

The 9th European Dry Grassland Meeting in Greece (19-23 May 2012)

This text presents an overview of the 9th EDGM of Prespa. It was intended to be included in the previous EDGG Bulletin, but time restrictions, other deadlines and the pressure of field data collection hindered its preparation. However, the author feels sure that this short trip back to the events in May is still welcomed by the audience due to the unforgettable moments participants shared in Prespa.



Participants of the meeting

One of the core activities of the EDGG is the organization of annual scientific meetings. The exchange of current knowledge regarding all aspects of grassland ecology, management, restoration, etc. is an major element of the meetings, but perhaps the most important is the opportunity for the local characteristics and peculiarities of grassland resources to be presented, communicated, discussed and promoted. After the central European dry grasslands and the eastern European steppes¹, in 2012, the EDGG lights turned to Southern Europe. This time, the Hellenic Range and Pasture Society (www.elet.gr) co-organized the EDGM in Greece.

The exceptional area of Prespa, northwestern Greece, hosted the event from 19 to 23 May 2012. The Information Centre of Prespa National Forest Management Body, by the western lakeshore of Micro Prespa, provided the perfect location for communicating scientific ideas and was highly appreciated by all participants. In total, 220 people registered; more than 120 people participated; 307 authors from 28 countries (Greece, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Finland, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ukraine, and USA) produced 123 papers (101 posters and 22 talks) and accepted to present either orally or exhibited as posters.

Grazing activity, as an ecological driver that mostly shapes southern European dry grasslands, was the central scientific interest of this conference. Grazing may alter the floristic composition of grasslands by favouring or disadvantaging specific plant species, the faunal character of grasslands by forming or not attractive sites for animals, and the abiotic conditions of grasslands by affecting soil and microclimatic processes. This biological activity also supports an important rural

economic activity - livestock husbandry. While livestock grazing is a key factor in sustaining high total biodiversity in the Mediterranean, a significant decline of total biodiversity of natural or semi-natural grasslands of the Mediterranean Basin is observed standing on socioeconomic basis: unregulated (irrational) grazing, land use/type changes, and abandonment of traditional human interventions; finally all lead to habitat shrinking and loss (shrub encroachment and afforestation). All these issues and dimensions of grazing/livestock influences were dealt with in Prespa through sessions dedicated to impact of grazing on abiotic and biotic conditions of dry grasslands, ecology and management of grasslands and the socioeconomic consequences of these influences.

The conference was devoted to Dr. Arne Strid, a living legend who dedicated his life to the exploration of floristic elements of Greece and greatly contributed to the knowledge of the Greek rangeland flora. From the early years of his professional life, Arne together with his wife Barbro, organized numerous missions to explore and promote via his writings, one of the most valuable treasures of Greece: its flora.

The conference started on the sunny morning of Saturday 19th of May with the introductory session, where participants were welcomed by Michael Vrahnakis (General Secretariat of Hellenic Range and Pasture Society, European Dry Grassland Group), Zoi Koukoura (President of Hellenic Range and Pasture Society) and Vasilios Tsepas (Mayor of Prespa). A welcome was also given by Prof. Panagiotis Dimopoulos from the Greek Commission of Natura 2000, and Prof. Angelika Schwabe (Floristisch-soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft; FlorSoz)). Dr. Nikos Yiannakis (Director of the Management Body of the Prespa National Park) and Mrs. Myrsini Malakou (Managing Director of the NGO Society for the Protection of Prespa) offered us



Shore of Ag. Achillios. Photo: S. Venn

introductory notes presenting the natural beauty of the area of Prespa and the efforts committed to restore, conserve and promote Prespa's natural resources. After that participants enjoyed the mental long journey from Theophrastus up to the modern data basing techniques for floristic records guided by Dr. Arne Strid. All participants had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Arne Strid about the efforts committed by the pioneer botanists from the ancient Greece, the ancient Rome, to the early of 18th century up to the last years, ending with the recent efforts to develop electronic data bases. The presentation was supported by some rare black and white photos of these botanists, snapshots from their lives and a lot of stories about their efforts. The audience admired their efforts and appreciated their personalities.

