

PlantLink Researcher in the spotlight

Hilde Nybom

November 2016

Professor Hilde Nybom works at the Department of Plant Breeding at SLU in Balsgård. She has worked 30 years at SLU. Her research career is devoted to fruit breeding and she has been involved in releases of already popular new apple varieties in Sweden. Outside of plant breeding she has a passion for soft coated wheaten terriers!



-How would you describe your research in three sentences?

Already since my days as a PhD student I have been deeply interested in the evolution of plants, especially those plants that have strange reproduction systems like *Rubus* (blackberries) and *Rosa* subsect. *Caninae* (dogroses). I however also work with applied apple breeding, i.e. the development of new and improved apple cultivars for commercial production in Sweden. In connection with this, I also try to learn more about the genetic background for some of the most important traits like fruit flesh firmness and the levels of resistance to various fungal diseases.

-Tell us about your “biggest” discovery, and why!

My most cited paper is a metastudy on the associations between various life history traits in wild plants on the one hand, and DNA marker-derived population genetics parameters on the other hand. However, my most exciting discovery was the revelation of how bivalent formation takes place in the highly irregular meiosis of dogroses. The result was very unexpected and I felt like Sherlock Holmes when putting all the little bits and pieces of evidence together!

-What have you experienced as the largest change in research since you started?

There was considerably more economical stability in the system when I started, with more permanent positions and also a much higher number of grant applications actually getting funded. Moreover, in the 30 years that I have been working at SLU, I have seen how applied research (i.e. closely tied in with stakeholder needs) has decreased dramatically. Finally, our tools have improved enormously, with easy access to e.g. advanced computer programs and molecular methods.

-Finally, let’s say you got unlimited funds and the chance to start another research career; where would your research be five years from now?

This time, I would make a careful evaluation of research policies – since I don’t believe those funds would be unlimited forever! If I still wanted to go into plants, I’d probably choose something within forestry – this is somewhat of a Swedish specialty and the possibilities of developing a viable research group with international standing would be considerably higher compared to in horticulture. Even more likely, I would however go into human or perhaps veterinary medicine.