



a project of  iDiv

– sPlot Letter No. 4 –

Bayreuth, Halle and Wageningen, 18 February 2015

Dear members of the sPlot Consortium,

While the last sPlot Letter is only two months old, many things happened since then, about which we would like to keep you informed. Most importantly, many new members have joined the sPlot Consortium meanwhile. Welcome to you!

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New sPlot Steering Committee

From 1–31 January 2015, the elections of the sPlot Steering Committee for the period 2015–2016 took place. All persons who were members of the sPlot Consortium on 31 December could vote, and 25 made use of this democratic right and submitted valid votes: The result is as follows:

- Helge Bruelheide: 24 votes
- Milan Chytrý: 24 votes
- Valério De Patta Pillar: 20 votes
- Jens Kattge: 18 votes
- Brody Sandel: 16 votes
- Jonathan Lenoir: 12 votes

Thus the first five are elected, and the old Steering Committee is the new Steering Committee.

Agreement between BIEN and sPlot signed

On 1 February 2015, the sPlot Steering Committee signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Leadership Team of the **Botanical Information and Ecology Network**

(BIEN; <http://bien.nceas.ucsb.edu/bien/>). BIEN is a large biodiversity informatics portal for North and South America, mainly containing species occurrence and trait data but also a significant amount of vegetation plots. The MoU states that BIEN will serve as supranational data aggregator towards sPlot for the Americas, like the European Vegetation Archive (EVA) does this for Europe, and in exchange receives the rights according to our Bylaw 4c. Unlike our agreement with EVA, which states that European data can exclusively be contributed via EVA, American databases have the option to provide their data either via BIEN or directly to sPlot.

The MoU further states that BIEN and sPlot will inform each other about plans for continental to global analyses of plot data. We now expect that BIEN will deliver a first bunch of standardised and integrated data stemming from three major American plot databases by end of February.

Database sPlot 1.1

After the workshop in Leipzig, we had started a large initiative to attract additional databases from all over the world, which resulted in a continuous inflow of many new data since end of December. Jürgen Dengler, Ute Jandt and Stephan Hennekens are currently busy to get all the data prepared for and imported into the sPlot database. Since the data have been sampled with many different approaches, come in various different formats and often lack important information, the data handling until final inclusion usually takes some time and several loops of feedback with you, the data providers. At the same time also our European partner EVA obtained new databases, while some already included databases augmented their content. Moreover several more EVA databases agreed to join also sPlot so that now all but one EVA databases are in sPlot, too.

As a result, **sPlot 1.1** (of 15 February 2015) contains **71 databases with 916,526 plots from 90 countries**:

- Europe (including Turkey and Cyprus): 45 databases, c. 855,900 plots
- Africa: 6 databases, c. 10,700 plots
- Asia: 13 databases, c. 21,000 plots
- Australasia: 1 database, c. 21,300 plots
- North America: 3 databases, c. 1,200 plots
- South America: 3 databases, c. 2,900 plots

This means an **increase by 18 databases, 77,500 plots and 28 countries** since the release of sPlot 1.0. Among the sPlot data the largest fraction, some **759,000 plots, are georeferenced** (see Figs. 1 and 2).

