

Botany in places time forgot

By *Monika Janišová, Susan Wisser and Alessandra Fidelis*



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In Marisel (Apuseni Carpathians, Romania) almost each meadow was once a field and each field was once a meadow, August 2019

After the IAVS Annual Symposium in Bremen I took advantage of my colleagues' interest in the Carpathian grasslands and invited Susan Wisser (New Zealand) and Alessandra Fidelis (Brazil) to Romania for a one-week fieldwork experience. I wondered how the non-European vegetation scientists would perceive local mountain rural landscapes with species-rich semi-natural grasslands. I also wondered whether people skilled in botanical field work in other biomes could prove themselves in completely different geographical and ecological conditions. Finally, I hoped that they would be enchanted by the beauty of the Carpathian landscapes like I am, and that the rare grassland ecosystems will have additional fans. The more fans they earn, the better the chance is that they will be maintained for the future. This article aims to bring Susan's and Alessandra's impressions closer by help of a few pictures and a short interview.

Monika: How was your first impression when you came to the Carpathians from the other continents?

Susan: Our first sites were relatively species-poor pastures and I felt like I was in a very weedy field in New Zealand. This is because many of the species we observed in pastures are also naturalized in New Zealand.

It took me a few days to appreciate that I was indeed working in native-dominated grasslands.

Alessandra: I had a completely different view. I was amazed by the beautiful mountains and all species were new for me. I knew few species (I remembered something from the time I lived in Germany), but most of them were new for me.

Monika: What do you think about the landscape in the Romanian Carpathians?

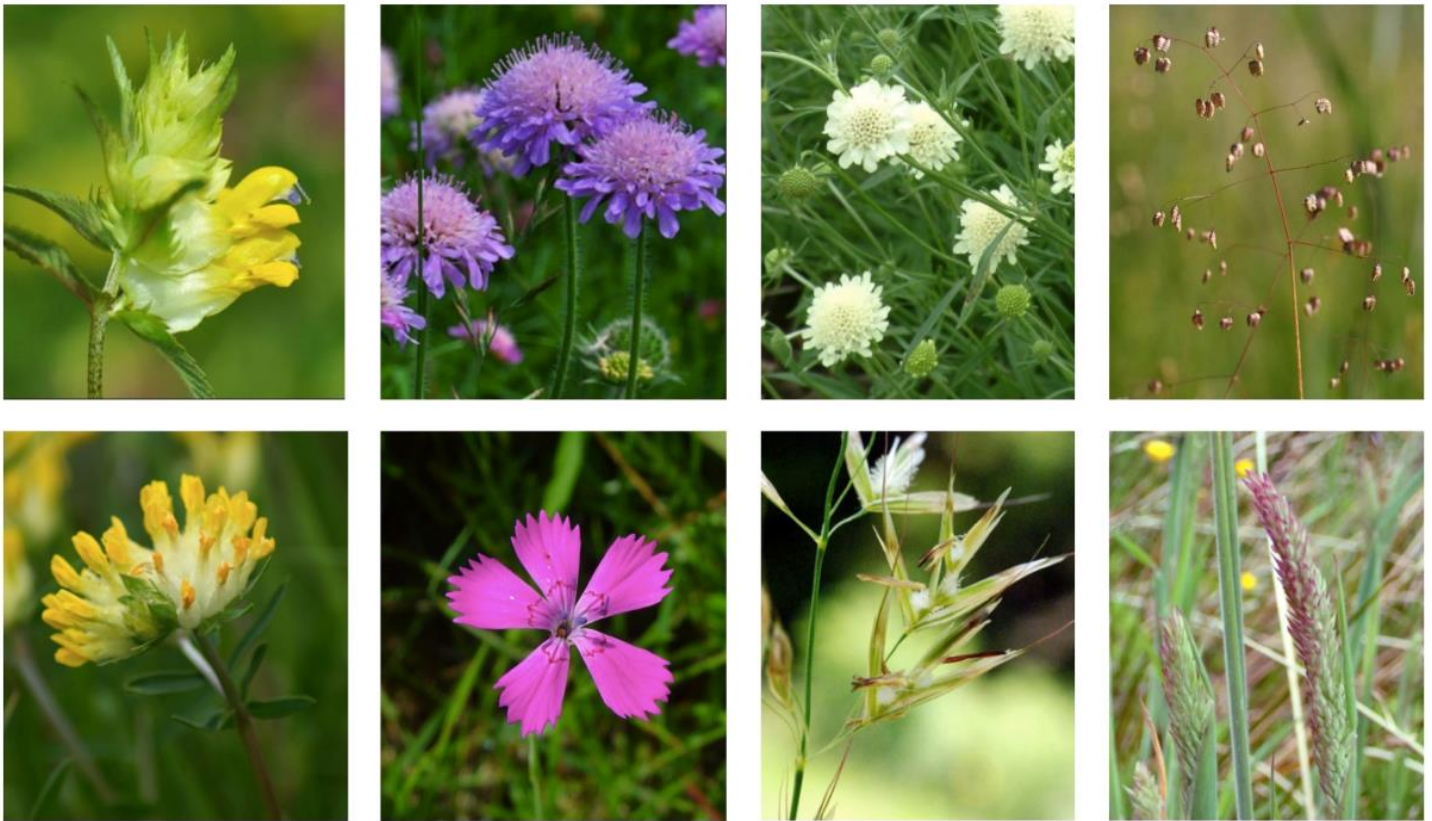
Susan: It is very beautiful, and it seems like a place time forgot, you get a view into the history, which is very interesting. And the plants are very beautiful.

