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Bioinformatics in Forest Biodiversity: From DNA Barcoding to Genomic Selection

Zeshan Haider Raza[1*], Muhammad Asif[2], Akhtar Munir[3], Mengyuan Wang[4]

[1, 4] Teesside University UK

[2, 3] University of Agriculture Faisalabad

[1]shaniabg493@gmail.com, [2]Asifaliwasiq@gmail.com, [3]akhtar.munir@uaf.edu.pk ,

[4]Mengyuan.wang@tees.ac.uk

Corresponding Author

Zeshan Haider Raza
shaniabg493@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The investigation along with preservation of forest biodiversity benefits tremendously from bioinformatics. The paper reviews essential bioinformatics applications which include DNA barcoding and genomic selection within forest ecosystems. DNA barcoding helps scientists identify species correctly yet environmental DNA (eDNA) and metabarcoding methods let scientists study diverse species through non-destructive monitoring procedures. Population genomics operates as a method to investigate genetic diversity which helps maintain populations in addition to adaptive management functions. Biological and evolutionary analyses demonstrate species family links while showing the historical movements of living things which supports better planning of conservation efforts. Genomic selection speeds up tree breeding activities through which breeders can improve traits involving growth patterns and disease immunity. Research in forest biodiversity progresses due to BOLD and GenBank and QIIME as well as bioinformatics tools which analyze and interpret data. Forest conservation together with management and sustainable forestry practice benefits from genomic technologies even though data standards and computing requirements create present-day obstacles.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of plant animal and microbial exist in forest ecosystems which play essential roles in preserving biodiversity worldwide while delivering ecosystem services through carbon-storing and

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water management and soil protection. Mammals face growing stress from climate change together with habitat loss hazards and invasive species attacks and human-related abuses thus creating a crisis for direct biodiversity evaluation and conservation methods [1]. Bioinformatics has developed into an interdisciplinary force which makes systematic analysis possible for big biological datasets to solve major issues in forest ecology and genetics.

The combination of computer software together with biological datasets and statistical procedures helps researchers extract valuable insights from extensive molecular data collections. Forest biodiversity research benefits from this technological advancement which changes both the species identification process and genetic variation understanding together with the methodology of conservation and breeding programs [2]. DNA barcoding among other advances made through bioinformatics lays down basic elements for data-based choices needed in forest management and conservation biology [3].

One of the first biodiversity science tools that relies on bioinformatics employs DNA barcoding which relies on standard short genetic markers to identify species from even very small and damaged material. The use of this approach enables better species diversity investigation within forest habitats by helping researchers identify hidden species as well as detect invasive taxa early [4]. Next-generation sequencing technology known as NGS allows bioinformatics applications in forest biodiversity to offer more extensive capabilities. The combination of metabarcoding analysis with environmental DNA (eDNA) enables researchers to detect wide range of species from liquid and solid environmental samples thereby enabling non-destructive mass biodiversity surveillance [5].

Bioinformatics serves as the primary instrument to analyze species identification together with genetic diversity patterns and population structures as well as phylogenetic associations and evolutionary activities of forest organisms. The obtained biotechnological data provides necessary information needed for priority-driven conservation decisions together with advantageous population evaluation and environmental change prediction. Genomic tools assisted by bioinformatics now help speed up forest breeding efforts since they locate genomic aspects related to disease resistance along with drought tolerance and growth performance through genomic selection [6].

The application of bioinformatics for forest biodiversity research leads scientists to conduct comprehensive investigations by processing large amounts of data. The successful implementation of forest biodiversity research through bioinformatics faces obstacles when it comes to standardizing data along with developing solid computational systems and integrating teamwork between researchers from various fields [7]. The research objective focuses on examining contemporary bioinformatics applications for forest biodiversity through DNA barcoding to genomic selection

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which features significant developments alongside assessment of upcoming research frameworks for scientists and conservation experts [8].

DNA BARCODING IN FOREST SPECIES

Scientists use DNA barcoding as a molecular method which uses defined genomic segments for species identification and discrimination purposes. Forest biodiversity research benefits strongly from DNA barcoding because it enables the systematic identification of species as well as the detection of cryptic taxa and the assessment of ecological changes and the support of conservation initiatives [9]. DNA barcoding works through analyzing distinct gene sequences that exist uniquely among different species hence research databases can identify organisms using remaining fragments of tissue leaf wood [10].

