

Ten years of Eurasian Grassland Conferences: a vehicle for the future of the EDGG

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Abstract: One of the primary outcomes of the first five annual meetings of the German Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen (2004–2008) was the need for internationalization, i.e. to attract scientists together with their knowledge and experience from abroad, at least from EU. Year after year this need became imperative and in the foundation of the European Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) in Kiel (August 2008) the idea for a European conference on dry grasslands was born. The first such conference, namely the 6th *European Dry Grassland Meeting* (EDGM), took place in 2009 in Halle (Germany). After Halle, six more annual EDGMs (in Slovakia, Ukraine, Greece, Poland, Russia, Germany) took place in consecutive years, upgrading the name of EDGG at the European level, and increasing the volume of its membership. In the summer of 2015, the EDGG boosted its internationalization by changing its name to Eurasian Dry Grassland Group and renamed its annual meeting as *Eurasian Grassland Conference* (EGC). Throughout the years, and in accordance with EDGG bylaws, the EDGM/EGC remains the main communication tool and one of the core activities of the EDGG. This article was written for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of EDGM/EGC, after its first organization in 2009. It aims to bring into light the communication power that the EGC has, by presenting an overview of past meetings and conferences that served as the main link between EDGG members. The relevant dry grassland meetings before 2009 are briefly presented in the first section of this article; the second section presents the seven EDGMs, and the third section presents an overview of the three EGCs that followed up to now.

Keywords: conference; Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG); Eurasian Grassland Meeting (EGM); grassland; International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS); Palaeartic; working group.

Abbreviations: EDGG = Eurasian/European Dry Grassland Group; EDGM = European Dry Grassland Meeting; EGC = Eurasian Grassland Conference.

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Introduction

Scientific conferences on grasslands and their resources are worldwide and well-established institutions and meeting points. The majority of them are of national interest, while others focus on broader geographic scopes, e.g. the symposia and conferences of European Grassland Federation, or the International Rangeland Congress organized by its Continuing Committee. The annual scientific conference of the EDGG is a scientific forum where ideas related to Eurasian dry grasslands and their resources find fertile ground to develop. Since 2004, the dry grassland meetings organized by EDGG or its ancestor scheme have offered a framework for exchanging ideas about dry grassland classification, management, restoration and protection, discussing and disseminating results of research on dry grasslands, meeting specialists from diverse origins but of common interests, and for developing cooperation with colleagues, old and new. From its inception as a small national event, the EDGG conferences soon gained in size and are becoming

more and more international (Table 1). The topics change from year to year and are adapted in accordance with the specific objectives and wishes of the local organizing committees. The conferences comprise both oral presentations (sometimes also with invited keynote speakers) and poster sessions. Furthermore, the General Assembly of the EDGG is holding during its conferences. Both the excursions to regionally representative dry grassland habitats in the surroundings of the venue and the “dry grassland party” have become popular elements of the EDGG conferences. The organization of the conferences is approved by the General Assembly of the EDGG and further supported by two members of the Executive Committee, who are standing next to the local organizers through the whole preceding period. To facilitate the whole procedure a Users’ Guide on how to organize the conference is published and posted in the web of EDGG (Vrahnakis 2015). The purpose of this article is to show the characteristic moments of the past conferences of the EDGG, from its early years

Table 1. Historical development of the Eurasian Grassland Conferences (EGCs).

