

# Access to genes and genomes with Ensembl



**Introduction and Worked Example** 



# **CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION	2
WORKED EXAMPLE	7
BROWSING ENSEMBL Error! Bookmark	
ExercisesAnswers	
BIOMART	30
Exercises	30
Answers	31
COMPARATIVE GENOMICS	34
Exercises	
Answers	37
EVALUATING GENES AND TRANSCRIPTS	38
Exercises	
Answers	39
VARIATIONS	41
Exercises	41
Answers	41



# Introduction

Ensembl is one of the world's primary resources for genomic research, a resource through which scientists can access the human genome as well as the genomes of other model organisms. Because of the complexity of the genome and the many different ways in which scientists want to use it, Ensembl has to provide many levels of access with a high degree of flexibility. Through the Ensembl website a wet-lab researcher with a simple web browser can for example perform BLAST searches against chromosomal DNA, download a genomic sequence or search for all members of a given protein family. But Ensembl is also an all-round software and database system that can be installed locally to serve the needs of a genomic centre or a bioinformatics division in a pharmaceutical company enabling complex data mining of the genome or large-scale sequence annotation.

### The need for automatic annotation

Recent years have seen the release of huge amounts of sequence data from genome sequencing centres (figure 1). However, this raw sequence data is most valuable to the

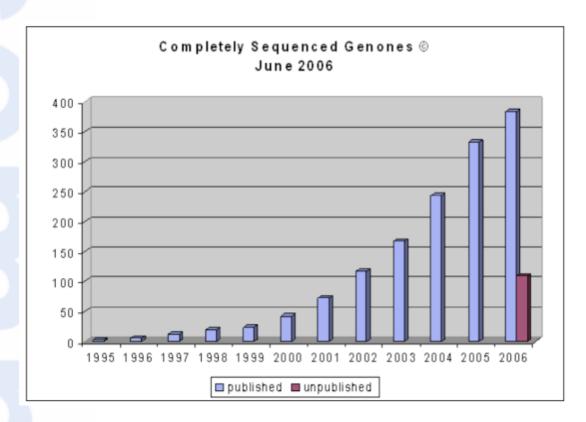


Figure 1. Completely sequenced genomes as of june 2006 (figure taken from http://www.genomesonline.org).



laboratory biologist when provided along with quality annotation of the genomic sequence. This information can be the starting point for planning experiments, interpreting Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms, inferring the function of gene products, predicting regulatory sites for gene expression and so on. The currently agreed 'gold standard' for the annotation of eukaryotic genomes is annotation made by a human being. This so-called "manual annotation" is based on information derived from sequence homology searches, the results of various ab initio gene prediction methods and literature searches. Annotation of large genomes (such as mouse and human) that meet this standard is slow and labour intensive, taking large teams of annotators years to complete. As a result, the annotation can almost never be entirely up-to-date and free of inconsistencies (as the annotation process usually begins before the sequencing process is complete). Hence, an automated annotation system is desirable since it is a relatively rapid process that allows frequent updates to accommodate new data. To meet this need, we produced the Ensembl annotation system by observing how annotators build gene structures and condensing this process into a set of rules.

### The start of Ensembl

Ensembl's genesis was in response to the acceleration of the public effort to sequence the human genome in 1999. At that point it was clear that if annotation of the draft sequence was to be available in a timely fashion it would have to be automatically generated and that new software systems would be needed to handle genome data sets that were much larger, much more fragmented and much more rapidly changing than anything previous dealt with.

Ensembl was conceived in three parts: as a scalable way of storing and retrieving genomic data; as a web site for genome display; and as an automatic annotation method based around a set of heuristics. It was initially written for the draft human genome, which was sequenced clone-by-clone but has also been successfully used for whole genome shotgun assemblies. The storage and display parts of Ensembl are used for all the genomes currently present in Ensembl, while the automatic gene annotation has been run for most of the genomes with the exception of Takifugu, Tetraodon, Fruitfly, *C. elegans* and Yeast.

Over the past few years Ensembl has grown into a large scale enterprise, with substantial computing resources enabling it to process and provide live database access to currently more than 25 different genomes (figure 2) and a bimonthly update frequency to its website. It has a large community of users in both industry and academia, using it as a base for their individual organisation's experimental and computational genome based investigations, some of which maintain their own local installations.

Ensembl is a collaboration between the European Bioinformatics Institute (EBI) and the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, both located on the Wellcome Trust Genome Campus in Hinxton, Cambridge, UK. Ensembl is funded



principally by the Wellcome Trust, with additional funding from the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL), the National Institutes of Health – National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIH-NIAID) and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).