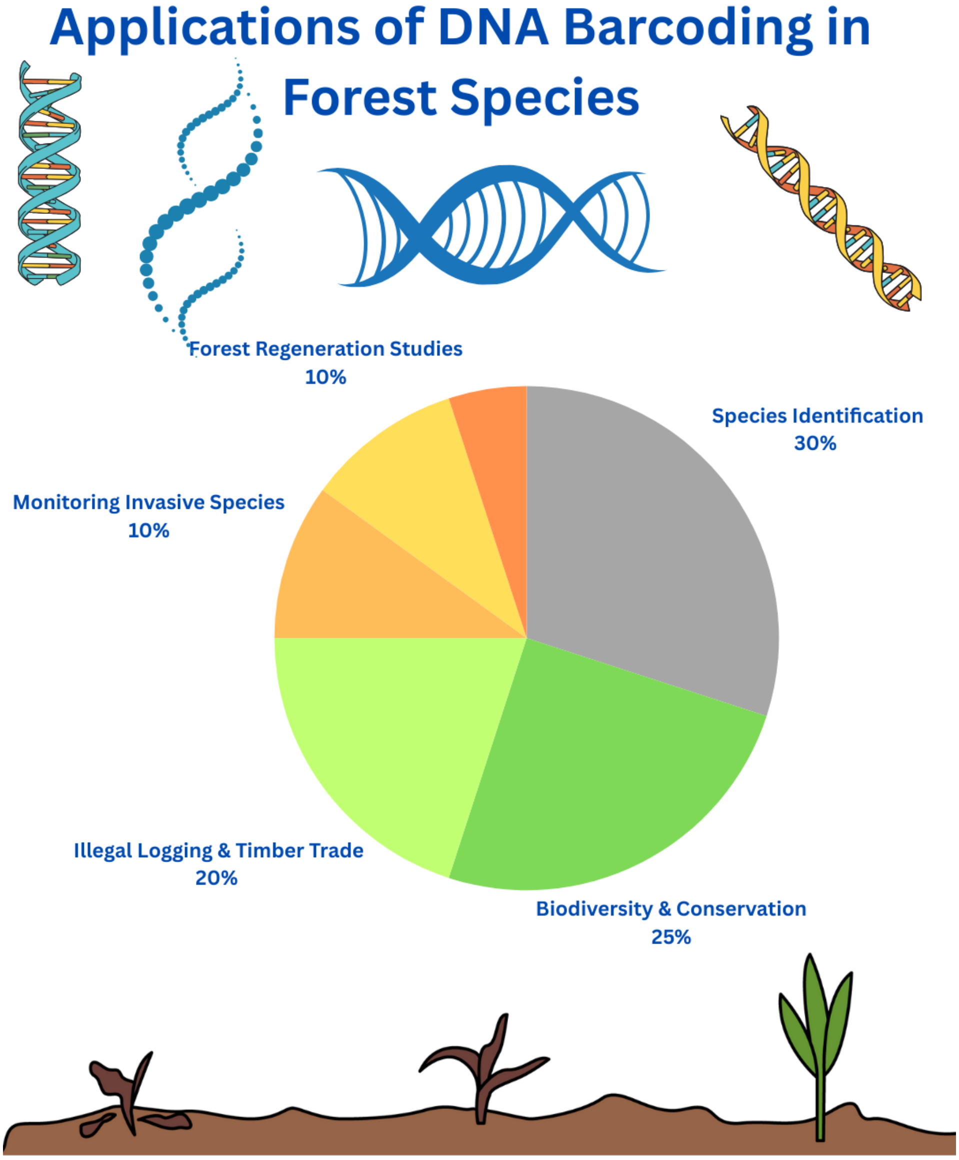

Figure: 1 applications of DNA barcoding in forest species

The swift identification of tree species becomes possible in tropical forests through DNA barcoding

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since many regions lack reproductive structures as well as expert taxonomists to conduct proper morphological identification. This identification method serves both to detect wood materials sourced from logged trees and ensure legal trade compliance and stop the exploitation of protected species [11].

DNA barcoding provides foundational techniques for executing metabarcoding together with environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis through which researchers can acquire DNA identifications from multiple organisms housed within single environmental samples. The technical developments enable both quick biodiversity monitoring systems and monitoring of temporal modifications in species populations [12].

