

15th Eurasian Grassland Conference
4-8 June 2018, Sulmona (Italy)

COOPERATING FOR GRASSLAND CONSERVATION



First Circular

The 2018 Eurasian Grassland Conference will take place from 4th to 8th June 2018 in Sulmona, a town in the heart of Italian Apennines. It will be the 15th annual conference of the EDGG, which aims to promote exchange and collaboration between those interested in all aspects of semi-natural and natural grassland research and conservation across Palaearctic biogeographical realm.

The main topic of the conference will be the conservation of grasslands through transdisciplinary and transnational cooperation. The conference wants to put the basis for the establishment of a network of cooperation within the EDGG.

Main topic of the conference

Cooperating for grasslands: from habitat interpretation to conservation measures

Grasslands are being addressed by a high number of projects aimed at conserving their biodiversity and the wide range of ecosystem services they provide. Still these projects are jeopardized by the challenges that derive from grasslands intrinsic features: the fine grain at which they should be analysed, the complexity that derives from their extraordinary biodiversity and variability, and their tendency to change rapidly in response to various natural and human drivers. Although local information is particularly important, a set of shared principles, methodologies and procedures would make the efforts to maintain grasslands across the Eurasian continent substantially more effective. The topic of the conference is therefore to address the main grassland conservation issues by establishing a basis for cooperation projects within the framework of the EDGG. The subtopics that are described below aim at stimulating exchange of local and national experiences that represent an example for effective cooperation projects.

Subtopics

1. Habitat classification and indicators of conservation status:

This session will cover grassland habitat classification, and the assessment of habitat conservation status by means of specific indicators. For habitat classification, a special emphasis will be on the potential use of the large number of vegetation relevés stored in European and global databases. Similarly, special focus will be given on widely applicable approaches for the identification of appropriate indicators of habitat conservation status.

2. Grassland threats and pressures:

Land abandonment, invasive alien species, and climate change are among several important threats to grassland habitats and species. However, how these threats change in relation to environmental conditions and land use legacies is still unclear. This gap in knowledge does not allow to define the practical steps that can be developed to increase resistance and resilience across the Eurasian continent. Large scale cooperation may represent a huge opportunity to assess threats through standardized monitoring and survey protocols, as well as to align a framework of threats and pressures for grassland habitats.

3. Conservation goals and appropriate measures:

Grassland conservation projects focus on goals related to target species and habitats, but the effectiveness of conservation measures to achieve these goals is often a topic of debate. Conservation goals and measures should be integrated into wider society by positively engaging stakeholders, respecting cultures and the role of traditional knowledge, as well as the economic

value of managing habitats and their ecosystem services. Conservation planning should therefore be framed in wider contexts and take into account other plans (such as forest plans, river plans, park plans, etc.). By comparing experiences and approaches with integrated management planning and stakeholder engagement, this session will indicate which factors should be considered to achieve good governance models.

4. Setting conservation priorities

Appropriate choice of priorities of sites/habitats to conserve or restore is essential in order to maximize the effort and money spent. Specific analyses should take into account how priorities can be different at different scales, and should therefore be addressed through a wide range of prioritization methodologies, from spatial analysis to a synthetic analysis of different habitats that will be addressed during this session.

Preliminary time schedule

June 4th

14.30-18.00	Course on preparing proposals for LIFE+, INTERREG and Marie Curie-Sklodowska Actions
18.00-20.00	Welcome drink

June 5th

9.30-12.00	Session 1 - Habitat classification and indicators of conservation status
12.00-13.00	Lunch
13.00-15.30	Session 2 - Grasslands threats and pressures
16.00-18.30	Session 3 – Conservation goals and appropriate measures

June 6th

8.00-18.30	Mid-conference excursion: from Rifugio Pomilio to Anfiteatro delle Murelle and Monte Focalone.
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June 7th