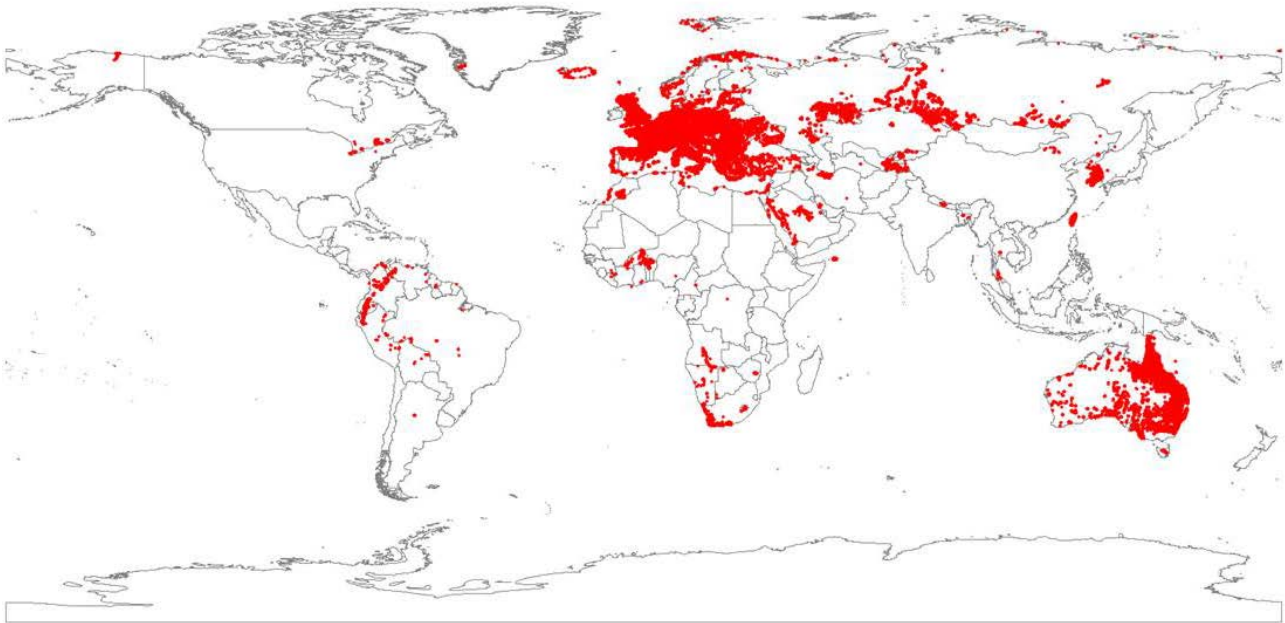


Fig. 1: Geographic distribution of vegetation plots in sPlot 1.1 (2015-02-15).

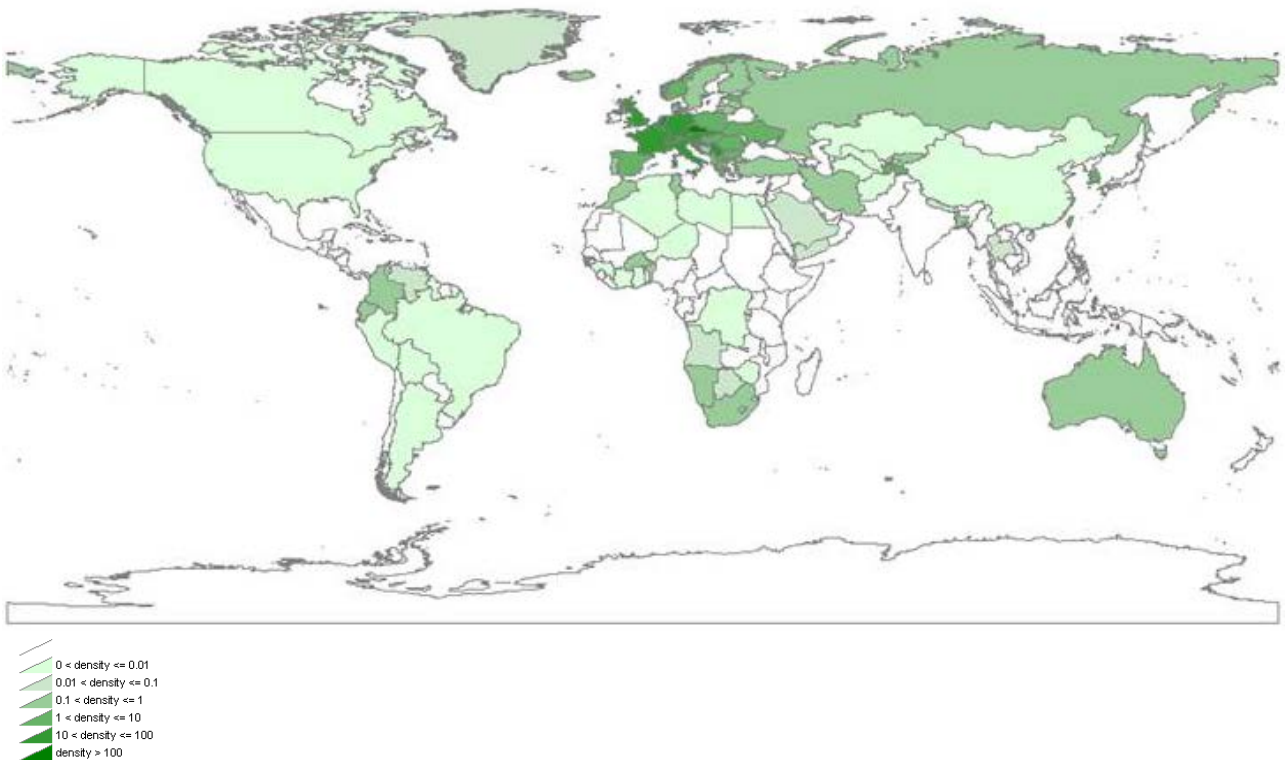


Fig. 2: Density of vegetation plots (number per 100 km²) per country as contained in sPlot 1.1 (2015-02-15).

