

World's oldest ecological study is honored

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Ecologists are preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the world's oldest ecological research project -- The Park Grass Experiment -- in Britain.

The 1856 experiment was set up at the Rothamsted Research Experimental Station in Hertfordshire to answer crucial agricultural questions of the day. But it's since proved an invaluable resource for studying natural selection and biodiversity.

To mark the occasion, Rothamsted -- one of the world's oldest agricultural research institutions -- will host an international symposium May 23-24 exploring the value of long-term ecological research.

Park Grass was designed to test the effect of fertilizers and manures on hay yields. However, it became apparent the treatments were affecting the botanical makeup of the plots and the ecological experiment has been studied ever since.

In a major review, Professor Jonathan Silvertown of The Open University and colleagues illustrate how long-term experiments grow in value with time and how they may be used to investigate scientific questions that were inconceivable at their inception.

During its 150-year history, Park Grass has demonstrated conventional field trials probably underestimate threats to plant biodiversity.

The Park Grass Experiment review appears in the British Ecological

Society's Journal of Ecology.

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