### The Ensembl software and database system

As a software/database system Ensembl can be best described as a hybrid of a scripting programming language (Perl) and a relational database (MySQL, pronounced "My Ess Que Ell").).

Ensembl Perl software inherits from a tradition of biological object-design developed through BioPerl (<a href="http://www.bioperl.org/">http://www.bioperl.org/</a>). This means that developers at Ensembl aimed at creating reusable pieces of software that would faithfully describe biological entities such as gene, transcript, protein, genomic clone or chromosome. Rules of usage and design of Ensembl and BioPerl objects can be best learned while using them, browsing their code and through a bit of trial-and-error. There is a comprehensive BioPerl tutorial available at the BioPerl website.

The Ensembl database is based on a relational database called MySQL. SQL in MySQL stands for 'Structured Query Language', a universal database programming language shared by many relational databases. Because MySQL is available free of charge for non-commercial developers, every academic centre can install its own local copy of MySQL (MySQL server) and download Ensembl data from the Ensembl ftp site. Simple queries of the database can be handled using the SQL language (see appendix), but for complex queries demanded by most biological analyses the Ensembl MySQL server is best accessed using Ensembl Perl objects.

### The Ensembl annotation pipeline

The Ensembl analysis and annotation pipeline is based on a rule set of heuristics that a human annotator would use. All Ensembl gene predictions are based on experimental evidence, which is imported via manually curated UniProt/Swiss-Prot, partially manually curated NCBI RefSeq automatically annotated UniProt/TrEMBL records. Untranslated regions (UTRs) are annotated to the extent supported by EMBL mRNA records. As there is no guarantee that UTR sequences in EMBL records are complete there is similarly no guarantee that the Ensembl genome analysis and annotation pipeline has enough biological evidence to predict complete UTR regions. For a limited number of species regulatory regions are annotated, but this annotation isn't very extensive yet as the set of well-characterised promoters is still small and there is currently no algorithm yielding reliable results on a genomic scale.

### The Ensembl website

Ensembl provides easy access to genomic information with a number of visualisation tools. The Ensembl website gives you for example the possibility to directly download data, whether it is a DNA sequence of a genomic contig



you are trying to identify novel genes in, or positions of SNPs in a gene you are working on. The key Ensembl web pages are called Views (e.g. GeneView, ContigView and SNPView), and will all be introduced appropriately later on. An updated version of the website is released bimonthly. Old versions are for at least two years accessible on the 'Archive!' website. Apart from that the 'Pre!' website provides displays of genomes that are still in the process of being annotated. There is also an ftp site to download large amounts of data from the Ensembl database, as well as the data-mining tool BioMart, that allows rapid retrieval of information from the databases. Finally, Ensembl BLAST offers the possibility to perform sequence searches against genomes and Ensembl gene and peptide sets.

### **Further reading**

Hubbard, T.J.P. et al.

Ensembl 2007

Nucleic Acids Res. 2007 (Database Issue)

Birney, E. et al. Ensembl 2006.

Nucleic Acids Res. 2006 Jan 34:D556-D561 (2006)

Hubbard, T. et al. Ensembl 2005.

Nucleic Acids Res. 2005 33 D447-D453 (2005)

Birney, E. et al. \*

An Overview of Ensembl.

Genome Research 14(5): 925-928 (2004)

Kasprzyk, A. et al.

EnsMart: a generic system for fast and flexible access to biological data. Genome Research (2004) 14:1, 160-9.

Ashurst, J. L. et al.

The Vertebrate Genome Annotation (Vega) database.

Nucl. Acids Res. 33:D459-D465 (2005)

\* This paper was part of the may 2004 issue of Genome Research which included an Ensembl special covering detailed aspects of the Ensembl web site, the underlying scalable database system for storing genome sequence and annotation information, as well as the automated genome analysis and annotation pipeline.