Year	Meeting	Location	Motto	# Participants	# Countries	# Talks	# Posters
2004 (24–26 September)	1 st Annual Meeting of the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen	Lüneburg (Germany)	<i>Dry Grasslands as Biodiversity Hotspots</i>	31	1	10	10
2005 (26–28 August)	2 nd Annual Meeting of the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen	Münster (Germany)	<i>Observation Scales in Dry Grasslands</i>	33	3	11	9
2006	3 rd Annual Meeting of the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen	Halle (Germany)		[cancelled]			
2007 (06–08 September)	4 th Annual Meeting of the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen ¹	Freising (Germany)	<i>Restoration and Spontaneous Establishment of Dry and Semi-Dry Grasslands at Traditional and Urban-industrial Sites</i>	49	2	13	6
2008 (28–30 August)	5 th Annual Meeting of the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen and the 1 st Meeting of the Working Group on Dry Grasslands in the Nordic and Baltic Region ²	Kiel (Germany)	<i>Dry Grasslands in a Changing Environment</i>	44	10	10	15
28 August 2008: Foundation of the European Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) in Kiel's meeting³ Autumn 2008 – Election of the first Executive Committee of the EDGG							
2009 (31 August – 02 September)	6 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Halle (Germany)	<i>Dry Grasslands – Species Interactions and Distribution</i>	40	11	15	17
1 September 2009: EDGG became a Working Group of International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS) after the official offer of its president Prof. Robert Peet							
2010 (28 May – 01 June)	7 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Smolenice (Slovakia)	<i>Succession, Restoration and Management of Dry Grasslands</i>	100	19	35	38
2011 (13–17 June)	8 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Uman' (Ukraine)	<i>Dry Grasslands of Europe: Biodiversity, Classification, Conservation and Management</i>	80	18	20	33
2012 (19–23 May)	9 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Prespa (Greece)	<i>Dry Grasslands of Europe: Grazing and Ecosystem Services</i>	120	25	23	100
2013 (24–31 May)	10 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Zamość (Poland)	<i>When Theory Meets Practice: Conservation and Restoration of Grasslands</i>	82	16	21	56
2014 (05–16 June)	11 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Kulikovo Field, Tula (Russia)	<i>Steppes and Semi-Natural Dry Grasslands: Ecology, Transformation and Restoration</i>	55	10	29	18
2015 (22–27 May)	12 th European Dry Grassland Meeting	Mainz (Germany)	<i>Population Biology and Community Ecology of Dry Grasslands and Dry Grassland Species</i>	50	15	23	18

¹Also 2nd Workshop 'Floristics and Geobotany – Contributions to Applied Questions' of the Floristisch-soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft²Jointly organised by the Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen and the Working Group on Dry Grasslands in the Nordic and Baltic Region³EDGG was established by the fusion of the German Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen and the Working Group on Dry Grasslands in the Nordic and Baltic Region

Table 1. Continuation

Year	Meeting	Location	Motto	# Participants	# Countries	# Talks	# Posters
Summer 2015 - European Dry Grassland Group changed to Eurasian Dry Grassland Group – European Dry Grassland Meeting changed to Eurasian Grassland Conference							
2016 (20–24 September)	13 th Eurasian Grassland Conference	Sighișoara (Romania)	<i>Management and Conservation of Semi-Natural Grasslands: from Theory to Practice</i>	85	25	26	32
2017 (04–11 July)	14 th Eurasian Grassland Conference	Riga (Latvia) – Western Lithuania	<i>Semi-Natural Grasslands across Borders</i>	92	19	23	20
2018 (04–08 June)	15 th Eurasian Grassland Conference	Sulmona (Italy)	<i>Cooperating for Grassland Conservation</i>	59	18	27	16
2019 (29 May – 05 June)	16 th Eurasian Grassland Conference	Graz (Austria) – Slovenia	<i>Species-Rich Grasslands in the Palaeartic – a Treasure without Economic Value?</i>	64	18	32	22

up to now, and to highlight its future perspectives in order to achieve the main goals of EDGG.

The early dry grassland conferences (2004–2008)

The first five annual meetings on dry grasslands were organized by the *Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen* in Germany (2004 in Lüneburg, 2005 in Münster, 2006 in Halle but cancelled, 2007 in Freising, 2008 in Kiel). The group was founded in 2004, having **Ute Jandt** and **Jürgen Dengler** as contact persons. The geographic coverage of the group was Germany and was jointly affiliated with *AK Syntaxonomy of the Floristisch-soziologische Arbeitsgemeinschaft* and the *Reinhold-Tüxen-Gesellschaft*. The aims of the group were to (i) establish and evaluate of a national vegetation database for dry grassland relevés; (ii) publish of the dry grassland volumes of the series “*Synopsis der Pflanzengesellschaften Deutschlands*” and (iii) build a platform

for research and conservation in German dry grasslands. The starting date of the group was 24 September of 2004 in Lüneburg (Germany), during the 1st Annual Meeting. This meeting had 31 participants, all from Germany. Ten talks and ten posters were presented in Lüneburg. The second meeting of the group took place in Münster (26–28 August 2005), having 33 participants from 3 countries, with 11 talks and 9 posters. The third meeting for 2006 was programmed to take place in Halle, but it was cancelled. The fourth meeting took place in Freising (6–8 September 2007); 49 scientists from 2 countries participated, presenting 13 talks and 6 posters. The scientific themes of the meetings covered several aspects of dry grasslands, i.e. on biodiversity (Lüneburg), on restoration and establishment (Freising) or on scaling processes (Münster).

