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NATURE AND LANDSCAPE STUDY TRAIL ON NAGY-EGED HILL Scrub forest with mahaleb cherry and pubescent oak



The dominant tree species of this forest community is pubescent oak (*Quercus pubescens*). This tree species grows up to 3-4 m and develops several trunks like a shrub, and has rough bark. Its name comes from the young shoots which are softly pubescent and the lower leaf surface also has soft tomentum. The ovoid acorns are hardly 1 cm long, edible and grow in large amount. During famines acorns used to be consumed ground into flour.

Today expansive forests dominated by pubescent oak exist only in the Balkan region, in Hungary this species occurs mostly in dry carst scrub forests.

Smoke bush (*Cotinus coggygria*) is very common in the bush layer of pubescent oak scrub forests. In autumn this submediterranean plant turns red. In October, the leaves of Tatar maple (*Acer tataricum*) and of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) take on a yellow color. The white flowers of wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*) and of common hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) bloom in spring and the autumn fruits of these plants are eaten by songbirds. **Bladder-senna** (*Coleutea arborescens*) is also a Mediterranean plant species.



The other typical tree species of this forest community is **mahaleb cherry** (*Prunus mahaleb*). Although it occurs here only sparsely, its sweet-smelling flowers adorn the hillside of Nagy-Eged in spring. Its mid-summer ripening fruit is small, with bitter flavour and it is a beloved food of blackbirds, but it is also used as spice and herbal remedy in Mediterranean region.

Dwarf cherry (*Prunus fruticosa*), which is closely related to mahaleb cherry, occurs here in big quantity. It is a typical plant of carst scrub forests and steppe meadows. Its small, coral red fruits are edible, however they taste very sour.



Eurasian treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) clings to the tree trunk with its curved claws, and picks small insects from crevices in the bark with its sharp beak. Treecreeper is one of the smallest birds in Europe, and its camouflage plumage makes it difficult to spot. This tiny bird usually builds its nest in crevices on the trunk or under loose bark.



Sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*) hunts on warm, stony ground. Its brown camouflage color makes it difficult to spot. Males turn bright green during the mating season. The males often fight over female mates in this season, and that often leads to losing the tail, which then grows back. The female lizard lays 10-12 soft-shelled eggs in the ground, leaving them to be incubated by the warmth of the sunlit ground. The eggs hatch in early August, after hatching the juvenile lizards start to hunt straight away. Their diet is mostly based on spiders, smaller butterflies and insects.



The herb layer of the pubescent oak scrub forest is also vivid. In spring snowdrop anemone opens its white flowers (*Anemone sylvestris*). Milkwort (*Polygala major*) blooms in early summer producing dark pink flowers. Here grows the highly poisonous **lily of the valley** (*Convallaria majalis*), and the late summer-blooming yellow monkshood (*Aconitum anthora*), which is likewise poisonous. Fragrant Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum odoratum*) and common Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) having big, fan-shaped leaves grow near the trunks of trees. Several Iris species also grow here: in spring bloom dwarf iris (*Iris pumila*) and grass-leaved iris (*Iris graminea*), both producing blue flowers. In early summer taller Iris variegata produces its yellow-variegated flowers.



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