

The 11th European Dry Grassland Meeting in Tula 2014



The river Don into the Rostov region. Photo: B. Deák.

The 11th European Dry Grassland Meeting took place between the 5th June and 15th June 2014 in Kulikovo Field, Tula region, Russia. The host of the meeting was a museum-reserve “The Kulikovo Field”. The Russian Foundation for Basic Research, the Central Black Earth State Reserve of Professor V.V. Alekhine, the State M. Sholokhov Museum-Reserve and some other organisations supported this meeting.

The aims of the EDGM-2014 were to acquaint participants with the diversity of steppe and dry grassland vegetation in different ecological situations, to discuss the influence of intensive anthropogenic impacts on steppe and dry grassland transformation and the means of restoration.

The meeting consisted of two parts, a conference (oral and poster presentations, excursions to protected areas of Tula region) and a post-conference tour (visit to Central Black Earth Reserve, excursion to Strelets Steppe, Kursk region; visit to the M. Sholokhov Museum-Reserve, excursions to chalk slopes and sandy sites, Rostov region).

The conference consisted of 3 sessions:

1. Steppes and Dry Grasslands: Diversity and Succession
2. History, Ecology and Current Management of Steppes and Dry Grasslands
3. Conservation and Restoration of Steppes and Dry Grasslands

Fifty-five EDGG members from 10 countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine) took part in the conference. In total, 29 talks and 18 posters were presented during the sessions. Participants also visited the protected areas “Srednyi Dubik” and “Tatinki”, and experimental fields of steppe restoration (Kulikovo Field).

The goal of post-conference tour was to acquaint the participants with the vegetation of the southern regions of Russia: forest-steppes of the Kursk region and the steppes of the Rostov region. 21 participants from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Greece, Finland, Russia took part in a post-conference tour (10-15 June). They saw not only dry grassland vegetation in the Upper Don



Tula region, Srednyi Dubik, Photo: B. Deák



*Rostov region, chalky grassland with *Scrophularia cretacea*. Photo: B. Deák*



Galatella villosa in the Rostov region. Photo: B. Deák,



Goniolimon tataricum in the Rostov region. Photo: B. Deák,

but also in the lower reaches of the Don! Local experts gave detailed information about the biota of each region by the lectures and field excursions.

During and after the conference the participants were involved in cultural programme and could see the living style of local people, and experience local meals, songs and dancing.

The Local Organizing Committee would like to thank all participants, the EDGG Executive Committee, sponsors and supporters and many other people and organisations who made this conference possible.

Elena Volkova, Tula, Russia (convallaria@mail.ru)



Elena Volkova, the president of the local organizing committee. Photo: T. Svetasheva



Participants of EDGG meeting near the river Don. Photo: T. Svetasheva



The participants of the excursion on the steppe slope near the Don river (Rostov region). Photo: T. Svetasheva



The chalk steppe slopes along the Don river valley (Rostov region). Photo: T. Svetasheva

General Assembly 2014

The General Assembly (GA) of the EDGG was held in conjunction with the 11th EDGM, in Tula, Russia on 7th June. The venue of the meeting was the Kulikovo Pole Scientific Centre. The GA was opened by Jürgen Dengler at 7:30 p.m. and commenced with a brief introduction of the six chairs (Jürgen Dengler, Monika Janišová, Solvita Rusina, Péter Török, Stephen Venn and Mike Vrahnakis) and their responsibilities in the organization. The meeting was legal, as it was organized in keeping with the Bylaws, though it was not able to make binding decisions, as it did not fulfil the terms of Bylaw 5 § 4, which requires that there should be at least 40 members present from at least 10 countries and no country should be represented by more than one third of the members present. In this case there were 10 countries represented though only 34 members were present and more than one third of the members present were from the same country; the host nation, Russia. This means that any decisions made at the conference will be unofficial or will have to be ratified by the Executive Committee (EC).

After approval of the agenda for the GA, reports were presented of the activities of the organization since the 10th Meeting, which was held in Zamość, Poland in 28 May 2013. First Jürgen Dengler presented a report on the development of the membership, which has now risen to a total of 1020 members (an increase of 72 since Zamość) and 61 countries (increased by three since Zamość). Whilst our focus is on Palaearctic dry grasslands, clearly our membership extends beyond the geo-political borders of Europe.

