

# *An Outsider's Tour of Conservation Grazing Across Europe*

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WSU Thurston County Extension  
County Director & Regional Agriculture

6-7 Oct 2025

Ethnoecological Seminar  
Nemetzi Botanikus Kert  
Vácrátót, Hungary



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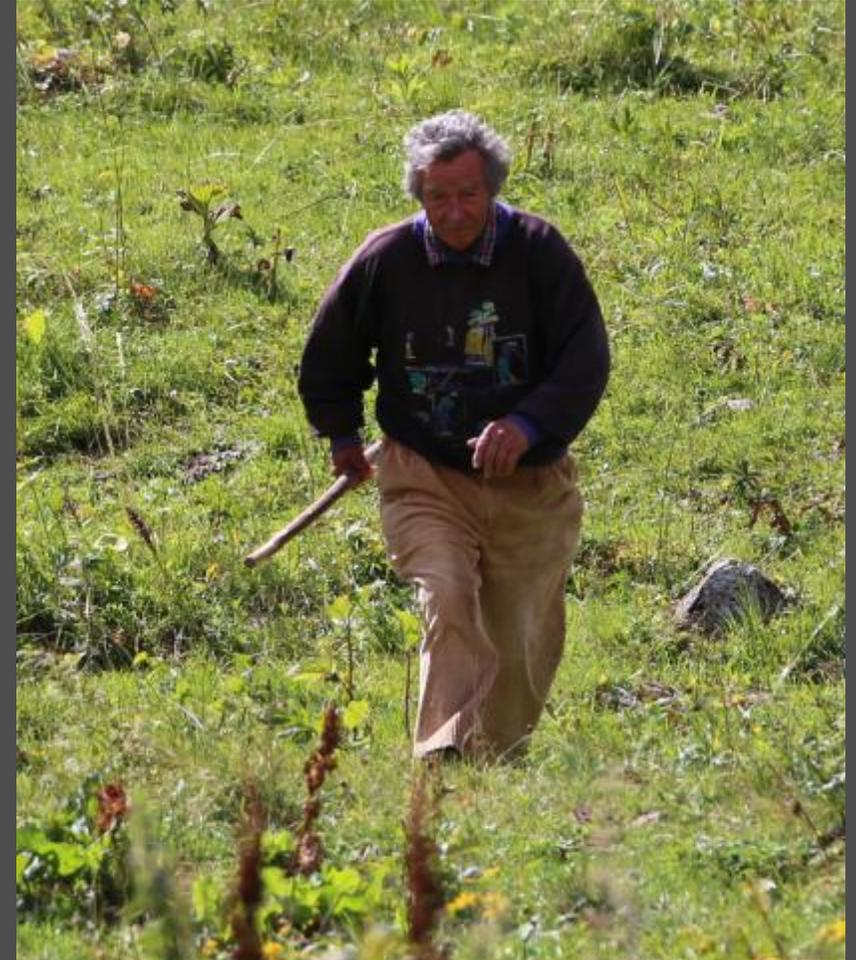


# Overview

1. What is “Conservation Grazing”, as a form of multifunctional farming?
2. What practices are used
3. How effective are the mechanisms of support for integrating grazing and conservation?

*Social – economic – policy – relationships  
– knowledge – motivation*

4. Develop a conservation-grazing training program for Western Washington





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# Washington State Area:



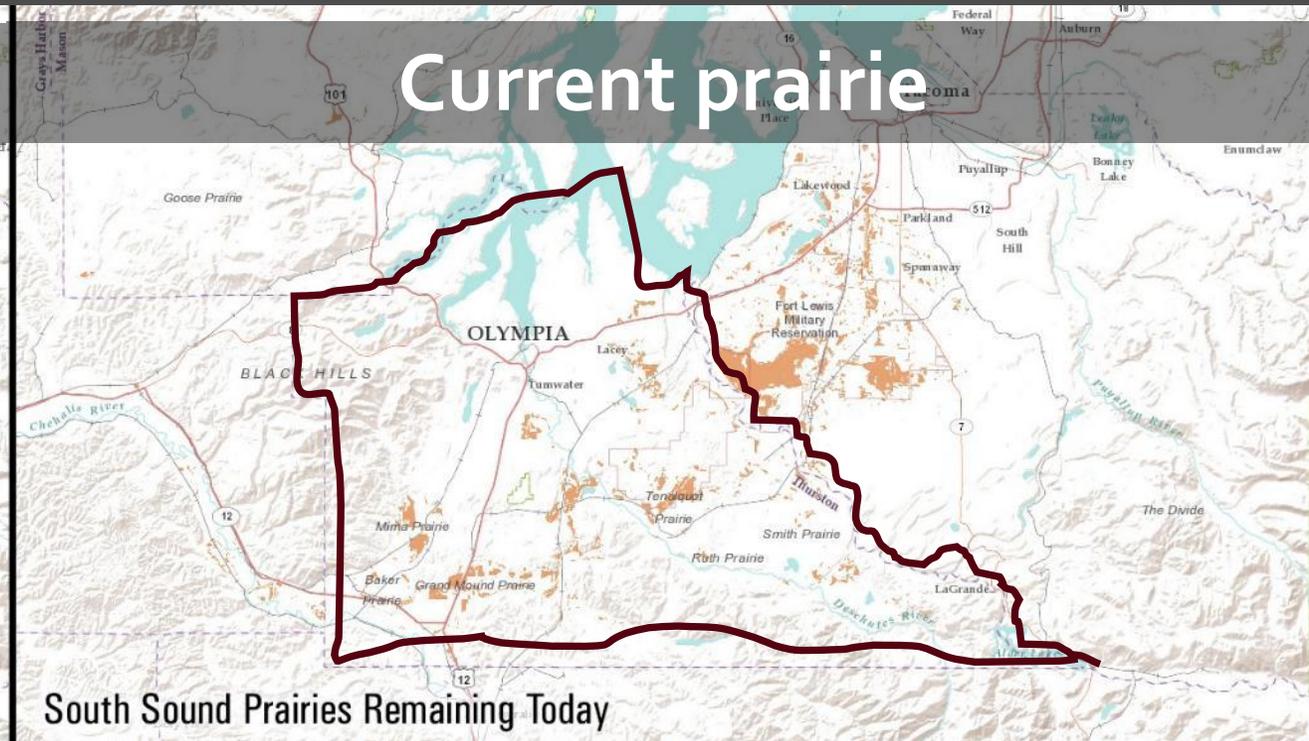
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# Thurston: area

## Thurston County: historic prairie



## Current prairie





# Prairie Resources

## Rare Species

- Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly  
(*Euphydryas edith taylori*)
- Mazama Pocket Gopher  
(*Thomomys mazama*)
- Vesper Sparrow  
(*Pooecetes gramineus affinis*)

*8+ other plants,  
butterflies, and birds*



## Human Uses

- Livestock production
- **Camas – staple bulb of indigenous tribes**
- Wild game (elk)
- Berries
- Medicine

V  
S  
U



# Example Practices Used in Western Washington

- Spring grazing deferment
- Native forb seeding

- Rotational grazing
- Restoration actions



# SW Washington



**rainegrazingservices**  
Fairweather Park



**rainegrazingservices** We finished up the Issaquah Highlands project today all in one piece and have moved onto our next project for the City of Medina at the Fairweather Nature Park.  
[#vegetationmanagement](#) [#grazeagainstthemachine](#) [#goatgrazing](#)  
[#invasivespeciesmanagement](#) [#firefuelreduction](#)  
[#womeninranching](#) [#womeninag](#)

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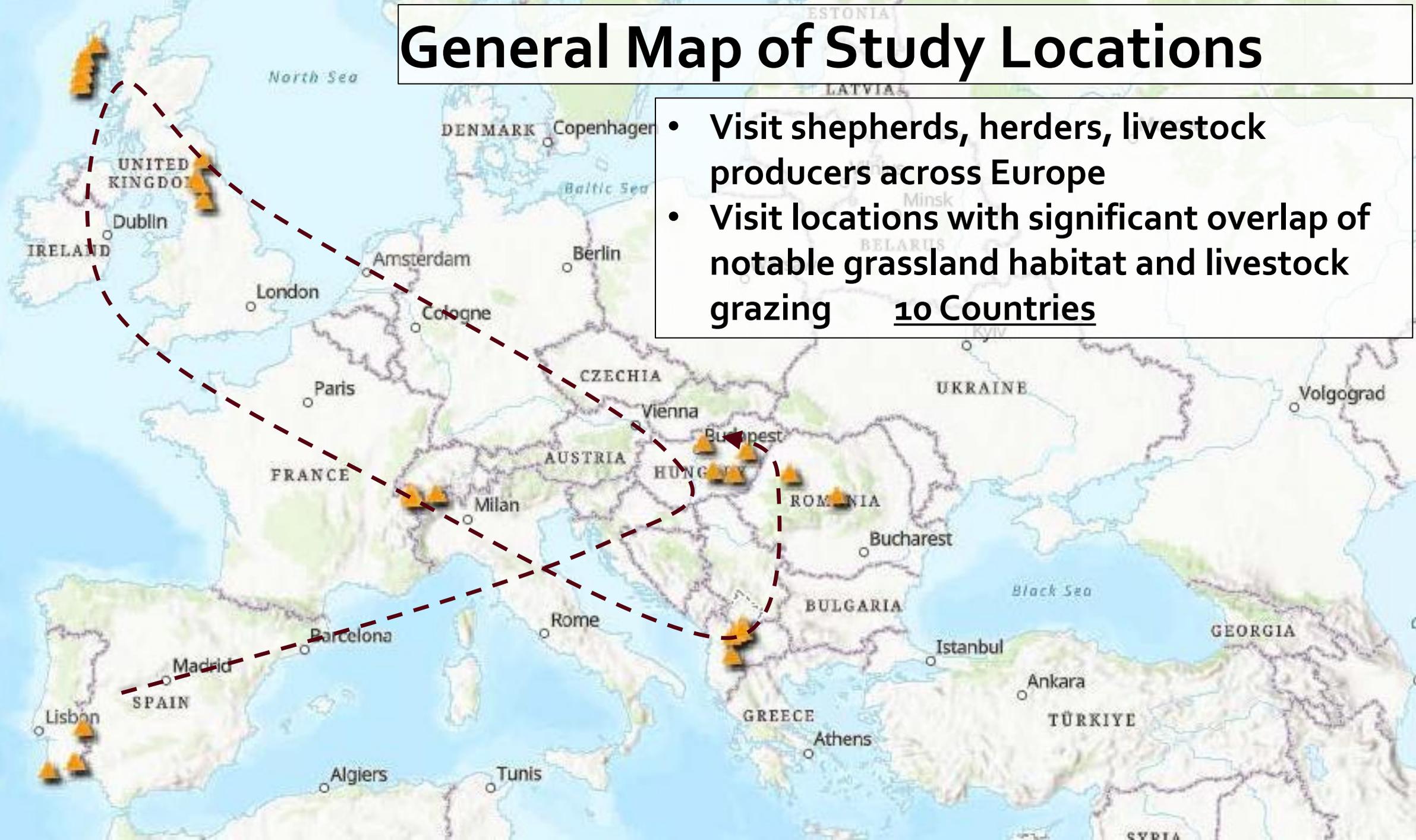


