

DOI: 10.21570/EDGG.PG.66.41-57

Photo Story**Impressions from the 20th EDGG Field Workshop (28 May to 6 June 2025) in the dry grasslands of the Maritime, Cottian and Ligurian Alps, Italy**

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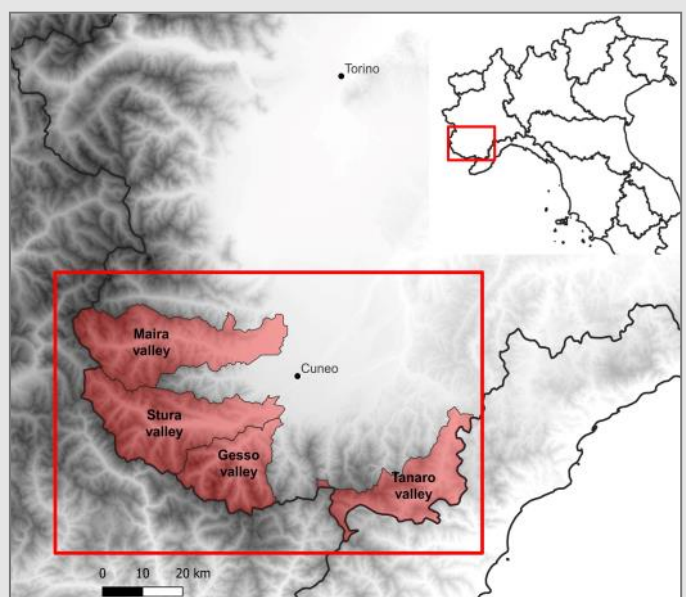
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The 20th Field Workshop of the European Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) took place in the southwestern part of the Italian Alps between May and June 2025. The working area of the expedition included the impressive mountains and valleys of the Maritime and Cottian Alps (Maira Valley, Stura Valley, Gesso Valley) and the Ligurian Alps (Tanaro Valley).

This sampling campaign is part of a series started during the 11th EDGG Field Workshop in 2018 aiming to study xerophytic grasslands in the Alps. The sampling areas were previously selected by local experts, who played a very important role in our expedition. This time 17 participants took part in the sampling, including local experts, researchers who have regularly participated in other expeditions, and people who were participating in an EDGG expedition for the first time.

Enjoy some memories from this beautiful Field Workshop in the valleys of the southwesternmost Italian Alps!



Location of the study area in the southwestern Alps, Italy.



The participants of the 20th EDGG Field Workshop in the Maritime, Cotian and Ligurian Alps.

Day 1 - 28th May 2025

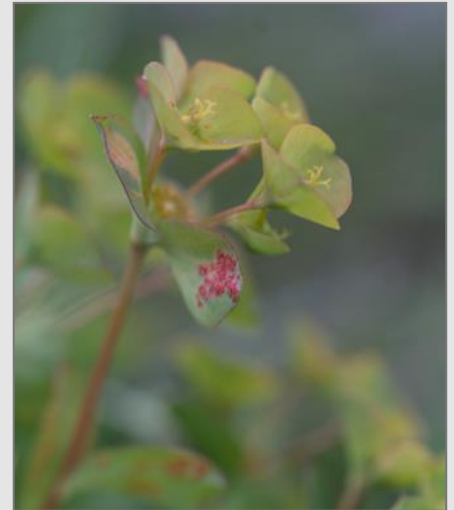
After having found each other in a parking lot outside Torino, we were ready to start. Upwards through the mountains we drove to the first sampling sites. Along the way, our wonderful local organizers arranged a lunch stop to try the typical Bra sausage and we had then enough energy for the first plot! Colle San Bernardo, not far away from our Hotel in Ormea, was perfect to start with a nice view of the valleys on the border between the Italian regions of Piemonte and Liguria.



Ready to search for a good spot and get acquainted with the precise EDGG method... And for the most also with some new plants!



The experienced field work coordinator Denys reminded us how to set a Biodiversity plot. But who can recall how long the diagonal of a Biodiversity Plot is again? 16.16 cm? 14.14 cm? 14.47 cm?



At the Colle San Bernardo we got to see the only occurrence of *Euphorbia ligustica* in the region of Piemonte.