9.30-12.00	Session 4 – Setting conservation priorities
12.00-13.00	Lunch
13.00-14.00	Poster session
14.00	Transfer to National Park Operation Center - Badia Morronese
14.30-17.30	Workshops: Four working groups will address the four session subtopics to brainstorm transnational cooperation projects within the EDGG.
17.30-18.30	EDGG General Assembly
20.00-22.30	Grassland Party (at the National Park Operation Center - Badia Morronese)

June 8th

8.00-18.30	Post-conference excursion (optional) - From Sant'Antonio (Palena) towards Tavola Rotonda
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Venue



The conference will take place in the Auditorium of the Annunziata, in the very heart of the town of Sulmona (25,000 inh.). The town is located in the Valle Peligna, a plateau once occupied by a lake that disappeared in prehistoric times. The center of the town is characterized by Piazza Garibaldi. This square, limited at one of its sides by a XIII century aqueduct, has a stunning view of Monte Morrone (2,061 m. a.s.l.), and it is one of the largest squares in Italy. It hosts important events and ceremonies and a traditional market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Sulmona is known for being the native town of the Latin poet Ovid, and for being the home of the Italian confectionery known as “confetti”.



A view of Piazza Garibaldi and Monte Morrone at sunset.

Excursions

Mid-conference excursion

The excursion will start from Rifugio Pomilio (2000 m a.s.l.) and will reach the altitude of about 2650 m a.s.l. (Monte Focalone) after a stop at the Anfiteatro delle Murelle. The footpath will cross interesting examples of mesophilous secondary grasslands (dominated by *Bromus erectus* and *Brachypodium genuense*).

The subalpine shrublands are represented by *Pinus mugo*, at the southern limit of its distribution.

Mountain shoes and clothes, hat and sunscreen will be necessary.



Anfiteatro delle Murelle. One of the mid-stops of the Excursion 1.

Post-conference excursion (optional)

The excursion will cover a great altitudinal range from about 1000 m a.s.l. to about 2000 m a.s.l.. Along the footpath it will be possible to see the secondary grasslands of the montane belt (dominated by *Bromus erectus* and *Sesleria juncifolia*), and the subalpine dwarf shrublands dominated by *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and *Juniperus communis* var. *saxatilis*. Finally, we will reach the alpine belt, with primary grasslands dominated by *Festuca violacea* subsp. *italica*, and scattered examples of alpine vegetation.

Mountain shoes and clothes, hat and sunscreen will be necessary.



A view from the slope towards Tavola Rotonda.

Technical workshop

In order to facilitate the work of the participants in establishing new connections and potential cooperation projects the workshop will introduce some funding possibilities, with special reference to the EU but with the possibility of involving other countries. The workshop will focus on LIFE+ and INTERREG programmes, as well as on the Marie-Curie actions addressing researchers. Proposal preparation will be explained and practical examples of successful proposals will be described.

Accommodation

It should be booked independently by each participant. Sulmona hosts several hotels and bed and breakfast that are advertised on popular hotel search engine. A brief list of accommodation structures will be given in the second circular.

Traveling

The city may be reached by train or bus from Rome or Pescara. Both these cities host international airports. The transfer from Rome or Pescara can be made by train (www.trenitalia.it/en) or by bus (www.tuabruzzo.it; www.autolineepstar.com). It takes approximately two hours from both cities. Details about the venue and travelling will be available in the second circular.

Registration

You can register and post your abstract at the web page of the conference which is expected to be launched soon (all EDGG members will be informed by e-mail when the website will be available).

Fees will be communicated in the second circular.

The fee covers: attendance to the pre-conference course, attendance to the scientific sessions, coffee breaks and lunches between the sessions, grassland party, attendant pack, transport and lunch pack for the mid-conference excursion.

An additional fee of 30 euros will be charged for the post-conference excursion (includes transport and lunch pack).

Fees should be paid to Società Botanica Italiana onlus – iban: IT 90K033 5901 6001 0000 0019 636. The object of the conference should be specified as: EDGG Conference – name of the participant.