Successful DNA barcoding operations rely on extensive reference library databases such as Barcode of Life Data System (BOLD) and GenBank which currently host millions of sequences from worldwide species collections. The expansion of DNA barcoding applications in forest biodiversity research becomes more plausible through the ongoing growth of databases and decreasing costs of sequencing technology [13].

ENVIRONMENTAL DNA (EDNA) AND METABARCODING

Co-joined use of Environmental DNA (eDNA) with metabarcoding has redefined species detection in complicated diverse areas by providing nondestructive molecular techniques. Scientists now detect species through eDNA techniques by analyzing DNA which organisms naturally shed into natural settings such as water, air or soil through skin cells and feces as well as pollen and dead remains [14]. DNA metabarcoding works from the basic principles of DNA barcoding to provide community-level analysis systems. The technology consists of using fixed primers targeting basecode zones along with next-generation sequencing technology that determines various species existing in one ecological sample. Both visible and cryptic organisms from many different taxa including plants, fungi, insects and vertebrates and microbes can be rapidly assessed through this method [15].

Forest ecosystems benefit significantly from eDNA paired with metabarcoding because they enable effective monitoring of plants and detection of invasive species as well as microbial diversity assessment and research on elusive endangered species. DNA analysis of forest floor soil unveils the root signatures as well as those from fungi and fauna thus allowing scientists to study belowground ecological communities alongside ground conditions [16].

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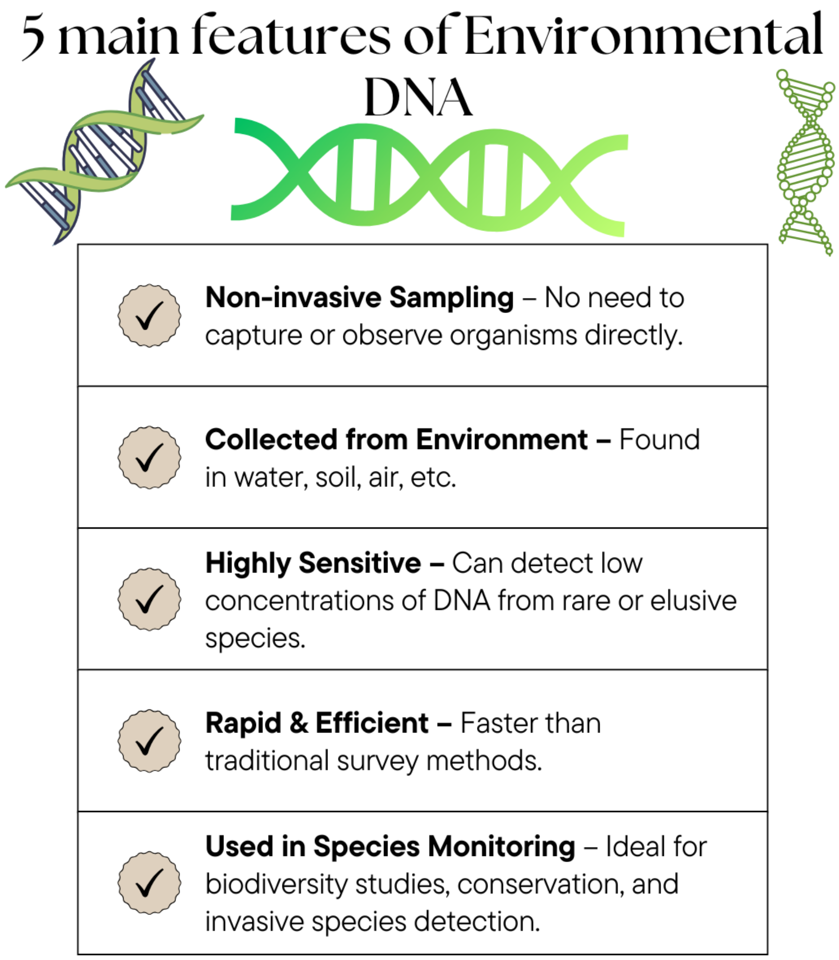

Figure: 2 showing 5 main features of environmental DNA

Serious bioinformatics pipelines are essential to achieve data analysis success from the vast amounts of data processed through filtering pipelines. The analysis tools QIIME OBITools and DADA2 serve the primary purpose of performing taxonomy assignments and diversity measurement and community structure visualization [17]. The correct species identification requires the use of reference databases such as BOLD and UNITE particularly for fungal DNA analysis.