Next the assembly reviewed the finances of the EDGG. Both for 2013 and 2014, our mother organization IAVS provided baseline support of 500 €, which is so far only partly spent. Also every year, IAVS gives a honorarium to one EDGG representative to attend the annual IAVS Symposium and give a report on EDGG activities in the Council meeting. With this honorarium (1000 € in 2013, 1500 € in 2014), EC member Monika Janišová attended the IAVS Symposium 2013 in Tartu and will attend the IAVS Symposium 2014 in Perth. Further, EDGG was successful with project proposals to IAVS. For 2013 we received 800 € for linguistic editing of our Special Issue in *Hacquetia* 2014 and 1500 € for renovating our homepage (both to be spent in 2014). For 2014, a joint project proposal with the European Vegetation Survey (EVS, another IAVS Working Group), resulted in 1500 € support for preparation of SE European vegetation databases (many specialised on grasslands) for inclusion in the European Vegetation Archive (EVA). For 2014, IAVS has established an additional funding scheme for its Working Groups, which provides travel grants for workshops and conferences. In 2014, 6000 € were available for each active Working Group. This funding has been used to provide 1500 € to support the participation of three members in the EDGM-11 at Kulikovo Pole, Russia, and 4500 € to support 11 participants in the EDGG Field Workshop in Navarre,

Spain. Finally we got also some financial support from the Floristisch-Soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft to cover the costs of our server space and the linguistic editing of articles in our Special Feature in *Tuexenia* 2014.

Regarding the web-site, Editor Solvita Rūsiņa is currently supervising a renovation of the site. Some parts have now been revised and are currently being reviewed and commented upon. Regarding the EDGG Bulletin, of which the Editor-in-Chief is Monika Janisova, three issues were published during 2013, of which one was the double edition 19/20. Number 22 was published in March 2014 and Number 23 was originally due to be published in June, though has been postponed until July. Brief reports were also presented on the activities and current status of the sub-groups and committees. The German group Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen now has two new chairs, Thomas Becker and Ute Jandt. The contact person for the Nordic-Baltic sub-group is Jürgen, and Steve has suggested using this group to try and revitalize cooperation between people working with dry grassland habitats in that region. The contact person for the South-East European Dry Grassland sub-group (SEEDGG) is Iva Apostolova. The contact person for the Mediterranean Dry Grasslands sub-group (Med-DG) is Mike Vrahnakis. The contact person for the Grassland restoration and management sub-group is Péter Török and the contact person for the Special Policy Committee (SPC) is Mike Vrahnakis. Further information about the groups can be found from the group's web-site at <http://edgg.org/subgroups.htm>.

Next Jürgen Dengler presented a review of the current status of the numerous Special Features that are currently in progress. The Special Edition entitled 'Dry grasslands of Southern Europe: syntaxonomy, management and conservation' edited by Iva Apostolova, Jürgen Dengler, Romeo Di Pietro, Rosario Gavilan and Ioannis Tsiripidis, has been published in *Hacquetia* (2014) and contains a total of eight articles and an editorial. A special feature in *Tuexenia*, edited by Thomas Becker, Steffen Boch, Monika Janišová, Eszter Ruprecht and Triin Reitalu, containing five articles and an editorial, is in progress and due to be completed within a week or two after the assembly. A Special Issue of *Hacquetia* entitled 'Semi-natural open habitats of Europe: biodiversity, conservation and management' edited by Péter Török, Idoia Biurrun, Marta Carboni, Jasmin Mantilla-Contreras, Stephen Venn, Michal Zmihorski and Jürgen Dengler with currently 13 manuscripts in review, is also in preparation and due to be published in 2015. These publications all offer full open access. Preparations for a joint Virtual Special Feature for Applied Vegetation Science entitled 'Large-scale classification of European grasslands s.l.' commenced in spring 2013 together with the European Vegetation Survey (EVS). The editors are Jürgen Dengler, Erwin Bergmeier, Wolfgang Willner & Milan Chytrý and approximately 12-15 articles are



Maxim Bobrovsky, Larisa Khamina (Russia), Michael Vrahnakis (Greece), Irina Safronova, Yury Semenishchenkov (Russia) among Stipa tussocks on the steppe meadow "Sredniy Dubik" (Kulikovo Field). Photo: T. Svetasheva



The excursion on the steppe meadow "Sredniy Dubik" (Kulikovo Field) conducted by Elena Volkova. Photo: T. Svetasheva

expected for this Special Features, with publication within a few years.