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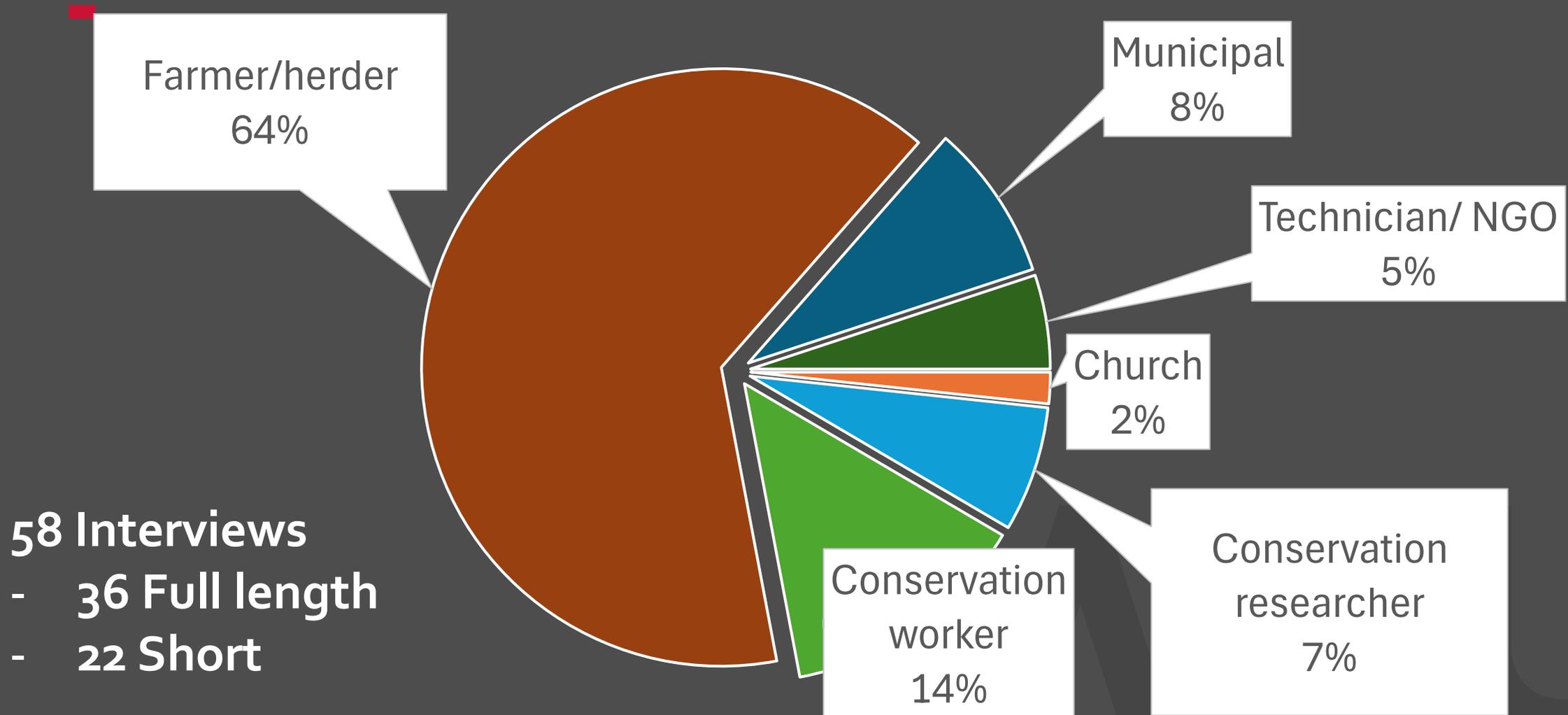
# General Map of Study Locations