The first session, chaired by Panagiotis Dimopoulos, focused on the impact of grazing on the biotic environment (grazing and plant/animal interactions, species composition, etc.) included four talks by Orsolya Valkó (grazing on species composition of grasslands along a moisture gradient), Sampson Panajiotidis (grazing and late Holocene vegetation changes), M. Kerim Gullap (vegetation structure of Eastern Anatolia), and Manolis Karmiris (grazing and European hare). Session 2, chaired by Vasilios Papanastasis, focused on the impact of grazing on the abiotic environment (soil properties, land use changes, etc.) included 4 talks by Li Qiang (soil properties in grazed versus mown lands in Inner Mongolia), Didem Ambarli (grazing and environmental variables), Olga Demina (steppe vegetation of the Don river), and Ji Li (dry meadows habitats for carabid beetle). Session 3, started on the morning of the Monday 21st of May chaired by Solvita Rusina and Laco Mucina, and focused on ecology and management of dry grasslands (syntaxonomy, diversity, etc.) and included 5 talks by Laco Mucina (an overview of syntaxonomical, chorological and evolutionary assembly of Festuco-Brometea), Jana Slancarova (butterfly richness affected by landscape heterogeneity), Stephen Venn (bee diversity and urban dry meadow habitats, Zeki Acar (methods for improvement of

botanical composition), Costas Kirkopoulos (post-fire vegetation restoration), and Agapi Papazafeiriou (heavy metal transfer). At the end of the session the audience had the opportunity to watch (and learn from) the lively but scientific debate between Irina Safronova and Laco Mucina about two different schools though about the classification and typology of the class Festuco-Brometea. The evening of the same day, the 4th Session, chaired by Guy Beaufoy, focused on the societal aspects of dry grasslands (policy, economic evaluation, etc) and included 5 talks by Christos Rukos (political aspects on grassland sustainability), Inge Paulini (a pilot agri-environment programme for Transylvania), Stavros Tsiantikoudis (economic evaluation and operational research), Olga Burova (past/present forest-steppe landscape of upper Don basin), and Dimitrios Chouvardas (diachronic evolution in pastoral landscapes of Greece). Finally, the first (Saturday, 19) and the third (Monday, 21) day 101 posters were displayed to the audience. The posters covered a wide range of the conference interests from a broad geographical scope, and were positively met by the participants.

The general assemblies of the organising societies took place after the first (HERPAS) and the third (EDGG) day's oral presentations (a special report for the assembly of EDGG is found in this Bulletin issue, pp. 10–13).



Participants Solvita Rusina, Li Ji, Guy Beaufoy and Natasa Pipenbaher visiting the village of Ag. Germanos. Photo: S. Venn

The second day (Sunday, 20th), the participants had the opportunity to visit Mt. Devas (1350 m), which covers the W and NW parts of the Prespa National Park, bordering with Albania (W) and Lake Macro Prespa (N). The soils are limestone and the area harbours more than 900 plant species and 10 habitat types (included in the European Directive 92/43/EEC); 3 of them being of priority at EU level (*6210, *6220, and *9562 Endemic forests with *Juniperus* spp. (code 9562) found in the N and E part of Mt. Devas, dominated by *Juniperus excelsa*, being unique for EU). The original plans for the second excursion (fourth day, Tuesday 22th) were to visit Mt. Varnous (over 2000 m). The participants arrived there, but heavy rain forced them to move lower and visit the isthmus that separates Lakes Micro and Macro Prespa, where the Natura 2000 priority habitat type *6120 - Xeric sand calcareous grasslands is situated (the habitat was recently reported for the first time in Greece), and the island of Agios Achilios. The last day of the conference (Wednesday 23rd) was devoted to the calcareous dry grasslands of Mt. Sfika (or Mt. Triklarion, 1750 m). It is located at the southern border of Prespa National Park and it supports 13 habitat types (included in the European Directive 92/43/EEC); 4 of them being of priority at EU level (*6210, *6220, *91E0, *9562) and more than 1000 plant taxa. Excursions were guided by Arne Strid, George Fotiadis, Yiannis Tsiripidis, Yannis Kazoglou and Michael Vrahnakis.