Economic benefits of eDNA and metabarcoding methods compete against PCR biases and incomplete reference databases as well as the inability to calculate species abundance based on DNA content [18]. Through constant research development in sequencing technologies together with bioinformatics advancements and standardization protocols these tools have established critical importance for big-scale forest biodiversity assessment and extended ecological monitoring efforts [19].

Population Genomics and Genetic Diversity Assessment

Population genomics represents an advanced method that analyzes genetic changes throughout entire genomes found within populations plus between them. The distribution pattern of genetic diversity

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together with population evolution patterns and adaptive capabilities to environmental conditions can be studied through this method in forest biodiversity research [20]. The acquired information stands essential for creating conservation strategies and managing forests sustainably alongside determining the climate change responses of species.

Population genomics depends on bioinformatics tools including STRUCTURE, ADMIXTURE, PLINK and PCAngsd which process genetic structure and allele frequencies together with demographic historical information. The research instruments used by investigators enable scientists to identify changes in population size quantities as well as detect selection-based genomic regions [25].

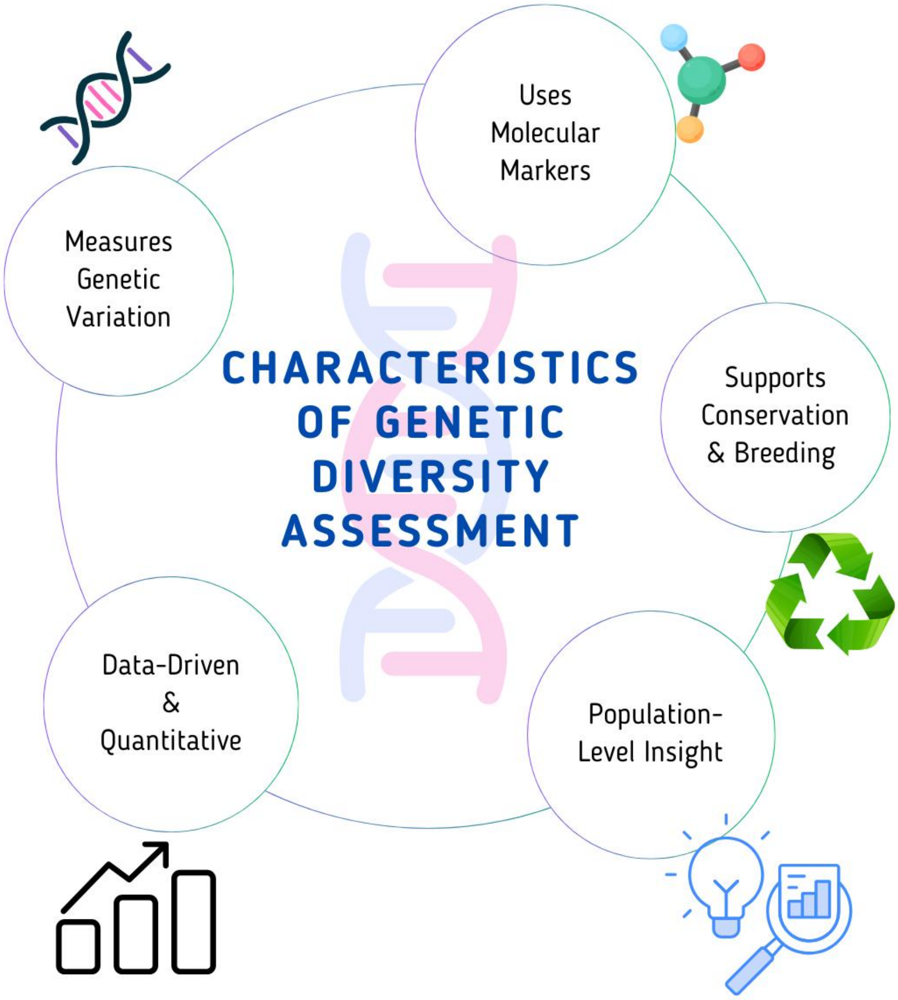

Figure: 3 showing characteristics of genetic diversity assessment

The development of next-generation sequencing (NGS) technologies permits researchers to analyze thousands of individuals through extensive discovery of genetic markers especially single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) [21]. The genetic analysis techniques RAD-seq (Restriction site Associated DNA Sequencing), Genotyping-by-Sequencing (GBS) and whole-genome resequencing help

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scientists study forest tree populations through advanced examination of genetic data for population structure and gene flow as well as hybridization and inbreeding and local adaptation traits [22].

