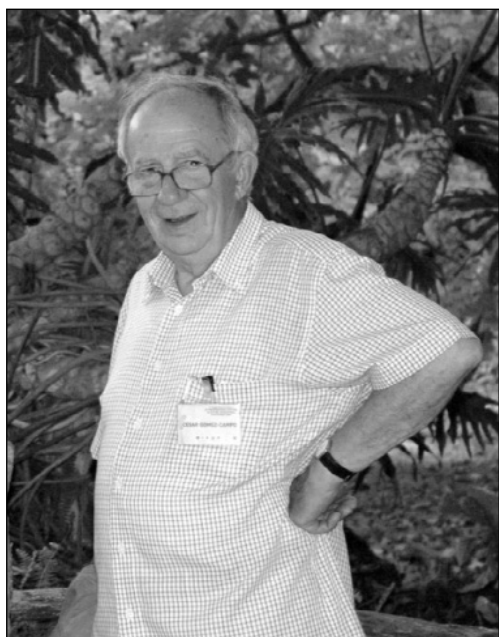


Juan B. Martínez-Laborde & Jesús M. Ortiz Marcide

César Gómez-Campo (1933-2009)



César Gómez-Campo (Photo by Gianluigi Bacchetta).

Professor César Gómez-Campo was born in Torrelavega (N Spain) on 5th September 1933. He obtained his degree in Agronomic Engineering in 1957, and his PhD in 1962 (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, UPM). He graduated also and in Biological Sciences in 1964 and obtained his second PhD (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) in 1967. Early in his career he became Head of the Department of Nuclear Energy Applications to Agriculture of the National Institute of Agricultural Research (INIA), which he directed for twelve years (1961-1973). In 1965 he became Professor of Plant Organography and Physiology in the School of Agronomic Engineering (Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Agrónomos, ETSIA) of the UPM. From 1973 onwards, he dedicated his efforts exclusively to teaching and research activities in the ETSIA, where he

became Head of the Department of Plant Organography and Physiology in 1975. After University restructuring in 1987 he became Head of the Plant Biology Department, UPM, until 1995. After retirement in 2003 he was appointed Emeritus Professor.

One of his first research interests was the effect of ionizing radiations on plants. He designed the INIA Gamma Radiation Field in El Encín (Alcalá de Henares), placing this pre-biotechnological infrastructure at the disposal of many Spanish researchers.

Prof. Gómez-Campo was a pioneer in the field of plant conservation. He established the germplasm bank of the ETSIA-UPM (now BGV-UPM) in 1966, thus becoming the first bank in the world specialized in the preservation of wild flora. Since 1966 the BGV-UPM has sent seed samples to numerous researchers worldwide, and a remarkably high number

of studies of diverse nature have been made possible thanks to the plant material stored under his initiative and guidance. The case of *Diploaxis siettiana* is an example of his achievements in the field of plant conservation; it had become extinct in the wild but could be reintroduced on the Mediterranean isle of Alborán using seeds that he had collected and stored. Thanks to the successful seed conservation procedure that César Gómez-Campo used and improved over the years, the first seed samples he stored in 1966 remained as alive as the first day a full 40 years later (2006). Based on these successes, he encouraged the establishment of many new seed banks, both in his country and worldwide.

He edited the first Red Book of Endangered Plants of the Iberian Peninsula and Balearic Islands and also the first Red Book of Endangered Plants of the Canary Islands, published in the 1980's, in collaboration with approximately 130 experts. As many as 600 data sheets of Spanish species (rare, vulnerable or threatened with extinction) were put together in those two books, which were vital first steps towards an effective protection of the Spanish flora. Thanks to César Gómez-Campo's initiative and efforts, the BGV-UPM now stores 354 threatened Spanish species and subspecies, representing approximately 24% of the total endangered flora of the country.

He had a great interest in Crucifers, the plant material of his first research on the effects of ionizing radiations, and to which he dedicated innumerable hours in the classroom, at the microscope, in the greenhouse and in the field. His eagerness to collect, study and preserve of wild Crucifer seeds (specially of the tribe *Brassicaceae*), drove him to travel not only across the entire Iberian Peninsula, but also throughout many North African and Middle Eastern countries, up to Iran and Pakistan. Most collecting trips were carried out on the lowest possible budget, under minimalist conditions which included sleeping under the stars and hardly stopping for a light meal, perhaps just a can of sardines. With this pared-down procedure he managed to magically multiply the number of kilometers and collection days, and thus to remarkably increase the trip's productivity. During those endless hours of collecting trips across the most diverse landscapes Prof. Gómez-Campo managed to all at once drive the car, catch sight of the sought-after plants and entertain his trip companions with the most interesting and innumerable tales and anecdotes.

His vast and incessant activity in the fields of plant conservation and *Brassicaceae* biology and systematics has resulted in no less than 250 scientific papers and at least nine books. He was a very active and enthusiastic member of OPTIMA since its foundation in 1974, attending most of its meetings and participating in its commissions. He also belonged to numerous other scientific societies and was member of several scientific and conservationist committees, both national and international, and was also President of Honour of the Ibero-Macaronesian Association of Botanical Gardens since 1996.

Prof. Gómez-Campo loved teaching, and had the gift of changing the most complex concepts or the most boring data into pleasant and interesting talks that immediately captivated his entire audience. He taught General Biology and Plant Physiology to undergraduate students at ETSIA-UPM for 40 years. He also coordinated and taught in the Plant Genetic Resources postgraduate (doctorate and specialization course) programs at ETSIA-UPM, attracting numerous students from abroad, mainly from Latin American countries. He had a vast knowledge on a wide variety of subjects which, as an enthusiastic and full-time born teacher, he readily shared with students, disciples and colleagues. In the last

three years of his life, already seriously ill, his admirable vigor and unbeatable tenacity enabled him to teach as many as 47 workshops on Efficient Long Term Seed Preservation in 17 countries, from Bolivia to China.

From the very beginning of his career, he received several national and international awards. The (Spanish) National Environment Award in 1994, the FONDENA (Spanish Foundation for Nature Protection) Award in 1997), the “in recognition” plaque from the XIII Crucifer Genetics Workshop, in Davis (California) in 2002 and the Silver Leaf Award Planta Europa in 2004 are among the most important ones.

Indefatigable, Prof. Gómez-Campo kept on working, collaborating with colleagues and planning ahead. He was a true pionner in plant conservation, a teacher of botanists, a renowned expert in Crucifer systematics, and the happy owner of an inveterate optimism which he readily transmitted to everybody around him. He passed away on 5th September, the day he was turning 76 years of age, in Madrid, at home and accompanied by the love and warmth of his family. He will always be remembered as a great scientist, a stimulating teacher, a guiding light, and a friend.

Address of the authors:

Juan B. Martínez-Laborde & Jesús. M. Ortiz Marcide,
Departamento de Biología Vegetal, Escuela T. S. de Ingenieros Agrónomos,
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria s/n, 28040 Madrid,
Spain. E-mail: juanbau.martinez@upm.es