

7th European Dry Grassland Meeting



Venue of the 7th European Dry Grassland Meeting—Smolenice Congress Centre of Slovak Academy of Sciences (Slovakia). Photo: P. Chmielewski.

The idea of dry grassland meetings is more than 7 years old. This idea was formed in Germany and its basic aim was to gather people dealing with the diversity, classification and conservation of dry grassland vegetation. It was also Germany where the first six grassland meetings took place (Lüneburg, Münster, Freising, Kiel and Halle). This year, the European Dry Grassland Meeting took place outside Germany for the first time. In some respect, it was a reflection of the ever wider cooperation among dry grassland scientists connected within the European Dry Grassland Group.

The 7th European Dry Grassland Meeting was held in Smolenice (Slovak Republic) from 27 May to 1 June 2010. The Congress Centre of the Slovak Academy of Sciences provided a pleasant location for scientific debates and was highly appreciated by all participants. Altogether, 100 participants from 19 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom) and Australia took part in the meeting.

The conference was devoted to applied ecological aspects of dry grasslands – their succession, management and restoration. These topics have recently become increasingly important. Secondary succession is a widespread phenomenon contributing significantly to degradation of dry grassland ecosystems. However, management and restoration are human activities helping to maintain dry grassland diversity. Slovakia is one of the most “successional” countries in Europe. The land-use changes commonly occurring within the whole continent are multiplied here in their consequences due to strong political changes during the last 60-70 years. The collectivisation and agricultural cooperatives during the second half of the 20th century were accompanied by a decreasing management intensity and land abandonment. Although the land was returned to private owners after the velvet revolution in 1989, the general trend of land abandonment continued.

The conference was devoted to the memory of Pavel Deván, one of the best Slovak experts in zoology of invertebrates and important nature conservationist. He devoted his life to the conservation and practical management of grasslands in the Biele Karpaty Mts.



In the Biele Karpaty Mts. even the wet dry grasslands were highly attractive for dry grassland scientists. Photo: M. Vrahnakis.

where he also lived with his wife Katarína and three children who took part in the meeting, too.

In the introductory session the participants were welcomed by Monika Janišová (Institute of Botany, Slovak Academy of Sciences and European Dry Grassland Group), Ján Šeffler (DAFNE – Institute of Applied Ecology) and Drahomír Stano (Administration of the Landscape Protected Area Biele Karpaty and NGO Pre Prirodu). Katarína Rajciová introduced Pavel Deván and his life. After that, the participants enjoyed a talk by Ladislav Mucina focusing on origin and evolution of dry grasslands of Central Europe. This influential vegetation scientist, recently made Professor of Environmental and Aquatic Science at the Curtin University of Technology in Australia, was born in Piešťany, a city located about 30 km from Smolenice. Years ago, Laco has worked at the Institute of Botany in the Slovak Academy of Sciences and carried out research in the regions of the meeting excursions. These were some of the reasons why he did not hesitate to travel such a huge distance from the

southern hemisphere to attend this meeting. The next speaker, Daniela Dúbravková provided an overview of Slovak dry grassland vegetation. Then, Ján Šeffler informed the participants in detail about the mapping of grassland vegetation and application of its results.

The second session, chaired by J. Dengler focussed on conservation of grassland species, communities and habitats (strategies, experiences) included 6 talks by C. Hobohm, V. Šefflerová Stanová, I. Vitasovic Kosic, Z. Drillet, M. Vrahnakis and S. Burrascano. The third session, chaired by L. Mucina and focussing on methodological issues (evaluation of habitat quality, detection of favourable habitat conditions, classification of successional stages and degraded communities), included 4 talks by S. Bartha, S. Maccherini, W. Willner and S. Hanoteaux. The fourth and the fifth sessions chaired by C. Wellstein and K. Prach focussed on processes in succession and management effects. Both sessions included 11 talks by L. Halada, S. Znamenskiy, A. Catorci, J. Šeffler, L. Rose, D. Galvánek, S. Kandrelis, M. Seifan, M. Wiezik, J.