- Visit shepherds, herders, livestock producers across Europe
- Visit locations with significant overlap of notable grassland habitat and livestock grazing 10 Countries





# Interviews



# Day 1. Cultural Context

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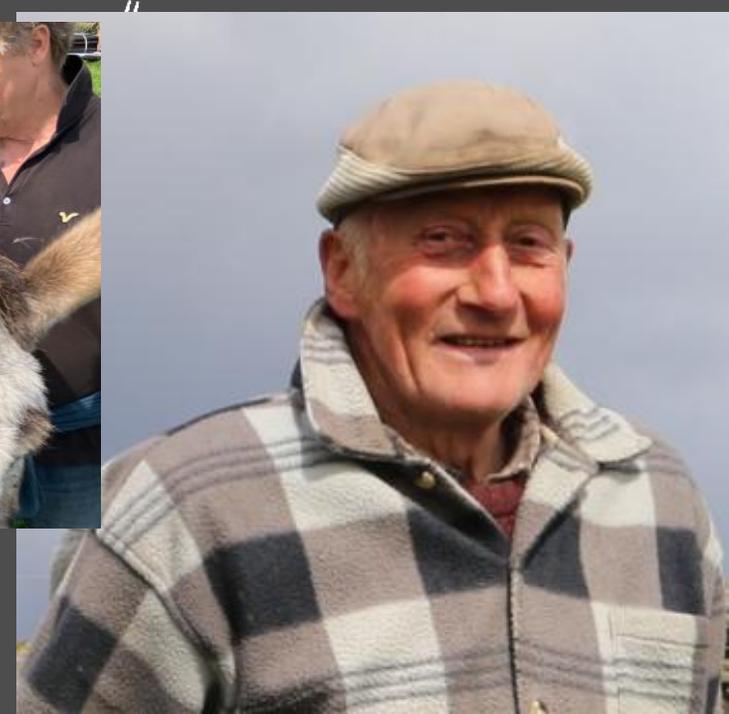
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# How Do Pastoralists (mobile and sedentary) Talk about Conservation and Grazing in European Grasslands?

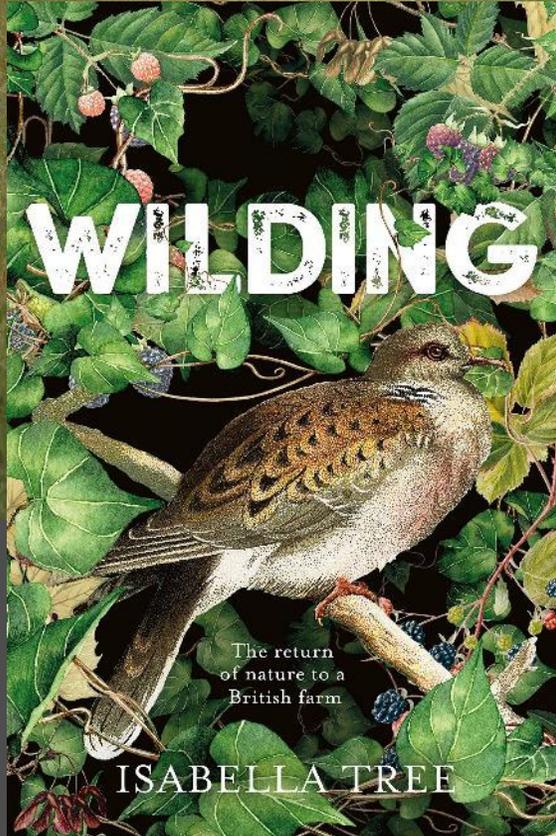
- What is the relationship between traditional grazing customs/communities and the modern concept of wildlife conservation?
- How do producer perspectives vary on wildlife and habitat protection?
- Is the language and concept of wildlife conservation familiar and/or relevant? What language do they use?
- *Indirectly: are perceptions of production and conservation goals compatible?*