Forest trees exist as long-living organisms with many genetic variants and experience significant movement of genes from different sources because pollination and seed distribution happen through wind and wildlife [23]. Knowledge about population genetic patterns of these species enables better protection of their evolutionary mechanisms along with their adaptive abilities in harsh conditions. Identifying how populations connect genetically enables scientists to define important conservation zones which enables them to determine which areas need protection the most [24].

Population genomics achieves spatial perspectives on genetic diversity through the combination of environmental and geographic data with genomic information which is referred to as landscape genomics. Reforestation planning benefits forms this research because it reveals suitable populations of seeds that demonstrate resistance to climate changes [26]. Population genomics based on increasing genomic resources for non-model forest species enables scientists to understand better evolutionary processes in forest systems. The approach enables scientists to use evidence-based methods for genetic resource preservation alongside programs that boost forest adaptation in our changing environment [27].

PHYLOGENOMICS AND EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES

Modern evolutionary biology relies on phylogenomics because it joins concepts from phylogenetics with genomics approach. Phylogenomics allows scientists to analyze evolutionary interactions between forest species as well as identify when new species emerged while reconstructing their historical geographic divisions [28]. Advanced bioinformatics platforms together with high-throughput sequencing enable scientists to utilize hundreds to thousands of genes or embrace whole genome analysis for developing powerful phylogenetic trees with excellent topological resolution [29].

Traditional phylogenetic research used restricted numbers of genetic markers because these proved insufficient to resolve species groups with quick evolution or recent radiative events. Phylogenomics aligns with large genomic data coming from transcriptomes or plastomes together with nuclear genomes to establish comprehensive evolutionary understanding of organisms [30]. The complicated evolutionary attributes of forest species that result from hybridization along with polyploidy and gene duplication become more understandable through this analysis approach [31].

The main benefit of using phylogenomics in forest systems involves the clarification of taxonomic relations. Apart from it, species definitions present challenges in tropical forests because many species share comparable morphology or show instances of morphological flexibility. Phylogenomic

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studies detect hidden species taxa while establishing clearer taxonomic configurations which results in better forest biodiversity compilation and conservation programs [32].

The scientific method uses phylogenomics to determine how forest species along with their lineages dispersed across multiple areas andclimate variables during regional evolution. The historical events involving glaciation together with plate tectonics and climatic changes enabled scientists to understand current forest biodiversity patterns [33]. Past hybridization events together with introgression stand out in tree populations due to the capabilities of phylogenomic tools to identify them. These occurrences play a role in adaptive evolutionary processes [34].

Practical forestry conservation measures benefit from evolutionary relationship knowledge for selecting species or populations that become part of ex-situ conservation and restoration programs and genetic resource management strategies. Species that demonstrate close evolutionary connections often exhibit similar evolutionary weaknesses or adapting habits which would determine their ability to cope with climate change conditions [35]. The successful operation of bioinformatics pipelines depends directly on the completion of sequence alignment and ortholog detection and gene tree creation and species tree reconciliation tasks. The phylogenetic inference together with divergence time estimation depends on commonly used software tools such as RAxML, IQ-TREE, BEAST and ASTRAL [36].

Phylogenomics provides scientists with an effective method to investigate the historical development and evolutionary methods of forest species and their adaptive features. The exposure of evolutionary patterns helps us protect species together with their sustaining genetic elements and evolutionary procedures which protect forest biodiversity through time [37].

GENOMIC SELECTION AND BREEDING IN FOREST TREES

The advanced technological method in forest tree breeding known as Genomic Selection (GS) relies on genomic information to forecast individual values for breeding which identifies top genetic potential candidates. The technique is transforming the way we develop forest trees with improved valuable characteristics which include increased growth speed alongside disease immunity and environmental stress defense capabilities against drought and heat [38]. Genomic selection employs molecular marker data specifically single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) to quicken breeding procedures and improve measurement accuracy instead of using conventional traditional multi-generation comparison [39].