Alessandra: I was really looking forward to seeing these semi-natural grasslands here, and it is really amazing. I loved the meadows and the opportunity to learn all the small plants with great experts.

Monika: Do you think this kind of life will survive here the next ten years?

Susan: I do not know.

Alessandra: I hope so.



Meadow plants that enchanted Susan and Alessandra (© M. Janišová).

Monika: Which type of grassland habitat is now your favorite?

Susan: The meadows.

Alessandra: The meadows.

Monika: Which are your three most favorite plants from this fieldwork?

Susan: I like *Rhinanthus alectorolophus*, *Knautia arvensis*, *Scabiosa ochroleuca*, *Briza media* (picture above, the upper row).

Alessandra: *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Dianthus deltoides*, *Avenula adsurgens*, *Holcus lanatus* (picture above, the lower row).

Monika: What would you like to hand down to readers of this post?

Susan: There is the point to maintaining the ability of people to live in this landscape, to know their land-

scape, and to have a nice life in their landscape. When everything is measured by money, it doesn't necessarily make people very happy. It is sad to see financial demands resulting in a loss of traditional systems of land management

Alessandra: I had the opportunity with this field trip with you Monika, not only to visit the Carpathian Mountains and the beautiful semi-natural grasslands there, but also to see the amazing research you are doing with the local people! I agree with Susan that financial demands are leading this people to leave their properties and old land use, which will directly affect these nice grasslands.

Monika: I was delighted with our collaborative fieldwork. Our small expedition had nine members from different countries, but only Susan and Alessandra were from outside Europe. I admired how well organized the girls were, how they handled difficult conditions, and how willing they were to learn new species. This year's botanical season does not favor foreign visitors. However, I believe that the next one will be even better.



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Mountain pastures of Poiana Călineasa are situated above the Ghetari village in the Apuseni Carpathians, Romania. Wherever you look, time forgot this landscape in the end of the 19th century. July 2019.



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This colourful meadow on a steep north-facing slope in Marisel (Apuseni Carpathians, Romania) has never been ploughed. For the last five decades, this plot has had a stable management: it is annually mown in August, grazed by cows for one week in May and then again in autumn (September-October), manured in winter, cleared of shrub and trees in spring, and cleaned from *Veratrum album* by picking when necessary. August 2019.



People in Bârsana, Alba district, Romania, stay in their houses at 1200 m a.s.l. the whole year through. Animal husbandry is the main occupation in the village and although the number of cattle is gradually declining, abundant hay meadows are still well-maintained according to local traditions, except that human labor is sometimes replaced by machinery. July 2019.



One of the family farms in Şugag, Alba district, Romania



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Susan and Alessandra enjoying their Carpathian fieldwork. Bârsana, Alba district, Romania, July 2019



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Alessandra is happy: In this meadow we recorded 57 species of vascular plants and 12 bryophyte species in our 100 m²-plot. The stand is full of plants and insects heard from a distance by their buzz. Before (May) and after (October) haymaking the meadow is grazed by cows and sheep. The haystacks must be fenced as the animals are not herded by a shepherd. Harrowing and cleaning from stones, shrubs and trees in spring are regular management activities keeping the meadow in a good condition. Bârsana, Alba district, Romania. July 2019.