The 9th EDGM in Prespa – The salt of life

Apart from the previously mentioned basic structure of the lecture/field trip elements of the EDGM in Prespa, the Organizing Committee had prepared several peripheral events that provided extra interest for the participants.

During the conference, Young Investigator Prizes were awarded to the three best oral and poster presentations by young EDGM members (< 34 years in age). Among these, the First Prizes were € 75 Book Vouchers from Wiley-Blackwell. The presentations were evaluated according to the five aspects/criteria (i) novelty and relevance of the research; (ii) appropriateness and quality of the methods applied; (iii) presentation of poster/talk appetizer in the lecture hall; (iv) layout and presentation of the poster/talk; (v) handling of questions and comments by the author in the poster/talk session. The six winners were the following:

Oral competition

(i) Didem Ambarli (Turkey) for Effects of livestock grazing and environmental variables on the diversity of Anatolian steppes - D. Ambarli, C.C. Bilgin

(ii) Jana Slancarova (Czech Republic) for Effect of landscape heterogeneity on local butterfly richness: Xeric grassland reserves of South Moravia, Czech Republic – J. Slancarova, J. Benes, M. Kristynek, P. Kepka, M. Konvicka

(iii) Inge Paulini (Germany) for Pilot agri-environment programme for threatened meadow-steppe grasslands: a case study from Transylvania (Romania) - I. Paulini, M. Barbos, A. Crisan, G. Jones, L. Rákossy, A. Rus, W. Schumacher, C. Sitar, E. Stoianov, N. Timus

Poster competition

(i) Ioanna Keisoglou (Greece) for Grazing effects on floristic diversity of a juniper-oak rangeland - I. Keisoglou, N. Pasiou, A.P. Kyriazopoulos, Z.M. Parissi, E.M. Abraham, G. Korakis, Z. Abas

(ii) Rocco Labadessa (Italy) for Butterflies and grasshoppers: relationships between insect communities and environment in a dry grassland system – R. Labadessa, R. Sorino, G. Corriero

(iii) Andras Kelemen (Hungary) for Underlying mechanisms that shape biomass- plant species richness relationship in an alkali landscape along a long productivity gradient – A. Kelemen, P. Török, O. Valkó, T. Migléc, B. Deák, K. Tóth, B. Tóthmérész

The evening of the first day (Saturday 19), the Hellenic Range and Pasture Society honoured Emeritus Professor Dr. Arne Strid (University of Lund, Berlin Botanical Garden and Museum) for his life-time efforts to highlight the floristic and natural beauty of the rangelands of Greece, through his monumental published work and talks. A special prize was awarded. Also, it was decided on the recommendation of the HERPAS Administrative Council to nominate Dr. Arne Strid honorary member of the HERPAS with all privileges bestowed to this status.

Dr. Arne Strid was born in 1943 in Kristianstad, Sweden. His doctoral thesis was an experimental study of differentiation and evolution in a group of plants in the Aegean area (Greece). He was employed at the Botany Department of the University of Lund 1964-72, working as a member of a research team led by Prof. H. Runemark studying problems of evolution and speciation with the Aegean archipelago as a model area. He was Associate Professor here 1970-72, and subsequently Senior Lecturer at the University of Zambia (Lusaka, Zambia) 1972-73. This was followed by positions as Professor of Botany at the University of Copenhagen 1973-2001, Honorary Research Associate at the Western Australian Herbarium, Perth, W.A., 1982-83, Visiting Professor at the University of Patras, Greece, 1997-98 (EU Senior Fellowship Grant), Director of the Botanical Garden and Natural History Museum in Göteborg and Professor of Phytogeography at the University of Göteborg from 2001-2008. He has been associated with the Botanical Museum, University of Lund, as Professor Emeritus since 2008, and since 2011 also as Professor Emeritus at the Berlin Botanical Garden and Museum. He is member of



