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The Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG) in 2015–2016

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The Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (EDGG, formerly known as European Dry Grassland Group) is an official working group of the International Association for Vegetation Science (IAVS) and was founded in 2008. The EDGG is a network of currently 1141 members from 64 countries (26 July 2016), interested in Palaearctic natural and semi-natural grasslands from any point of view, including fauna, flora, vegetation, ecology biodiversity, conservation, land use and management.

The main activities of the EDGG (see Vrahnakis et al. 2013) are (i) the facilitation of international communication between researchers, site managers, policy and decision-makers; (ii) coordination of scientific and policy-related actions in grassland research, conservation and restoration in the whole Palaearctic; (iii) promotion of the development of databases for grassland classification, best-practice in conservation and restoration; (iv) organisation of annual events, such as the Eurasian Grassland Conferences (EGCs) and Field Workshops (formerly known as EDGG Research Expeditions); and (v) dissemination of research results in Special Features of peer-reviewed international journals such as Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment (Dengler et al. 2014), Biodiversity and Conservation (Habel et al. 2013, Török et al. 2016), Applied Vegetation Science (Dengler et al. 2013), Plant Biosystems (Janišova et al. 2011), Tuexenia (e.g. Becker et al. 2016) and Hacquetia (e.g. Valkó et al. 2016). Whilst we are affiliated to the IAVS, our scope is not restricted to just vegetation science but also includes all taxa that are associated with grasslands. Further information about the EDGG can be found from our web-site at http://www.edgg.org/. You can also find us on Facebook: EDGG - Eurasian Dry Grassland Group.

This contribution aims at summarising the major developments in the EDGG since the last report (Carboni et al. 2015). The EDGG has undergone a number of fundamental changes during 2015. First of all, whilst we are still the EDGG, "EDGG" now stands for 'Eurasian Dry Grassland Group', in place of the previous 'European Dry Grassland Group'. This reflects a broadening in our geographical scope that has been evident for a considerable time, with active contributions from North Africa, the Near East and Central Asia. The grassland biome extends eastwards far beyond the borders of Europe, and our interest and activities certainly do not end at the European border. The scope of the EDGG has also been modified to cover all Palaearctic natural and semi-natural grasslands, without the previous restrictions to dry grasslands and to Europe. This latter change is reflected in the sub-title we have added to the name of the organization, "Eurasian Dry Grassland Group – Grassland Research and Conservation".

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Table 1: The eight members of the EDGG Executive Committee (EC) 2015–2017 and their responsibilities.
Tabela 1: Osem članov izvršnega odbora EDGG 2015–2017 in njihove zadolžitve.

EC member	Role
Didem Ambarlı	Editor-in-Chief of homepage; Deputy Conferences Coordinator
Idoia Biurrun	Membership Administrator; Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the EDGG Bulletin; Deputy Field Workshop Coordinator; Deputy IAVS Representative; Editor-in-Chief of homepage
Jürgen Dengler	Coordinator for Special Features; Field Workshop Coordinator
Monika Janišová	Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the EDGG Bulletin
Anna Kuzemko	Editor-in-Chief of Bulletin; Book Review Editor; Facebook Group Administrator
Péter Török	IAVS Representative; Contact Officer to other organisations; Deputy Coordinator for Special Features; Deputy Secretary-General; Deputy Book Review Editor
Stephen Venn	Secretary-General; Deputy Membership Administrator; Deputy Policy Officer; Deputy Facebook Group Administrator
Michael Vrahnakis	Conferences Coordinator; Policy Officer; Deputy Contact Officer to other organizations

The EDGG has also undergone major organizational changes during 2015. Firstly, the biennial election of our governing body, the Executive Committee (EC), saw the departure of Solvita Rūsiņa, who decided not to stand for re-election. Partly to cover the demands resulting from the growth of the organization, as well as filling the gap left by Solvita's departure, we decided to increase the strength of the EC from the previous six to the current eight members. The Bylaws were amended to ensure that in the future, the EC will comprise at least seven members. The new members of the EC are Didem Ambarlı, Idoia Biurrun and Anna Kuzemko, and the roles of each EC member are presented above in Table 1. The current Bylaws of the EDGG are accessible via our website. Membership of the EDGG is open to anyone who is interested in Palaearctic grasslands and is free of charge. If you would like to join us, then simply send an e-mail to our Membership Administrator, Idoia Biurrun (idoia.biurrun@ehu.es).