Important dates

Deadline for early bird registration: 28 February 2017

Deadline for abstract submission: 28 February 2017

Deadline for registration: 30 April 2017

Grants

We hope to offer a limited number of travel grants for IAVS members. To qualify, active participation at the conference (oral presentation or poster) is required and priority will be given to young scientists with financial constraints. Grants can be applied during registration, including a short motivation letter. More details will be given in the Second Circular.

Conference publications

As in previous years, there will be Special Features (SFs) with selected contributions from the conference in international, peer-reviewed journals, guest-edited by EDGG members.

Young Investigator Prizes

As in previous years, prizes will be awarded to young scientists for excellent presentation of their research (talk or in poster form). For these purposes, young scientists (less than 35 years old) will be asked during registration if they wish to participate in the contest.

Visas

In case you need an invitation, please refer to the contact persons.

Contact persons

Sabina Burrascano – sabina.burrascano@uniroma1.it

Giampiero Ciaschetti – giampiero.ciaschetti@parcomajella.it

Eleonora Giarrizzo – eleonora.giarrizzo@uniroma1.it

Michael Vrahnakis (Executive Committee, EDGG) – mvrahnak@teilar.gr

Didem Ambarlı (Executive Committee, EDGG) – didem.ambarli@gmail.com

Local Organizing Committee

Sabina Burrascano – sabina.burrascano@uniroma1.it

Giampiero Ciaschetti – giampiero.ciaschetti@parcomajella.it

Eleonora Giarrizzo – eleonora.giarrizzo@uniroma1.it

Emanuela Carli

Eva Del Vico

Laura Facioni

Organizers

Besides the EDGG, the conference will be organized by the Department of Environmental Biology – Sapienza University of Rome, and by the Majella National Park with the support of the Società Botanica Italiana.

Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) (www.edgg.org) was established in August 2008.

It is an official group of the International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS, www.iavs.org). Its basic aims are to compile and to distribute information on research and conservation in grasslands beyond national borders, and to stimulate active cooperation among scientists, NGO's and all who work with or are interested in grasslands.

Sapienza University of Rome, founded in 1303 by Pope Boniface VIII, is one of the oldest universities in the world. With over 111,000 students, 4000 teachers and 2000 employees, technicians and librarians, in addition to 2000 administrative staff in university hospitals, Sapienza is the largest university in Europe. Its mission is to contribute to the development of a knowledge society through research, excellence, quality education and international cooperation.

The Department of Environmental Biology (DBA) was founded in 2010 after a re-organization of the Departments of Biology of Sapienza. The Department focuses on research and teaching of the biology and ecology of various taxonomic groups ranging from algae and fungi, to plants, animals and man.

Majella National Park was founded in 1991. The park has an extent of about 75,000 hectares and it is completely occupied by mountains. Majella is known as the Mother Mountain of Abruzzi and it is located in the most remote and wildest area of central Apennine. This area is also called the Holy Mountain because of many sites that have always inspired profound religiousness and hermitage. The Park is notable for its vast plateaus at high altitudes and for the wild and imposing canyons, but also for its Abbeys, and wonderful old towns.

The Società Botanica Italiana onlus was founded in Florence in 1888. Its origin derives from the Società Botanica Fiorentina, the oldest botanical association in Europe (founded in 1716). Today the Society has about 1300 members that carry out a wealth of activities, from courses and excursions to conferences and publications with the ultimate goal of promoting the advance and dissemination of botanical culture and sciences and of their various applications.

Supporting organisations / institutions

International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS, www.iavs.org): its original precursor was the International Phytosociological Society (IPS), which was founded in 1939. IAVS is a worldwide union of scientists and others interested in theoretical and practical studies of all aspects of vegetation. The main goals of the IAVS are to facilitate personal contacts among vegetation scientists all over the world and to promote research in all aspects of vegetation science and its applications.

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