

## Conference excursion (Wednesday 11. 9., starts at 15:00)

The track starts near the conference center, making a circle of around 11 km (ca 7 miles). On the way, you will be able to enjoy dramatic landscape and interesting views of Prague and its surroundings, namely the Vltava river valley. Further, you will go through a biologically diverse landscape, with extremely high site heterogeneity and the occurrence of rare species and communities that are vanishing from the current landscape of central Europe. In general, the track goes through a landscape that has been impacted by humans continually since the prehistoric times. However, this has not lead to the exploitation of the land, but rather to the mosaic of scrub, grasslands and remnants of thermophilous forests. The extremely high site heterogeneity promotes high diversity of species, including rare species of high conservation priority. This kind of landscape is threatened by the abandonment of the traditional management, followed by the expansion of scrub and weeds of both native and alien origin. In this context, the natural succession represents the factor threatening to unify the originally heterogenous landscape, reducing the high species diversity dramatically.

The track will take you back to the conference center, where you can have a dinner at the restaurant "Na Farmě". Most importantly, you will finish close to a bus stop, where you can get on the bus to the Prague center.

1. The nature reserve "Dolní Šárka" features the outcrops of proterozoic rocks, which host thermophilous flora and fauna of open habitats, rare in the current landscape of central Bohemia. This area has been deforested in the past and most of the current forests were planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, a historically continuous forest may still be found on a small area within the reserve, near the spot "Duchoňská". On the contrary, the most valuable parts of the reserve, the rocky outcrops with thermophilous flora and fauna, are threatened by the secondary spread of shrubs and trees, especially the European dwarf cherry (*Prunus fruticosa*) and an invasive alien black locust (*Robinia pseudacacia*). Therefore, the main aim of the current management is to emulate the traditional land-use, i.e. a combination of mowing and low-intensity grazing by sheep and goat. In the spring, the rocky slopes of this nature reserve are all yellow, due to the blooming golden alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*), accompanied by the pale grey fescue grass (*Festuca pallens*) and the yarrow (*Achillea collina*). The Saint Bernard's lily (*Anthericum liliago*) and the thyme (*Thymus pannonicus*) also rank among the rare species found on the rocky outcrops of the "Dolní Šárka" nature reserve. Between the rocky outcrops with no or very shallow soil, you can see the patches of thermophilous grasslands, with species like the European feather grass (*Stipa pennata*), the fescue (*Festuca valesiaca*) and the late-blooming aster (*Aster linosyris*). The expanding scrub, dominated by the hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.), the blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and the dog rose (*Rosa canina* agg.), threatens the species-rich open habitats. However, it also provides a refugee for animals, especially birds.
2. The "Baba" vista provides one of the nicest views of Prague, even though it is not appreciated so often. You can see the Prague castle from an angle different from that you usually find on postcards, the Vltava river valley and also the hotel "International". This building was finished in 1956 and ranks among the most appreciated monuments of the architecture style usually called the "Stalin's baroque", which is an eastern interpretation of the "art deco" style. The origin of the "Baba" ruin is uncertain. It may be a remnant of an old vineyard house, a remnant of a chapel or a romantic, artificial ruin from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rocky outcrops host rare thermophilous flora, with species like the aster (*Aster linosyris*), the wallflower (*Erysimum crepidifolium*), *Gagea bohemica* or the small pasque flower (*Pulsatilla pratensis* subsp. *bohemica*). The specific combination of microclimate and habitat pattern, called the "riparian phenomenon" is expressed by the occurrence of *Inula germanica*, a species that is otherwise extremely rare in the Czech Republic. The traditional land-use consisted of a combination of grazing by sheep and goat and burning, supported by the steam engines on the railroad below the reserve. After the traditional management has been abandoned, the reserve is threatened by the expansion of scrub, namely the hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.), the blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and the dog rose (*Rosa canina* agg.). The more mesic parts of the reserve are also threatened by the spread of the dominant mesophilous false oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*).

Last but not least, the "Baba" locality ranks among the oldest continually inhabited sites in the Czech Republic, due to its strategic position, with a very good overview over the surrounding landscape.

3. Natural monument “Nad mlýnem” consists of rocky outcrops and dry grasslands above the meandering Šárka brook. The slopes are covered by species rich vegetation, dominated by the shrub European cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster integerrimus*), the Melica grass (*Melica transsilvanica*), the European feather grass (*Stipa pennata*), the bloody cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*), the mountain garlic (*Allium montanum* subsp. *senescens*), *Gagea bohemica* and the small pasque flower (*Pulsatilla pratensis* subsp. *bohemica*) rank among the rare species of this natural monument. This area is also known for the occurrence of rare butterflies and insects in general. This locality represents a prime example of a biologically diverse cultural landscape, that has evolved due to the centuries of a patchy, small scale management. This type of landscape, with a mosaic of scrub, thermophilous forests and dry grasslands, is currently threatened by the expansion of shrubs, such as the blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), and by the invasion of the alien invasive black locust (*Robinia pseudacacia*).
  
4. The “Housle” natural monument consists of a deep ravine, created by the water erosion. This has led to a mosaic of habitats, hosting a selection of rare plants and animals, especially insects. The open habitats used to prevail in the upper part of this area, with rare species such as the European dwarf cherry (*Prunus fruticosa*) and the feather grass (*Stipa capillata*). The secondary forests have expanded since then and only a small area of open habitats and scrub remains today. On the contrary, the bottom of the deep ravine hosts rare bryophytes and fungi, owing to its wet and cold environment.