This Hacquetia Special Issue (SI) on the Ecology and Conservation of Steppes and Semi-Natural Dry Grasslands contains contributions from the two previous annual conferences of the EDGG, in Tula, Russia (2014) and Mainz, Germany (2015). The steppe bioregion is a prominent topic, as the Tula meeting and subsequent conference excursions provided a comprehensive familiarization with steppe grasslands in all their diversity, and then Mainz took us to the westernmost extremity of steppe-like azonal grasslands. This is now the third such SI published by the EDGG in Hacquetia and we hope to continue the tradition by announcing a call for the fourth SI at the forthcoming Eurasian Grassland Conference, at Sighișoara, Romania, from 20-24th September 2016.

The Tula meeting was the 11th annual meeting of the EDGG, and the theme was '*Steppes and Semi-natural Dry Grasslands: Ecology, Transformation and Restoration*'. The venue for the meeting was the Kulikovo Field Scientific Centre at Tula and the organizers were Elena Volkova of the Tula State University and Olga Burova, of the Kulikovo Field Scientific Centre. The programme included an excursion to the Kulikovo Pole steppe restoration sites, and post-conference excursions to Steppe grassland reserves in the Kursk and Rostov regions.

The 12th European Dry Grassland Meeting was organised by Ute Becker (Botanic Gardens, University of Mainz) and Thomas Becker (University of Trier), and hosted by the Universities of Mainz and Trier. The theme was '*Population Biology and Community Ecology of Dry Grasslands and Dry Grassland Species*'. The excursions of the Mainz conference included a visit to a recreated steppe at the Botanic Garden at Mainz, and grassland sites in the Mainz, Rhine-Hesse and Middle Rhine Valley regions (Figure 2).

The 8th EDGG Field Workshop took place in Poland from 13th–23rd June 2015. It was organized by Zygmunt Kącki (Department of Botany, Institute of Environmental Biology, University of Wrocław) and Iwona Dembicz (Department of Plant Ecology and Environmental Conservation, Institute of Botany, University of Warsaw), in collaboration with other Polish botanists: Grzegorz Swacha, Marta Czarniecka, Anna Cwener, Piotr Chmielewski, Łukasz Kozub and Piotr Zaniewski. The group of 18 participants from five countries (Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Spain and Ukraine) consisted of experienced senior scientists, young postdocs and PhD students. In total, six oral presentations on various PhD topics related to grassland research were given by the participants. During the workshop, 117 relevés (including 31 nested-plot series) were recorded. The biomass of vascular plants, cryptogams

Figure 1: Participants of the 8th EDGG Field Workshop in Poland. Photo: Piotr Chmielewski.
Slika 1: Udeleženci 8. terenske delavnice EDGG na Poljskem. Foto: Piotr Chmielewski.

Figure 2: Participants of the Middle Rhine Valley Excursion within the 12th European Dry Grassland Meeting in Mainz, Germany. Photo: Monika Janišová.
Slika 2: Udeleženci ekskurzije v dolino reke Ren med 12. konferenco EDGG v Mainzu v Nemčiji. Foto: Monika Janišová.

and litter were collected at each of the plots (Figure 1). Recently, EDGG organized its 9th Field Workshop in Serbia from 2nd–9th July 2016. The Field Workshop was organised by Zora Dajić Stevanović, Ivan Šoštarić, Svetlana Aćić (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Agriculture) and Mirjana Krstivojević Ćuk (University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Biology and Ecology Department), in cooperation with Jürgen Dengler and Idoia Biurrun of the EDGG.