In addition to the already physically included data (Figs. 1 and 2), we have received 14 other databases, which are currently prepared for inclusion. They come from 12 different countries: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Russia and Spain (Canary Islands, exceptionally directly contributed to sPlot).

Future additions to sPlot

sPlot will continue to fill gaps in the geographic representation and thus looks forward to the help of all its members to identify vegetation-plot databases of suitable quality and size whose owners might be willing to join the sPlot Consortium. Suggestions for potential member databases can be sent to juergen.dengler@uni-bayreuth.de (preferably with some background like number of plots, extent of sampling region and data properties, such as full species list vs. only tree layer). Note that due to constraints in personnel and time, only databases of special importance can still be added before the release of sPlot 2.0, while all others can join to a later version.

It should be noted that **sPlot member databases are usually larger (typically 1,000 to > 100,000 plots) and represent the collaborative effort of teams**. Personal databases are also acceptable, provided they have a similar size or, if smaller, fill very important gaps. Please note that sPlot cannot accept several closely related datasets from the same working group or research project, if they are contributed as several individual databases instead of a single larger one. There were discussions with some (potential) contributors during the last weeks who hoped to gain more benefit through partitioning their datasets into smaller units instead of aggregating them. If we agreed with that, it would unnecessarily inflate the workload for the sPlot database managers. It would also not be just for the large database contributors who built the current backbone of sPlot.

One should note that according to the sPlot Rules **each member database has one custodian and a maximum of one deputy custodian** (even those with > 100,000 plots!) despite we are fully aware that in the large majority of databases more than two persons contributed data or were involved in sampling the plots and setting up the database.

Incentives for contributing databases to sPlot

We have frequently been asked about incentives of contributing databases to sPlot, including those for other involved persons than the custodian and deputy custodian. We consider it as important both for each individual sPlot database as well as for sPlot as a whole that the sPlot databases are easily recognised as established units and their use results in credit for the whole team involved in setting up the respective database, not only the custodian and deputy custodian. Therefore we would like to summarize the incentives here.

A central part of the sPlot philosophy is to ensure proper crediting and reward for all the databases when their data are used via sPlot:

- **The forthcoming sPlot “database paper”** will offer all database-custodians the opportunity to contribute to the manuscript and co-authorship. The paper will **cite all databases included in sPlot 2.0** with a bibliographic reference of their choice in the reference list.
- **Co-Authorship in research papers using data via sPlot:** We expect several papers using data via sPlot and database custodian will be invited for co-authorship. He/she can hand on this right of becoming co-author to other members of the team (by turns or depending on personal interests).
- **Citation of contributing databases in research papers using data via sPlot:** According to good scientific practice (e.g. <https://www.force11.org/datacitation>) research papers using sPlot data should cite the references of the contributing datasets, in addition to citing the sPlot database paper and the link to the acknowledgements attribution page (given the frequent limitations in number of references to appear in printed reference lists, this will typically happen in an electronic supplement to the reference list).

Acknowledgements: sPlot will include an “**Attribution Page**” in its Internet representation where each sPlot database can present its crediting according to own wishes and requirements. This “Attribution page” will be cited and linked in any publication using sPlot data.

Using data via sPlot: Proposals for using data via sPlot have to be submitted by the custodian. However he/she can do it on behalf of any other member of the respective database.

Additional opportunities to give credit to your database: GIVD and Phytocoenologia

Through two members of the sPlot Core Team (Florian Jansen and Jürgen Dengler), we offer two attractive options to achieve visibility and credit for sPlot member databases (and vegetation databases in general):

- The **Global Index of Vegetation-Plot Databases (GIVD)**; www.givd.info allows you to register the metadata of your database on our highly visited Internet platform. Each registered database will receive a **unique permanent ID** that allows referring to this database unanimously as well as a citeable standardised online report about the content. sPlot collaborates with GIVD in as far as GIVD handles the metadata of sPlot anyway, but you can decide whether you wish to make them publically visible or not. Most sPlot databases are already in GIVD, but those that are not will receive specific information from us during the next weeks.
- For all databases that are registered in GIVD and above certain thresholds in size, GIVD in collaboration with the Web-of-Science journal **Phytocoenologia** offers the option to publish a **Long Database Report (LDR)** or a **Short Database Report (SDR)** that will count for your publication/citation performance and where you can have as many co-authors as you like. The format will be similar to those LDRs and SDRs in *Biodiversity & Ecology* 5 (http://www.biodiversity-plants.de/biodivers_ecol/vol4.php, pp. 77 et seq.). You are eligible if you have not published such an LDR/SDR before (or your database has grown much since then) and your database contains at least 5000 plots (Europe)/2000 plots (extra-European) for LDRs or 500/200 for SDRs (note that in tropical forest plots, not the large 1-ha plots are counted but the subplots of typically 1/16 or 1/25 ha in which they can be divided). Eligible databases will be informed automatically during the next weeks, but if you wish to speed-up things you can contact Florian Jansen/Jürgen Dengler.

