

EDGG Event

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17th Eurasian Grassland Conference
**Grassland dynamics and conservation in a
changing world**



Spain, with Tolosa town as
the conference venue,
7–13th September 2020

**First call**

Mountain summits in Aizkorri-Aratz Natural Park, Basque Country. Photo: J. Loidi.

Global change is one of the major threats of natural and semi-natural grasslands, which are facing important challenges for their conservation, caused by land-use and climatic change. We would like to invite you to Tolosa (Basque Country, Spain) to participate in the 17th Eurasian Grassland Conference (EGC), with the theme of *Grassland dynamics and conservation in a changing world*.

We offer you the opportunity to hear about the latest advances in grassland science and conservation, exchange and improve your knowledge and networking, and have a good time. The conference will be full of events, e.g. talks and poster sessions, workshops, grassland party, and mid- and post-conference excursions.

We hope to meet you in the Basque Country!!

The Organizing Committee

Dates and Venue

The 17th EGC of the Eurasian Dry Grassland Group (IAVS Working Group) will be held in Tolosa (Basque Country, Spain, 20,000 inh., http://bit.ly/Tolosa_wiki; <https://tourism.euskadi.eus/en/>) from Monday 7th to Sunday 13th September 2020.

This historic town is located in the valley of the Cantabrian River Oria (Fig. 1), and is 25 km away from San Sebastian (Donostia in Basque), a famous touristic location with three beaches, at 20-30 min train distance (Fig. 2). In medieval times, Tolosa was a very important checking point among the Kingdoms of Navarre and Castile, France and the Can-

tabrian harbours. Currently it hosts many important cultural events and a traditional market every Saturday.

The registration and conference sessions will be held in the Antonio Maria Labaien Cultural Centre (Kultur Etxea), in Tolosa city centre: Trianguloa, 1 (Figs. 3 and 4).

Topics

Grassland dynamics and conservation in a changing world

Natural and semi-natural grasslands are currently facing several challenges in the context of global change, both regarding land-use and climatic change. Palaeartic grasslands are among the most negatively impacted by humans, characterized by a strongly declining trend in habitat extent and intactness, as well as species diversity and abundance since the second half of the 20th century. Both intensification of management and cessation of extensive traditional land use are affecting the conservation of semi-natural grasslands. In this context, we want to focus on the following topics:

- **Succession and species turnover in abandoned grasslands**, in the context of cessation of traditional land use.
- **Biodiversity of urban grasslands**, which may often act as refuges for endangered fauna, flora and habitats.
- **Above- and belowground grassland diversity**, including plants, animals, mycobiota and bacteria, in the context of grassland management type.
- **Grassland conservation and global change**: historical changes and future prospects on grassland extent and quality in the context of land-use changes and climate change.

In addition to these, any other contribution relevant to Palaeartic grassland diversity, classification, management and conservation, is welcome.



Fig. 1. View of Tolosa and its location on the Iberian Peninsula. Photo: I. Biurrun.



Fig. 2. View of San Sebastian, on the Cantabrian coast. Photo: http://bit.ly/Donostia_Concha.



Fig. 3. Venue of the EGC in the Antonio Maria Labaien Cultural Centre (Tolosa city centre). Photo: I. Biurrun.



Fig. 4. Location of venue in the map of Tolosa.

Programme outline

Monday	September 7 th	[Potential technical workshops], EGC registration, Welcome drink
Tuesday	September 8 th	EGC registration, 1 st session day
Wednesday	September 9 th	Mid-conference excursion, grassland party
Thursday	September 10 th	Conference, 2 nd session day, EDGG General Assembly
Friday to Sunday	September 11-13 th	Post-conference excursion (optional)

Excursions

Mid-conference excursion to Aizkorri-Aratz Natural Park, 9 September

The highest peak in the Basque Autonomous region, Aitxuri (1551 m a.s.l.) is located in this limestone mountain range, which limits the Cantabrian and Mediterranean basins. Basque legends place one of the houses of the goddess Mari, a personification of Mother Earth and all the elements it contains, in these summits. In these mountains, we can find such treasures as the Tunnel of San Adrian, with a chapel inside, crossed by a medieval road, and the Arrikruz cave, with galleries full of giant stalactites. Near the summit

of the Aizkorri peak, there is a chapel and a small refuge (Fig. 5).