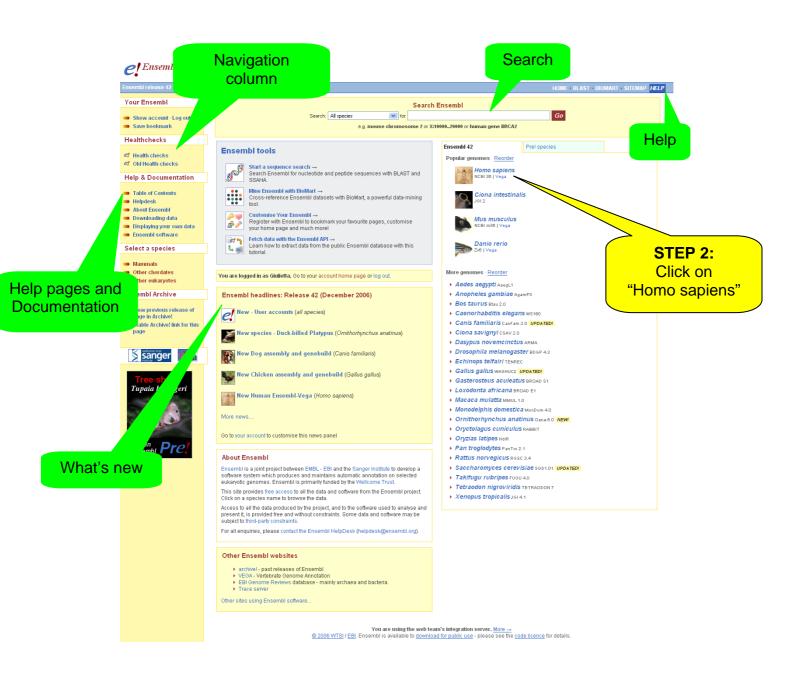
SPECIES		ASSEMBLY		GENEBUILD	
Mammals					
Human	Homo sapiens	NCBI 36	oct 2005	Ensembl	jul 2006
Chimpanzee	Pan troglodytes	PanTro 2.1	mar 2006	Ensembl	mar 2005
Rhesus macaque	Macaca mulatta	MMUL 1	feb 2006	Ensembl	aug 2006
Bushbaby*	Otolemur garnettii	BUSHBABY1			
Mouse	Mus musculus	NCBI m36	dec 2005	Ensembl	apr 2006
Rat	Rattus norvegicus	RGSC 3.4	dec 2004	Ensembl	feb 2006
Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	RABBIT	may 2005	Ensembl	aug 2006
Dog	Canis familaiaris	CanFam 1.0	jul 2004	Ensembl	nov 2004
Cat*	Felis catus	CAT			
Cow	Bos taurus	Btau 2.0	mar 2005	Ensembl	dec 2005
Pig**	Sus scrofa				
Shrew*	Sorex araneus	sorAra1			
Hedgehog*	Erinaceus europaeus	eriEur1			
Microbat*	Myotis lugigfugus	MICROBAT1			
Armadillo	Dasypus novemcinctus	ARMA	may 2005	Ensembl	aug 2006
Elephant	Loxodonta africana	BROAD E1	may 2005	Ensembl	aug 2006
Lesser hedgehog tenrec	Echinops telfairi	TENREC	may 2005	Ensembl	aug 2006
Opossum	Monodelphis domestica	MonDom 4.0	jan 2006	Ensembl	feb 2006
Platypus*	Ornithorhynchus anatinus	OANA 5			
Other species					
Chicken	Gallus gallus	WASHUC 1	mar 2004	Ensembl	dec 2005
X. tropicalis	Xenopus tropicalis	JGI 4.1	aug 2005	Ensembl	nov 2005
Zebrafish	Danio rerio	<u>Zv 6</u>	mar 2006	Ensembl	aug 2006
Fugu	Takifugu rubripes	FUGU 4.0	jun 2005	IMCB/JGI	may 2005
Tetraodon	Tetraodon nigroviridis	TETRAODON 7	apr 2003	<u>Genoscope</u>	sep 2004
Stickleback	Gasterosteus aculeatus	BROAD S1	feb 2006	Ensembl	aug 2006
Medaka	Oryzias latipes	HdrR 1	oct 2005	Ensembl	may 2006
C. intestinalis	Ciona intestinalis	<u>JG 12</u>	mar 2005	Ensembl	feb 2006
C. savignyi	Ciona savignyi	CSAV 2.0	oct 2005	Ensembl	apr 2006
Fruitfly	Drosophila melanogaster	BDGP 4	jul 2005	<u>FlyBase</u>	mar 2006
Anopheles	Anopheles gambiae	AgamP 3	feb 2006	VectorBase	oct 2005
Aedes	Aedes aegypti	AaegL 1	aug 2005	VectorBase	jun 2006
C. elegans	Caenorhabditis elegans	WS 150	nov 2005	<u>WormBase</u>	nov 2005
S. cerevisiae	Saccharomyces cerevisiae	SGD 1	nov 2005	SGD	nov 2005

Figure 2 – Species in Ensembl, including name and date of their genome assembly and source and date of the genebuild. \* = currently only available on the Pre! website, \*\* = only clone information available.



WORKED EXAMPLE – A walk through the main pages of the Ensembl browser, using the EPO (Erythropoietin precursor) gene as an example.