The next EDGG event is the 13th meeting of the EDGG, now under the name Eurasian Grassland Conference (EGC), which will be held at Sighișoara, in central Romania, from 20–24th September 2016. The main topic of the conference is '*Management and Conservation of Semi-Natural Grasslands: from Theory to Practice*'. The conference will be organized by ADEPT Fundatia and the Babes-Bolyai University. The excursions will provide the opportunity to meet and explore the High Nature Value grasslands in the hilly Târnava Mare landscape near Sighișoara, and mountain hay meadows in the Miercurea Ciuc (Csíkszereda) area. Further information is available from the conference web-site at https://egc2016.namupro.de/.

For 2017, two EDGG events are planned: the 10th EDGG Field Workshop will take place in June 2017 in the Abruzzo National Park in Central Italy, hosted by Goffredo Filibeck and colleagues (University of Tuscia, Viterbo). The 14th EGC will take place jointly in Latvia and Lithuania in 2017, co-organized by Solvita Rūsiņa and Valerijus Rašomavičius.

The EDGG has published five issues of its journal, the *Bulletin of the Eurasian Dry Grassland Group* within the reported period (Issues 27–31, all issues are freely available from http://www.edgg.org/publications.htm). In addition, the EDGG has continued its long-standing tradition of Special Issues/Features in international journals over the past year. Currently, five such Special Issues/Features are in production, some close to completion:

- Traditional Dry Grassland Special Feature in *Tuexenia* 2016 (Chair: Thomas Becker) to be published in August 2016 (Becker et al. 2016)
- Third EDGG Special Issue in *Hacquetia* 2016 (Chairs: Orsolya Valkó & Stephen Venn) to be published in July 2016 (Valkó et al. 2016, in this issue)
- Special Issue "Ecology, biodiversity and conservation of Palaearctic steppes" in *Biodiversity and Conservation* (Editors: Jürgen Dengler, Didem Ambarlı, Johannes Kamp, Péter Török & Karsten Wesche) to be published in August 2016 (Török et al. 2016)
- Virtual Special Feature (jointly with EDGG) "Classification of European grasslands" in *Applied Vegetation Science* (Editors: Jürgen Dengler, Erwin Bergmeier, Milan Chytrý & Wolfgang Willner) to be completed in December 2016 (see Dengler et al. 2013)
- Special Issue "Classification of Palaearctic grasslands" in *Phytocoenologia* (Editors: Monika Janišová, Jürgen Dengler & Wolfgang Willner), to be published in December 2016.
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In conjunction with the EGC 2016 in Romania, a Special Feature in Tuexenia for summer 2017 and a new Special Issue in Hacquetia for early 2018 are planned. Furthermore, the EDGG is aiming to organize the Palaearctic chapters in a book on global grassland conservation and management.

The EDGG Field Workshops are not only nice events of intensive field work in an international group of enthusiastic grassland researchers, their main purpose is analysing grassland diversity patterns across the Palaearctic biome via the collection of highly standardised datasets. These workshops have generated a number of papers in international journals, highlighting the diverse drivers of grassland diversity in different regions and at different spatial scales (Turtureanu et al. 2014, Kuzemko et al. 2016, Polyakova et al. 2016). Recently, we analysed this megadata to produce the first overview of minimum, maximum and mean species richness in Palaearctic grasslands across seven spatial grain sizes (Dengler et al. 2016), thus expanding on the scope of the highly cited world-record paper by Wilson et al. (2012).

Finally, the EDGG, together with a second IAVS working group, the European Vegetation Survey (EVS), has supported a project led by Kiril Vassilev (Sofia). With the financial support of the IAVS, he has organised three collaborative vegetation-plot databases for Southeast Europe, where data were previously scarce (see Chytrý et al. 2016): the general Balkan Vegetation Database (Vassilev et al. 2016), the Balkan Dry Grassland Database and the Romanian Grassland Database. The latter two provide a broad-scale classification of grasslands (Dengler et al. 2013) and macroecological analyses. It is planned to continue this successful activity and extend it to neighbouring regions through forthcoming Field Workshops.

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