The 5th Dry Grassland Meeting was co-organized by the *Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen* and the *Working Group on Dry*



Plate 1. The 5th Annual Meeting of the *Arbeitsgruppe Trockenrasen* and the 1st Meeting of the Working Group on Dry Grasslands in the Nordic and Baltic Region in Kiel, Germany (2008). Photos: J. Dengler.



Plate. 2. The European Dry Grassland Meetings (EDGM, 2009–2015): (a) the 6th EDGM in Halle, Germany (2009), (b) the 7th EDGM in Smolenice, Slovakia (2010), (c) the 8th EDGM in Uman', Ukraine (2011), (d) the 9th EDGM in Prespa, Greece (2012), (e) the 10th EDGM in Zamość, Poland (2013), (f) the 11th EDGM in Kulikovo field, Russia (2014), (g) the 12th EDGM in Mainz, Germany (2015). Photos: J. Dengler (a, d, e, f, g), M. Vrahnakis (b), A. Kuzemko (c).

Grasslands in the Nordic and Baltic Region, in Kiel (28–30 August 2008) (Dolnik 2008) (Plate 1). The latter group was founded in 2005 (contact person: **Jürgen Dengler**) and aimed at establishment and evaluation of a supra-national vegetation database for dry grassland relevés from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, NW Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, N Poland, and NE Germany. The main theme of the conference was on the ways that physical and social changes affect grasslands; 44 specialists from 10 countries participated and 10 talks and 15 posters presented in Kiel. One of the major outcomes of the meeting was the need to engage scientists outside Germany and the Nordic-Baltic region in joint activities. This way, the European Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) was originated (28 August 2008); **Jürgen Dengler**, **Monika Janišová** and **Solvita Rūsiņa** volunteered to serve as its chairs. EDGG was perceived as an umbrella organization for research and conservation activities in European dry grasslands.

The European Dry Grassland Meetings (EDGMs, 2009–2015) (Plate 2)

Right after its formation the EDGG organized its 6th EDGM in Halle (Germany), 31 August – 2 September, 2009). The theme was on “*Dry Grasslands – Species Interactions and Distribution*”. Forty people from 11 countries participated, and 15 talks and 17 posters were presented (Anonymous 2009). The topics ranged from population biology and phylogeography of dry grassland species, through regional studies on dry grassland and related vegetation types, diversity patterns, pollination ecology, and simulation studies, to conservation issues. Apart from guided tours through the city's Botanical Garden, an excursion to visit different types of dry grassland on porphyry hills in the surroundings of Halle was also organized. Participants had the opportunity to study the vegetation marked by an overlapping of continental, subatlantic, and widespread

Central-European species and consists of atlantic-subatlantic dwarf-shrub heaths as well as (sub)continental dry and semi-dry grassland communities. A post-conference excursion was organized to the Unstrut valley SW of Halle. Participants visited several nature reserves with stands of *Dictamnus albus* in forest-edge communities as well as dry and semi-dry basiphilous grasslands.

The first EDGM organized outside Germany took place in Smolenice (Slovakia), 28 May – 1 June 2010. The 7th EDGM focused on applied ecological aspects of dry grasslands – their succession, management and restoration (Janišová et al. 2010). The conference was devoted to the memory of **Pavel Deván**, one of the best Slovak nature conservationists who worked intensively in the Biele Karpaty Mts. The EDGM was attended by 100 scientists from 19 countries; overall 35 talks were given and 38 posters were presented. **Ladislav (Laco) Mucina** gave a plenary talk with the theme: “Origins and Evolutionary Assembly of Dry Grasslands of Central Europe: Ideas, Data, Perspectives”. A guided tour was organized through the Smolenice castle, while next days the participants travel to dry and semi-dry grassland sites in the Tematínske vrchy, Biele/Bilé Karpaty and Malé Karpaty Mts. In the 7th EDGM, the first competitions for the best talk and poster contributions were announced; the winners were **M. Wieszik** (best talk) and **I. Paulini** (best poster). During the conference, the text of Smolenice Grassland Declaration was formulated. The Declaration concluded “*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.*” The Declaration was posted on the EDGG’s web-page and was signed (freely) by those who supported its ideas.