STEP 1: Load Ensembl www.ensembl.org





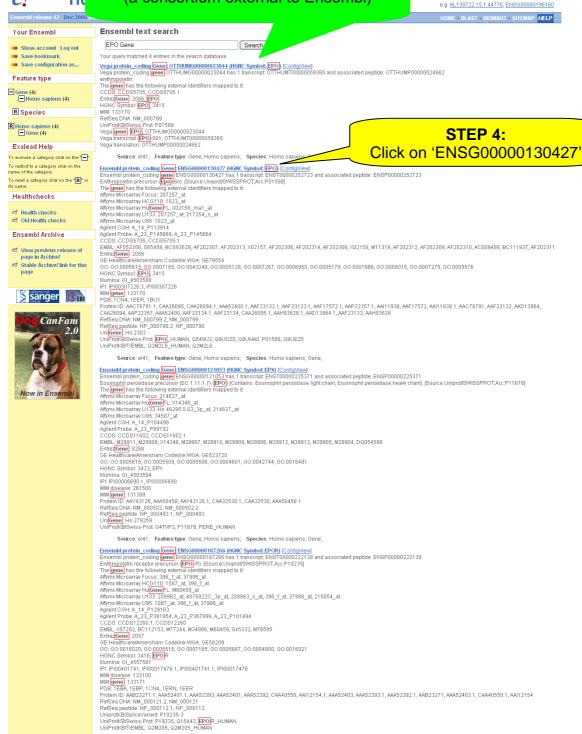




### e! Ensembl Hu

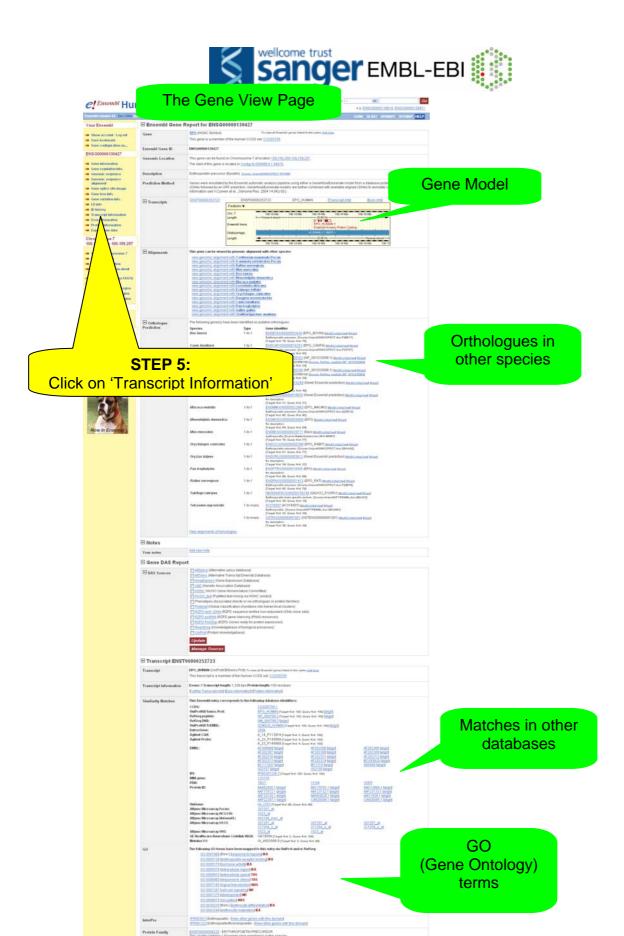
## A 'Vega' gene (a consortium external to Ensembl)



