

Post-conference report

16th Eurasian Grassland Conference (2019)

Graz, Austria and Maribor, Slovenia



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Abstract

The 16th EGC took place jointly in Austria and Slovenia between 29th May and 5th June 2019. A total of 68 participants from 17 European countries were welcomed. In hall sessions, 27 oral (10 from young investigators) and 22 poster (9 from young investigators) contributions were presented. Three keynotes, Zsolt Molnár, Matej Vidrih and Wolfgang Willner, gave inspiring and informative plenary talks. Optional workshops were held on Natura 2000 biogeographical processes, scientific writing and bryophyte identification. A mid-conference excursion was taken to a “hay-milk region” in Steiermark and a three day post-conference excursion to Slovenia.

The main topic of this year’s conference was to discuss the economic value of species-rich grasslands. The aim was to connect the biological and agronomical as well as sociological aspects of the grassland preservation. The conference brought those different disciplines related to grasslands together. Participants had the opportunity to hear studies and perspectives from different sides. It was concluded that both biology and agronomy need to learn more from each other to find ways of how this treasure of 6,000 years of grassland culture can survive.

Introduction

The 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference “Species-rich grasslands in the Palaeartic – a treasure without economic value?” was held in Graz, Austria with a post-conference excursion in Slovenia from 29th May to 5th June 2019 (Magnes 2019). The conference was organized jointly by Martin Magnes, Institute of Biology, University of Graz as well as Nataša Pipenbaher and Sonja Škornik, Department of Biology of the University of Maribor, Slovenia and was supported by the University of Graz and the Nature Park Zirbitzkogel-Grebenzen. It took place in the Botanical Garden and in the halls of the Institute of Biology, Department of Plant Sciences of the University of Graz. The event was officially opened on 30th May by the speech of the head of the Department of Plant Sciences of the University of Graz, Martin Grube.

Keynote speakers and mid-conference excursion

Three keynote speakers gave inspiring and informative plenary talks. The first one, shortly after the opening ceremony, was presented by Zsolt Molnár (Fig. 1, Traditional Ecological Knowledge Research Group at the MTA Centre for Ecological Research, Hungary) with the title “Maintenance of species-rich grasslands by traditional farmers: diversity, practice, knowledge, subsidies and future” where he showed the deep knowledge of grassland ecosystems of the local Hungarian Csángó in the Eastern Carpathians in Romania and how they could use it for developing sustainable management techniques. The second keynote lecture was given by Matej Vidrih (Fig. 2, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) on “Sustainable pasture management in Slovenia: balancing productivity and biodiversity” in the morning of the 31st



Fig. 1. Zsolt Molnár giving the 1st keynote lecture on the 30th of May. Photo: P. Sengl.



Fig. 2. Matej Vidrih presenting the 2nd keynote lecture on the 31th May. Photo: P. Sengl.

May. It was a perfect introduction to the mid-conference excursion, organized and guided by Martin Magnes, to Neumarkt in der Steiermark that showed us two farms that can use species rich grasslands for economic milk production. The 42 participants first visited the farm of the Sperl family in Mariahof where we saw the stable and the winter paddock following by a walk along their haymeadows and pastures. Magda Witzmann gave a short compilation of the results of her master thesis on the biodiversity of these pastures (Fig. 3). Our next and last target was the farm “Zeischgl” (Fig. 4), belonging to the Wölfl family who sells their home made products by direct marketing. After visiting the pastures, haymeadows, fields and some of the tourist facilities we were invited by the Naturpark Zirbitzkogel-Grebenzen for a tasting of the farm products.

The last keynote lecture was given by Wolfgang Willner (Fig. 5), VINCA - Vienna Institute for Nature Conservation and Analyses and University of Vienna, Department of Botany

and Biodiversity Research, Austria) about “Semi-dry grasslands of Central and Eastern Europe - syntaxonomic and biogeographical aspects”. In his lecture Wolfgang showed the high probability of the existence of “semi-natural grasslands” during the whole Holocene in Europe.