On the lake (A.Strid, O.Valkó, L.Mucina). Photo: A.Kelemen



View over Lake Prespa from Mt. Devas (upper left)
*Solvita Rusina photographing *Iris germanica* on Mt. Devas (center left)*
*Terrace of Prespa National Forest Management Body's *Geum coccineum* growing adjacent to a mountain stream on Mt. Varnous (upper right)*
Information Centre, which was the venue for the EDGM IX (bottom). Photo: S. Venn





Photo: J.Dengler



Campanula lingulata. Photo: A.Kelemen



Photo: J.Dengler



Photo: J.Dengler

the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters (1976), the Royal Physiographic Society of Lund (1983), the Polish Academy of Sciences (1997), the Swedish Science Research Council (1976-80), and of several botanical associations and editorial boards as well as the International Board of OPTIMA (Organisation for Phyto-Taxonomic Investigation of the Mediterranean Area) since 1974. Dr Strid is author of 12 books and more than 140 scientific publications totalling c. 6,000 pages in the fields of taxonomy, biosystematics, phytogeography and evolution, particularly on the flora of Greece, editor of the Mountain Flora of Greece, published in two volumes in 1986 (852 pp.) and 1991 (999 pp.), and secretary of the steering committee for Flora Hellenica and editor of Volumes 1 (1997) and 2 (2003). Other major publications include Wild Flowers of Mount Olympus (1980), the Flora Hellenica Bibliography (1996, 2nd ed. 2006) and an annotated re-issue of Flora Graeca Sibthorpiana (vols 1-3, 2009-2011). Has started and coordinated a major project for experimental studies of wild relatives of barley and other cereals (c. 1976-1990). He married Dr. agro. Barbro Jende in 1966, scientific co-worker at the Carlsberg Laboratory in Copenhagen 1973-2001.

On Sunday 20th, participants had the opportunity to take part in a short boat cruise to the Greek coast of the western lakeshore of Macro Prespa. Apart from the rocky beauty, the visitors admired the sculpted hermitages which standing hanging on the rocky slopes of Mt. Devas. Rare icons and frescos, all traces of a previous austere religious life of medieval orthodox monks, were seen. Participants also had the opportunity to visit the basilica of Agios Achillios (established by Tsar Samuel in 983 AC), situated in the island of the same name, close to the conference venue.

The religious impressions were coupled with the poetic intervention of Julian Hoffmann*, assisted by his partner Julia (evening of Saturday 19th). Inspired by the calcareous rockiness and humanity of the Mt. Sfika's landscape, Julian gave a marvelous speech; an impressive

cascade of lyrics and photos that guided us back/front to Time(s) in the Karst Country. This unforgettable experience underlined the aesthetic and lyric power that the natural beauty of dry grasslands may offer to humans.

The aesthetic value of the Prespa's living (and non-living) landscape is dominant in the paintings of Vangelis Tamoutselis**. Participants had the opportunity to admire his work, since several paintings (among them Autumn colors symphony, Traditional dancers and 16 more) were exhibited throughout the conference. The popular impulse of the landscape coupled with the unique beauty of Prespa are effectively impressed on Tamoutselis exhibitions.

The same day (Sunday 20th) a grassland party was organized in the conference venue by the Municipality of Prespa. Local groups of dancers and musicians entertained the people by offering a musical mix of traditional songs originated from Turkey (a portion of local people draw their origin from the northern coast of Black sea) or from the local area. Several local dishes with pies and meats, and wines and spirits were offered during this unforgettable night.

The Lakes of Prespa host a vast variety of birds that occasionally or permanently nest in the area. Bird watching activities took place throughout the conference. Such activities were facilitated by the telescopes established by the Management Body of the Prespa National Park in the venue. Participants had the opportunity to watch several birds, like pelicans, cormorants, etc.

