



## **Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG)**

*Report for the period from 9th June 2018 to 1th July 2019*

### **Members and organisation of the EDGG**

Since the last report in 2018, we revised the membership list and validated the contacts. The number of validated EDGG members is 1,299 from 64 countries (June 2019). Membership in EDGG is free of charge and can be activated by sending an e-mail to our membership administrator Idoia Biurrun ([idoia.biurrun@ehu.es](mailto:idoia.biurrun@ehu.es)). So far, the membership administration has been maintained separately from IAVS, creating double work and some inconsistencies. We have hoped for several years that the IAVS administration would merge these management activities, but unfortunately this has not happened. The biennial election of our governing body, the Executive Committee (EC), in spring 2019 saw the departure of Mike Vrahnakis, who decided not to stand for re-election, and the election of two new members, Alla Aleksanyan and Iwona Dembicz. Eleven candidates stood in the EC elections, of which eight were duly elected for the term 2019–2021. The chairs in the current executive committee are Alla Aleksanyan (Armenia), Didem Ambarlı (Germany/Turkey), Idoia Biurrun (Spain), Iwona Dembicz (Poland), Jürgen Dengler (Switzerland), Anna Kuzemko (Ukraine), Péter Török (Hungary), and Stephen Venn (Finland).

### **Past EDGG events**

The 16th Eurasian Grassland Conference (EGC) was jointly organized in Austria and Slovenia during May-June 2019. The topic was the economic value of species-rich grasslands in the Palaearctic realm. It provided an opportunity to attend workshops on scientific writing, on Natura 2000 Biogeographical Process, and take part in a field excursion on bryophyte identification, led by Christian Berg. The conference had three keynote talks, by Zsolt Molnár, Matej Vidrih and Wolfgang Willner, as well as a mid-conference excursion to a variety of relevant habitats in Neumarkt/Steiermark (Austria). The post-conference tour took us to semi-natural grasslands in Slovenia, with destinations of the Goričko Landscape Park, the Haloze region and the Slovenian Dinaric region. The event was hosted by the University of Graz (Austria), and University of Maribor (Slovenia) and our hosts were Martin Magnes, Nataša Pipenbaher, and Sonja Škornik.

**See further details on: <https://edgg.namupro.de/egc2019>**

The 11th EDGG Field Workshop was held in the Eastern Alps, Austria from 6th-13th July 2018, with Martin Magnes, Philipp Kirschner and Helmut Mayrhofer as the local organizers. The field workshop was attended by 18 participants from ten countries; fifteen

nested-plot series and 37 additional standard plots were sampled.

The 12th Field workshop also targeted the inner-alpine valleys but in Switzerland, organised by Jürgen Dengler and his co-workers (11-19 May, 2019). This field workshop was attended by 16 participants from five countries. During the field workshop, 30 nested-plot series and 81 additional standard plots were sampled.

The 13th Field Workshop: “Grasslands of Armenia along an elevational gradient” was held between 26 June –7 July 2019 in Armenia, organised by Alla Alexsanyan. Further details will be included in the next report, as the Field Workshop was in progress at the time of the submission of this one.

### **Future EDGG events**

The 17th Eurasian Grassland Conference will be held during 2020, in Bilbao, Spain, organized by Idoia Biurrun.

For future years there are many offers for hosting EDGG Field Workshops, among them Bosnia, Montenegro, Middle Asia, Central System of Spain, European Russia, Italian Alps, or Northern Poland, and if the demand for participation remains at a high level, it is possible for two such events to be organised in the same year.

### **Publication activities of EDGG**

In 2018, the former Bulletin of the Eurasian Dry Grassland Group was transformed into a fully-fledged scientific journal of a new type, called *Palaeartic Grasslands*. Currently six issues of *Palaeartic Grasslands* have been published. While *Palaeartic Grasslands* continues to be the platform for official announcements of the EDGG Executive Committee to the members (“News”, “EDGG Events”), for “Short Contributions” from members for members, “Book Reviews”, overviews of “Recent Publications of our Members” related to grasslands and “Forthcoming Events”, it now has two major new elements: (i) *Palaeartic Grasslands* now publishes scientific articles in four categories: “Research Article”, “Review”, “Forum Article” and “Scientific Report”. They are subject to editorial peer review, which ensures on the one hand scientific soundness, and on the other hand fast decisions. (ii) *Palaeartic Grasslands* has a strong focus on excellent quality photography from Palaeartic grasslands, their flora and fauna and the people using them. The new format of “Photo Stories” allows grassland articles of a couple of pages to be submitted, consisting mainly of photos with brief texts, which celebrate the beauty of certain grasslands of specific regions and their rich biota.



Moreover, we now have a regular “Photo Competition” on selected topics, such as animal-plant interactions or grassland people, of which then the three best contributions are presented in the subsequent issue. *Palaeartic Grasslands* is made possible by an international Editorial Board of 30 dedicated members from 17 countries throughout the Palaeartic, from Spain to Japan.