Workshops and hall sessions A total of 68 participants from 17 countries were welcomed (Fig. 6). During hall sessions, 27 oral and 22 poster (Fig. 7) contributions were presented. Thanks to IAVS for supporting nine presenters with travel grants. Three optional workshops were held. A pre-conference workshop on Natura 2000 was led by Theo van der Sluis and Jan Sliva, 15 participants attended. After an introduction into the Biogeographical Process (BGP) and the EU habitat plan for European semi-natural dry grasslands (code 6120) as well as European dry heaths (code 4030) by Theo, Jan showed some current Life-supported grassland projects and best practise examples. Working in small groups, the participants discussed (Fig. 8): 1. What are the



Fig. 3. Magda Witzmann on the pastures of the Sperl-farm during the mid-conference excursion. Photo: M. Magnes.

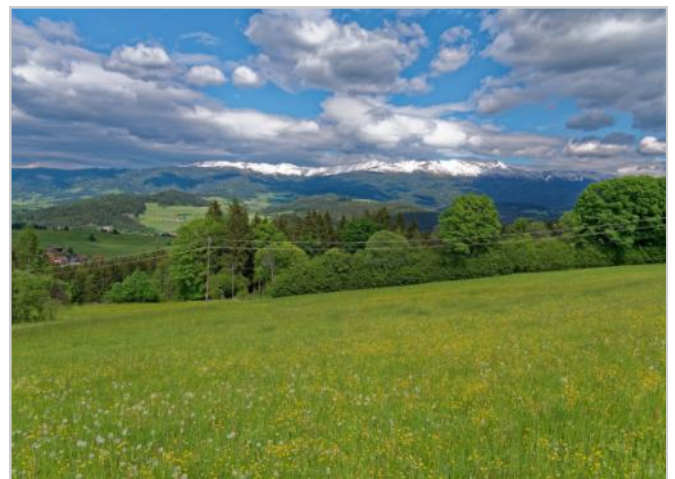


Fig. 4. Hay meadows of the farm Zeischgl, in the background the Zirbitzkogel. Photo: M. Magnes.



Fig. 5. Wolfgang Willner giving the 3rd keynote lecture on the 1st June. Photo: M. Magnes.

values delivered by grasslands? 2. How do farmers use and manage species rich grasslands? 3. What are best practices for grassland management? 4. What are important socio-economic conditions to conserve these grasslands? After the presentation of the results, Theo moderated a discussion, that showed that a majority thinks that a somehow economical use of these grasslands would be the most important aspect for their preservation.

The second workshop, on the topic of scientific writing, was organized and led by Jürgen Dengler on the 30th May, after

the poster sessions, and was attended by 10 participants. The participants learnt key points in clear and concise scientific writing.

Parallel to the already mentioned mid-conference-excursion on the 31st May, Christian Berg led a bryophyte identification field-workshop (Fig. 9) where seven participants received detailed guidelines, learnt the collecting of bryophyte specimens, key features for their identification and got familiar with common species in cities and grasslands.

Post conference excursion

The post-conference workshop of this year’s EGC was organized by Sonja Škornik and Nataša Pipenbaher from the University of Maribor. The excursion took place in Slovenia between 2nd and 5th June. In addition to the organisers, Mitja Kaligarič, Igor Paušič, Branko Bakan, Matej Vidrih and Stanka Dešnik were our excursion guides. A total of 25 participants joined the excursion and observed the diversity of the Goričko Landscape Park (Fig. 10), which forms one part of the Trilateral Park extending across Austria, Hungary and Slovenia. Goričko is a well-preserved example of typical and traditional Central-European agricultural landscape with a mosaic of fields, grasslands, orchards, vineyards, hedges and forest. The next morning the participants visited the Šturmovci Landscape Park (Fig. 11), where they could marvel at semi-dry alluvial hay meadows – the traditional management left some trees to preserve the hay from being washed away by summer floods of the near Drava river.