The organizers would like to express their thanks to all conference participants for their valuable scientific contributions and good mood. We are grateful to Yannis Kazoglou, Georgia Reppa, Haido Daoula, Triantafyllia Gkogkou, Amalia Topalopoulou, and Vasso Papadopoulou (Vassoula's Grocery) for intensive help before and during the meeting. We thank to Arne Strid, Yiannis Tsiripidis and Yannis Kazoglou for help in



A Byzantine church in the village of Agios Germanos. Photo: S.Venn



Chapel in cave, visited during boat-trip from Psarades. Photo: S.Venn

guiding excursions. We are grateful to the heads of Municipality of Prespa, Society for the Protection of Prespa, and Management Body of the Prespa National Park for their support during the conference organization. The meeting was supported by Wiley Publishers and by the Floristisch-soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft e. V.

The evening of May 20th a meeting of rangeland experts with local stock-breeders took place in the conference venue. (For more details please visit pp. 10–13 of this Bulletin issue).

Having passed these days, the unprecedented experience of the Prespa EDGM still remains fresh.

Michael Vrahnakis, Karditsa, mvrahnak@teilar.gr

Whole days can pass in the karst country without seeing a soul, the ridges ebbing away in the haze. Secluded at the very edge of Greece, only an hour's walk from Albania, our phones rarely work; their signals, like our view of each other, blotted out by the undulating land. So we are left alone with the stone and arched sky, the mysterious winds and clamor of wings, the unending passage of time.

Julian Hoffmann – Time in the Karst Country

*Julian Hoffman was born in England and grew up in Canada. In 2000, he and his partner moved to the Prespa Lakes where they began an organic small-holding. His writing has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in the Kyoto Journal, Flyway, Fifth



Astragalus angustifolius. Photo: A.Kelemen

Wednesday Journal, Wild Apples, The MacGuffin, and The Redwood Coast Review, among others. He was the 2nd place winner of the 2010 Carpe Articulum International Fiction Prize. You can catch up with him at

www.julianhoffman.wordpress.com.

**Vangelis Tamoutselis was born in Drosopigi (Florina, Greece) in 1935. He worked on the art of icon painting until 1967, leaving a significant number of icons in churches of Florina. In 1975 he set up his Workshop 10 his personal gallery. He has made 36 solo exhibitions, two of them in the U.S. and has many collective artistic presences in Greece and abroad. For his contribution to art, the Hellenic Ministry of Culture honoured him with lifetime pension.



Convolvulus elegantissimus. Photo: A.Kelemen

EDGG General Assembly 2012

The General Assembly of the EDGG was held on 21st May 2012 at the Information Centre of the Prespa National Forest Management Body, in conjunction with the EDGM IX. The assembly was chaired by Jürgen Dengler and Stephen Venn was secretary. The assembly was attended by 56 people from 19 different countries, thus satisfying the requirement of at least 40 EDGG members from at least 10 different countries. Reports were presented of the activities of the organization during the previous year. The ratified version of the EDGG Bylaws was presented. The stages in the development of the Bylaws were described in Bulletin 15, and the full text of the Bylaws is available from the EDGG web site <http://www.edgg.org/index.htm>. The suggestion to introduce peer review for the Bulletin was discussed. It was decided to keep the possibility open for the future but not make any change as yet, primarily due to lack of resources. Discussion of finances brought up news of the possibility of receiving financial support from the IAVS. Reports were also presented on the activities of the Mediterranean and Conservation sub groups. Special features for the previous and current meeting were discussed. Reports of previous expeditions were presented and news of the Altai Mountains expedition, scheduled for 2013, as well as a proposal for an expedition to the Crimea in 2014. It was confirmed that EDGM X will be held at Zamość, Lublin District, S.E. Poland in 2013, the provisional date being 24–31 May 2013. The assembly voted on and accepted, thus confirming, the proposal to hold the 2014 meeting in Tula, Russia. A proposal has also been made to hold the 2015 EDGM in S.W. Germany. Finally, Michael Vrahnakis presented information on the Proceedings of EDGM IX before the chairperson closed the assembly. For further details on the General Assembly 2012, the minutes are available from the EDGG website.

