SCCS Europe 2023 – Student Conference on Conservation Science

Connecting East and West Europe in Conservation Biology

SCCS conference has been organized over the past 21 years by Cambridge University and its associates. So far, they have hosted over 3419 delegates from 136 countries worldwide in parallel SCCS conferences in Australia, Beijing, Bangalore, New York and Hungary (SCCS, 2023). In 2015, Hungary joined this event and started to organize conferences having the Centre of Ecological Research as a corresponding host.

This year the 8th SCCS Europe Conference was held between 13–16 September 2023 in Balatonvilágos, Hungary. 37 participants from 10 countries from Europe and beyond gathered during the three-day conservation conference Conservation topics from scientists in the early stages of their research careers were brought together.

The conference program included keynote talks, student sessions, workshops and poster sessions. The first day's topic was the protection and conservation of insects. It was opened by Dr. Ante Vujić the first key speaker. He teaches a number of courses in Environment and Conservation Biology at the University of Novi Sad, Department of Biology and Ecology. Professor Vujić gave an overview of the hoverflies' ecology, taxonomy and conservation. He raised the issue of the lack of taxonomists for the countries and the importance of their role in conservation. This plenary was followed by the students' presentations. The addressed topics were: “Local and landscape-scale effects of diverse, large-scale wildflower plantings on cavity-nesting hymenopterans”, “The identification of unknown samples of honeybee wings from India using geometric morphometrics” and finally “How the drainage canals support Orthoptera assemblages in the European lowland region”.

An interesting workshop was held on the first day by Dr. Mark Brown. He is a professor of Evolutionary Ecology and Conservation at Royal Holloway University of London. For his workshop, a task was assigned to groups of four people. Each group worked separately before the conference, preparing a summary of an article of free choice. The task was to summarize and present it. Once in the workshop, the challenge was to re-summarize it in a clearer and more understandable way for a specific audience
(e.g. students, elder people, entrepreneurs, decision-makers, politicians). The objective of the workshop was to demonstrate the importance of effective communication of scientific results. Participants were encouraged to practice their skills of didactic and effective communication strategies, by using simple phrases, addressing clear points, using visual tools and being quick so the audience's attention is not lost. The importance of implementing effective communication strategies when communicating science was highlighted. What was practiced in the workshop will be useful for future presentations of research work, poster designs and even for showing project proposals to convince founders.

During the second part of the first conference day, three more students' presentations took place. The topics were: "Nontarget catches of trap with chemical lures reveal bush crickets' (Tettigoniidae) flower visitation, pollination, and feeding", "How weather and body size affect survival, senescence and detectability in a natural butterfly population" and "Leave uncut strips on hay meadows to support arthropods". The day finished with dinner and a beer tasting at the local brewery.

The second day started with the plenary of Dr. Balázs A. Lukács. He is a senior research fellow at the Institute of Aquatic Ecology, Centre for Ecological Research. He presented his work on "Unifying research underwater and land for effective freshwater conservation". His work advances sustainable water management techniques. He tackled socio-economic issues related to freshwater restoration, including the impact of fishermen on freshwaters and the application of the Water Framework Directive.

The student's session this day included topics related to landscape, microclimate, vegetation and occurrence and protection of vertebrates. Some of the presented research projects were: "Geomorphological diversity and canopy cover: the effects of canopy gaps on the microclimate and species composition of dolines", "Effects of different grassland management regimes on the density of the Hungarian meadow viper (Vipera ursinii rakosiensis)", Global habitat suitability mapping of a group of avian pollinators (sunbirds, Nectariniidae), etc.

The afternoon plenary and workshop were led by Tamara Mitrofanenko. She is working as an expert in the field of regional sustainable development as part of the team of the United Nations Environment Program office in Vienna. She presented the topic "Facilitating biodiversity protection and implementation of Agenda 2030 in the Carpathian Region". Her presentation put emphasis on the richness of the Carpathian region in cultural history, traditional and ecological knowledge that is vital for the preservation of both nature and cultural landscapes. Under this main idea, the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (the Carpathian Convention) was presented. Participants were asked to draw connections between the Convention's activities and the SDGs (sustainable development goals) and offer ideas and proposals for how experts in the area of conservation biology, particularly those in their early stages of careers, can help with these initiatives.

The plenary was an introduction to the workshop of Dr. Mitrofanenko, where people used the principles from the presented Framework to experiment with the Causal Loop Diagram technique. The aim was to think about specific connections (and possible trade-offs or synergies) between SDG, conservation and other Carpathian Convention subjects including sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, agriculture, rural development, transport and others. Recommendations about linking biodiversity with other important sustainable development topics resulting from the exercise will be taken for the Carpathian Convention by Dr. Mitrofanenko.

Best presentations and posters were recognized during the conference's closing ceremony. Individualized support from the Oryx team to help in publishing scientific

work and books from Cambridge University Press were the prizes. Two of this year's winners are students of MATE. Bhraaz Kashyap bachelor student who participated with his work "Comparative study of habitats & sustainability of natural & reintroduced populations of greater one-horned rhinoceros" and Johanna Maribel Soria Aguirre Ph.D. candidate who participated with her work entitled "Herptérkép citizen science project – survey about the experience of the participants" (ECOLORES 2023: Awards for the most outstanding presentations. SCCS Ecolores. https://sccs.ecolres.hu/node/295).

The conference was closed with a hike in the area of the Kis-Balaton. It is part of the Balaton Uplands National Park. In this area, wetland reconstruction was conducted which led to a rich avifauna. Designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), it covers 14 745 hectares. The following bird species can be seen Ixobrychus minutus; Nycticorax nycticorax; Ardeola ralloides; Egretta alba; Ardea purpurea; Platalea leucorodia; Anser fabalis; Anser albifrons; Anser anser etc.

The small-scale format maintained by SCCS allows for interactions with experts and keynote speakers. Participating in SCCS resulted in a valuable experience for early career professionals in the fields of ecology, environmental science, resource management, geography, economics, and social sciences. Besides practicing skills in presenting the research findings, it is a great opportunity to learn from each other, make international connections for future cooperative work and meet with experts in the field who can offer guidance in future careers.

Award session for best talks and posters SCCS 2023

Johanna Maribel Soria Aguirre
Department of Nature Conservation and Landscape Management
Institute for Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation
Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE)
Szent István Campus, Gödöllő