In 2006, the Aizkorri mountain range became the Aizkorri-Aratz Natural Park, with 19,400 ha. The main entrance to the park is from the impressive Sanctuary of Arantzazu, over a steep ravine at 750 m a.s.l., which has great artistic and architectonic value (Fig. 6).

Several forest types are abundant in these mountains, mostly beech forests, but there is also space for semi-natural grasslands in many open areas that have been retained for extensive grazing, especially in Urbia and Oltza open fields, at approx. 1000 m a.s.l. They have been used for the summer grazing of sheep since the Neolithic, as testified by several megalithic monuments (Figs. 7 and 8). Nowadays, also cattle and horses are grazing in these fields, but the indigenous *latxa* breed has been traditionally bred, mainly for its milk, which is used to make *Idiazabal* cheese. Shepherds join in small groups of *txabolas* (small mountain houses) during the summer months. Besides shepherding, charcoal-making has also been a traditional activity in these mountains.

Many species of mammals, birds and amphibians inhabit these forests, pastures and cliffs: alpine newt (*Ichthyosaura alpestris*), Iberian frog (*Rana iberica*), Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), Alpine chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*), Red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), European snow vole (*Chionomys nivalis*), European pine marten (*Martes martes*), European polecat



Fig. 5. Inauguration day of the refuge in Aizkorri, 8th July 1934. Photo: I. Ojanguren.



Fig. 6. Front view of the Sanctuary of Arantzazu, with 14 apostles by the Basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza. Photo: <http://www.oñatiturismo.eus/en/listings/arantzazuko-santutegia/>.



Fig. 7. Urbia and Oltza open fields in Aizkorri-Aratz. Photo: http://bit.ly/Urbia_field.

(*Mustela putorius*), European wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) and several bat species.

On our way to the mountain summit, we will cross dry grasslands with *Helictotrichon cantabricum* and *Sesleria autumnalis* and basophilous thorny-cushion scrub with *Genista occidentalis*, successional stages of *Quercus pubescens* forests. We will go up to the Urbia fields, at 1100 m a.s.l., through beech forests. In Urbia, grasslands of the *Violion caninae* and heathlands of the *Daboecion cantabricae* form the traditional pastoral landscape. Back on the limestone steep slopes towards the summit, rocky grasslands of the class *Festuco-Ononidetea* occur, with *Teucrium pyrenaicum*, *Carex caryophylla*, *C. ornithopoda*, *Festuca rectifolia*, *Brachypodium rupestre*, *Acinos alpinus*, *Thymus praecox*, etc. At higher elevations, we will find subalpine dry grasslands with *Festuca gautieri* subsp. *scoparia* and *Agrostis schleicheri* (*Festucion scopariae*). Near the summit, limestone cliffs harbor rupicolous communities, with *Potentilla alchimilloides*, *Hornungia alpina* subsp. *auerswaldii*, *Dehthawia splendens* and *Erinus alpinus* (*Sedo-Seslerion hispanicae*), as well as mesic chionophilous grasslands with *Sesleria caerulea* (*Primulion intricatae*).

The grassland party will be held near the Arantzazu Sanctuary, at the Gomiztegi shepherd school.

Post-conference excursion to the Basque Country and Navarre (optional, restricted to approx. 40 people)

11 September

Atlantic valleys and mountains in Gipuzkoa and Northern Navarre: Coastal heathlands in Jaizkibel. Mountain acidic grasslands, heathlands and mires in Belate. Night in Isaba.

12 September

Pyrenean mountains: subalpine and alpine grasslands in Belagua and Larra. Night in Beire/Tudela.

13 September

Ebro valley (Bardenas Reales): Mediterranean grasslands and scrub. Urbasa mountain range: submediterranean dry grasslands. Night near Bilbao, in hotel with transfer to airport (most flights to European cities start early in the morning).

Accommodation during the conference

Accommodation should be booked independently by each participant. A list of accommodation options will be provided in the second circular.