### EDGG Organised Special Features

Further, EDGG continued its long-standing tradition of Special Issues/Features in international journals. In the reporting period, EDGG organised three special issues during the reported period. There were two regular issues organised in the journals *Hacquetia* and *Tuexenia* and one issue in progress in *Flora*:

- In *Hacquetia*, the fourth Special Feature was edited by Orsolya Valkó, Stephen Venn, Idoia Biurrun, Rocco Labadessa, Jacqueline Loos and Michal Zmihorski. This special feature was initiated by members of the EDGG attending the 13th Eurasian Dry Grassland Conference (EDGC) at Sighisoara, Romania, in September 2016. It contains six papers dealing with the conservation, ecology, syntaxonomy and zoology of grassland and steppe habitats from East Europe to central Asia. The core topic of the issue is the challenge of abandonment in the conservation of Palaeartic grasslands.
- The 13th regular EDGG Special Feature in *Tuexenia* focuses on the conservation, management, restoration and biodiversity of semi-natural and natural grasslands in Central-Europe. The special feature was guest edited by Balázs Deák, Thomas Becker, Steffen Boch and Viktoria Wagner. Altogether 43 authors from six countries contributed to this publication.
- A further special issue organised by EDGG was guest edited by Péter Török, Barbara Neuffer, Karl-Georg Bernhardt and Karsten Wesche in the journal *Flora*. This special issue is devoted to the ecology and evolution of steppe biodiversity and forms a nice addition to the formerly published issues and papers on the topic. So far 20 papers have been invited and the tentative publication deadline is in the first months of 2020.

During the reported period, EDGG members worked on a comprehensive book “Grasslands of the World: Diversity, Management and Conservation” for the publisher CRC. The book was co-edited by EDGG Chair Jürgen Dengler, and a team of 28 EDGG members wrote eight regional chapters (nearly half of the book) of Western and Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, Mediterranean Basin and the Middle East, Russia, Kazakhstan and Middle Asia, China and Mongolia, and Japan. The book was introduced by a synthesis chapter by P. Török and J. Dengler. In this book, the origin, biodiversity, types, threats, management, and conservation issues of grasslands were summarised for the first time for the whole Palaeartic.

### **Other EDGG media**

The EDGG homepage (<https://edgg.org/>) was re-constructed with the support of IAVS under a new server with a new content management system, easy-to-follow layout and many other innovations. The new homepage contains all information about the EDGG family, past, current and planned conferences (<https://edgg.org/egc/overview>) and field workshops (<https://edgg.org/fw/overview>), as well as publications (<https://edgg.org/publ/overview>): [EDGG journal](#), [special features](#) and [publications from members](#). Furthermore, [Events](#) and [News](#) sections inform visitors about upcoming events of interests and other news. A login system allows participants of previous events to register for future ones without having to repeatedly enter their personal data.

In order to enhance the rapid dissemination of information to our members about EDGG activities, as well as in order to attract new members, a discussion on various topics related to grasslands research and conservation has been established in the EDGG Facebook group. It can be visited at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/938367279561202/?ref=bookmarks> Facebook page editors: Stephen Venn ([stephen.venn@helsinki.fi](mailto:stephen.venn@helsinki.fi)) and Anna Kuzemko ([anya\\_meadow@i.ua](mailto:anya_meadow@i.ua)).

### **Database activities of EDGG**

In our last report we informed the IAVS about the re-launch of the EDGG managed GrassPlot database, based on the former Database Species-Area Relationships in Palaeartic Grasslands. GrassPlot stores multi-scale richness, composition and environmental data from precisely delimited plots of grasslands and other open habitats of the Palaeartic Realm. Since its formal establishment during an international workshop in March 2017, with 87 datasets, 27,355 plots and 1,144 nested-plot series of at least four grain sizes, the database has increased its content and spatial coverage. GrassPlot version 2.0. contains 190,684 plots and 4,654 nested-plot series from 184 datasets. A new report will be published shortly in Palaeartic Grasslands, providing an update on the content and functionality of GrassPlot version 2.0.

A new Governing Board of GrassPlot was elected in February 2019. Jürgen Dengler, Idoia Biurrun, Iwona Dembicz and Riccardo Guarino continue from the former Governing Board, and Jutta Kapfer, Sabina Burrascano and Remigiusz Pielech are new members for the period 2019-2021.

In addition to GrassPlot, the development of some national databases was also been facilitated by EDGG. The Ukrainian Grassland Database contains 11,953 relevés (June, 2019). During 2018-2019, work has been done to improve and refine the data in the database. Some gaps in the representativeness of the data were filled - several thousands of relevés from the Western regions of Ukraine (Chernivtsi and Ivano-Frankivsk regions) and the Steppe Zone (Odessa, Mykolaiv and Kherson regions) were added. Also the Romanian Grassland Database (RGD) and the Balkan Dry Grassland Database (BDGD) have developed very dynamically under the leadership of Kiril Vassilev, while the Nordic-Baltic Grassland Vegetation Database (NBGVVD) and the German grassland database (GrassVeg.DE) experienced few additions. All five regularly contribute valuable data to continental and global analyses, organised via the European Vegetation Archive (EVA) and sPlot, respectively.

### **Financial issues**

The main financial support of EDGG occurs via IAVS. In 2017 and 2018, IAVS provided an annual baseline support (500 €). The IAVS provided travel grants for the EDGG Field Workshops and EGC in total of 7500€. IAVS also provides honorarium (1000 €) to one EDGG representative to attend the annual IAVS Symposium to Bremen. The support is greatly acknowledged by the EDGG.

EDGG received from IAVS an additional 3700 € project funding for 2019 for supporting chairs to attend the EDGG conference in Graz (up to 3000 €), and for covering costs of linguistic editing of non-native authors in the EDGG special features in *Hacquetia* and *Tuexenia* (in total of 700 €).

This year we organised a campaign to raise funds for the EDGG. By charity donations EDGG received 1608 €, which were transferred to the virtual account of EDGG. From these donations this year we supported EDGG Field Workshops. The EDGG has also received from FlorSoz a language correction support for *Tuexenia* (500 €). All support is greatly acknowledged.

We cordially invite you to join EDGG, its events and activities!

***Péter Török (on behalf of the Executive Committee of the EDGG)***