Dengler and J. Házi. Session 6 chaired by V. Stanová was devoted to restoration of dry grasslands. Eight lectures were given by Jongepierová, P. Török, A. Csecserits, B. Tóthmérész, G. Matus, C. Wellstein, A. Ödman and E. Volkova. Then the destinations of the three field excursions were introduced by M. Janišová, I. Škodová and K. Hegedúšová.

The program continued with social events. After the guided tour through the Smolenice castle, the grassland party was opened in the castle courtyard. The results of competition for the best talk and poster contributions were announced. The winners, M. Wiezik (the best talk on “The importance of dry grasslands for preservation of ant communities in cultural landscape of central Slovakia”) and I. Paulini (the best poster on “Vegetation survey of the hay meadows in the proposed Natura 2000 site „Eastern Hills of Cluj, Transylvania, Romania”), were awarded by the book on Grasslands of the White Carpathian Mountains edited by I. Jongepierová.

The third EDGG General Assembly took place after the first day’s oral presentations (the special report is devoted to this event in this Bulletin issue, pp. 10–13).

During the three following days the conference participants visited dry and semi-dry grassland sites in the Tematínske vrchy Mts. (the first excursion guided by L. Mucina, M. Janišová, K. Rajcová and S. Mertanová),



Iris variegata in the National Nature Reserve Machová (Czech Republic). Photo: K. Baraňská.

Biele/Bílé Karpaty Mts. (the second excursion guided by I. Škodová, K. Devánová, S. Mertanová, I. Jongepierová and K. Fajmon) and Malé Karpaty Mts. (the third excursion guided by K. Hegedúšová and V. Feráková).

The pdf versions of the talks and poster presentations for which the authors agreed to publish their electronic version will be available at http://www.edgg.org/edgg_meeting.html. On this web page you can also find the conference proceedings and the photo gallery from the meeting.

During the conference, the text of Smolenice Grassland Declaration was formulated. By now, 107 participants, invited scientists and persons of different institutions and authorities from 16 countries have signed this declaration (the list of signatories is available at the conference homepage http://www.edgg.org/edgg_meeting.html). We invite you to join our Declaration and sign it electronically (the detailed instructions will soon be available on the EDGG homepage).

Finally we would like to express our thanks to all conference participants for their valuable scientific contributions, good mood and high resistance against the moisture stress. We are grateful to Monika Budzáková, Daniela Dúbravková, Dobromil Galvánek, Peter Jánsky, Jana Medvecká, Zuzana Melečková, Sylvia Mertanová, Mária Petrášová, Katarína Rajcová and Janka Smatanová for intensive help before and during the meeting. We thank to Karel Fajmon, Viera Feráková, Ivana Jongepierová and Ladislav Mucina for help in guiding excursions. We are grateful to the heads of Institute of Botany, Slovak Academy of Sciences and Daphne – Institute of Applied Ecology for their support during the conference organisation, to organisations of the State Nature Conservancy for enduring high density of grassland scientists in the protected areas. The meeting was supported by a grant „Management models for grassland habitats” through the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and from the state budget of the Slovak Republic in the framework of individual project SK0115 and by the Floristisch-soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft e. V.

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Smolenice Grassland Declaration



Europe supports a huge variety of grassland ecosystems, both natural and those made or managed by man, spanning the coasts and high mountain regions and ranging from tundra in the North to the Mediterranean in the South and from the Azores in the West to the Ural Mountains in the East. These grassland ecosystems provide many goods and services such as food/forage, climate regulation, securing water and nutrient cycling, medicine and energy - all related to human health, prosperity and well-being in general.

Furthermore, grasslands are home to both wildlife and domestic livestock. For several groups of plants and animals, grassland ecosystems are characterized by remarkably high biodiversity. Many parts of Europe landscapes with pastures, meadows and/or natural grasslands contain regional biodiversity hotspots and support high proportion of native and rare species.