The usage of genomic selection in forest trees becomes essential due to both their extended generation times alongside their intricate characteristics. Traditional tree breeding operates at a slow pace since it demands extensive data collection from several generations regarding their performance traits.

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Forest managers can reach quicker genetic success rates through the early assessment of traits with genomic data. The rapid need for climate change adaptation requires this method to be most effective [40].

The implementation of genomic selection in forest trees depends heavily on premium genomic resources which include reference genomes together with dense marker panels. The genetic data collection method consists of Genotyping-by-Sequencing (GBS) and RAD-seq and whole-genome sequencing (WGS) which enable precise identification of genomic markers that link to particular traits. Creators of breeding programs can select individuals that possess favorable genetic traits by using identified markers [41].

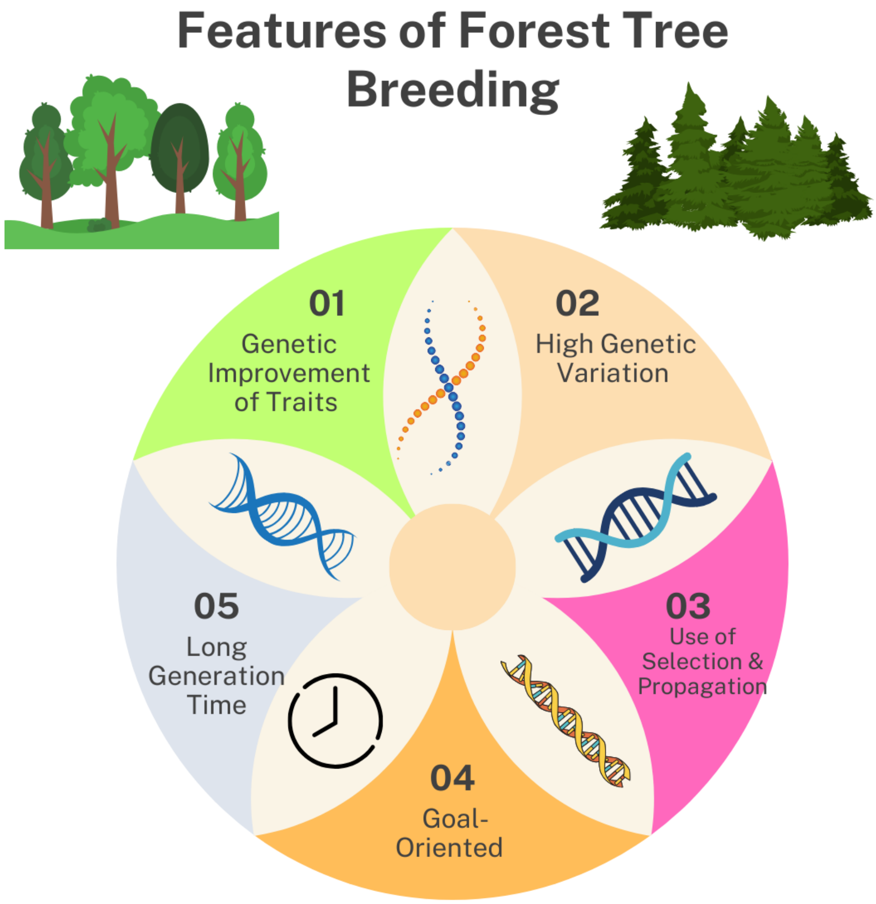

Figure: 4 showing features of forest tree breeding

Genomic selection functions optimally with contemporary forest management procedures like assisted migration and reforestation because it helps identify breeding material which matches upcoming environmental needs. Genomic information brings opportunities to enhance forest population diversity thus ensuring their long-term health along with resilience [42]. Forest tree breeding takes advantage of genomic selection yet its implementation faces two main difficulties from running extensive multiple-trial field tests to handle complex datasets involving non-model

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species. Forest tree population management through sustainable improvement strategies is expected to adopt genomic selection as standard operation as genomic technology and bioinformatics keep advancing [43].

