrates that hay-transfer has maintained

genetic diversity in restored populations. However, we also note that it may have inadvertently

contributed to increase the genetic diversity and adaptive potential of only one of the two

species, due to differences in the genetic makeup of the donor populations. This might lead to a

competitive advantage of one over the other species in the long term, potentially disturbing the

balance in the community. On the one hand this shows that restoration by hay-transfer may

enhance the adaptive potential, which is especially important in the face of a rapid climate

change. On the other hand, this also highlights that understanding the underlying genetics of

the community to be transferred is a pre-requisite for the design of restoration strategies that

promote the maintenance of both endangered ecosystems and endangered species.

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Data availability

The genome assembly, annotation, raw reads, ITS sequences and RAD-seq samples will be uploaded to EMBL ENA upon acceptance (available upon request for review). VCF files and custom scripts will be uploaded to Dryad repository upon acceptance (available upon request for review). An R Markdown file describing the population genetic analysis is provided in the supplemental material.

Author contributions

JdM, HD, AT and NH conceived the study. HD and NH collected plant material; HD and CB prepared material for sequencing; WBJ, KS and HD were responsible for bioinformatic processing. JdM, HD and NH analyzed data and wrote the manuscript with significant contributions from CB, WBJ, KS and AT.