In spite of European states' commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity objective of halting biodiversity loss by 2010, and in spite of the global importance of European pastures and meadows, the area covered by grasslands continues to decline dramatically, in particular due to conversion to cropland or abandonment; the remaining grasslands are often impacted by changes of management and accompanied by eutrophication, causing the regional extinction and the high global extinction risk of many species.

We note that while many European countries have water and forest legislation and strategies which promote a coherent vision and an integrated policy approach, grasslands lack such a framework and the effects are clear to see.

We therefore call for a strong and comprehensive Convention on Grassland Conservation in Europe within the framework of the Pan-European Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy, to secure the future of grasslands which provide vital ecosystem services to human society, are home to biodiversity, sources of natural beauty and cultural values.



Moments in the Smolenice castle: Katarína Devánová with her son Peter (upper left picture taken by Lenka Janišová), coffee break on the castle terrace (upper right picture taken by Mike Vrahnač), Karel Prachý chairing session 5 and the audience (pictures in the middle taken by Janka Smatanová), grassland party in the castle courtyard (bottom pictures taken by Rita Ketner-Oostra).

Next page:

Moments in the field: the excursion to the Tematínske vtchy Mts. (upper pictures taken by Monika Janišová and Janka Smatanová), the excursion to the Biele/Bilé Karpaty Mts. (four pictures in the middle, taken by Monika Janišová and Janka Smatanová and the excursion to Sandberg and Devinská Kobyla (bottom pictures taken by Monika Janišová).



Minutes from the General Assembly of the EDGG

These notes were kept by Michael Vrahnakis – if there are points that participants wanted to be presented here and they are not please do not hesitate to make a conduct with Michael at mvrahnak@teilar.gr and additional material of the G.A. maybe presented in the next 8th Bulletin.

The General Assembly (G.A.) of the EDGG during the 7th European Dry Grassland Meeting in Smolenice took place after the first day's oral presentations (28/05/2010), starting at 20:00 hrs. Before the G.A. the three members of the Executive Committee (E.C.) present, Jürgen Dengler, Monika Janisova and Michael (Mike) Vrahnakis had a short meeting just to structure the general shape of the G.A. Eight major topics were discussed during the G.A. chaired by Jürgen Dengler.

The first one was about some introductory notes, like **membership development, subgroup formation, and relationships with other organizations**. The rapid expansion of our Organization was illustrated by figures that show an expansion from 191 members in 09/12/2008 up to 561 members in 13/05/2010. A special acknowledgement was addressed to Mike's effort to expand our Organization in the Mediterranean countries. The an-

nouncement of the new EDGG subgroup formation for the south-east European countries (SEEDGG) was shortly presented with a special reference to its dynamic nature (134 members, 14 countries). A general conclusion was that despite the rapid expansion, there are still European countries missing or with rather low representativeness in EDGG. We shortly discussed the need to establish closer relationships with organizations like IAVS, EGF, and FAO.

Secondly, a short report from the present members of the E.C. was devoted to the activities related to their responsibilities, and a short introduction was made for the responsibility allocated to the new member of the E.C. (Mike) to support Solvita in editing the EDGG homepage. The G.A. welcomed the new member of the E.C. and his responsibilities.



Orobanche lutea and Orobanche alba in the National Nature Reserve Devínska Kobyla (Slovakia). Photo: P. Chmielewski and J. Smatanová.

