

Montgomeryshire Field Society

Indoor meeting

Saturday 11th February 2017

Talk with slides about Transylvania, focussing on wildflower meadows by Răzvan Chisu

Romania, Răzvan's home country is made up of 3 original kingdoms, Transylvania being the last to be united into Romania after WWI.

Transylvania has a continental climate, temperatures ranging from -14°C in winter to 30°C in summer. The weather is influenced by the steppes of Russia and Eastern Europe and many of the plants Răzvan showed growing wild in great profusion in the hay meadows and grazing lands were steppe-like capable of withstanding very cold temperatures. There were lovely photos of *Centaurea* species, scabious, wild carrot and *Rudbeckia* which has become naturalised and many bedstraws.

Since the revolution of 1989 when plots of land were restituted to the people some have continued in agriculture and others have sold up, so land ownership is fragmented as buyers could rarely find plots next to their own to purchase. 45% of the population of Romania is engaged in subsistence farming. The family farmsteads and outbuildings tend to be gathered in a village in the valley bottom with vegetable plots and household orchards close by. Arable plots of the staples: potatoes, corn (maize) and wheat are grown on the sloping hillsides and higher up are hay meadows, community grazing lands and forest. Hay is cut by hand with scythes, turned with rakes and dried on a variety of open wooden structures - pyramids, fences or cones. Haystacks were shown built up around a central tall pole making a conical stack from which the rain runs off. In winter the hay is stored in small wooden sheds dotted about the countryside.

The hay is feed for the animals, mainly sheep and cattle, each family farm owning a few head of each. In the mornings the cattle are released from their secure night time byres in each farmstead and they wander off to graze communally with others from the village. The sheep are gathered into a flock by a shepherd who supervises their grazing throughout the day. At dusk the cattle return home of their own accord and the sheep branch off from the returning flock to their respective homes. Romania still is home to one third of the bears and one third of all the wolves in Europe so night time security of the beasts is vital.

The villages have grazing councils who agree on the land management and this cooperation obviates the need for fences so the land is open and one can wander at will and discover the wild flowers everywhere - 16 species of *Iris*, *Adonis vernalis* and other *Adonis* species and even great swathes of *Trollius europaeus* (Globeflowers).

The famous and infamous castles of Transylvania were built by Germanic settlers who were offered land in exchange for defending the borders from marauding Tartars. They constructed the Germanic looking castles and fortified churches with surrounding walls made up of storerooms accessible only from inside. When attackers were sighted the villagers were alerted and they hurried to the church compound where they could withstand sieges of several months.