The biodiversity, classification, conservation and management of dry grasslands of Europe was the main topic of the 8th EDGM which held in the fantastic National Dendrological Park ‘Sofiyivka’, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Uman’, 13–17 June 2011 (Kuzemko 2011). Altogether 80 participants from 18 countries attended 20 talks and 33 posters. The winners for the Young Investigator Prizes (YIPs) for outstanding talks or posters by researchers under the age of 35 were **Péter Török** and **Triin Reitalu** (best two talks) and **Anikó Csecserits** and **Orsolya Valkó** (best two posters). The excursion program included the most interesting areas of dry grassland in southern Ukraine. In the National Natural Park of “Buz’ky Gard” the participants visited granite rocks in South Buh River valley near the island Gard and were able to see the locality of several narrow-local South-Buh endemics. In the Ingul River valley the participants visited the limestone steppe slopes. In the Biosphere Reserve “Askania-Nova” they saw a huge (in the European context) area of undisturbed steppe and visited the famous Chaplinsky pod – the biggest depression at the Reserve territory, where almost naturalized herds of Przewalsky horses, bison, antelopes and ze-

bras were grazing. In the National Park “Oleshkivs’ki Sands” the participants visited a desert, developed at Kozache-Lagera Lower-Dnieper area after the 2nd World War, as a result of excessive sheep grazing. Finally, in the botanical reserve “Sagi” the participants visited the typical Near-Black-Sea Pontic sandy steppe, which was of great interest, in comparison to the widespread in Central Europe Pannonian steppes.

The 9th EDGM took place in Prespa area, northwestern Greece, 19–23 May 2012. In total, 220 people registered; more than 120 people participated; 307 authors from 28 countries produced 123 papers (101 posters and 22 talks) and accepted to present either orally or exhibited as poster (Vrahnakis 2012). The main theme of the EDGM was the way that grazing is balancing with ecosystem services. The conference was devoted to **Arne Strid**, who greatly contributed to the knowledge of the Greek rangeland flora. **Arne Strid** gave a plenary talk under the theme “All the way: from Theophrastus up to modern flora databasing - A brief historical review”. The participants had the opportunity to visit Mt. Devas with more than 900 plant species and 10 EU habitat types and explore the *Juniperus excelsa* communities. They also visited the isthmus that separates Lakes Micro and Macro Prespa, where xeric sand calcareous grassland are situated, and the island of Agios Achillios. Finally, they visited the calcareous dry grasslands of Mt. Sfika, which supports 13 EU habitat types and more than 1000 plant taxa. YIPs were given to **Didem Ambarli**, **Jana Slancarova** and **Inge Paulini** for the three best talks and **Ioanna Keisoglou**, **Rocco Labadessa** and **Andras Kelemen** for the three best posters. Apart from bird-watching activities, other peripheral events included an honorary ceremony for **Arne Strid**, a short boat cruise to the Greek coast of the western lakeshore of Macro Prespa where orthodox hermitages are located and a visit to the byzantine basilica of Agios Achillios. Finally, poems inspired by the calcareous rockiness and humanity of the Mt. Sfika’s landscape were told by the poet himself, **Julian Hoffmann**, and the unique aesthetic value of the Prespa’s landscape was presented in the exhibition of works by local painter **Vangelis Tamoutselis**. For the first time in the history of EDGG conferences, a special volume was published with the full text of all presented and peer reviewed papers (Vrahnakis et al. 2013).

The next year (24–31 May 2013) the 10th EDGM took place in the old town of Zamość (Poland). A total of 82 people from 16 countries participated and attended 21 talks and 56 posters (Chmielewski 2013). The conference was organized within the framework of EU LIFE project “Conservation and restoration of xerothermic grasslands in Poland – theory and practice” and the main topic was “When Theory Meets Practice: Conservation and Restoration of Grasslands”. The contributions dealt with dry grassland management measures (grazing, burning, examples and best practices), dry grassland restoration (deliberate and spontaneous) and various theoretical issues. During the lunch and coffee breaks, the participants had an opportunity to enjoy the exhibition entitled “Natura 2000/Lubelskie/PL”. Ple-