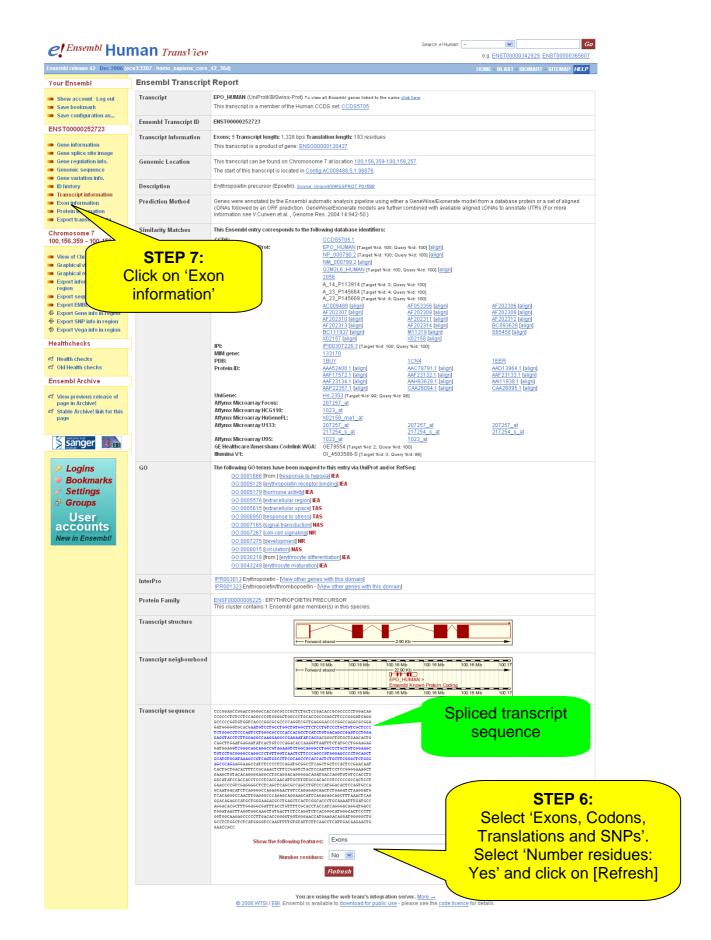


Source: el41; Feature type: Gene; Homo sapiens; Species: Homo sapiens; Gene;

You are using the web team's integration server. More  $\rightarrow$  © 2006 WTSI / EBI. Ensembl is available to download for public use - please see the code licence for details.

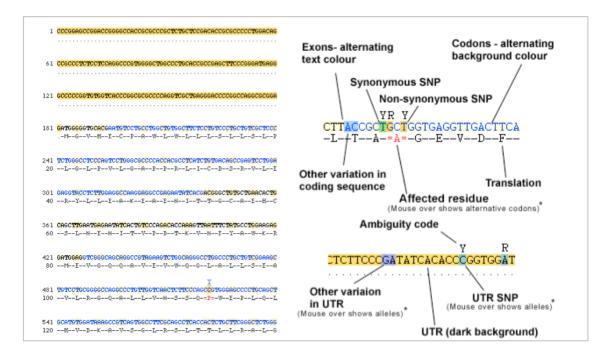








### Result of STEP 6:





### Result of STEP 7:





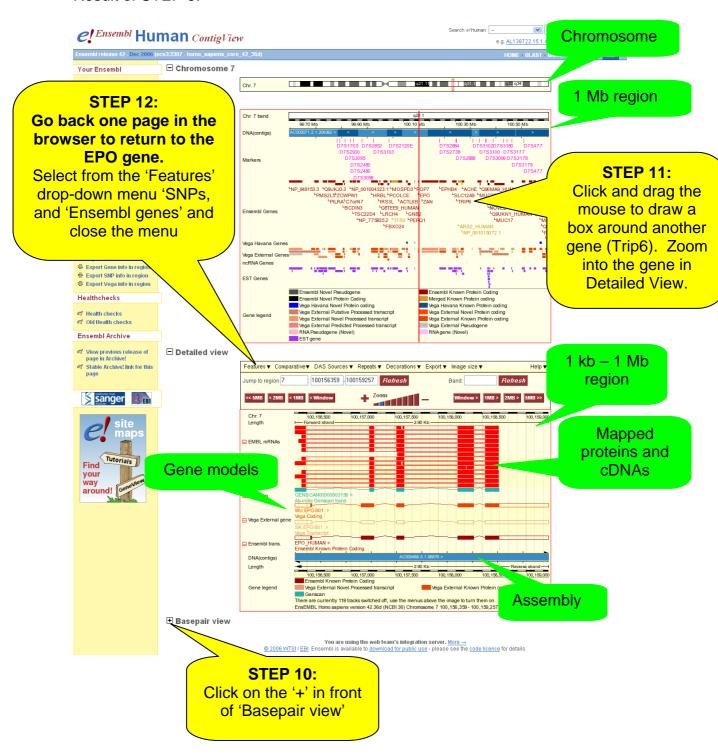
# Result of STEP 8:

