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NATURE AND LANDSCAPE STUDY TRAIL ON NAGY-EGED HILL

Steppe meadow



The small, grassy spots evolved here recall the eastern woody steppes. Long-known plant species, like pasqueflower, pheasant's eye or feather grass, find conditions on the Nagy-Eged's hillside similar to those in Eurasia. These conditions are due to the relatively low annual rainfall, furthermore rain water runs fast down the hill. Water holding capacity is low in the shallow soil, hence the hillside is quite dry. As southern orientation and high sun angle result in slightly warmer microclimate, this area provides good habitat also for submediterranean-climate species.

Due to its climate and its wildlife, Nagy-Eged is similar to other Hungarian sub-mediterranean regions, like Badacsony, Sas-hill in Buda, Sár-hill in Gyöngyös and Kopasz-hill in Tokaj.

Preserving these regions having such a peculiar climate is very important. Only here can the wildlife of former times survive the constantly changing climate conditions even during unfavourable weather periods. So thus, after the conditions change for the better, it can proliferate and revitalize the natural bioenvironment.

For the early blooming the **greater pasqueflower** gains energy conserved from previous year by the underground root. Its spectacular achene fruits spread with the wind, the sharp seeds are burrowed in the ground. If the seeds get moistened, their feathery tails get untwisted and make the seeds burrow deeper.



The extremely poisonous **spring pheasant's eye** (*Adonis vernalis*) is avoided by grazing animals. In spite of it, the population of this plant has declined, especially on the Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld). Habitats of the plant have been squeezed out by turning it into agricultural land, furthermore pheasant's eye was also collected for its spectacular flowers and for medicinal purposes. Its diuretic effect has long been known, it was used to treat kidney and heart diseases as herbal remedy. The collection of the plant in large quantities made its protection necessary.



In May blooms the highly protected early **spider-orchid** (*Ophrys sphegodes*), a rare submediterranean plant of Eged. The plant uses mimicry - the flowers resemble a spider - to entice the pollinators. The **lady orchid** (*Orchis purpurea*) has more spectacular, dense, cylindrical inflorescence. The plant often reaches half a metre (20 in) of height. It is more common than early spider-orchid, yet legally protected, as all species of orchids in Hungary.



The protected **white dittany** (*Dictamnus albus*) also blooms in early summer. Its strong-smelling, bitter root was used in traditional medicine for numerous diseases, however the plant is toxic and causes skin irritation. The whole plant contains volatile oils, it has characteristic lemon-like smell. White dittany should be avoided as it can cause severe rash when it comes into contact with the skin.

Iris variegata occurs in steppes, in scrub forests and in warm-temperate oak forests. It takes its name (Iris) from the Greek goddess of the rainbow. *Iris variegata* is related to the highly protected Hungarian leafless iris (*Iris aphylla* ssp. *hungarica*) appearing on the back of the 20 Forint coin.



In early summer can be observed the eye-catching fluffy inflorescence of **feather grass** swaying in the wind. It is a peculiar plant of dry meadows and hillsides. Due to breaking up sods and the forestation, there are less and less habitats for these plants. All species of feather grass are legally protected in Hungary.

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