

## 6220 Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals (*Thero-Brachypodietea*)

Management of Natura 2000 habitats. Summary



*Xerophile pseudo-steppic grassland on calcareous soil. Murcia (SE Spain). Photo: Alfonso San Miguel-Ayanz*

Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals includes a variety of xeric, termophilic and mostly open Mediterranean perennial and annual grasslands growing on usually eutrophic, but also oligotrophic, soils. Three major sub-types should be considered: one of perennial basophile rather hard short-grass communities, included in *Lygeo-Stipetalia*; another one of very dense and short but highly productive perennial summer drying swards, created by intense and continuous livestock activity, included in *Poetalia bulbosae*; and a last one of pioneer and ephemeral basophilous annual grasslands, included in *Brachypodietalia (Trachynietalia) distachyae*. The diversity of plant, invertebrate and vertebrate communities is usually high.

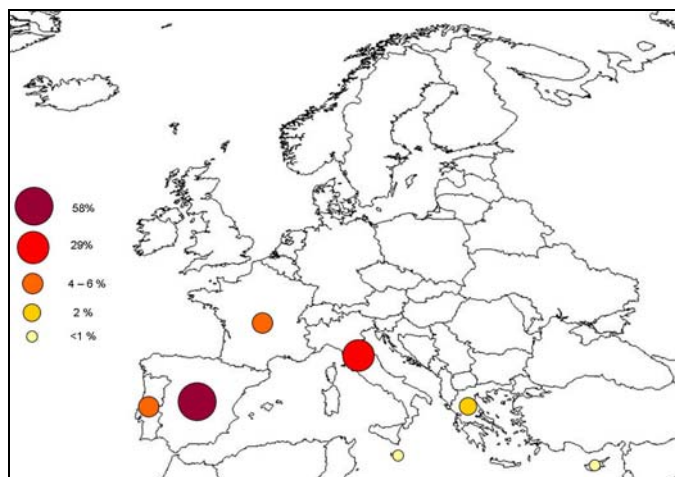
Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals has a typical Mediterranean distribution, with a significant area located in the Iberian Peninsula (mostly in Spain), followed by Italy, France, Greece, Cyprus and Malta.

The habitat has been favoured by traditional management schemes and contributes to the so-called cultural landscapes. It usually occurs in a mosaic pattern with a wide variety of related habitats, many of them also included in the 92/43 EEC Directive. As a consequence, a high number of animal species protected by that Directive depend, to a higher or lesser degree, on this habitat type. That is why a holistic perspective is needed when considering conservation management models.

Too low a grazing intensity will result in scrub encroachment, a reduction in biodiversity and an increased risk of wild fires. For *Poetalia bulbosae* communities, experience shows that this will lead to their disappearance due to rapid changes in floristic composition. Therefore, grazing (particularly sheep grazing) is essential for the long-term maintenance of this habitat.

Regular scrub clearing on small to medium-size irregular plots and silvicultural treatments on related forests and coppices are advisable as complementary measures, as well as the conservation or restoration of traditional infrastructures (water points, hedges, stone walls) and nearby small agricultural plots. A light phosphoric fertilization is recommended for *Poetalia bulbosae* communities; however, fertilization with other nutrients or on other 6220 habitat type communities should be banned.

Restoration of 6220 habitat type communities from overgrown sites will require scrub clearing and intense grazing for many years. Other relevant measures are reducing or banning the use of pesticides and herbicides, protecting the habitat from urbanization processes, control of tourism activity when necessary, promoting livestock quality labels, improving living conditions for shepherds and implementing new land management strategies.



Percentage distribution of the total surface of pseudo-steppes with grasses and annuals of the *Thero-Brachypodietea* in Natura 2000

The complete text of the document is available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/best\\_practice\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/management/best_practice_en.htm)

Management of Natura 2000 habitats is a project launched by the European Commission in January 2007 aimed at defining best practices for management of habitat types included in Annex I of the Habitat Directive (92/43/EEC) that need active recurring management. Twenty six habitat types that are representative of different bio-geographical regions have been considered.