No.	Exon / Intron	Chi	Strai	nd Start	End	Start Phase	End Phase	Length	Sequence	Flank (green
	5' upstream sequence								tttctagaaca attgtggaaggagaccactcatttgcccctccctaaagcttctgggctt gctactttgcggaactcagcaccacgcactccttagagctctcgccaccacgaggagctgcccccaggggagctgccggagccagggctgcagggccaggcctaggccaggccaggaccacaccacacgcacacggctgagcacacaccacacgcacacggggggcccaacaccacacgcactctgcagcacgggggacctcaacccctcaccaccccaccaccaccaccacacacacacacacacaca	ca a catg cagactc cacagct cggccaga
1	ENSE00001130431	7	1	100,156,35	9 100,156,552	l) (e)	1	194	CCCGGAGCCGGACCGGGCCACGCCCCCCCCCCCCACACCGCGCCCCCC	CTGGACAG GGATGAGG
	Intron 1-2	7	1	100,156,55	3 100,157,1	Intro (blue			gtgagtactogoggotgggogotocogocogggtocotgtttgagog gogococggotattggocaggagtggotgggttoaaggacogogacttgt cogaaaggaggaggagtgaggotocaagtgocagggaactgg tggggatggcaaaaaoctgacotgtgaaggggacacagtttgggggtttgag gttttggggttottgctgtgocagtgagagaagctgataagctgataacot gagocaccacttactgcoagaggagagcotctgtocaccaggattgaag gagacagcagtgatgatggggagggttgogocacaggagagagag gagacgtgggatgaaggaagccttctgcacggagaaggagagaga	caaggacc ggagtcct ggaagaag gggcgctg tttggccg gaatgaag ctggggca
2	ENSE00001144077	7	1	100,157,11	7 100,157,262	1	0	146	AATGTCCTGCCTGGCTGTGGCTTCTCCTGTCCCTGCTGCTGC	CCTCCCAG CCTCTTGG
	Intron 2-3	7	1	O SOCIAL MARKET STOCK	3 100,157,520 ng sequ				gtgagacocottcocoagcacattcoacagaactcacgotcagggcttcagg cccagatccaggaactggcacttggtttggggtggagttggagactaga cctacataagaataagtctggtggcccaaaccatacctggaaactaggcag gccagcagatcctacggcctgtgggccagggccagagccttcagggacctt gggctgtgtgcatttcag	actgcccc ggagcaaa
3	ENSE00001130423	7		0.00	(black)		0	87	ACGGGCTGTGCTGAACACTGCAGCTTGAATGAGAATATCACTGTCCCAGACA AATTTCTATGCCTGGAAGAGGATGGAG	CCAAAGTT
	Intron 3-4	7			(Diaok)			615	gtgagttocttttttttttttttttoctttottttggagaatotoatttgoga ttggattgaaagggagaaatgataaatgagcagcaagaga totggatgaaagggaagattaaaatgagcagcagaaga ttggacgagaggatocagattataatocaggotgagatggocgagatgg ttgagocotggagtttoagaccaaoctaggcagcagatagtgacgagatgg ttgagocotggagtttoagagtgagtggtgotgatgtogagtagcocagatat otgaggoggaggatogottgagocagagtaggotggotgagotga	gaggotgo agaattgo totacaaa ttggaaag gatcacac gaaaaaag tcactcac tcagottg
4	ENSE00001130416	7	1	100,158,22	3 100,158,402	. 0	0	1000	GTCGGGCAGCAGGCCGTAGAAGTCTGGCAGGGCCTGGCCCTGCTGTCGGAAG CGGGGCCAGGCCCTGTTGGTCAACTCTTCCCAGCCGTGGGAGCCCCTGCAGC GATAAAGCCGTCAGTGGCCTTCGCAGCCTCACCACTCTGCTTCGGGCTCTGG	TGCATGTG
	Intron 4-5	7	1	100,158,40	3 100,158,536	i			gtgagtaggagcggacacttctgcttgccctttctgtaagaaggggagaagg aaggagtacaggaactgtccgtattccttccctttctgtggcactgcagcga tttctccttggcag	gtcttgct cctcctgt
5	ENSE00000894545	7	1	100,158,53	7 100,159,257	0	ř		ANGGANGCATCTCCCCTCAGATGGGCCTCAGCTGCTCCATCCGACAA GACACTTTCCGCAAACTCTCCCGAGTGCAACTTCCTCCGGGGAAAG TACACAGGGGGGCCTCCAGGACCAGGCACAACTTCCTCCGGGGAAGC CACACACCTCCTCACCAGGACAGGGCACAGATACCAGGGCCACTC GTCAGGGGGCTCTCAGCTCAG	TGAAGCTG GGGCATAT TGAACCCC AGCAATGA GTCACAGG GGGACAGA CAGGACAC CTGGATAA TGGGCTCTG
	3' downstream sequence								aatatgactottggcttttotgttttotgggaacotccaaatoccotggctc toctggcagcagtgcagcaggtccaggtccgggaaacgagggggagggg tacgtgcttotaaccagcotgtctgacottctgacoctaccgggctgag ctctgcctacgctggtcaataaggtgctccattcaaggcctcaccgcagta gccaaccctgcccagggcaaggctgcagtgcgctgagattgtcatcaaggag acaagacaggstccttttgggagttttggggctggtagtacacactacaaggacggcccaactcaggcccaactaggacggccctagttaattttggctctttggtagttgtaacagctgccaact agocttcgcctcaatgcaactctgctaagtcagctgctcctttact	ctgggccc gccacaag aggcagct agggaggc tggtcact cccagcat

