

- GrassPlot Newsletter No. 5 -

21 January 2019

Dear current and potential members of the GrassPlot Consortium,

Happy New Year and all the best for 2019. During the last months our database experienced a very dynamic development, thus we can present here after only three months again a Newsletter full with new information. Most importantly the second paper from the GrassPlot database has just been submitted, while two more papers to be written in the near future are initiated now and call for your involvement. Soon, the first two years of the GrassPlot Consortium are approaching an end. It is thus time to start the procedure for the election of the new GrassPlot Governing Board for the period 2019–2021 – we seek fresh volunteers and your nominations are welcome.

Last but not least, we hope that many of you will use the field season 2019 to collect new high-quality nested plot data of grassland types and/or regions that are hitherto underrepresented in GrassPlot and contribute them to our common database. With the GrassPlot publications taking up speed it is now evident what enormous benefit can come from contributing such valuable data – beyond the original purpose for which they might have been sampled.

Looking forward to a constructive and productive cooperation in 2019,

The GrassPlot Governing Board

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Current status of GrassPlot

The current GrassPlot version 1.28 contains **169 datasets, including 186,749 plots and 4,654 nested-plot series** with at least four grain sizes, which is a plus of 43 datasets, 17,752 plots and 1,857 nested-plot series compared to GrassPlot 1.00 reported in the first paper. The spatial coverage has much improved compared to GrassPlot 1.00 (see Fig. 1). However, there are still many **major gaps, particularly in Russia, Middle East, Middle, Central and East Asia and for nested-plot data from everywhere**. Therefore you are encouraged to collect and contribute further data and spread the word about GrassPlot.