Thirdly, Jürgen outlined the present status of some **publication-related issues**. *Tuexenia* 30 (2010) with a Dry Grassland Special Feature guest-edited by a team of EDGG members is presently in press and contains six articles + one editorial. Also, it was stressed that, given the efforts are made for *Tuexenia* to gain an Impact Factor, only high quality papers for the Special Issue devoted to the Smolenice Conference will be accepted by the guest editorial committee. The Dry Grassland Special Feature in *Tuexenia* 31 (2011) will comprise up to 150 pages, and only invited papers will be accepted to publish. Jürgen expressed his regret that as he was recently informed it would not be possible to have a Special Feature in *Applied Vegetation Science (AVS)*, given that AVS is already planning to devote two complete issues in 2011 to Special Features (Ecoinformatics and Vegetation classification). Nevertheless efforts were and are still made to find a hospitable space in some other significant journals (like *Restoration Ecology*, *Plant Biosystems*, *Community Ecology*, etc.). Mike expressed his thoughts that it might be productive to have some contacts with the *Grass and Forage Science* that it is the official journal of the European Grassland Federation (IF=1.378). The G.A. approved all the efforts made by the E.C. to find Special Issues for hosting the members' papers.

In the fourth and fifth session, we discussed about the future venues that may host **next EDGG's conferences and research expeditions**. Several future conference venues were proposed by the present members, thus illustrating the emerging robustness and appeal of the EDGG in the scientific European grassland community. Representatives from Ukraine, Greece, Poland, and Russia expressed their wish to host the 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015 conferences in their countries, respectively. The G.A. approved the Ukrainian proposal to host the conference 2011 in the Dendrological Park of the National Academy of Sciences in Uman' near Kiev. Anna Kuzemko as chair of the local organizing committee in consultation with the E.C. will publish a First Circular in the next months to be sent to all EDGG members.

In the sixth session Mike presented to the G.A. his thoughts about the **expansion of the web site**. This expansion may include the construction of: 1. A *Dry grassland-related project list* where open calls, project names, objectives, participants, findings, publication lists, web links are to be presented. Our members will be able to post all this information for communication purposes. 2. *Training and mobility* (open calls, running Erasmus projects, etc.) will offer the opportunity to our academic members and their students to exchange experiences and methodologies. 3. *Policy issues* will offer the opportunity to establish communication with policy makers and to exchange scientifically-based ideas. 4. *Alerts for issues for consultation* may host relevant links where our members are kindly invited to express their ideas for consulting dry grassland related issues. 5. Finally more *Thematic parks*, are expected to develop in our web page relevant to (among others) (i) DG and climate change, (ii) DG and



The area of the former quarry in the protected site Sandberg is recently overgrown by successional woody species. Photo: J. Smatanová.



The results of restoration activities of the NGO Pre Přírodu in the Tematínské vrchy Mts. Dry grasslands gradually overgrown by successional pines have recently a new chance to be maintained. Photo: K. Baraňská.



During the moments without rain the grassland scientists enjoyed grassland observations and common debates. Photo: J. Smatanová, M. Janišová and R. Ketner-Oostra.

desertification, (iii) DG and biodiversity, (iv) DG and renewable energy resources, (v) Methodological issues, (vi) issues of terminology, (vii) country's DG profile, etc. This way ideas, articles, and papers of our members will find a ground to be expressed and discussed. The G.A. approved these ideas and authorized Mike (together with Solvita) to proceed with the necessary reforms of the web page. Our members are all kindly invited to take part in this initiative by sending relevant information to Mike and Solvita.

The seventh session included **governance issues**. Jürgen pointed out that the E.C. of the EDGG is not a close group and anyone who has interests in coordinating our

members and community is welcome. The G.A. authorized the present E.C. to continue its work. The present E.C. expressed its acknowledgements to the G.A. and it was agreed that such authorizations will take part in every future EDGG conference. It was also reminded that a call for a fifth chair (a zoologist related to dry grasslands, preferably from a country not yet represented among the E.C. members) is still open.

In the last (closing) session Jürgen expressed the E.C.'s gratitude for this excellent Smolenice conference, and deeply **thanked the organizing committee**.

Michael Vralnakis, Karditsa, Greece

Next page: Landscapes with semi-dry grasslands in the Biele/Bílé Karpaty Mts. Photo: R. Ketner-Oostra and L. Janišová.

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