Day 2 - 29th May 2025

We got to know the Ligurian Alps and our first valley: where the river Tanaro flows through. From the small village of Upega we discovered nice shrublands of *Genista cinerea*. While in the afternoon we moved to the southernmost area visited during our expedition: In the municipality of Alto, we sampled some almost Mediterranean grasslands.



The beautiful landscape of the Tanaro Valley made us eager to start. How many different green shades could we see? And how many plant species do they belong to?



We only had to decide how to divide the group and start sampling!



Enjoying the landscape was part of the field workshop experience. A nice lunch break with nice colleagues is very important to restore some energy to sample even more plots.



The evening activity we like the most... Identifying plant species! Until the hotel owners kicked us out because it was too late at night... But what can we do, we could identify the whole night.

Day 3 - 30th May 2025

We left our hotel in Ormea and headed to the sampling area in the higher Tanaro Valley, Ligurian Alps. In the evening, we moved to our second hotel in Borgo San Dalmazzo, not far away from the city of Cuneo.

This day we made three nested plots (100 m²) and eight normal plots (10 m²). Sometimes there is debate about whether it is better to sample nested plots or normal plots. It depends on the time available, the number of people involved, and, above all, the diversity of grassland types and locations we want to cover.



Sometimes, in places that seemed abandoned, people came out to meet us, interested in the presence of a group of grassland researchers.



Utensils that are probably no longer useful but bear witness to ways of life not so distant in time.



This corner of the plot must be very important.



But it is also important to be aware of photographers from time to time.



In the Rocca d'Orse sampling area, there was a significant presence of shrubs, notably *Genista cinerea* subsp. *cinerea*.



The Primula Hotel at Borgo San Dalmazzo, our comfortable accommodation for most of the expedition. It is not easy to find a good location where you can work on identifying plants and filling out forms. But an accommodation with a plant name is always a good start.

Day 4 - 31th May 2025

After spending the first night in Borgo San Dalmazzo, we headed to the Gesso Valley. Thus, we began our first day of study in the Maritime Alps. The morning sampling area was near the village of Andonno, where we found very interesting meso-xeric grasslands and rocky grasslands on limestone. In the afternoon, we split into two groups. One visited the area of S. Anna di Valdieri, where relevés of *Sedo-Scleranthetea* communities on siliceous rock were sampled. The second group visited other areas near the village of Valdieri (Rocca San Giovanni), one of the most important villages in the Gesso Valley.



Near the village of Andonno in the relevé number AML031 *Sedum album*, *S. rupestre*, *Teucrium botrys* and *Satureja montana* were common. The herb layer covered 55%, while the cryptogam cover, mainly bryophytes, was 30%.



In Andonno, grassland plants had been used to fill these curious dolls.



We learnt that Occitan culture and language are preserved in this area of the Alps.



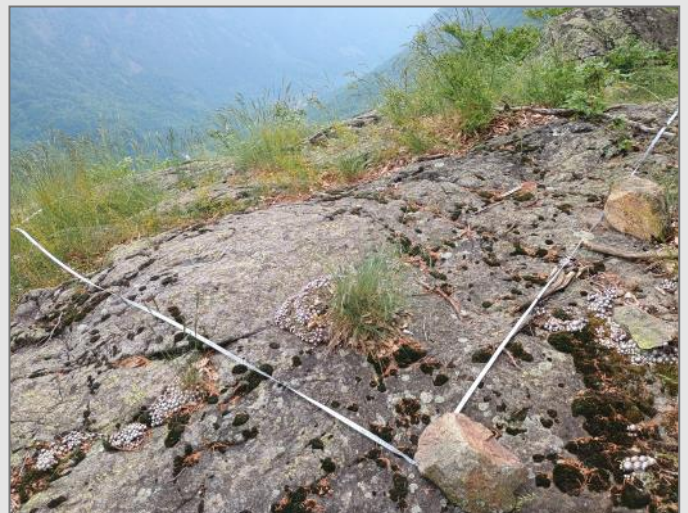
Enjoy. It is also part of the expedition...