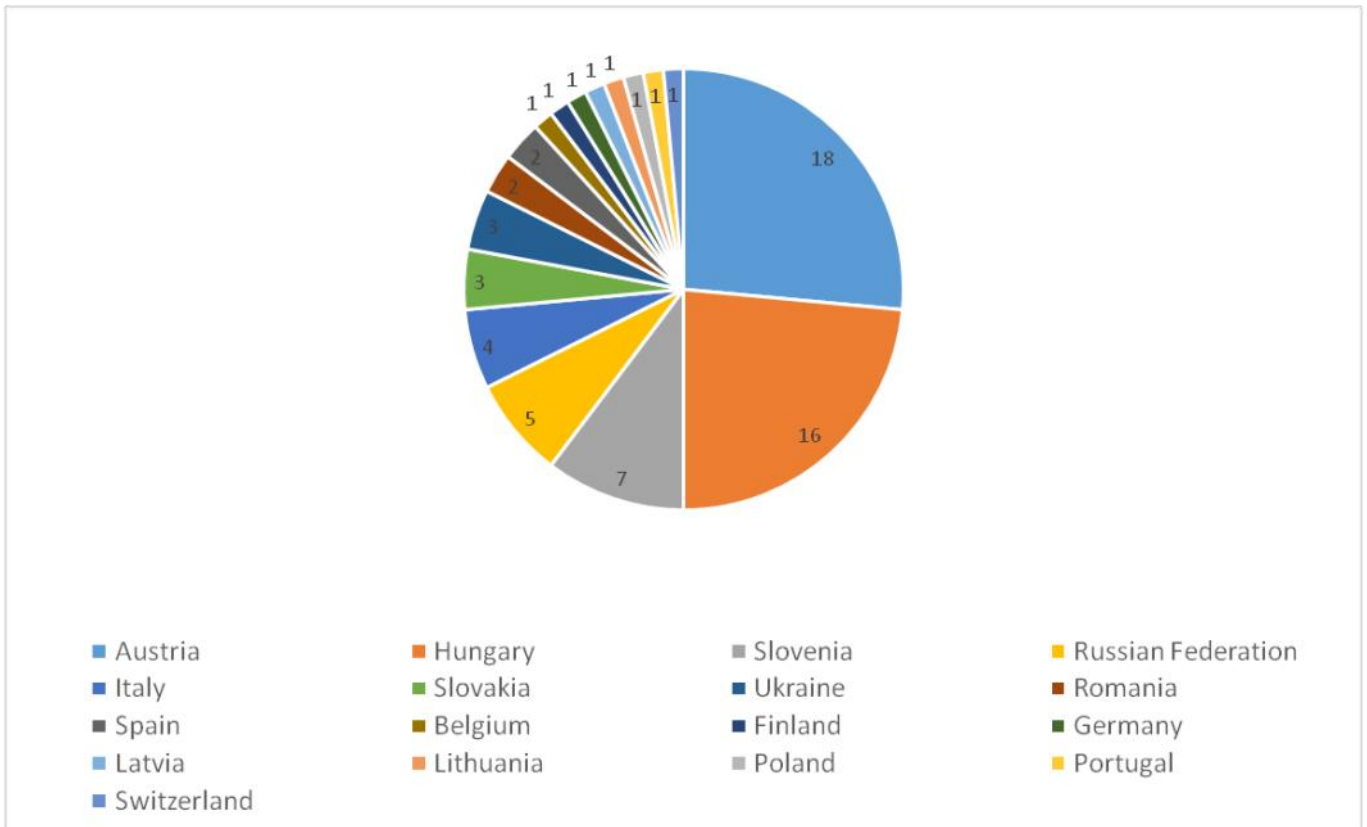


Fig. 6. Number of participants from different countries.



Fig. 7. Poster session. Photo: P. Sengl.



Fig. 8. Natura 2000 workshop, Luciana Carotenuto presenting the ideas of her group. Photo: M. Magnes.

Later they visited the Haloze region (Fig. 12), which has the highest density of “orchids-rich meadows” (*Bromion erecti*, ass. *Onobrychido vicifoliae-Brometum*) in Slovenia (approx. 25% of non-forest land), bearing fantastic orchid habitats (Fig. 13). The third day took participants to the Slovenian Northern Adriatic karst zone, which represents the northwesternmost branch of the Dinaric mountain range, extending along the Eastern Adriatic (Fig. 14).