Stephen Venn, Secretary-General



Irina Safronova and Lao Mucina presenting their ideas. Photo: J. Dengler



Katarzyna Baranska presenting the Polish EDGM 2013. Photo: J. Dengler



Traditional food.. Photo: M. Vrahnakis



The lecture hall (left). Michael Vrahnakis and Apostolos Kyriazopoulos from the organizing committee (right). Photo: J. Dengler



On the way to hermitages. Photo: J. Dengler



Yannis Kazoglou leading the second excursion. Photo: J. Dengler



Relaxing out of the conference room. Photo: J. Dengler



Rainy moments. Photo: J. Dengler



Laco Mucina, Panagiotis Dimopoulos, Ioannis Tsiripidis under the shadow of hermitages. Photo: J. Dengler



Prof. Papanastasis (ex president of HERPAS), the Strid couple and Prof. Koukoura (president of HERPAS). Photo: J. Dengler



Boating on the Macro Prespa lake. Photo: J. Dengler



The 3rd day excursion to Mt. Sfika. Photo: J. Dengler



Traditional dancing originated from the Black Sea. Photo: J. Dengler



Mt. Sfika. Photo: J. Dengler



Relaxing with a glass of red wine. Photo: J. Dengler



Ji Li and Stephen Venn. Photo: J. Dengler



Ready for the 2nd excursion in Mt Varnous (left). Aslan Ünal and Michael Vrahnakis (above). Photo: J. Dengler

Meeting of rangeland experts with local stock-breeders during the 9th EDGM, Prespa, Greece, 19-23 May 2012

On Sunday 20th of May 2012, an organized meeting took place in the Information Centre of the Prespa National Forest Management Body, Greece, between local stock-breeders and specialists dealing with primary sector issues.



Photo: J. Dengler

The meeting took place in the evening of May 20, 2012, at Pyli Information Center, and was attended by more than 45 people (stock-breeders, researchers and representatives of public organizations responsible for primary sector issues).

Prof. Vasilios Papanastasis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Laboratory of Rangeland Ecology) opened the session and focused on a) the importance of stock-breeding (particularly grazing) for the management of pastures and rangelands, which renders stock-breeders to managers of natural ecosystems, b) the issue of the definition of rangelands at the level of the European Commission (important for the new CAP regulations) which should include – apart from grasslands – phryganean pastures, and grazed shrublands and forests (a common traditional practice in Greece, Spain and Portugal), and c) the fact that since the late 90's, there has been no activity in Greece contributing to the proper management of rangelands and pastures (construction of water-troughs, sheds, small houses for shepherds, other infrastructure). On the first point, Prof. Zoi Koukoura, chairwoman of the HERPAS, added that grazing is also a major factor for fire prevention in Mediterranean ecosystems, a role largely neglected in recent decades, but strongly highlighted after the catastrophic wildfires in Greece in 2007-8.

The issues of stock-breeding in the framework of the new CAP for the period 2014-2020 – a topic of ultimate interest for most participants – were presented by Mr.

Guy Beaufoy, representative of the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP). He explained that the role of grazing in environmental management, provided that other environmental terms are also kept (e.g. cross-compliance), will be supported by the new subsidy system, and added that the new CAP should be fairer for all stock-breeders in the countries of the European Union. Mr. Beaufoy explained that subsidies will be clearly related to the surface area of pastures owned/used by each stock-breeder and that, on a more general level, will be regulated by both European and national programs. The latter include agro-environmental measures, from which areas like Prespa (protected areas, high nature value areas) could particularly benefit. In general, the new CAP aims at supporting the “greening” of agriculture at all production levels.

Following these two oral presentations, various issues were vividly discussed, among which a) the main differences between the ongoing and the new CAP subsidy payments, b) the licensing of stables and other stock-breeding infrastructure in Greece based on the recent law (4056/2012), and c) the need to get scientific organizations, like the Hellenic Range and Pasture Society (HERPAS), closer to both cooperatives of stock-breeders and the Ministry of Rural Development and Food to improve stock-breeding and nature management practices in Greece.

Yannis Kazoglou, Prespa, Greece, ykazoglou@gmail.com