sPlot on conferences

During the 7th biennial conference of the **International Biogeography Society (IBS)** from **8 to 12 January 2015 in Bayreuth**, Germany, with approx. 650 attendees (<http://www.bayceer.uni-bayreuth.de/ibs2015/>), Oliver Purschke from the sPlot Core Team presented our Consortium with a lightning talk and a poster in the session “Global functional diversity in a data-rich area”. Our poster hung next to the poster on the release 3.0 of our cooperating trait database TRY, and delegates were impressed by the potential of sPlot in conjunction with TRY 3.0. The activities of Oliver and several other present Core Team members attracted new databases to sPlot, brought constructive, positive feedback on first results and yielded offers for additional environmental layers (remotely sensed as well as modelled). For your information we have attached the poster.

Forthcoming sPlot presentations include those of Ute Jandt at the **Vegetation Database Meeting from 4 to 6 March in Oldenburg**, Germany

(<http://vegetationdatabases2015.namupro.de/>) and that of Oliver Purschke at the **European Geoscience Union (EGU) general assembly from 12 to 17 April in Vienna**, Austria (<http://www.egu2015.eu/>). If other Core Team members see opportunities to present sPlot on conferences and workshops, feel free to discuss this with Helge Bruelheide and Jürgen Dengler.

Important deadlines and next steps

The **deadline for database contributions and updates to be included into sPlot 2.0** has been postponed from 31 January to **28 February 2015** due to the high amount of databases that are currently coming in. We don't intend any further extension – so please ensure that you send your data (or your data update) in a proper format to Jürgen Dengler during this month. Later submissions unfortunately can only be considered for future releases of sPlot, but not for sPlot 2.0.

We assume that the sPlot data managing team will need at least the full month of March to get all the received data properly imported and possibly a few more weeks in April to standardise everything in the common database before the data can be released as version 2.0 for the sPlot papers planned in this year. We know that the author teams of the seven papers planned for this year are eager to get the data into their hands as soon as possible, but we believe that all will benefit when we are able to deliver a more comprehensive and more consistent database. For the sPlot members involved in the data management the coming weeks will thus be quite strenuous, while for the leaders of the analytical papers this gives a bit more time to prepare and refine their approach (as far as this is possible without data).

As there have been questions from Consortium members about authorship of the forthcoming papers, two aspects should be highlighted:

- According to the sPlot Rules each paper will be formally proposed when it is officially started, giving all sPlot Consortium members at that point of time the opportunity to opt-in as active co-authors. Therefore, the confirmed co-authors listed in the last sPlot Letter are just a starting point, not “closed clubs”.
- If you find a certain paper particularly attractive you can already now contact the lead author to get involved in current discussions before the data release (if there are any).

J.D. is job seeking

As my 75% position in another third-party project at University of Bayreuth will terminate end of February 2015, I am urgently seeking a fulltime job or a complement to my 25% position as sPlot Coordinator at iDiv, University of Leipzig, preferably in the context of vegetation-plot databases like EVA and sPlot and their use for addressing fundamental ecological questions. In principle, I am searching for a full position in the fields of vegetation ecology (with strong field competence), macroecology and ecoinformatics, and would be geographically highly flexible if an attractive offer reaches me. To bridge several months or a year, I would also appreciate offers as guest lecturer abroad, if you have funding for that. Many thanks in advance for any proposition reaching me!

Jürgen Dengler (e-mail see below)

Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.de/citations?hl=de&user=j-9uXO8AAAAJ>

Web of Science: <http://www.researcherid.com/rid/B-6604-2008>

With our best regards,

Jürgen Dengler (sPlot Coordinator), **Helge Bruelheide** (On behalf of the sPlot Steering Committee), **Stephan Hennekens** (sPlot Data Manager) & **the sPlot Core Team**

Phone: +49-921-55-2360 (J.D.)

E-mail: juergen.dengler@uni-bayreuth.de

URL:

http://www.idiv.de/sdiv/postdoc-fellowships/workshop-postdocs/vcard_item_900389/detail

German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig

Deutscher Platz 5e

04103 Leipzig

Germany

URL: <http://www.idiv.de/>

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