Social events and young investigator prizes

The participants enjoyed a grassland party on the evening of the 31st May, savoured typical Styrian food, wine (including examples from the Slovenian Stajerska), a special brewed “16th EDGG conference beer” and some music performances from regional artists in the nice buildings of the green houses of the Botanical Garden. On the last day, the EDGG general assembly was held where chairs informed participants about past, current and future activities and

received participants’ valuable opinions. Finally, six researchers under the age of 35 received Young Investigator Prizes for outstanding talks or posters (Fig. 15). We congratulate Réka Kiss (1st prize talk), Peter Kozel (2nd prize talk), Laura Godó (3rd prize talk), Iris Moeneclaey (1st prize poster), Katalin Lukács (2nd prize poster) and Maik Preßnitz (3rd prize poster).

Acknowledgements

We thank our keynote speakers, tutors and excursion guides for sharing their expertise with us. We also thank our student helpers for their help during the conference days.

Reference

Magnes, M. (ed.) 2019. 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference (EGC) (29 May-5 June 2019): Species-rich grasslands in the Palaeartic—a treasure without economic value? (Program and Abstracts). *Fritschiana* 92: 68 pp. [pdf](#)



Fig. 9. Christian Berg explaining field determination of bryophytes. Photo: P. Sengl.



Fig. 10. First day of the post-conference excursion in the Goričko Landscape Park. Photo: N. Pipenbahr.



Fig. 11. Second day of the post-conference excursion in Šturmovci Landscape Park. Photo: N. Pipenbahr.



Fig. 12. Second day of the post-conference excursion in the Haloze region. Photo: N. Pipenbahr.



Fig. 13. *Ophrys holosericea* in the Haloze region. Photo: M. Magnes.



Fig. 14. The third day of the post-conference excursion in the Čičarija, Mitja Kaligarič explaining details of a hay meadow. Photo: M. Magnes.



Fig. 15. The proud winners of the YI competition. Photo: J. Dengler.



Anna Komarova, Russian Federation

Dear colleagues!

I'm very grateful for the chance to participate in the 16th EDGG conference in Graz, Austria. This was my first EDGG conference, and I was really impressed by the very friendly and hearty atmosphere! At the same time the atmosphere was really productive and inspiring for very intensive work.

The topic of the conference - Species-rich grasslands in the Palaeartic – a treasure without economic value? – was rather new for me. It complements our research, because in Russia we investigate grasslands on abandoned land – the only type of place where we have *Molinia* meadow, for example. I was very pleased to present two reports covering our work. One of them, concerning two microsites, was presented first. Therefore, the questions and following

discussion provided a great step forward for this research. In addition, the discussions and sessions at the conference made me realise that succession on abandoned lands (in our case) not only increases species richness, but also results in a decrease in the number of syntaxa.

I would like to say Thank you to Jürgen Dengler for the very useful Paper Writing Workshop. In spite of the very late time of the workshop, the content was very clear. My only suggestion for the conference would be to have more workshops or training sessions.

I also like the conference hosting. The botanical garden was really amazing! Honestly, I'm sure that the meditative walking through the collection redounded to advantage of assimilation and reinterpretation of the new information:) And I like Graz – the small quiet town with the aura of ancient European settlement. At the same time, the logistics were very handy and comfortable.

Of course, I really enjoyed the field trip! It's difficult to imagine seeing traditional agriculture and (semi-)natural landscapes at the same time! And – again – I appreciated the atmosphere of the field trip. Due to a lot of comments and consultation, I've learned a lot about Central Europe's flora and vegetation.

So thanks a lot to IAVS and EDGG for supporting of my participation and all conference attendees for a very productive and inspiring time! I'm sure this is not the last EDGG conference I attend, and hope to be part of a Big Grassland Community! I send the warmest wishes to all of you from cold Russia!

Vadim Prokhorov, Russian Federation

The conference in Graz was my first experience in participating in EDGG events. Prior to this, I only participated in IAVS symposia and EVS workshops. I was very happy to meet new people and see familiar faces. The venue impressed me a lot, the city of Graz is very beautiful with many big old parks and historical places. I really liked the University botanical garden where the conference was held, with a large collection of plants in greenhouses and arboretum. I would like to thank the Executive Committee of EDGG for financial support and the opportunity to participate in the 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference. The conference program was very

interesting and useful for me. It was a nice place to present the part of our work dedicated to distribution modeling of different plant communities. It was possible for me to communicate with many researchers from different countries and we found common topics for discussion. All presentations from participants were very interesting for me, especially the keynote talks, which helped me gain further understanding about many areas of work and new trends in the study of grasslands by European researchers.