Travelling

Tolosa town may be reached by train or bus from San Sebastian. The best option is to take a direct bus from Bilbao airport to San Sebastian (1 hour and 8 min), and, close to the bus station, take a train to Tolosa (20 or 30 min). There is also the possibility to fly to Biarritz airport, in France, and travel by bus to San Sebastian (45 min). Details about travelling will be provided in the second circular. Fig-



Fig. 8. Menhir of Zorrotzarri. Photo: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menhir_de_Zorrotzarri.

Figure 9 shows the location of Tolosa in relation to Bilbao and Biarritz airports.

Registration

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

Details of the fees will also be provided in the second circular. The fees will cover: attendance to the scientific sessions, coffee breaks and lunches between the sessions, grassland party, attendance pack, transport during the mid- and post-conference excursions.

Visas and deadlines

If you require an official **letter of invitation** to attend the conference, please contact the Chair of the Organizing Committee, Idoia Biurrun, after registering (Department of Plant Biology and Ecology, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) P.O. Box 644, 48080 Bilbao, Spain. Email: idoia.biurrun@ehu.eus). This letter does not represent any commitment on the part of the organizers to provide financial support for you; it is only for the purpose of obtaining your visa or other such purposes.

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

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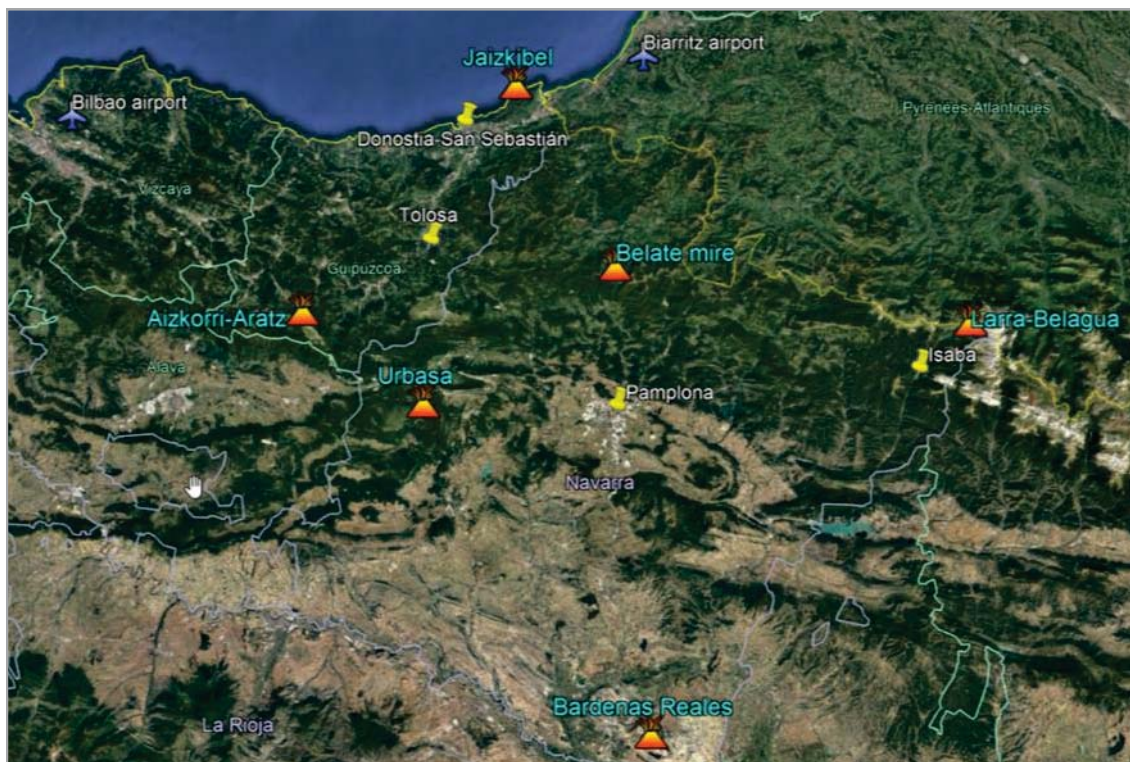


Fig. 9. Location of conference venue, main cities, accommodations and excursion sites.