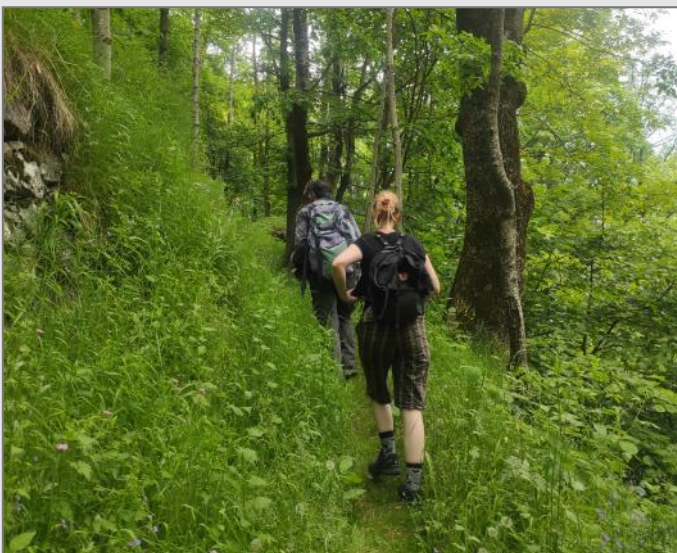
... And smile, because the expedition helps.



Even in a rocky place and even if it rains, it can be comfortable to take relevés if you have good colleagues.



The whitish colour of *Sempervivum arachnoideum* is easy to recognise already at some distance.



On the way in search of *Sedo-Scleranthetea*, some of us could enjoy forest fringe communities, probably belonging to the *Trifolio-Geranietea* class.



Among the species that characterised these forest fringe communities, *Silene flos-jovis* stood out. Other species were *Campanula trachelium* and *Geranium robertianum*.

Day 5 - 1st June 2025

The new month began with the exploration of the upper Gesso Valley. In the morning, sampling focused on rocky grasslands and *Festuco-Brometea* grasslands with *Stipa* spp. on calcareous substrates above the village of Entracque. In the afternoon, a long van trip took us to the highest grasslands of the workshop (over 1800 m a.s.l.), where we had the opportunity to observe some Western Alpine endemics, which are very abundant in these valleys.



Botanists at work among their beloved Poaceae, enjoying panoramic views of the valley.



A shared pause in the grasslands: lunch break at the “Centro Uomini e Lupi” (Men and Wolves Center) in Entracque, a facility for the care of injured wolves.



In the higher slope of the Gesso Valley the beautiful *Festuca paniculata* is the star of the afternoon.



The endemics *Pinguicula arvetii* and *Viola valderia*, along the path to reach the afternoon plots.



The weather could change quickly in the high-altitude plots, even between the start and end of a Biodiversity Plot survey, while the group was enjoying the flowering of *Genista*. Better to always come well-equipped... or hide in a tunnel.



The park ranger Ivan Pace told us about the rich plant biodiversity in the Maritime Alps Natural Park. After dinner, we got a glimpse of it while identifying the day's collected species.

Day 6 - 2nd June 2025

The following day, the group moved to the adjacent valley to the north, focusing on its innermost sector, the upper Stura Valley. Here, we were able to sample interesting *Sedo-Scleranthetea* communities and *Stipa*-dominated grasslands above the villages of Vinadio and Aisone.



Early in the morning, some of us were already fully absorbed in plant observation, while others ventured uphill towards the rockier plots.



After quiet moments overlooking the valley, we were ready to take on even the steepest plots.



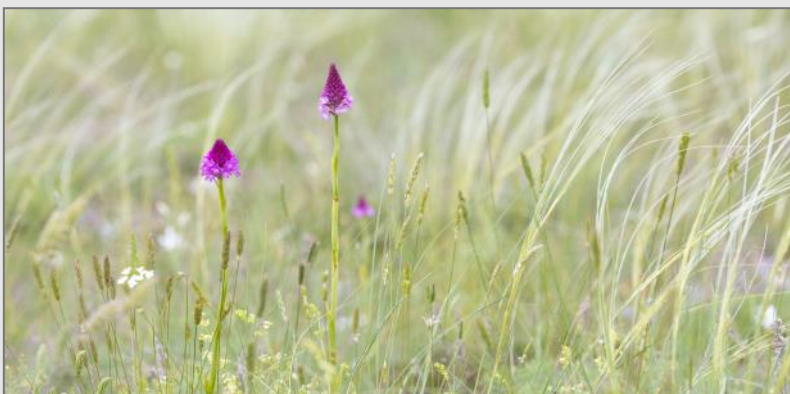
In the village of Vinadio we enjoyed our lunch on a species-poor lawn.



Afternoon field surveys in the grasslands surrounding the Aisone Caves Nature Reserve.



Documentation of our work is one of the most important aspects.