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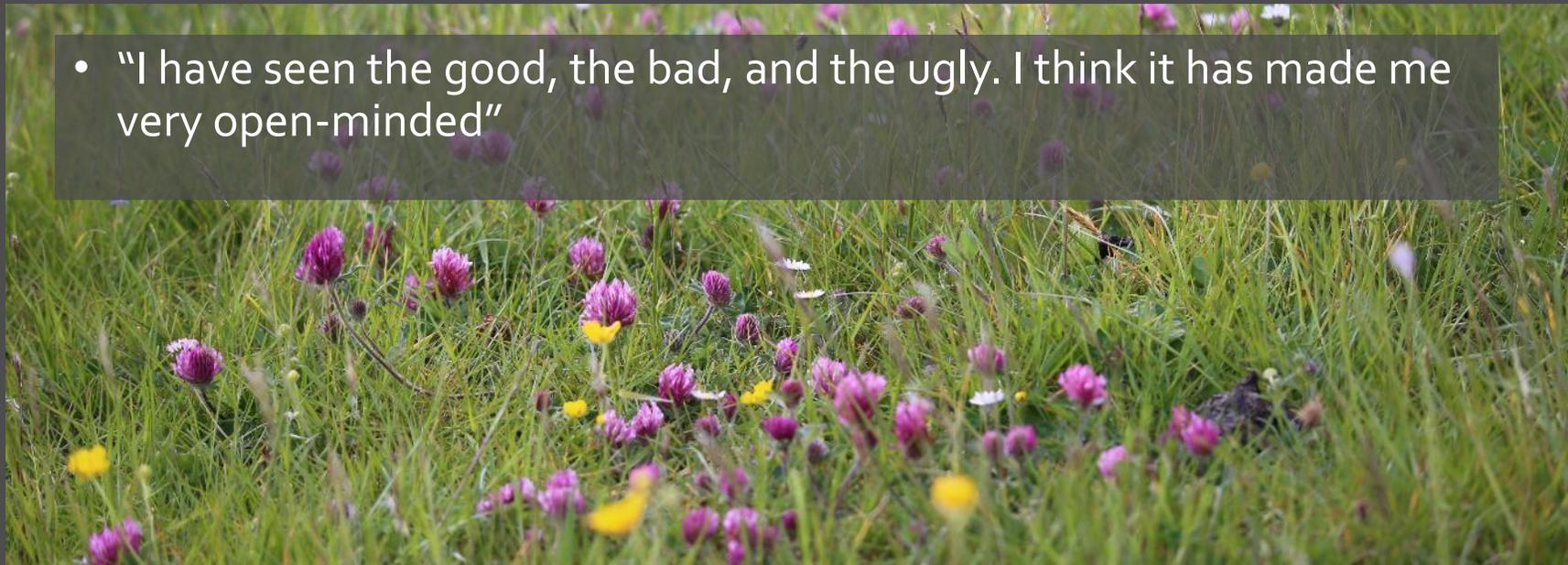
## Hill Gill Farm, Northern England

- Dale ponies + Dalesbred sheep
- Logger, horse-breeder, farmer
- “You can have nature and farm. I want to show you can get nature back without rewilding”





- "I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. I think it has made me very open-minded"



# Hortobagy National Park



- Long-term livestock grazing since ~Bronze Age and before that wild ruminants (Auroch, wild ass...)
- “A natural system has developed here”
- 
- Plant knowledge: palatability, regrowth, seasonal quality, invasive pressure (setaria sp.)

# Hortobagy National Park



- “I am there, next to the pasture”
- Multi-species grazing for forage outcomes
- Difficult to gauge wildlife or habitat concepts (early in trip)
- Understanding conceptual knowledge would take much more time



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# Near Vidigal, Portugal

- Montado: “for me, one of the deep examples of agroforestry in Europe”
- Re-visiting 15<sup>th</sup> century Montado ecology
- “I want to find an occupation of this space with natural solutions. Not pure nature, it does not exist anymore”