BIOINFORMATICS TOOLS AND DATABASES

Bioinformatics tools together with databases serve essential roles in the evaluation and processing of enormous genomic datasets produced throughout forest biodiversity studies. The tools permit scientific teams to examine sophisticated data collections while locating genetic identifiers and explore biological diversity levels and develop strategic decisions about conservation programs as well as breeding programs for trees [44]. Forest genomics has become completely dependent on bioinformatics because of the combination between high-throughput sequencing technology progress and rising genomic data complexity [45].

The fundamental role of bioinformatics in forest biodiversity consists of maintaining genetic databases. The Barcode of Life Data System (BOLD) facilitates worldwide DNA barcode sequence storage for species recognition through its global database while GenBank supplies broad access to genetic sequences from various organisms [46]. The identification of species in forest ecosystems depends on DNA barcoding or metabarcoding methods that databases support through taxonomic reference library development. The fungal DNA barcoding resource UNITE serves researchers who study forest habitats because fungi take essential ecological functions in these environments [47].

Different bioinformatics tools provide the ability to cope with genetic data through management systems and visualization tools that help extract meaningful interpretations. The data analysis tools QIIME and Mothur stand among commonly used assessment programs for eDNA metabarcoding and environmental DNA (eDNA) identification and community composition evaluations [48]. The programs enable rapid DNA sequence handling together with taxonomic identification of organisms and biodiversity determination. Stacks stands as one of the most prevalent tools within population genomics that solves both Single Nucleotide Polymorphism (SNP) discovery and genotyping challenges in forest tree species [49].

Genomic selection and breeding makes use of PLINK and Tassel software to handle and analyze SNP data which helps researchers identify traits-associated markers that are essential for breeding purposes. The phylogenetic analysis of whole-genome data relies on the use of RAxML, IQ-TREE and BEAST which let scientists generate evolutionary trees to observe species genetic relations [50]. Programmers continue to develop bioinformatics tools that operate through intuitive platforms including Galaxy and Bio conductor which makes them available to researchers of different computational abilities [51].

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Large datasets require efficient processing and storage solutions because data volumes and complexity increase along with the adoption of cloud-based platforms together with high-performance computing (HPC) environments. Research tools working alongside reliable databases help scientists access the complete value of genomic information for studying forest biodiversity which results in better knowledge about evolutionary patterns and species diversity as well as conservation practices [52].

CONCLUSION

Bioinformatics brought a significant change to scientific understanding of forest ecosystems and wild genetic diversity by integrating into forest biodiversity research. The use of bioinformatics tools delivers highly precise results in species recognition and population genetics as well as forest biodiversity protection because of DNA barcoding and state-of-the-art genomic selection. The deployment of these technologies has become essential for ecosystem research since they allow scientists to observe biodiversity non-intrusively to enhance conservation methods and implement better forest management practices.

DNAbarcoding has advanced how researchers identify species through improved biodiversity monitoring particularly within intricate forest areas that are challenging to study. The integration of environmental DNA (eDNA) with metabarcoding under bioinformatics management enables extensive biodiversity surveys that monitor various taxa thus providing complete forest ecosystems insight. Population genomics allows professionals to measure genetic diversity hence providing critical data about species adaptability for extended preservation planning as climate changes.

Phylogenomics together with evolutionary studies expanded our knowledge of how forest species relate evolutionarily and disseminate across their habitats since this information enables better conservation strategy planning. The acquired knowledge enables scientists to identify species and create conservation units for genetic resource management as a means to safeguard evolutionary continuum. Farmlands understand forestry better through genomic selection because it enables fast breeding programs that create valuable trees resistant to diseases and environmental threats. Forest managers use genomic data to accomplish more efficient choice of superior genetic individuals that enable forest populations to adapt and survive in changing environments.

Bioinformatics databases together with appropriate tools serve as vital requirements for successful implementation of these approaches. Research teams equipped with BOLD and GenBank and UNITE genetic databases together with bioinformatics tools QIIME, PLINK, and RAxML enable scientists to assess giant genomic collections that lead to better decisions regarding forest protection and management. The accomplished achievements in this field encounter ongoing hurdles mainly because

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of data standardization difficulties and limited computational power and the absence of genomic data application in operational conservation programs. Bioinformatics' capability to assist forest biodiversity research and conservation will enhance notably because of ongoing technological progress and growing data acquisition strategies. The approach toward forest biodiversity management achieved revolutionary progress through bioinformatics by delivering essential research instruments for understanding and protecting forests while ensuring sustainable forest management under present global environmental threats.

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