However, the field excursions made the greatest impression on me. In a short time, it was possible to see a huge variety of natural habitats, from high alpine meadows to the Mediterranean coast. We traveled all over Slovenia and saw how grasslands are used and protected in different places.

As a flora specialist, I was extremely interested in seeing and photographing new plant species for me in their natural environment during the excursions.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in the preparation and conduct of the conference and excursions, and for excellent communication with us before our arrival. These are professional and enthusiastic people. I am looking forward to the next EDGG events!





Maria Kozhevnikova, Russian Federation

I would like to say a great big thanks to the IAVS for supporting my participation on the 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference in Austria and Slovenia. It was a great experience for me. I have got a lot of new ideas about my future work and inspiration for it. The conference location seemed extraordinarily appealing to me. I think that the choice of such venues, which are very beautiful in nature and with a long cultural history at the same time, help to strengthen the desire to preserve all of this for future generations.

It was my first time attending an EDGG conference. I liked the spirit at the conference very much because all participants cooperated in order to contribute to grassland conser-

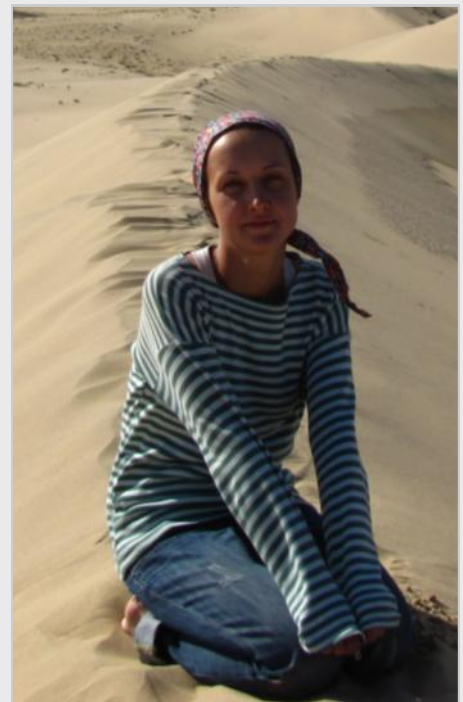
vation and restoration in the Palaeartic realm.

I want to say a big thank you to the organizers of the conference for the careful selection of key speakers; all of them were extremely interesting and professionally useful.

The post-conference tour was just awesome! It opened Slovenia to me, so small and so beautiful. I took a large number of photos in order to use them in the future to prepare lectures for students (different types of land use, unique types of communities, amazing Karst plateau). I want to thank the organizers for the great conference and I am looking forward to the next EGC and other EDGG events!

Natalia Dulepova, Russian Federation

I am very thankful to the EDGG and IAVS grant committee for the travel support and the opportunity to participate in the 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference (EGC) in Graz (Austria). The EGC 2019 was the first EDGG conference attended. I have never felt such sensitive support at a conference. There was a helpful and generally relaxed working attitude all at the same time. The selected city of Graz for the conference was ideal – a remote, comfortable, beautiful and green town. I enjoyed all presentations from keynote speakers, which gave me chance to have a broad-scale view on current international challenges and tendencies of different research in grasslands. The mid-conference excursion in the Neumarkt in Styria was very exciting and informative for me. It was fascinating to learn and to see how management, management changes and abandonment have shaped the appearance and plant species composition of these grasslands. Wolfgang Willner's lecture devoted to the semi-dry grasslands of Central and Eastern Europe was especially valuable to me. This knowledge is relevant to me, as I take part in common projects with our Siberian colleagues devoted to diversity and syntaxonomy of steppes from Ural to Trans-Baicalia. One of the most significant and very useful parts of the conference for me was the scientific writing workshop led by Jürgen Dengler. Thank you for the detailed analysis of the article, answers to the questions and recommended literature. I thank the organizers of the post-conference excursion to Slovenia. This allowed me to expand my knowledge, to see places unforgettable in beauty.