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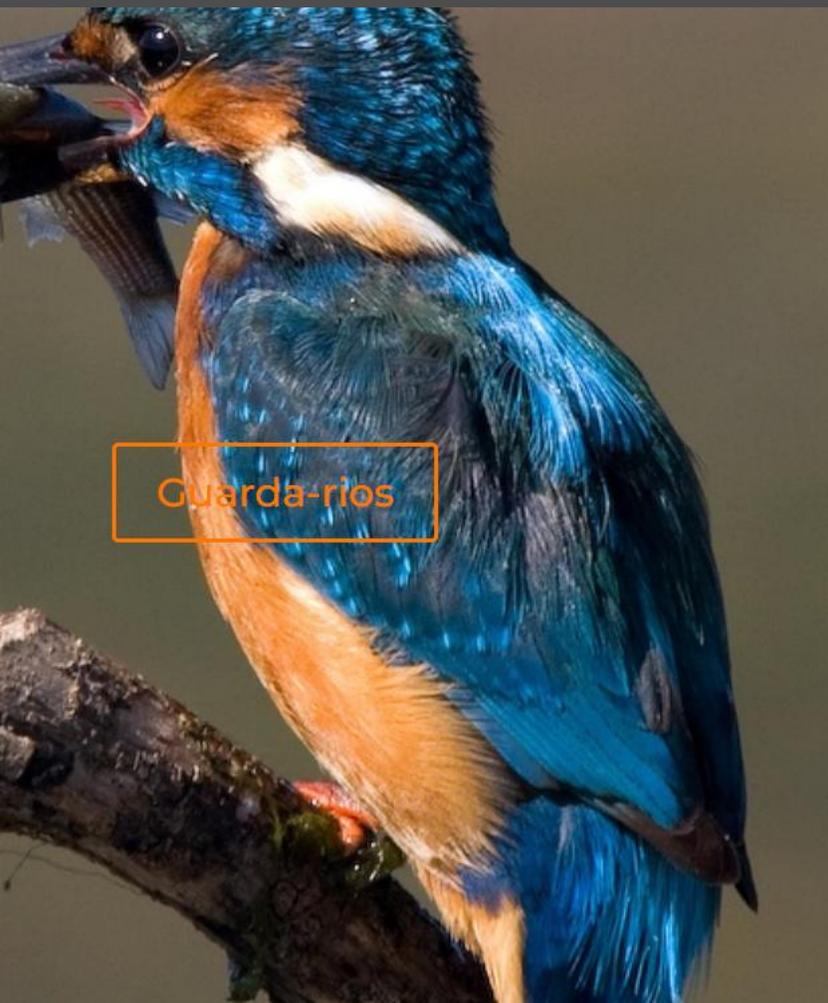
“my grandfather was owning 7,000 ha. You can't imagine the quantity of people living here starving. Everything belonging to one guy and lots of people with nothing. This is a consequence of a non-good relationship with resources, with nature”

“we need an economy that is at least as competitive as things trying to occupy our space”



Para a Ex.<sup>ta</sup> Senhora D. Ana Maria Cortal, com a minha estima e o apelo  
(na Helder de Freixo de Meio - 6 Abril 2008)

Natural values are the goal,  
economy is the means to get there.



Guarda-rios



Mata-bois



Gato-l

# radiant

PROJECT

## Agroecological Production of Sweet Acorn

Sendim, A., Fonseca, A., Vasconcelos, A.C., Monteiro, E.

### Historical Value and Identity

Acorn is the fruit of the Oaks, and the most used for consumption in Alentejo - Portugal is the one from the native Holm oak (*Quercus rotundifolia*), which is the sweetest. Until the 20th century acorn was an important part of the human diet in Portugal, but due to changes in rural



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<https://herdadedefreixodomeio.naturdata.com/>

# Corte Gafo, Portugal



## Regenerating the montado, the last frontier in the desertification process

If you've been to Alentejo, are you familiar with the montado? And do you know that the montado is losing area every year? It's lost due to tree death

- Adaptation, CAP programs, cattle->sheep
  - "Conservation goals are completely compatible with tree, ecosystem, Montado health"



WWSU



- Rest
- Vegetation diversification
- Soil organic matter increase
- Tree recruitment



- “I assume if I can improve soil, I will have many good side effects: tree growth and health, conservation”

# Outer Hebrides, Scotland



- “Look after the land and it will look after us”
- “Balance: some rush, some grass, some iris (for corncrake) and some young heather”
- Complex land ownership history

John Gordon, the Most Hated Man in Scotland



Stòras Uibhist  
Going forward together



## Practical ecological knowledge

- “Stocking rates have become too low, the land is going rank, closing wetland water surface”

## Wildlife perspectives are held up by poor partners

- Awaiting reciprocity (“more respect if NatureScot would engage”)

- 

- Few *thought* partners

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# North Pennines, England

## Traditional customs, compatibility:

- Native seed transfer versus walling and shepherding, which “over time got physically too difficult”
- Son likes working on tractors
- Maintaining their meadows and helping other people maintain species rich meadows

