



PREFACE

Celebrating Diversity in Oaxaca

It was an honor and a privilege for me to host the 11th International Oak Society Conference. It was truly exciting to see the Conference room filled with so many colleagues, friends, and former mentors. More than 140 participants traveled from 20 countries to attend. This speaks not only of the global importance of the genus *Quercus*, but also to the reach and impact of the International Oak Society.

A better location for the Conference could not have been chosen. Mexico is a country of extraordinary biological and cultural diversity, and the state of Oaxaca stands out particularly in both respects. In a territory of just over 90,000 km² – roughly the size of Portugal – it is home to more than 9,000 plant species. This remarkable species richness is due to its highly complex physiography, which combines major mountain ranges with valleys and ravines, allowing for the development of tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, temperate pine, oak, and pine–oak forests, cloud forests, xerophytic scrublands, and grasslands.

The genus *Quercus* reaches peak diversity in Oaxaca, with approximately 54 species present in the state. Cultural richness is equally outstanding, as Oaxaca is home to numerous Indigenous peoples, including the Zapotec, Mixtec, Triqui, Mazatec, Mixe, and Chontal, among others, who speak many distinct languages and dialects. Oaxaca is also a key center of the origin and domestication of maize, according to archaeological evidence found at sites such as the famous Guilá Naquitz Cave, which dates back more than 6,000 years.

These are some of the reasons why I considered it an excellent idea when, about three years ago, Béatrice Chassé suggested that we jointly organize this conference in Oaxaca – after we had shared a few mezcals in the city center. At the time, I did not fully realize what I was getting into, but I sincerely hope the effort was worthwhile for everybody!

I must also say that hosting the Conference was demanding work, but I enjoyed it immensely – especially because I had the pleasure of working side by side with an extraordinary organizing committee, composed, in addition to Béatrice, of Amy Byrne, Phil Douglas, Dirk Giseburt, Dan Kostka, and Ryan Russell, as well as our former President, Roderick Cameron. I would also like to acknowledge our local organizers,

Susana Alejandre and Iván Alejandro Ortiz Rodríguez, and my colleagues from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: Oscar De Luna Bonilla, Sofía Zorrilla Azcué, María Fernanda Cidel Rocasalvo, and Ricardo Gaytán Legaria for their support in organizing and ensuring the smooth running of the traditional Pre- and Post-Conference Tours associated with this meeting.

Throughout the organizing process, I was delighted to witness the generosity of the International Oak Society, as a significant effort was made to ensure that this was an inclusive meeting – bilingual and with simultaneous translation, as well as financial support provided to 46 participants, primarily students, to enable their attendance. It is also noteworthy that the first meeting of the Global Conservation Consortium for Oak (GCCO) Mexico and Central America Species’ Stewards, entitled “Collaboration, Progress, and Challenges for Oak Conservation in Mesoamerica”, was held under the auspices of the International Oak Society.

During the Conference, we enjoyed a series of oral and poster presentations covering a wide range of topics, including the latest advances in research on oak evolution, genomics, taxonomy, conservation, physiology, ecological interactions, and the cultural value of oaks as a source of artistic creation. I am certain that all of these presentations have inspired participants to seek new opportunities for collaboration that will help them continue their own work, which, in turn, will contribute to expanding collective knowledge about our favorite genus.

In today’s context, the International Oak Society has a crucial role to play in addressing the issues raised by anthropic pressures and climate change that loom over oaks and the ecosystems they form. But perhaps most serious of all is the lack of knowledge and appreciation regarding the diversity, ecological functions, and conservation status of oaks. We often do not even know precisely which species exist in each region, which are endangered, or what roles they play in their ecosystems. I believe that the International Oak Society and all the people who participated in this meeting can contribute to filling these gaps in our beloved oaks and the ecosystems they inhabit.

Because within every oak, within every forest, there is a story worth telling.
And a future we can build.

Antonio González Rodríguez
Conference Host