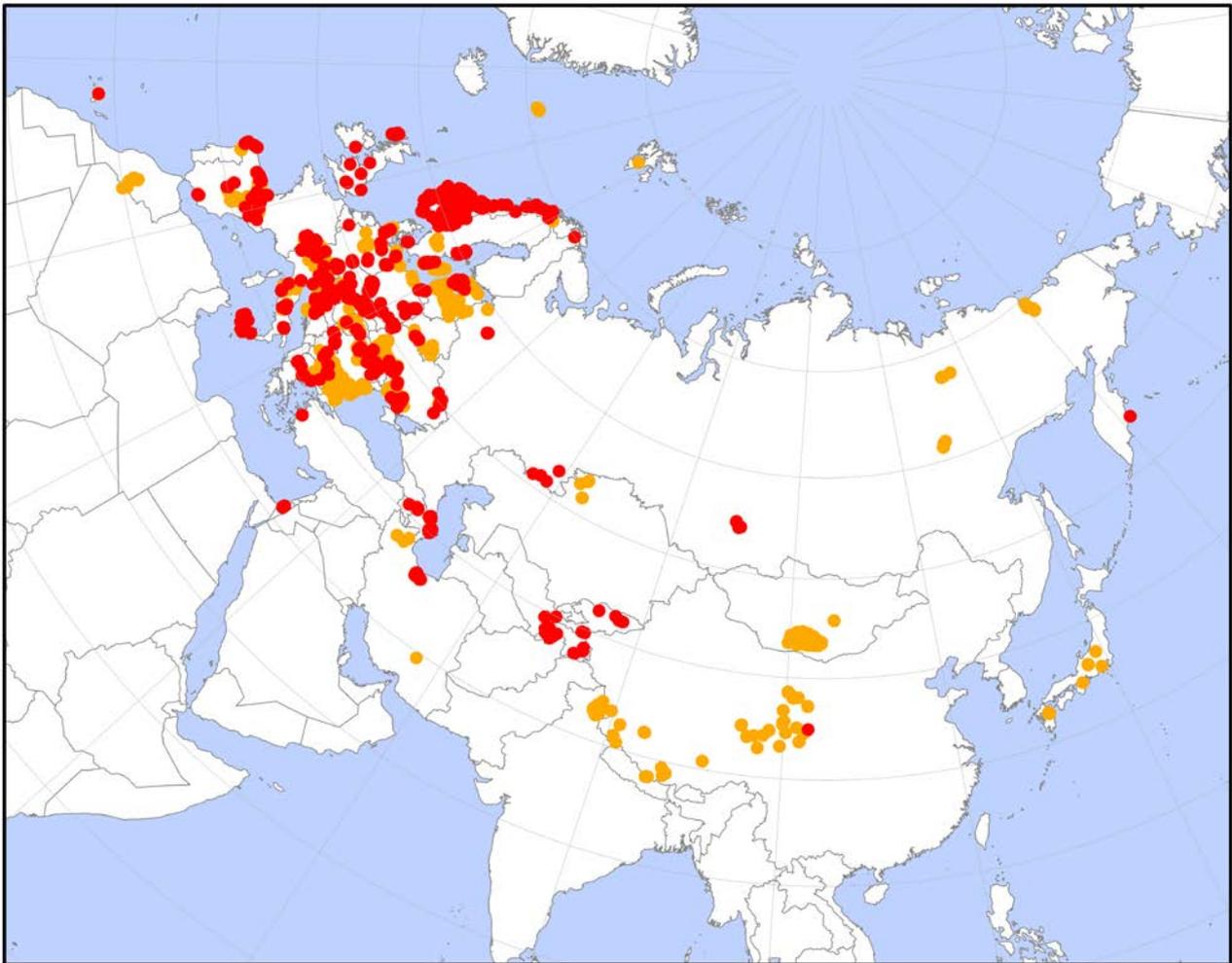


Fig. 1. Spatial coverage of GrassPlot version 1.28 (as of 20 January 2019). Red = nested-plot series with at least four grain sizes, orange = other plots.

Several members of the GrassPlot Consortium have worked very hard during the last months to fill and harmonize many important header data, like grassland type, region, land use and its different facets. Other Consortium members have worked hard to prepare the compositional data. A big thank you to all of them because our exciting papers would not be possible without these efforts.

The GrassPlot Consortium now has 260 members. The modified GrassPlot Bylaws have been unanimously approved on 31 December 2018. Based on the communication with the owners of the respective member datasets, we are currently working towards making the suitable data from GrassPlot (i.e. plots of 1 m² and more with available compositional data) available also in

EVA and sPlot, respectively, if the owners wish and the data are not already in EVA/sPlot via another database.

New achievements

On 20 January, Jürgen Dengler together with 44 co-authors from the GrassPlot Consortium managed to submit the **GrassPlot paper #04** as an invited manuscript to a Special Issue of *Journal of Biogeography*. The title is "**Species-area relationships in continuous vegetation: evidence from Palaeartic grasslands**". We got many exciting results and now look forward to the reviews and the editor's decision. Since the results were far too numerous for one paper, we decided to split this paper into three papers #04A (the submitted one), #04B which is already far developed (see opt-in call below) and a third potential paper (scale-dependence of z-values), which has not been started yet and which is available to interested lead authors from the Consortium.

In November/December an international group of leading researchers (led by Jürgen Dengler and Werner Ulrich) has also prepared a proposal for **two sDiv-Workshops, entitled "sCALE – Towards multidimensionality in community assembly: linking multiple ecological distributions across spatial scales"**. These workshops would use the GrassPlot database as a core ingredient but also explore ecological scaling laws theoretically and by simulations. We succeeded to pass the first hurdle and are now invited to prepare a full proposal until mid-March. The formal constraints on such sDiv workshops are very high, meaning that actually only few members of the GrassPlot Consortium could be included in the putative list of workshop participants. However, if the workshops should be funded and exciting papers are going to be produced with GrassPlot data, these papers would go through the normal GrassPlot opt-in process, allowing many of you to become active co-authors even if you could not physically attend the workshops.

On 28 February, **Iwona Dembicz** from the GrassPlot Governing Board will present a **keynote talk about GrassPlot on the 18th German Conference on Vegetation Databases** in Triesdorf, Bavaria. Further, Jürgen Dengler will give an oral presentation on the results of GrassPlot papers #04A and #04B at the Macroecology 2019 Conference in Würzburg, Bavaria, in March.

Initiation of two new opt-out papers

Herewith we initiate two new opt-out papers to be prepared in the near future:

GrassPlot paper #01B: Update of the GrassPlot Long Database Report in *Phytocoenologia*): Target journal is *Palaeartic Grasslands*.

GrassPlot paper #02 (Benchmarking Palaeartic grassland diversity): The target journal for this paper is not yet clear and we welcome plausible suggestions. Since this, according to the GrassPlot Bylaws, is an opt-out paper, all co-authors of the *Phytocoenologia* paper plus the representatives of the newly joined datasets will automatically become co-authors unless they opt out. All owners of several datasets provided by Milan Chytrý specifically for this paper will also be co-authors.

You find further details in the attachments.

Opt-in procedure for GrassPlot paper #04B

As indicated above, we split-off a part of the original paper project #04. **Paper #04B (“Patterns and drivers of small-scale beta-diversity in Palaeartic grasslands”)** will the relationship of z-values to a wide array of different factors. While the analyses are more or less finished and half of a manuscript draft already exists, according to our Bylaws still other potential co-authors could opt in.