nary talks were given by **Peter Török** “Application of technical grassland restoration in Europe: recovery of grassland biodiversity by seed mixtures at multiple countries and scales” and **Simona Bacchereti** “LIFE Nature for dry grasslands: examples and best practices”. YIPs for best four oral presentations were given to **Rocco Labadessa**, **Philipp Sengl**, **Verena Rösch** and **Eleonora Giarrizzo** and for the best two posters to **Orsolya Valkó** and **Milan Zajac**. Apart from a guided tour of the Zamość Old Town, post conference excursions included a visit to one of the largest Polish colonies of an endangered mammal, the spotted ground squirrel *Spermophilus suslicus*, in Popówka village. The second visit was organized for a loess grassland near the Czumów village (Bug river, Polish-Ukrainian border), with many endangered plant species. Next, the “Skarpa Dobużańska” nature reserve (Huczwa river valley) with numerous *Orobanche lutea* individuals was visited. More excursions were organized to the “Żmudź” nature reserve with a short *Juniperus communis* scrubland and some rare and protected orchid species, the steep slope “Horodysko” (Howiec village) with a *Prunetum fruticosae* scrubland, and “Machnowska Góra” reserve with the sub-endemic *Carlina onopordifolia*. The final excursion was organized for the limestone slopes of “Albrechtówka” hill (Mećmierz village, Vistula river valley) with *Inuletum ensifoliae* vegetation.

The historical place of Kulikovo field, near Tula, Russia hosted the 11th EDGM, 5–16 June 2014. 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 main theme of the conference was the ecology, transformation and restoration of steppes and semi-natural grasslands, with 29 talks and 18 posters presented for this (Volkova 2014). The EDGM was attended by 55 colleagues from 10 countries. The winners of the YIPs were **Csaba Tölgyesi** for the best talk, and **Orsolya Valkó** for the best poster presentation. Participants visited the protected areas “Srednyi Dubik” and “Tatinki”, and experimental fields of steppe restoration (Kulikovo Field). Participants who took part in the post-conference excursions (10–15) June had the opportunity to get familiar with the vegetation of the southern regions of Russia: forest-steppes of the Kursk region and the steppes of the Rostov region. They saw not only dry grassland vegetation in the Upper Don 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.

Next year, it was Mainz (Germany) which hosted the 12th EDGM, 22–27 May 2015. The main topic was “Population Biology and Community Ecology of Dry Grasslands and Dry Grassland Species” and the EDGM was attended by 50 par-

ticipants from 15 countries (Becker & Becker 2015). Twenty-three talks were given and 18 posters were presented. The invited speaker **Joachim W. Kadereit** (Mainz) presented the “Biogeography of Rhine Gorge orophytes” and **Martin Diekmann** (Bremen) presented the “Long-term changes in the vegetation of dry calcareous grasslands – evidence from community and population ecology”. For YIPs, the two best oral presentations were given by **Eleonora Giarrizzo** and **Lisa Thill**. Best poster presentations were those of **Dávid D. Nagy** and **Jianshuang Wu**. During the conference the participants were involved in a cultural programme in the historic part of Mainz. A one half-day excursion to the dry grassland replica sites of the Botanic Garden was organised and another to the original Mainz Sand area where participants visited the westernmost dry continental sand grasslands of *Koelerion glaucae* and stands of the *Festucion valesiacae* on sandy soil. The one-day excursion to Rhine-Hesse (the Martinsberg and Höll sites near Siefersheim, and the Mühlberg and Horn sites near Neu-Bamberg) offered the opportunity to visit dry grasslands and heathlands on volcanic substrata. Finally, an excursion led to the Middle Rhine Valley with slopes covered by xerothermic vegetation complexes containing dry grasslands and *Acer monspessulanum* forests.

The European Grassland Conferences (EGCs, 2016–)

(Plate 3)

In summer 2015 the EDGG decided to expand its geographic scope to cover all Palaeartic grasslands and not be restricted to European ones. The name of the organization changed to Eurasian Dry Grassland Group, while the name of its annual meetings (EDGM) changed to Eurasian Grassland Conferences (EGC), in order to indicate a wider coverage (from meeting to conference, and from dry grasslands to all grasslands).

