

Life to grasslands

DRY GRASSLANDS on Calcareous Substrates



Dry grasslands are characterised by grasses and wild flowers growing on shallow and nutrient-poor soils with low and sparse turf. Created by man, they are still being maintained by moderate mowing or grazing, while many farmers combine both. Old varieties of fruit trees were often planted on such grasslands. Therefore, they can also be found in meadow orchards.

Where to find dry grasslands in Slovenia?

In Slovenia, dry grasslands are found in permeable karst landscapes and in hinterlands, where they grow on sunny southern sides of slopes and hills. Experts call this type of grasslands **semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (*important orchid sites)**. In eastern Slovenia they can be found in the hilly areas of eastern (wine-growing) and western Haloze, Donačka mountain and in the Posavje hills with its highest peak Kum. Smaller areas of dry and semi-dry grasslands (so-called meadows) with rich biodiversity are located in the middle of wooded Gorjanci with the plateau Radoha. They can also be found in Goričko, Kozjansko, Bela Krajina, the Polhograjsko hills and elsewhere. Dry grasslands are among the most endangered habitats in Slovenia.

They are a treasure trove of plants, including wild orchids and different animals

Dry grasslands are characterised by a rich diversity of plant and animal life; up to 80 different species can be found in an area of one square metre. Some of them are protected and endangered. The greatest diversity of species is in moderately or extensively used grasslands.



Typical and easily identifiable plants growing on dry grasslands are grasses (erect brome, tor-grass and quaking-grass) and thermophilous herb species (common sainfoin, ox-eye, cloves or carnations, silver thistle, hoary plantain, rattle, Carnolian lily). Meadow pearls (wild orchids) bloom in May and June.



The rich diversity of plant life provides a favourable environment for a large variety of insects, butterflies, grasshoppers, bugs, praying mantis, and beetles. Due to the rich diversity of insects, many bird species are also found in dry grasslands.

Why are dry grasslands under threat?



According to old sources, dry grasslands were once widespread, but after the agricultural revolution in the 20th century, the situation changed drastically. Livestock breeding was the main reason for the creation of grasslands; due to the increase in population density an ever growing need for the production of food (meat, milk) and animal feed arose, and deforestation was thus being encouraged. In the last 50 years, a decline of grassland systems in both Europe and Slovenia has been noted.

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Dry grasslands are threatened by abandonment (mowing, grazing) and consequent overgrowing. The population in these areas is aging, the young are emigrating, and there are fewer and fewer people who work the land. However, early and frequent mowing, overgrazing and overfertilisation also change the diverse dry grasslands.



Hardworking and tenacious farmers, whose work is often insufficiently appreciated and respected, play a key role in the preservation of dry grasslands. Dry grasslands are a habitat for many plant and animal species (even rare and endangered), therefore their preservation is very important in maintaining the natural balance and a healthy environment.

More about the project

In the project LIFE TO GRASSLANDS - Conservation and Management of Dry Grasslands in Eastern Slovenia we strive for the long-term conservation of grasslands in the four project sub-areas: Haloze, Pohorje, Kum, and Gorjanci.

More information about the concrete actions and possibilities of involvement in the project is available on www.travisca.si or www.lifetograsslands.si.

The project LIFE TO GRASSLANDS (LIFE14 NAT/SI/000005) runs from November 1 2015 to October 31 2020. The leading partner of the project is Zavod RS za varstvo narave (The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation). Other partners include Podeželsko razvojno jedro Haloz (Haloze Rural Development Centre), Kmetijsko gozdarski zavod Ptuj (Ptuj Agriculture and Forestry Institute), Krajevna skupnost Dobovec (Dobovec Local Community) and Društvo Gorjanske košenice (Gorjanci Mown Grasslands Society). The project is being carried out with the contribution of LIFE Nature and Biodiversity, the financial instrument of the European Commission. The project is co-financed by the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia.



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