Philipp Sengl, Austria

The 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference was especially exciting for me because it took place in the region where I live (Styria, South-East Austria), introducing the participants to some of the most exciting places of Austria and – during the post-conference excursion – to Slovenia. With my colleagues I contributed to the scientific program with one poster and one oral presentation. While the poster, presented by my colleague Lisa Bernhard (University of Graz), dealt with germination properties of several dry grassland species, the oral presentation gave a preview of a new research topic: using habitat suitability models for pre-selecting most promising sites for restoration measures. The latter was presented by Patrick Schwager (University of Graz). One of the highlights for me was participating in the bryophyte course, during the mid-conference excursions. My former doctorate supervisor, Christian Berg, took us to a low to mid mountain range (640–960 m a.s.l.) in the vicinity of Graz (Semriach) und gave us some insight in the diversity of grassland bryophytes (Fig. 1). All in all, we exceeded the excursion target by far and collected more than 40 species, although we found time for a coffee and cake break too. Due to his enthusiasm in the field (Fig. 2), Christian was easily able to arouse our interest in this exciting field of botany. Traditionally, the ‘grassland parties’ are the main social events of the EGCs and are highly valued by the participants. Besides scientific interchange or design of common studies, it’s the place to gain new friends in the scientific community. Additionally, during the grassland party in Graz a new tradition was founded – the auction of grassland-related artifacts. In my case, I was extraordinarily happy to purchase a traditional Romanian shepherd’s crook (Fig. 3) made of European cornel (*Cornus mas*) which was provided by courtesy of Zsolt Molnár. Additionally, Zsolt showed me how to use it as a seat in the field... it’s more comfortable than one might expect! So, by purchasing the shepherds crook, the IAVS grant was partly reinvested to support the Eurasian Dry Grassland Group and will persistently remind me of the wonderful conference in Graz.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Edina Tóth, Hungary

This year's 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference well-explored the issues and experiences of dry grasslands from many different perspectives. The conference was organized around four sessions, where all those interested found the most appropriate lecture and poster for their field of interest. I am grateful that I managed to get to the conference with the help of the travel grant, and after my first EGC conference in 2016 I was able to present our Hungarian study on the effects of cattle grazing, in which I tried to draw attention to the importance of grassland-type management. My presentation was given in section 2, where we were able to present our national experiences with lawns together with many Hungarian colleagues. For me, the two major presentations of the conference were Zsolt Molnár's plenary presentation and his presentation in section 3, where we could see how important it is to observe in detail the traditional lawn practice, the ancient relationship between people and nature and the acquisition of traditional knowledge that for example the local farmers of Gyimes and the shepherds of Hortobágy know and practice even today. But through several lectures, we could get an overview of the lawn and lawn management practices of the country organizing the conference, Austria. In the poster section, more than 20 posters were presented by the authors, which proved to be a good opportunity for young researchers to introduce themselves and the mood of the public performance. In my opinion, we have heard good poster presentations and interesting results have been shared.

The mid-conference excursion was also a good day and lively day during which we visited farms in Neumark / Steiermark as planned, but only two hay milk farms and surroundings: a hay milk farm of Sperl family in Mariahof and a hay milk farm: Farm Wölfl (Buschenschank Zeischgl). During the first bus stop we went to extensive grazing grasslands, which were very species rich and spectacular, with many interesting plant species such as *Persicaria bistorta*, *Clematis alpina*, *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, *Valeriana tripteris*, *Cam-*

panula and *Primula* species. At our second stop, we were surrounded by a hay milk farm- Farm Wölfl. The farm is very old, has been a family of owners for several generations. They were engaged in the production of butter and cheese, from which we could get tasty samples at the end of the trip. The grasslands here are more heavily loaded by grazing, as they are grazing cattle in the surrounding lawns for the production of butter and milk. The mowing of mowed grasslands is the source of winter feeding for animals. In this region, this is a form of farming and livelihood. The produced dairy products are sold to local, nearby restaurants, where organic products are becoming more and more popular. During the excursion around the farm, there were also high numbers of species, such as: *Persicaria bistorta*, *Pimpinella major*, *Avenula pubescens*, *Geum rivale*, *Dactylorhiza majalis*, *Pinguicula vulgaris*. After the excursions, we could take part in the high-quality grassland party. All in all, we were able to listen to presentations from a number of perspectives and see the posters, and we also got an insight into the operation of the hay milk farms. The conference was also useful for me, and I have try to use the knowledge gained during the conference in our research on grasslands and cattle grazing. Thanks again for the travel grant.