The 13th EGC was organized in Sighisoara, Romania, 20–24 September 2016, under the main theme: “Management and Conservation of Semi-Natural Grasslands: from Theory to Practice”. The EGC was attended by 85 participants from 25 countries, who listened to 26 talks and saw 32 posters (Sutcliffe et al. 2016). For the first time, the EDGG organized three optional technical workshops during its conference. The first one was about “Scientific writing” and run by **Jürgen Dengler**. The workshop focused on writing clear, precise and engaging scientific texts in English for publication in high impact factor international journals. The second workshop named as “Reflecting ecology in policy” and facilitated by experts in agri-environmental policy from European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) (**Jabier Ruiz Mirazo**, **Caitriona Maher**) and Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) (**Clunie Keenleyside**). The objective was to jointly analyze several biodiversity-related measures in the Common Agricultural Policy. The third workshop for “Establishing and Maintaining National Grassland Databases” was facilitated by **Kiril Vassilev**. A keynote talk was given from **Jörn Fischer** (“Integration by Place, Case and Process: Transdisciplinary

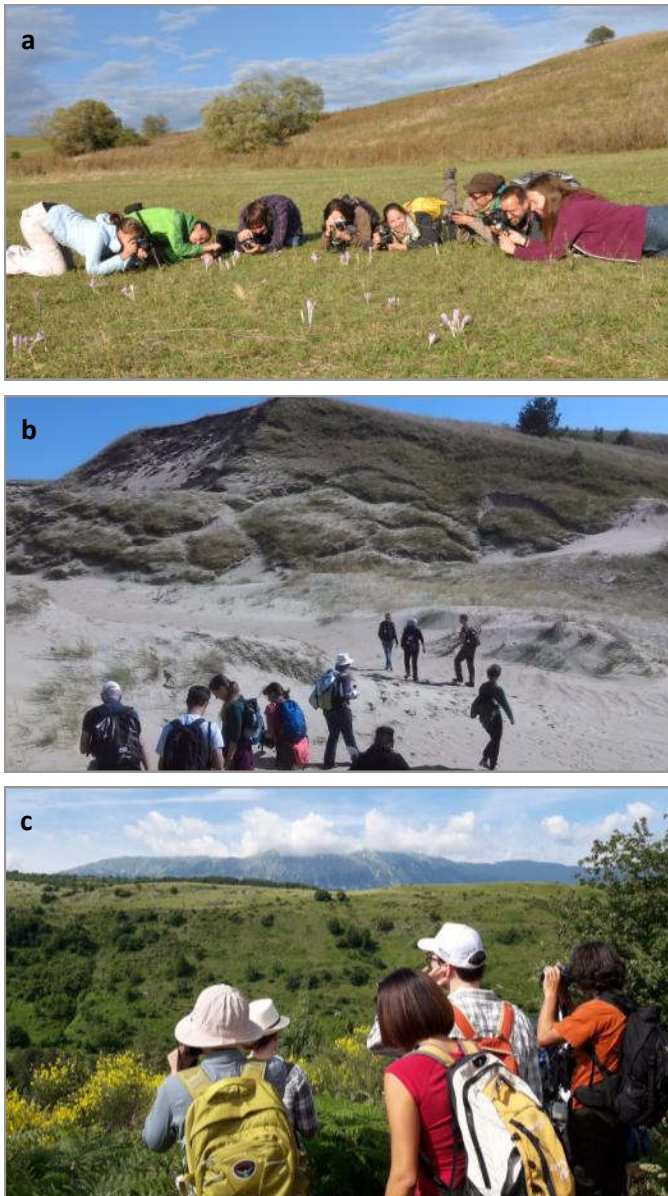


Plate 3. The Eurasian Grassland Conferences (EGC, 2016–2018): (a) the 13th EGC in Sighisoara, Romania (2016), (b) the 14th EGC in Riga (Latvia) – Western Lithuania (2017), (c) the 15th EGC in Sulmona, Italy (2018). Photos: A. Csecserits (a), M. Vrahnakis (b, c).

Sustainability Science in Transylvania”). A second keynote talk was given by **Cristina Craioveanu** together with **László Rákósy** which focused on the evolution of grasslands in Transylvania and their present-day value and conservation, and how research can contribute to this. YIPs were given to **Csaba Tölgyesi, Orsolya Valkó, Tsvetelina Terziyska, Szilvia Raócz, Ágnes Balázi** and **Eugen Görzen**. The mid-conference excursion was organized to the High Nature Value grasslands in the hilly Târnava Mare landscape near Sighisoara and the post-conference one to the Mountain hay meadows in the Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) area, where grassland-related activities such as meadow scything took place.