After enjoying *Stipa pennata* grasslands and orchids, a moment to recharge before the evening species identification session.

Day 7 - 3rd June 2025

Moving northward across the boundary between the Maritime and the Cottian Alps, we conducted field sampling in the lower Stura and Grana valleys. This transition allowed us to admire small alpine villages, striking flowering displays and steep rocky habitats characteristic of this sector of the Alps.



No hill is too steep for our vegetation surveys.



Top down and bottom up - everything is possible here in Demonte.



“The mountains in bloom are our garden! Do not plunder them! Collect with moderation.” As botanists, we do our best to comply, although proper identification sometimes calls for slightly less moderation.



But with the fragrant *Anthirrinum latifolium* collecting is not needed, smelling is enough.



Flowering mood of *Anthericum liliago*.



For our lunch break we met at the fairytale-like village of Colletto in the Stura Valley.

Day 8 - 4th June 2025

Everybody was looking forward to that day as we were supposed to visit great grasslands and rocky outcrops with a lot of endemic species in the well known touristic area of the Maira Valley. Indeed, the plants and landscape were great, but not the weather. After the heavy rain in the morning only half of the group continued to sample despite being wet from head to foot.



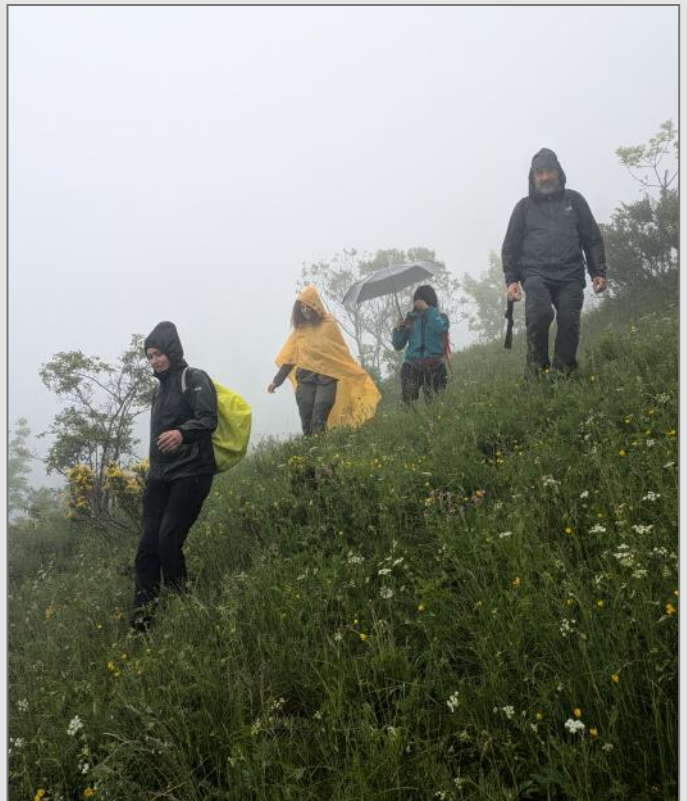
Not the best conditions for working...



... means good conditions for the plants. Rain refreshes *Scleranthus perennis* and the whole *Sedo-Scleranthetea* community in Valle Maira.



But sometimes enough is enough...



... and it is better to go.



It is the right moment to have a nice warm drink in the bar and check up on what to do.



And sometimes it is also ok to split and take care of everyone's needs.



The afternoon weather was more favorable. Indeed happy plants made happy botanists!