If you are interested, you should send your **opt-in request to Jürgen Dengler by 4 February 2019, stating why you are interested in this paper and what you would like to contribute as co-author**. Note that up to one co-author per dataset that contributed nested-plot data with at least four grain sizes to paper #04B is basically allowed, but in the end only those persons will be listed as co-authors who made an intellectual contribution. Datasets can decide to nominate a different member for paper #04B than for #04A. Please note that those who originally opted in for paper #04, but did not make an intellectual contribution until the split of the papers would have to opt in a second time if they want to participate in paper #04B. According to the GrassPlot Bylaws, 4 February is also the deadline until when owners of suitable restricted datasets can agree that they are used in this paper and owners of semi-restricted datasets can decline the use for this particular paper.

Start of the elections: nomination period

The term of duty of the current **Governing Board** is going to end in early March 2019. We need **seven dedicated and active members for the next Governing Board for the period 2019–2021**. Some of the current members might also run for another term of duty, but we specifically need people who have capacities and want to get active in the further development of GrassPlot during the next two years. We therefore ask you to send nominations of GrassPlot members for the election to the Custodian juergen.dengler@uni-bayreuth.de with a subject line “[GrassPlot] Nomination”. You can nominate other GrassPlot members whom you would like to see in the next Governing Board, but **we particularly welcome self-nominations**. **Nominations are possible until 8 February 2019, 24:00 CET**. All nominees will then be asked whether they are willing to stand for the election and to provide a **photo of themselves as well as a short “biosketch” (200 words maximum)** in which they explain who they are, what they contributed to GrassPlot so far and what their visions for GrassPlot during the next two years and their possible contributions to these are. In case of self-nominations, please already include a biosketch and photo. The actual elections will then take place in February over a period of at least two weeks.

Options for PhD and Postdoc scholarships with GrassPlot projects

Manuel Steinbauer and **Jürgen Dengler** would like to push forward the production of exciting GrassPlot paper projects by inviting applications for PhD and Postdoc scholarships using GrassPlot data. The projects of different length could be carried out either in Manuel’s research Group at University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, or at Jürgen’s research group at ZHAW, Wädenswil, Switzerland. Manuel and Jürgen, respectively, would develop together with the interested applicant a convincing project to be submitted to one of the national funding schemes for foreign scholars in **Germany or Switzerland**, respectively. These funding schemes are quite competitive, but our idea is that if one application fails in one of the countries, you could use the same application with some formal adjustment just in the respective other country to double your chances of acceptance. If you are from outside Germany or Switzerland and interested in such an opportunity, please get into contact with manuel.steinbauer@fau.de and juergen.dengler@uni-bayreuth.de. Before doing so, you should

have familiarized yourself with the GrassPlot data and the many options of exciting analyses based on them (see for example, the previous GrassPlot Newsletters).

Compositional data and cooperation with EVA and sPlot

Currently some GrassPlot members are spending great efforts in preparing the compositional data which more than 90% of our members contributed along the richness and environmental data. Once the compositional data are in a status that they can be use, many more exciting GrassPlot studies will become possible.

Moreover, the we also intend to provide those GrassPlot data of grain sizes $\geq 1 \text{ m}^2$ that are not anyway in EVA and sPlot to these European and global megadatabase, respectively. Of course we only will do this with your explicit consent; therefore you will be approached by us individually in the near future.

Cooperation with DarkDivNet

Many teams worldwide joined the **new global research network "DarkDivNet"** (<https://www.botany.ut.ee/macroecology/en/darkdivnet>), launched by Meelis Pärtel during the 61st IAVS symposium. Main task of the DarkDivNet teams is to collect at least 32-96 high-quality 100 m² plots (with vascular plants) in their sites, by the end of the current year. The GrassPlot consortium agreed to support the DarkDivNet initiative for mutual benefit.

Therefore, we encourage all GrassPlot consortium members to join the research network DarkDivNet and, if your plots will come from open habitats in the Palaearctic, they will be highly welcomed in the GrassPlot Database too. With little more effort you could add some smaller grain sizes to make your plots even more valuable for GrassPlot! Likewise, DarkDivNet will encourage its consortium members to contribute data to GrassPlot. Doing a combined high-quality sampling that fits the protocols of both networks is a very efficient way to become co-authors of a whole bunch of high-rank papers.

So if you have some "spare time" in 2019, why not establishing a DarkDivNet site in your surroundings and sampling the DarkDivNet 100-m² plots that fall into open habitats with the EDGG multi-scale methodology (Dengler et al. 2016, Bull. Eurasian Dry Grassl. Group 32: 13–30). Further information on DarkDivNet is attached.