## Wildlife language/concepts:

- Business opportunity creates identification



**North  
Pennines**  
National  
Landscape

WWSU



## Wildlife concepts familiar/relevant:

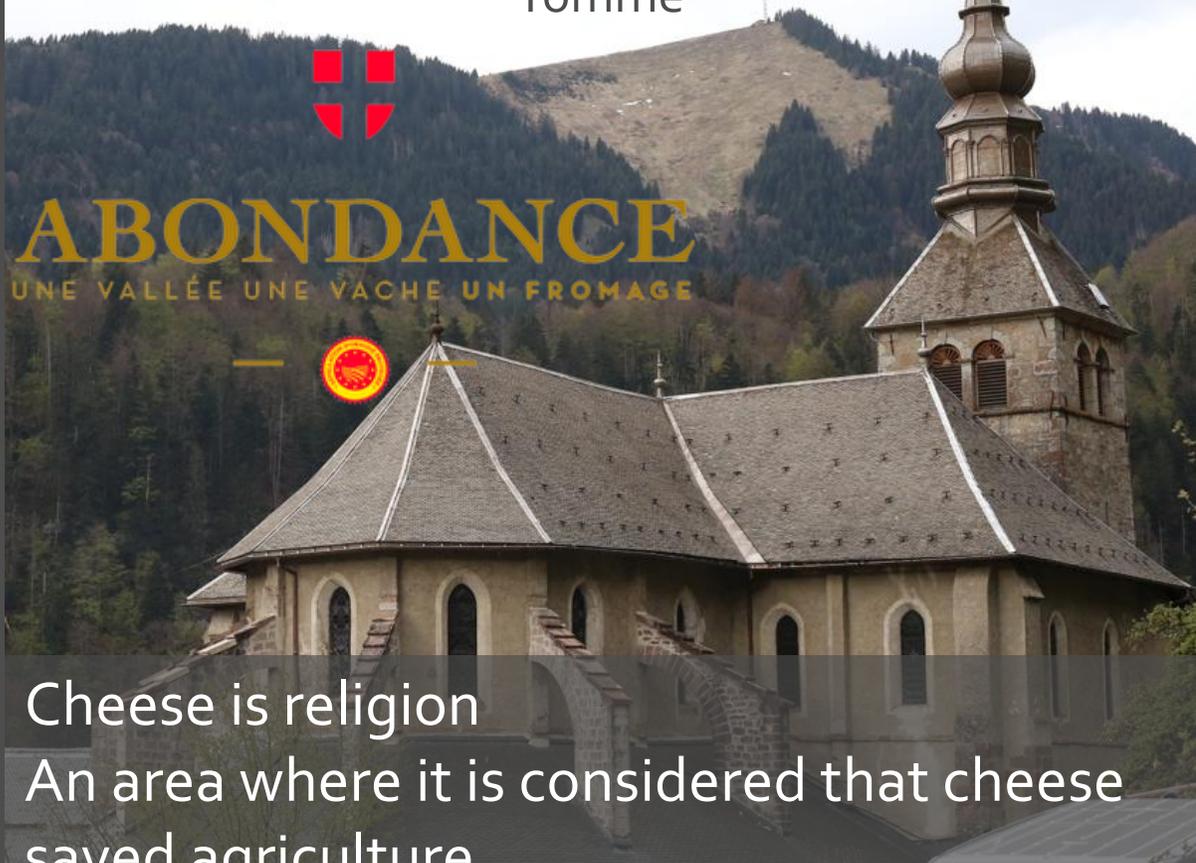
- Native seed harvest/transfer business
- **Goals:** help other farmers increase species richness in their fields, moving towards a rotational system, and liming for increased productivity and soil health.
- 
- From “us against them dynamic” to “reassuring farmers”



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# Haute Savoie, France

Galochard  
Jouly  
Abondance  
Tomme



Cheese is religion  
An area where it is considered that cheese saved agriculture





## Near Cornettes de Bise

### Traditional customs, compatibility:

- Seasonal transhumance
- “Life of fighting” institutions and groups
- Adaptation, creativity (cheese, tourism, book)
- Relation: combative unless respected

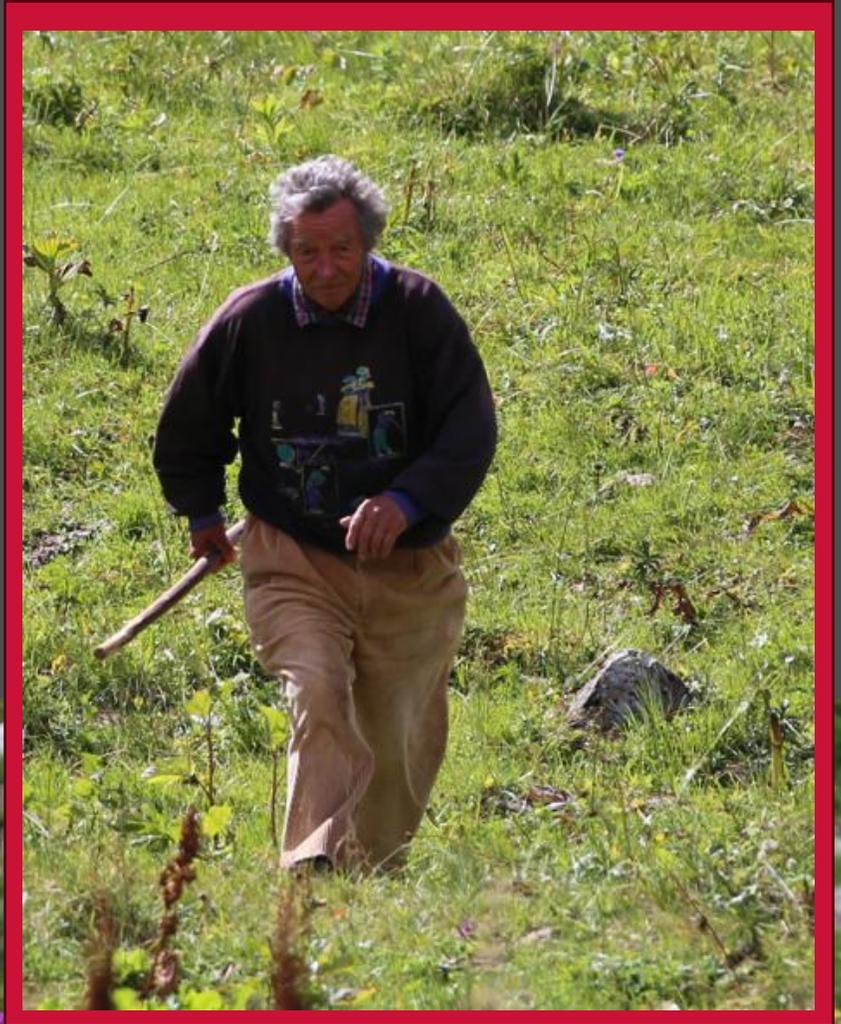
### Wildlife language/concepts:

