

EDGG Event

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21st Eurasian Grassland Conference
“Connecting science and conservation for grassland sustainability”
Sofia, Bulgaria, 19-23rd July 2026

First Call

Welcome to the 21st Eurasian Grassland Conference in Sofia on 19-23rd July 2026, hosted by the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (IBER) at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). With the main topic of “*Connecting science and conservation for grassland sustainability*”, we aim to highlight the connection of studies on grassland ecosystems with management practices and conservation goals.

Registration

The Conference registration will be opened in January 2026. Favourable participation fees will be available for “an early-bird option”, students and IAVS members, offering reduced participation fees. Please, visit the [Conference website](#) for the latest information. For any queries, please contact egc2026@abv.bg.

Venue

The city of Sofia is the capital and largest city of Bulgaria, situated in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula, with a population of 1.5 million people. Geographically, it lies in the Sofia Valley, surrounded by the Vitosha, Lyulin, Lozenska and Balkan Mountains.

The city of Sofia has a long history, dating back to the 7th millennium BC, with a rich past as the Roman city of Serdica, the Bulgarian stronghold of Sredets, and an Ottoman provincial capital before becoming the capital of modern Bulgaria in 1879. Today, Sofia combines vibrant culture, rich history and contemporary urban charm. One could enjoy exploring Roman ruins at the archaeological complex of Serdica, the city’s Orthodox heritage like the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the 4th-century St. George Rotunda and the medieval St. Petka Temple, along with a variety of city parks like Borisova Garden, South Park, the City Garden in front of the National Theater, etc.



Location of Bulgaria and Sofia in Southeastern Europe.



View of part of the city center.

The Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (IBER) at the [Bulgarian Academy of Sciences](#) (BAS) conducts research in fundamental and applied ecology, biodiversity, nature conservation and sustainable use of biological resources.

The IBER trains PhD students in fields such as botany, mycology, zoology, ecology, conservation biology and environmental genetics. IBER also provides scientific and methodological support to state institutions and NGOs.

Accommodation

There is a diverse range of hotel accommodation available within easy reach of the city centre at reasonable prices. Further details and recommendations will be published soon on the [conference web-page](#).

Travel

Getting to Sofia

Sofia is easily accessible from many European cities by bus/train, or via plane, arriving at Vasil Levski Sofia Airport (SOF).

Several companies offer low-cost overland connections or flights. The international bus and train stations are also well connected to the city centre by metro or bus/tram. The airport is only 10 km from the city centre, connected by the metro network and Buses 84 and 184. A night bus is also available.

Moving around Sofia

Sofia's public transport system is reliable and cheap: metro ([link](#)), trams, trolleys, buses ([link](#)).

Payment: Tap a debit/credit card at the POS terminal for a single travel ticket (€0.82).

Daily Cap: The maximum charge per day is €2.04 (a day card cost), activated after the third public transport POS terminal single registration (excluding night buses). For more information about the Sofia public transport prices see [link](#).

Navigation: Use the Movit app or Google Maps for routes.

If you prefer driving, consider using [Spark](#), a short-term car rental service that offers flexibility without the hassle of lengthy contracts. Keep in mind that the city center operates on a [zoned parking system](#).



On the left: The Largo, architectural ensemble. On the right: St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.



The National Palace of Culture.

Main topic of the conference

The conference theme is: "**Connecting science and conservation for grassland sustainability**"

The program will feature oral and poster presentations focused on various regions and grassland systems. Sessions will cover:

- Scientific topics (details are still under discussion);
- Practical aspects of grassland management and conservation.

You are all welcome to influence the selection of topics by voting for topics you prefer from the tentative list of topics via the [Preliminary Participant Information form](#). You will also have the possibility of suggesting additional topics via a second link at the end of the topic selection form.

Preliminary time schedule

- 19th July - Registration, Welcome party
- 20th July - Registration, Opening ceremony, Day 1 of scientific programme
- 21st July - Day 2 of scientific programme, City Tour
- 22nd July - Mid-conference excursion to Vitosha Natural Park
- 23rd July - Day 3 of scientific programme, Business Meeting, Grassland Party.

Plenary presentations

Vanishing agrobiodiversity and the growing importance of small grassland fragments: the potential of Eurasian burial mounds in EU-level conservation and restoration policies

Balázs Deák, HUN-REN Centre for Ecological Research, Hungary.

Balázs Deák is an ecologist studying the role of small grassland fragments – particularly ancient burial mounds (kurgans) – in maintaining biodiversity in intensively used Eurasian landscapes. Using landscape-ecological and trait-based approaches, his research explores how kurgans contribute to grassland biodiversity, how landscape factors and environmental heterogeneity shape species and trait composition of fragmented grasslands, and how cultural and natural values complement each other on kurgans. He aims to provide evidence-based strategies for integrating kurgan protection into national and international conservation frameworks.



Ecological scaling laws in Palaeartic grasslands: insights from EDGG Field Workshops and the GrassPlot database

Iwona Dembicz, University of Warsaw, Poland.

Iwona Dembicz is an Assistant Professor at the University of Warsaw in Poland. Her scientific interests include grassland ecology, biodiversity patterns, habitat isolation, nature conservation and management, and ecological restoration. She has been a member of the European Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) since 2011. She has co-organised and participated in numerous EDGG field workshops. Since 2017, she has been involved in developing GrassPlot - database of multi-scale plant diversity in Palaeartic grasslands.



