

Grass Cuttings

Conserving Croatia's Grasslands



HELLO AND WELCOME to the second issue of *Grass Cuttings*; the newsletter of the Darwin Initiative project “Developing a model for the conservation of Croatia’s grassland biodiversity”. The months have flown by since our last issue in winter, a reflection of how busy the project team have been both in Croatia and the UK. In this autumn issue we hope to fill you in on some of our most interesting activities that have occurred over the last six months or so.

Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park hosts training workshop for Croatia’s protected areas

Nikica Radić and Tihomir Devčić, from Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park and Sjeverni Velebit National Park respectively, discuss the grazing regime of a pasture with a local farmer.



Workshop participants estimating the percentage cover of plant species in a quadrat.

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IN JULY 2005 representatives from Croatia’s protected areas came to Sošice, Žumberak to attend a four day workshop on grassland biodiversity and surveying. The workshop was led by Jerry Tallwin, principal research scientist at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER) and opened by the Assistant Minister (nature protection), Zoran Šikić.

The workshop participants, from the length and breadth of Croatia, were initially presented with an overview of grassland ecology and the factors which create and maintain biologically diverse grasslands. They were then given practical training in a range of grassland survey techniques including how to conduct rapid biodiversity assessments of grasslands and plant community surveying.

This workshop and the two planned for the forthcoming year, on grassland management and monitoring, will place Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park (ŽSGNP) at the forefront of conservation training of Croatia’s protected areas.

The project would like to thank Milan Radić, director of Pliješ Ltd., a local textile firm, for the use of the workshop venue and providing the accommodation.



Surveying the Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park grasslands

SINCE THE SNOWS MELTED in mid-May the project team have focused on refining and developing grassland surveying protocols for the ŽSGNP. Three different surveys have been developed (rapid biodiversity, rare plants and plant community) in addition to a semi-structured interview for farmers (to obtain past and present management information). The aim of the grassland surveys is to collect baseline grassland biodiversity data which will be used in the development of specific management actions at a later stage.

A three day training workshop, led by Jerry Tallwin (IGER) and Antonia Eastwood (FFI) was held at the beginning of July to train the Park staff in the different surveying methods. As well as the practical training in the field, Park staff were also given background information on grassland biodiversity and the factors which create, maintain and threaten it.

Zrinka Mesić, the Darwin scholar, has taken the preliminary data from the plant community survey work to IGER where she will be shown different methods of data analysis during her three month study visit.



Goran Grdinić, one of the Park's ranger, talks to a local farmer about the mowing time of meadows.



Mr Zvonko Vučinić, an organic sheep farmer, is one of the many farmers that have been interviewed by the project.

Training workshop in the Peak District National Park

THIS SUMMER Biljana Janev Hutinec, the Conservation Manager at ŽSGNP, attended a five day workshop in the Peak District National Park on "Grassland Management for Nature Conservation". This workshop is one of the many training opportunities that the Darwin Initiative project has enabled. Here Biljana shares some of her experiences in the Peak District.

"Each day of the workshop started with presentations and lectures from a range of conservation practitioners and grassland ecologists. This was followed by fieldwork in the afternoon, where we could put what we'd learnt into practice, and lively discussions in the evening.

The workshop covered a wide range of topics including basic grassland ecology,

plant strategies, grassland surveying, the effects of grazing with different livestock, and the management of grasslands for birds and invertebrates.

I learnt a huge amount and I now understand how just small changes in management can have a large affect on the associated animal and plant diversity. The workshop was a wonderful opportunity to share and exchange knowledge with British experts and colleagues and to discuss the similarities and differences between Croatian and British grasslands."

Find out in the next issue how Zrinka Mesić's (the Darwin Scholar) three month study visit at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Science went.





Croatian grasslands vs British grasslands

IVA ANTOLIĆ, education officer at the ŽSGNP, asks Anna Gundry, a botanist at IGER, about the differences between the grasslands in Britain and Croatia during her visit this summer.

Iva Antolić: *What were your first impressions of our grasslands?*

Anna Gundry:

The first thing that struck me about the grasslands was how rich they all were. In Britain we have protected sites that are nearly as species rich. But each field is tiny and there are very few of them remaining. Most of our grasslands have only a few species and there are hardly any wildflowers.



Gentiana utriculosa, just one of the many gentian species that can be found in the Park.

IA: *Are grasslands in the UK similar to the ones in Croatia? And if not, how are they different?*

AG: Before I came to the ŽSGNP I was expecting not to know a single plant species. However, there are many species that are the same or very similar in Britain, which was a bit of a relief for me as a botanist. The difference is that Croatia has many, many more species than we do in Britain, so as well as the familiar species there were very many that I had not come across before.

IA: *Would you like to return to the ŽSGNP?*

AG: It was a real treat for me to have the opportunity to study the meadows this summer; however, I feel I only glimpsed a fraction of what the Park has to offer. I would love to come back in early spring, particularly to see the columbines in flower, which I've heard cover the slopes around Sveta Gera in spring time. A sight to behold indeed!



Did you know? That in just 1m² of grassland in the ŽSGNP you can find up to 40 different plant species. Species rich grasslands such as these provide food for livestock, many of our medicinal plants and also support a wealth of insects, birds and mammals.

Rapid biodiversity survey

THE RAPID biodiversity survey was developed as an easy-to-use survey method for the Park, particularly the rangers. It aims to make a quick assessment on the biodiversity value of a grassland site and assess any current or potential threats. As well as providing baseline survey data it will allow the project team to prioritise sites for future conservation management.



Sward structure, the key to maintaining invertebrate diversity, is just one of the measures of biodiversity assessed in the rapid biodiversity form.

Project commences management planning training at Učka Nature Park

EARLIER THIS YEAR the project started working with Učka Nature Park (UNP), in west Croatia, in the development of its first ever management plan. As at the ŽSGNP the management plan is being developed in a participatory way, that is, it integrates stakeholders into its development by engaging them fully in the planning process. So far the project has developed a stakeholder engagement plan and UNP staff have been trained in semi-structured interview techniques. They have started to interview a wide range of stakeholders to gather information and opinions on the Park and its future management and will be holding a number of village meetings in September.



PROJECT PARTNERS



Fauna & Flora International

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) acts to conserve threatened species and ecosystems world-wide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science, and take into account human needs. Founded in 1903, FFI is the longest established international conservation group, and is currently supporting conservation in 40 countries.

www.fauna-flora.org



The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research

The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER) is the largest centre in the UK for independent research on grassland based livestock agriculture and agri-environment relationships.

www.iger.bbsrc.ac.uk



Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park

The Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje Nature Park was declared a protected area in 1999 due to its distinctive landscape; a product of the interaction of man and nature over the centuries, rich in both natural and cultural heritage.

www.ppzsg.org



Darwin Initiative

The Darwin Initiative, funded by the British government, draws on British expertise in biodiversity conservation to work with local partners in host countries to protect and enhance their biodiversity. Since the Darwin Initiative was set up in 1992 more than 350 biodiversity projects have been funded in 100 countries.

www.darwin.gov.uk



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New and improved website now up and running!

Please check out our new and improved website on www.ppzsg.org/darwin and keep up to date with the project!