The “*Semi-Natural Grasslands across Borders*” was the motto of the 14th EGC (4–11 July, 2017) shared, for the first time in the EDGG’s conferences, between two countries: in Riga, Latvia, for hall sessions, and in western Lithuania for post-conference excursion. The conference placed emphasis on cases in which grassland ecosystems are shared between man-made and natural geographical, political and ecological borders. The EGC was attended by 92 colleagues from 19 countries, who took part in 23 oral and 20 poster presentations (Rüsiņa et al. 2017). Two optional workshops were held and led by **Didzis Elferts**; the first was to introduce the R for statistical analysis, and the second to introduce the ggplot2 graphical system. A keynote talk was given by **Irina Herzon** on the most recent policy developments of relevance, including the reformed CAP in 2013, and concluded that conservation policy needs to perceive semi-natural grasslands as socio-ecological systems. In her keynote talk, **Aveliina Helm** highlighted the research results from ten separate regions in central and northern Europe to identify regions where an extinction debt has already been paid and where it still remains to be settled, and further discussed the possible effects of landscape-scale restoration activities in maintaining grassland species diversity and related ecosystem services. The winners for the YIPs were **Philipp Kirschner, Kristina Plenk** and **Alina Baranova** for best oral presentations, and **Iwona Dembicz, Kristina Plenk** and **Yulia Rozenblit** for best poster presentations. Participants of the pre-conference excursion visited the Eastern Baltic semi-natural grasslands of the Daugava River Valley. The second day was devoted to the Dviete River Valley with extensive floodplain grasslands with rare species. Participants of the mid-conference excursion visited the Abava River Valley with an exceptional calcareous dry grassland diversity, at least for Latvia. The post-conference excursion took place on the Curonian Spit and the Nemunas River Valley in western Lithuania. Participants observed the diversity of the coastal sand vegetation including sandy beaches, coastal foredune ridges, sea sand plain/palves, and the Great Dune Ridge, with shifting and fixed dunes. The Nemunas – the largest Lithuanian river floodplains – offered the diversity of the floodplain vegetation including swamp and fen vegetation, managed grasslands of different floodplain ecological belts and dry grasslands of riverine dunes.

The 15th EGC was organized from 4th to 8th June 2018 in the town of Sulmona in the center Apennines in the Majella National Park, Italy. The main theme of the conference was “Cooperating for grasslands: from habitat interpretation to conservation measures” and the aim was to address the main grassland conservation issues by establishing a basis for cooperation projects within the framework of the EDGG. Fifty-nine colleagues from 18 countries attended 27 oral and 16 poster presentations (Burrascano et al. 2018). A keynote lecture was given for carabid beetle assemblages in natural and seminatural grasslands of Italy by **Pietro Brandmayr**. The conference started with a workshop on the main EU funding schemes related to grassland conservation (Interreg Europe and LIFE+). Another work-

shop on effective writing for international peer-reviewed journals was led by **Jurgen Dengler**. There was also a workshop on the Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process; almost 50 experts participated in the workshop in the last session of the EGC. The results from the workshop will be used to support the Road Map for the Mediterranean biogeographical region, and because they are related to recurring problems also in other biogeographic regions. The best two oral presentations were those of **Ludovica Oddi** and **Eugen Görzen**, and the best two poster presentations were those of **Anna Theresa Lehmail** and **Sven Rubanschi**. The mid-conference trip participants visited different types of regionally typical grasslands, from those dominated by annual species at about 800 m a.s.l. to those in contact with the subalpine *Pinus mugo* formations. The second excursion gave the participants the possibility of enjoying one of the widest and richest grassland slopes in the National Park and to perform a sample according to the standardized GrassPlot protocol.

Last EDGG conference, 16th EGC, was held in Austria and Slovenia, with Graz as conference venue, 29 May – 5 June 2019. Detailed report on this conference will be published in one of the next issues of *Palaeartic Grasslands*.

Conclusions

The annual conferences of the EDGG are the major tool for promoting the objectives of the EDGG. Every conference, especially after the official formation of the EDGG (2008), resulted in a significant expansion of EDGG as is reflected in the increase of its membership volume. The conference is a well-established fixture between members of the EDGG and year by year is becoming better known amongst plant ecologists, botanists and phytosociologists. Major challenges in the coming years for the Executive Committee of the EDGG are to expand the conference interests in underrepresented topics, like animal ecology, soil science, grassland management and to extend the conference locations to western Europe, north Africa and Asia.

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