- Native plant community is stable in an intact system
- Requires maintenance (“clean” pastures”)
- Solid v. liquid manure (“better for flowers”)

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## Perspectives on Wildlife

- Less tampered with plant communities are easier to manage
- Plant knowledge (uneven)
- Farmers: “... for subsidy, no care of pasture”
- Pasture reclamation theory, log strips
- Observation based, independent thinking  
*(thought partner needed)*





## Kosovo, Albania

### Traditional customs, compatibility:

- Seek EU membership
- Large Parks, few employees
- Enforcement > resource management
- V. little known farmer perception
- Compatible (*encroachment*) ↓75%
- No government/Park support

### Wildlife language/concepts:

- Shepherd perception not well known
- Used to manage *Juniperus* sp. (no longer enough people + rules)
  - *Opportunity for collaboration*
- Functional (job, for fun, tradition...)

## Perspectives on Wildlife/Other

- Very little known based on limited interactions
- Curious/observant
- “too much Juniper”, “Pinus sp. has no value”
- Depopulation main issue (200 families to 20 in Shebenik Park)
- “It’s a hard life” (traditional farming in a modernizing world)
- “Come here the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, you will be amazed, 150 species flowers..”
- Without proper support and participation, language of wildlife conservation is out of place to some extent. A process of shared language development would be needed





## **Durham, Northumberland Counties, N. England**

- Marginal land between lowlands and fells
- Strong grazing association and community
- Organic farmers, low-input focus
- High need to reduce costs
- Range: transactional habitat value to eco-farmer

## Traditional customs, compatibility:

- Brexit, reduced payments
- Limited traditional custom (mixed)
- Transactional, conservation compatible with encouragement
- **Wildlife language/concepts:**
  - Language and concepts are relevant
  - Farmers engage selectively, strategically
  - Conservation is “nested” in natural resource management (soil organic matter, soil biology)
  - Historic memory: “corncrake was done in by mechanical haying”
  - No herbicides/fert. Economically good + otter recovery (no resistance to DDT)
  - “Some indicator species you see about, like curlew, we have in half-decent numbers



## Perspectives on Wildlife

- “Want ecological research that helps me be a better farmer, not a better person”
- Unprofitable biodiversity conservation, “Result: Misery” (Dickens 1850)
- “I appreciate biodiversity and wildlife. They are incidental benefits of organic farming”
- “A lot of that stuff, we’ve always had an environmental outlook”
- Of ↑ raptor numbers, “there are more of something they are eating”





## Durham, Northumberland Counties, N. England

### More ecological focus:

- “wilding around the edges”
- “I want a mixture of everything [forages], the more diverse the better”
- “...the whole healthiness of the system”

# Northern England: Lord Ownership

- Absentee owners
- Raise rent if make improvements
- Grouse hunting Lord owner sets stocking rate
- Outstanding wader bird populations
- Habitat is a side issue
- Manage 2,500 ha of fells



# Thank you

Conservation grazing as a form of multifunctional farming is a bit of conundrum. It is like farmers feeling different parts of an elephant and trying to figure out what it is and how best to use it. We are attempting to translate a “foreign system” into existing economic, political, cultural and social settings.

## Special Thanks to Country Partners:

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Conservation  
Grazing Toolkit



# Discussion

- 1. Why is it valuable to recognize the different perspectives, words used by farmers/pastoralists in how they talk about nature? And why is local context important? Discuss with your partner when you have experienced this.
- 2. What do you think each side would think is left out when the other [side] describes or thinks about them? Please make two lists. What does this tell us? What are the potential implications?
- 3. Try to think of an approach, an exercise you could use to bridge the gap between producer experience and conservation experience, (or a different group).