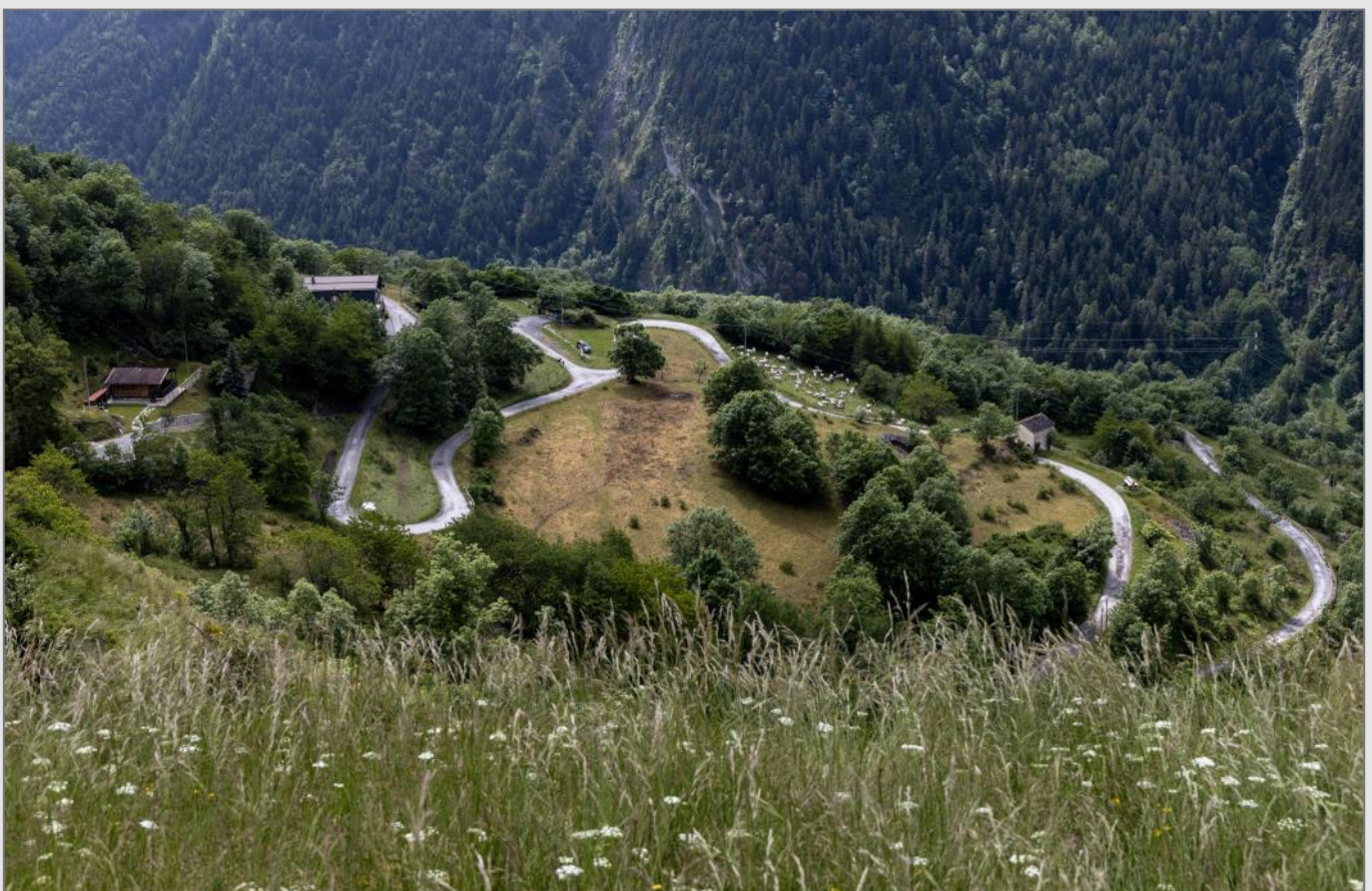
On that day we could also use the precious help of the local expert Alberto Selvaggi.

Day 9 - 5th June 2025

The second day in the Maira Valley was reserved for the lower parts. Weather conditions improved and we had a great last full sampling day. The evening was exploited until the last minute identifying and pressing the last plants, which couldn't be recognised in the field.



Last day, nice grasslands: Girls just wanna have fun!



From the small village of Ussolo we had a nice view of the valley.



On the way we saw a lot of beautiful grasslands with *Helianthemum apenninum* and *H. canum* aggr. ...



....Finally Denys chose the steepest area to sample it.



After ten days we were so trained that one person could almost do a biodiversity plot on their own.



One last evening together, plants and pizza... What do we want more!

Day 10 - 6th June 2025

Even on the departing day we couldn't help but stop to visit nice dry grasslands. On our way back to Torino we sampled a riparian grassland at the river Gesso near Cuneo. Even a habitat under a bridge can hide some treasures for us.



Is Denys so happy for the just sampled nice riparian habitat or for the end of this Field Workshop?.....



Last but not least: material division. Who is taking the precious soil samples back? And the critical plant samples to identify?

Selected species from the 20th EDGG Field Workshop



Capra ibex.



On the left, *Saturnia pyri*. On the right, *Cerambyx cerdo*.



From left to right: *Dianthus inodorus*, *Ononis natrix* and *Stachys recta*.