Tatyana Gavrilo, Russian Federation

EDGG events allow vegetation scientists from different countries to share the results of their work as well as to get new ideas and inspiration for future research. Thus, I am very grateful to the EDGG and IAVS grant committee for the travel support and the opportunity to participate in the 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference in Graz, Austria.

This was my first EDGG conference as well as my first international conference; hence, I was particularly excited to participate in it. I was fascinated by the opportunity to meet people whose scientific articles I have read for my research. I was pleasantly surprised by the atmosphere of EGC 2019, both relaxed and professional. My aim of participating in the conference was to present the first results of studying functional traits of leaves at abandoned and managed sites in Central Forest Reserve, NW Russia, as a poster. I had a wonderful opportunity to discuss the results of my work and received valuable feedback. I hope that it will help me to improve the quality of my future research. Furthermore, participating in the conference allowed me to improve my communication skills and to learn more about current methods and approaches of studying grasslands.

I was especially interested in a workshop on scientific writing guided by Jürgen Dengler. I am particularly grateful to Jürgen and the participants of the workshop for valuable advice concerning various aspects of scientific writing such as structuring the article and its parts, choosing the best title and targeting the journal most suitable for the article.

I would like to thank local organizers of EGC 2019 for a delightful social dinner with traditional Styrian cuisine and music as well as for the mid-conference excursion to Neumarkt. It was an excellent opportunity to learn more about EU practices of grassland management and organic farming as well as to enjoy the magnificent landscapes of the Alps. Thank you all for a wonderful conference!

**Olha Yaroshko, Ukraine**

I am thankful to the EDGG and IAVS grant committee for the financial support they gave me to participate in the 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference 2019 in Graz.

It is the first time I have participate in an EGG conference, and the first large-scale conference in my life. The conference program was very eventful. There were a lot of interesting poster presentations.

During the conference, I obtained new knowledge and practical skills in identifying plants during the mid-conference excursion to the mountains. I am glad that I met new people, I was very pleased to talk with Didem, Idoia, Martin and Iwona, I will remember them for a long time. I also met several young scientists, most of all, I remember Iris from Belgium and I had the opportunity to share my experience with her, her PhD work is also related to the introduction of plants *in vitro* culture and

the propagation of plants. Also, unexpectedly for me, I met participants from Ukraine, with whom I was previously familiar (I did not know that they would participate in the conference).

The conference in 2019 was held in the city of Graz (Austria), the mid-conference excursion was held in the mountains around the village of Neumarkt. The conference venue and excursions were successfully chosen. Graz is a very old city, the second after Vienna in economic importance. In the town of Graz, I was impressed with the Graz botanical garden, with a large collection of tropical plants. The collections of botanical gardens are of direct interest for me. I worked in two botanical gardens in Kyiv and previously specially visited botanical gardens in Ukraine and other countries, growing plants is my job and a hobby that I adore. Most of all I was impressed with the conference in the mountains. I have never been to such high mountains. The wildlife in these mountains is wonderful. I, with several participants from Ukraine, found several species of rare orchids during the excursion tour. I got acquainted with the species diversity of mountain meadows and forests in the area of the village of Neumarkt. Now it's hard for me to describe the emotions that I experienced in the mountains. It was a delight and ecstasy from the beauty of nature, fresh and clean mountain air and the aromas of herbs and moist soil, which harmoniously merged into a single picture. Thanks to the organizers, you gave me not just the opportunity to present my work and exchange knowledge, you gave me emotions and inspiration.

PS: In 2020, the Field Workshop will be held in Ukraine. If anybody (I mean participants), has the desire and opportunity to get acquainted with the nature of not only southern and central Ukraine – You are welcome, I can be “an excursion guide”. In Ukraine, we have the Carpathian Mountains - the pearl of Ukraine. You can contact me about Ukraine nature information. Hope to see all new friends at the next conferences.