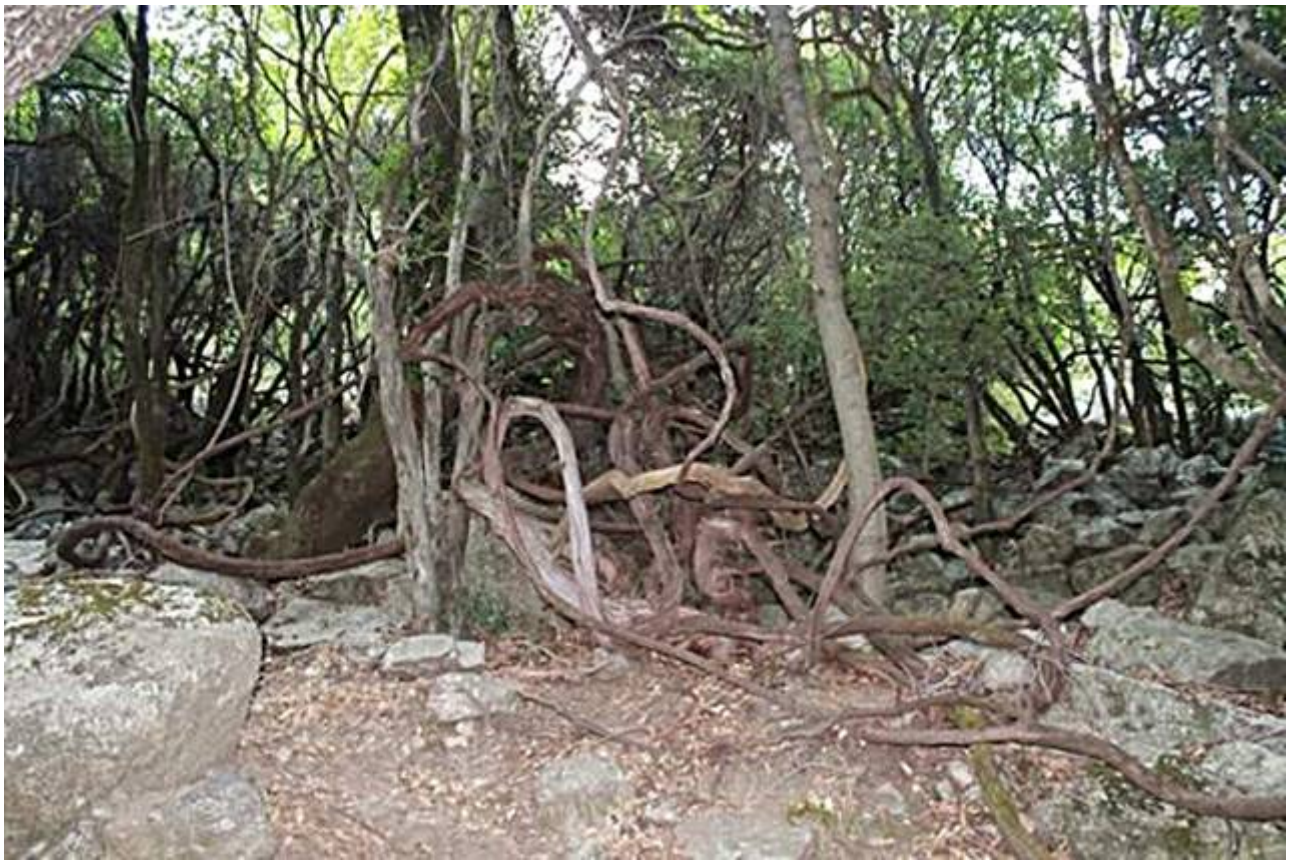
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Millennia-old Grapevine Discovered in Sardinia, Spurs Call for UNESCO Protection

Scientists Hail the Discovery of a Genetic 'Mother' to Cultivated Grapes

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A millennia-old grapevine has been discovered in the Ogliastra region, deep in the heart of Sardinia. This unique plant, identified as Vitis silvestris, stands in the municipality of Urzulei, specifically in an area called "Bacu de Biladestu." The vine was initially found in 2011 by forestry workers from the "Silana" project, and its significance

has since underscored the urgent need to preserve this natural treasure.

The wild Urzulei vine is described as a genetic "mother" to nearly all cultivated grape varieties worldwide. The vine is monumental, with a main trunk boasting a circumference of 135 centimeters, and its extensive branches climb high into the surrounding ancient trees, extending for dozens of meters. Adding to its uniqueness is the fact that it produces only male flowers, a rare botanical trait that sets it apart from other nearby vines. In the surrounding area, around sixty additional wild grapevines have been identified, some of which are hermaphroditic or bear female flowers, indicating a viticultural ecosystem of notable complexity and diversity.

The scientific community has taken a particular interest in this find, with experts like Professor Mario Fregoni, a former president of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, emphasizing the need to protect the vine. Fregoni has advocated for its inclusion on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites, highlighting the vine not only as a biological marvel but also as a cultural and historical treasure deserving of preservation.



Ogliastra's natural environment is known for its rich biodiversity, serving as a sanctuary for a wide range of animal, plant, and microbial species within a largely untouched mountainous landscape. The ancient Vitis silvestris of Urzulei contributes to this delicate ecological balance and enhances the appeal of a region already celebrated for its natural wealth.

Joining the "Città del Vino" association has brought further recognition to Urzulei and this ancient vine, attracting researchers, winemakers, and wine enthusiasts alike. Protecting this botanical rarity is more than a matter of conservation; it is also about acknowledging a living piece of viticultural history and its deep-rooted connection to Sardinia's cultural landscape. The ongoing study and preservation of this vine could shed new light on the evolution and domestication of grape varieties in the Mediterranean, a crucial area for the history of winemaking.

Beyond its scientific significance, the Urzulei vine is also a cultural emblem of Ogliastra, representing the longstanding relationship between local communities and their environment. For centuries, this region has been a cultural crossroads, and its people have maintained a deep connection to nature. Protecting and studying this unique specimen is, therefore, a way of honoring the collective memory of a territory that has preserved its natural and cultural wealth with respect and wisdom.

The call for international protection of the Urzulei vine reflects the shared commitment of experts and local communities to conserve a heritage that transcends borders. It also serves as a reminder of the collective responsibility to ensure that wonders like this ancient vine endure for future generations. The collaborative efforts of researchers, authorities, and local residents will be crucial in safeguarding this unique legacy.