Grassland syntaxonomy and ecological patterns in the Central Balkans

Renata Ćušterevska, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University; Skopje, North Macedonia.

Renata Ćušterevska is Full Professor at the Institute of Biology, University in Skopje. Her research focuses on plant and habitat diversity, vegetation ecology, and the syntaxonomy of open habitats across the Balkans. She has extensive experience in phytosociological and habitat mapping, contributing to numerous national and international projects on biodiversity conservation and environmental impact assessment. She is a member of several professional networks, including IAVS, EVS, and EDGG. Her current work emphasizes the integration of floristic, ecological, and biogeographical data to better understand vegetation patterns and promote effective conservation of grassland ecosystems in SE Europe.



Global change in European grasslands: insights from local to continental studies

Jürgen Dengler, University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), Wädenswil, Switzerland.

Jürgen Dengler is Professor of Vegetation Ecology at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in Switzerland. He has broad research interests in biodiversity patterns, global change, macroecology, bioindication, conservation and restoration as well as broad-scale vegetation classification. He co-founded EDGG and its database GrassPlot and serves in the steering committees of both, and he is one of the Chief Editors of "*Vegetation Classification and Survey*".



Distribution and conservation of reptiles in steppe, semi-arid and high-mountain pastures in Serbia and North Macedonia

Ljiljana Tomović, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia; Macedonian Ecological Society, Skopje, North Macedonia.

Professor of Morphology and Systematics of Vertebrates at the Faculty of Biology, University of Belgrade. Research interests: herpetology, population biology, life history characteristics, ethology, faunistics, zoogeography, conservation biology, biodiversity of herpetofauna.



Tackling the unknown. Studying and conserving fungi in sand dunes

Borys Assyov, Bulgarian Academy of Science, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Boris Assyov graduated from Sofia University and accomplished his PhD study in mycology in the Institute of Botany of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He is presently employed by the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research (Sofia, Bulgaria). His interests are in the diversity, taxonomy, nomenclature and ecology of larger fungi. Boris published a sizable number of papers on those topics, mostly in indexed and refereed journals.



Key Dates

- Proposals for Special Sessions: 1 – 20 December 2025
- Earlybird registration: 10 January – 15 March 2026
- Standard registration: 16 March – 20 June 2026
- Call for abstracts: 15 February – 20 May 2026
- Travel Grant applications: 1 May 2026
- Notification of abstract acceptance: 10 June 2026

All submitted abstracts will be processed within two weeks of the submission date, and authors will be notified promptly.

Conference Sponsor

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Pre-conference Field Workshop

This Field Workshop will take place from 14–18 July in the Pirin Mts., Southern Bulgaria. It will start and end in Sofia. Thus participation in both EDGG events is conveniently possible. For more details, see pp. 14-15.



Subalpine belts of Pirin Mountains. Photos: K. Vassilev.

Mid-conference excursion

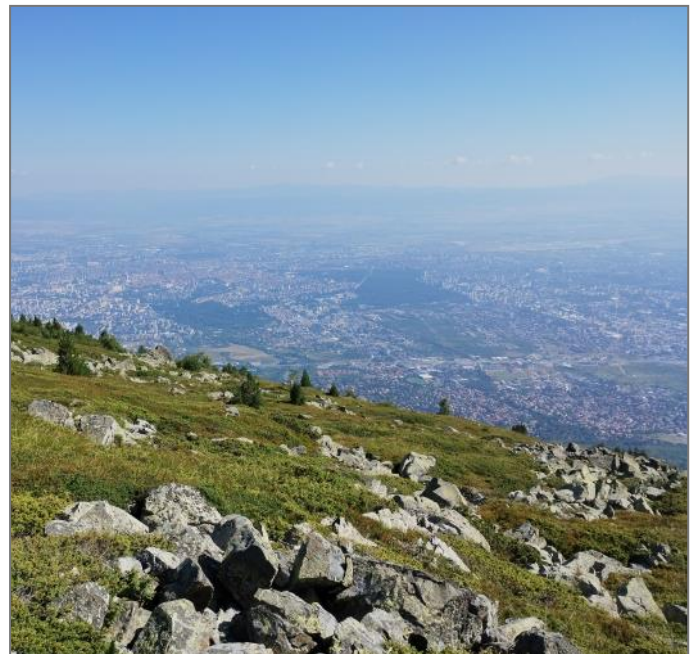
The Mid-conference excursion will take place in the Vitosha Nature Park and Natura 2000 SCI Vitosha (BG0000113) covering Vitosha Mt. The Vitosha Nature Park is located in the immediate vicinity of the capital city Sofia and is the oldest Nature park on the Balkan peninsula (founded in 1934, with an area of over 270 km²) and also falls within the boundaries of the NATURA 2000 network in Bulgaria.

Vitosha Mountain is characterized by rich and diverse flora, vegetation, and natural habitats, forming five altitudinal vegetation zones, including deciduous and coniferous forests and subalpine vegetation.

The Vitosha Nature Park includes two Nature Reserves: Bistrishko Branishte and Torfeno Branishte. During the excursion, we will experience the beautiful landscape of Torfeno Branishte Reserve, composed of diverse meadow, scrub, and mire ecosystems.



Location of mid-conference excursion.



Mire vegetation of the Torfeno Branishte Reserve (on the left) and dwarf-shrub phytocoenoses in the subalpine belt (on the right), Vitosha Mountain. Photos: K. Vassilev.

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