UTR (purple)



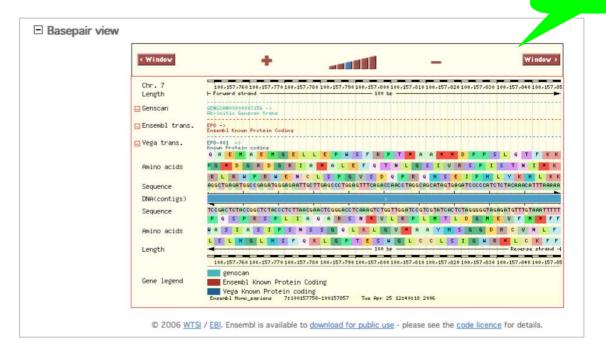
### Result of STEP 9:



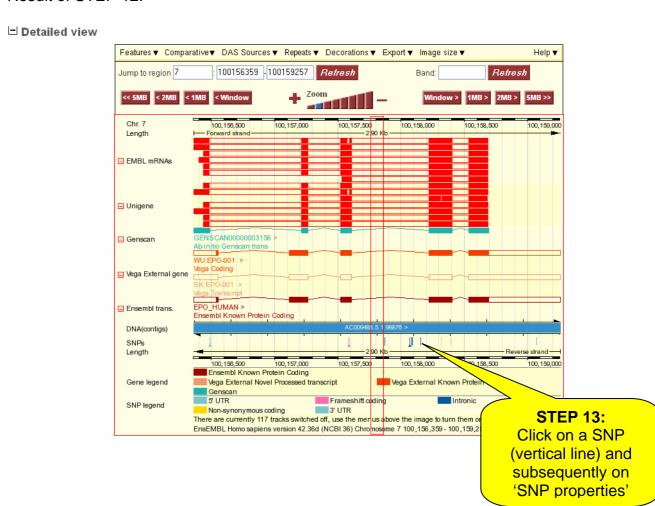


### Result of STEP 10:

25 – 500 bp region



### Result of STEP 12:







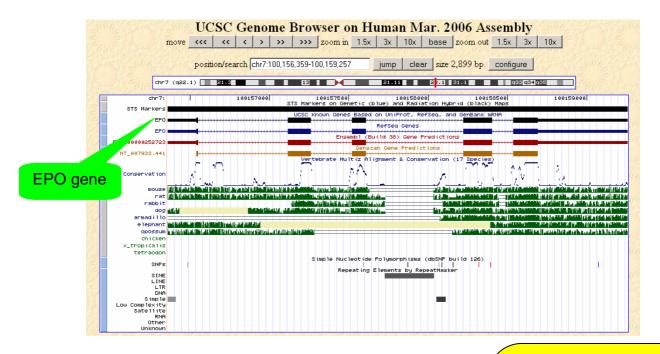
### **STEP 14:**

Go back to ContigView with the back button of the internet browser.



### **STEP 15:**

To see the same chromosomal region in the UCSC genome browser, click on 'Show in UCSC browser' on the left of the page.
A new window will open.