Preparations are also currently in progress for an additional three Special Issues, including ones on 1) Natural Steppes of the Palaearctic realm in Biodiversity and Conservation coordinated by Jürgen Dengler, 2) Vegetation and Flora of Semi-Natural Dry Grasslands in Central Europe s.l. in *Tuexenia* coordinated by Thomas Becker and 3) Fauna, flora, vegetation and conservation of steppes and semi-natural dry grasslands in *Hacquetia*, coordinated by Stephen Venn. In addition to these, negotiations are underway for a Special Issue in *Phytocoenologia* on large-scale syntaxonomic works, particularly from outside Central Europe, to be coordinated by Jürgen Dengler. All members are encouraged to submit manuscripts on suitable topics for consideration for these forthcoming publications.

Mike Vrahnakis reviewed the current status regarding EDGMs. He has collated a set of guidelines for meeting organizers, and these will be provided to the organizers of future EDGMs. The next EDGM will be organized in Mainz, Germany on 23-26th May 2015. Tentative discussions for subsequent EDGMs are under way though more proposals are welcome.

Jürgen Dengler presented reports on the recent Research Expeditions to Khakassia, South Siberia, organized by Nikolai Ermakov & Marya Polyakova in 2013 and Navarra, N. Spain organized by Idoia Biurrun, Itziar Garcia-Mijangos & Asun Barestegui, in 2014. Plans for future Research Expeditions are still open and proposals are welcome. The following publications have been prepared from previous expeditions:

Turtureanu, P.D., Todorova, S., Becker, T., Dolnik, C., Ruprecht, E., Sutcliffe, L.M.E., Szabó, A., Dengler, J. (2014): Scale- and taxon-dependent biodiversity patterns of dry grassland vegetation in Transylvania (Romania). *Agric. Ecosyst. Environ.* 182: 15–24.

Pedashenko, H., Apostolova, I., Boch, S., Ganeva, A., Janišová, M., Sopotlieva, D., Todorova, S., Ünal, A., Vassilev, K., Velez, N., Dengler, J. (2013): Dry grasslands of NW Bulgarian mountains: first insights into diversity, ecology and syntaxonomy. *Tuexenia*. 33: 309–346.

Kuzemko, A.A., Becker, T., Didukh, Y.P., Ardelean, I.A., Becker, U., Beldean, M., Dolnik, C., Jeschke, M., Naqinezhad, A., Uğurlu, E., Ünal, A., Vassilev, K., Vorona, E.I., Yavorska, O.H., Dengler, J. (in press): Dry grassland vegetation of Central Podolia (Ukraine) – a preliminary overview on syntaxonomy, ecology and biodiversity. *Tuexenia*. 34.

Other papers on the results of subsequent Research Expeditions are in preparation.

Jürgen Degler gave an overview on two data base projects to which members are invited to submit suitable data. One of these is the European Vegetation Archive (EVA), coordinated by Milan Chytrý for the European Vegetation Survey, which is another Working Group of the IAVS. Currently this database contains data on 550 000 vegetation plots, of which 90% are georeferenced. EDGG is involved for handling and attracting grassland



Photos: T. Shupova

databases. Further information can be found from <http://euroveg.org/eva-database>. The second project is the sPlot global vegetation-plot database coordinated by Jürgen Dengler.

Finally, attention was given to the following matters raised by members for consideration by the General Assembly.

1. To post the presentations of participants in the EDGM on the EDGG web-site.
2. To support the proposal of including the European and Asian steppes as carbon intensive ecosystems in the post Kyoto protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
3. To initiate discussion on the syntaxonomy of European grasslands, including the natural and semi-natural steppes, via the EDGG web-site.
4. It was proposed that the EDGG should support the efforts of the Kulikovo field towards the preservation of various grasslands and recommend the expansion of the territory of the biosphere reserves.
5. It was also proposed that the EDGG should support the creation of a virtual “Encyclopedia of the Great Steppe”, initiated by the joint Holarctic Steppes Thematic Group of the CEM (Commission for Ecosystem Management) and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

The General Assembly of the EDGG ended at 9:00 p.m.

*Stephen Venn, Secretary-General
Jürgen Dengler, Chair of the Assembly*



Xeranthemum annuum on the abrupt slope of the Don river. Photo: T. Svetasheva



Astragalus tanaiticus a rare steppe species, endemic to the Central and Azov Upland, Russia. Photo: T. Svetasheva