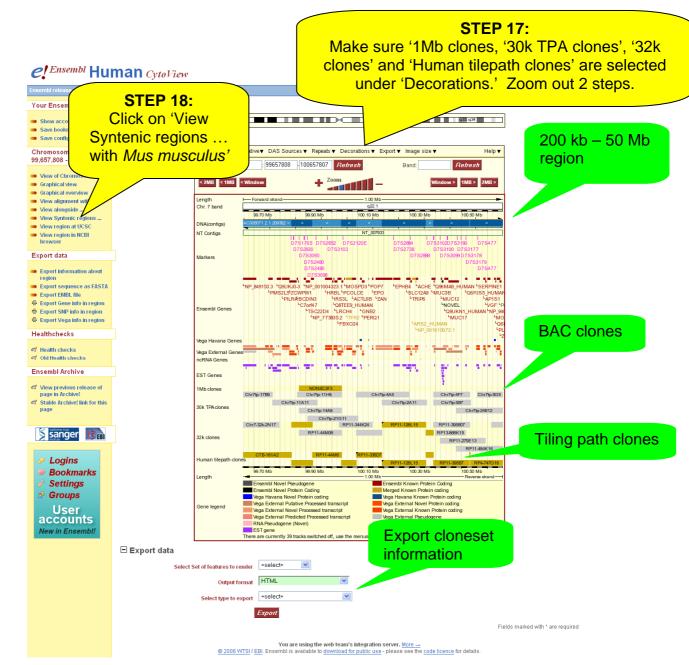


### **STEP 16:**

Once you see the EPO gene and close this window. (You can turn on 'Ensembl genes' by changing 'hide' to 'full')

Click on 'Graphical Overview' on the left hand of the ContigView page to reach CytoView.





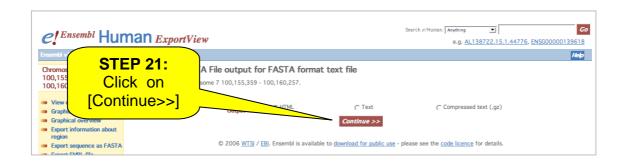






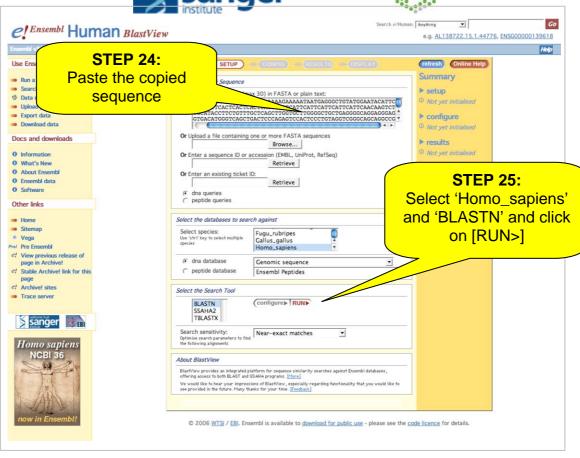






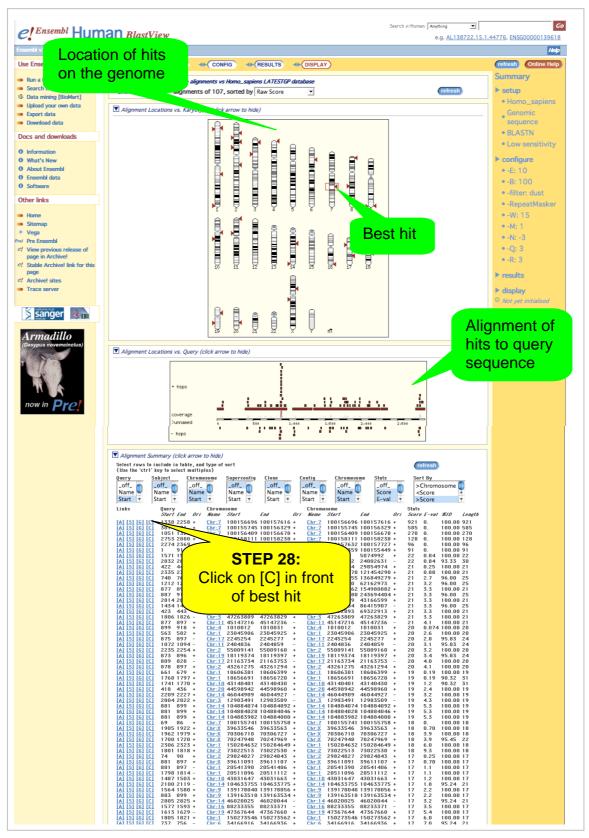








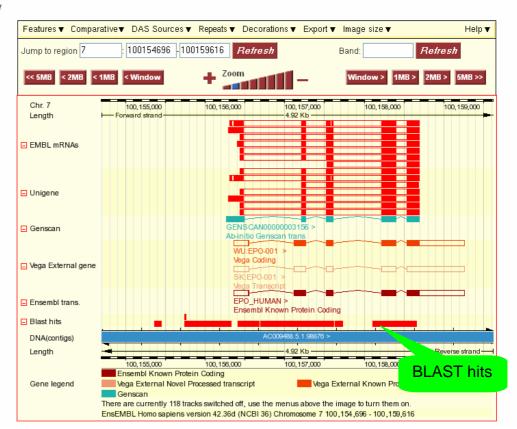






# Back in the contigview page...

### ■ Detailed view



**END of the Worked Example**