Meet the new IAVS Governing Board

During the Bremen Symposium, the new Council meeting on Wednesday 17 July, a new IAVS Governing Board has been elected:

Susan Wiser: President
David Zelený: Secretary
Martin Diekmann: Vice President
Alessandra Fidelis: Vice President
Monika Janišová: Vice President
Javier Loidi: Vice President
Peter Minchin: Vice President

In order to introduce ourselves to the IAVS members, we have done some mutual interviews where everybody asked the other Governing Board members about what was most interesting to him or her. Finally, each of us provided short answers to 6 questions. The person who asked is indicated by initials at the beginning of the question.

Susan Wiser

MJ: Was it difficult to establish in New Zealand as a vegetation scientist (I mean adaptation to a different system of institutions, research approach, vegetation or plant species)?

I first came to New Zealand for personal reasons and was uncertain about whether it would be possible to establish myself as a vegetation scientist here. My first challenge was to get to know other plant ecologists in NZ, but this was not too hard because NZ is a small place, I quickly met other early-career plant ecologists through the NZ Ecological Society and through my partner, who was a well-established forest ecologist. Except for the weeds, all the plants were new and I was surprised that NZ ecologists generally didn’t think about what plant family a species belonged to. At the same time, the flora here is not too diverse so I managed to learn the primary species pretty quickly – although I am still learning (and forgetting!) species in the more difficult groups. As I had come directly from completing my PhD, the system of working in a NZ crown research institute, a corporatised Crown entity charged with conducting mostly applied scientific research, was new to me. However as these had only been established a few years before, they were new to most the scientists here anyway. I adapted pretty quickly and it has been an interesting and varied career.

JL: What do you think about the current trends in Vegetation Science after your experience in attending the Symposia and reading IAVS journals?

I think the incorporation of functional traits into our understanding and interpretation of pattern and process in vegetation has led, and continues to lead, to important insights. The increased availability of global datasets of vegetation plot data and the ability to integrate with global spatial layers, trait and phylogenetic data is allowing novel syntheses and generalities. The ability to link high resolution remotely sensed data with spatially accurate ground-based plot data is enabling us to both spatially extrapolate the nuanced understandings we gain from our hard-won plot data and allowing us to understand properties of vegetation that were extremely difficult, or impossible, to measure until now. Last but not least, with the rapid change in natural ecosystems as a result of anthropogenic change, the value of long-term datasets to help us understand the impacts of these changes is becoming increasingly apparent.

DZ: You asked us all about our first IAVS meeting and how we liked that, so I can’t help myself to ask you the same: what was your first IAVS meeting and how was it? And did you already that time have a “gut feeling” that you will stay with this association for so many years?

My first IAVS symposium was in Uppsala in 1998. I participated in the pre-symposium excursion to Öland and got my first taste of the beautiful diverse, traditionally managed systems and landscapes in Europe. I learned so much at the conference and can still remember discussions about constrained versus unconstrained ordination. The most impressive event, however, was at the symposium dinner when many of the delegates congratulated Eddy Van der Maarel on his retirement in their native language. There must have been >50 different languages spoken. I was so impressed by the combination of scholarliness and friendliness that with time IAVS became my favorite society and the one in which I am most active.

PM: What is your favourite plant community and why?

My favorite plant communities are those of the high elevation rocky outcrops of the Southern Appalachians. They are the closest community in physiognomy and species composition to alpine plant communities of the Northern Appalachians, in a region where the mountains aren’t tall enough for there to be an alpine...
zone. I love the aesthetic of the open, low vegetation, the abundance of endemics and other rare species, the relatively low levels of weed invasion and the geomorphological setting. I suppose I’m also partial to them because these communities were the primary study sites for my PhD, so they feel like old friends.

AF: You have to deal with big data and different database. From your experience, what is the most important thing you have to keep in mind when working with such a big amount of data?

This is a very difficult question as the challenge is that there is no single most important thing, instead the devil is in the details and the challenge is keeping track of all these details and remembering that problems will arise that you haven’t even considered. When combining data from many sources it is critical that one understand what each element of the data from these sources actually signifies and that the analyst combines like with like rather than mixing apples with oranges. Data analysts always need to consider sources of potential error and bias in their source datasets. In vegetation science one needs to know the methods used in collecting original data, to appreciate inconsistencies that can arise especially with inconsistent use of taxonomic names and much more. The main lesson? Garbage in, garbage out…

MD: How would a „perfect working day“ look like for you?

Can I have two types of perfect days? The first is going to a new field site that requires some exercise to get to, but not too much, and sampling vegetation consisting of diverse and interesting plants in a beautiful landscape, with perfect weather and colleagues who have both high standards and are fun to be with. Oh, and a delicious lunch in my pack. The second is back at the office, when I have realistic goals set at the start of the day to do something interesting, such as analysing data or writing a paper or reading the literature. Nothing diverts me from my intention – no spontaneous urgent meetings or crises. For lunch, I sit
outside with my colleagues and it is a nice day and we talk in an animated way about some strange and interesting topic. Then at the end of the day I’ve actually achieved everything I had planned to do!

David Zelený

MJ: Since 2015 you work at National Taiwan University in Taipei. Is botany and vegetation science a popular study field in Taiwan and what features do you appreciate on the students at you university?

I started to teach in Taiwan in 2015, half for the personal reason, half because I really hoped to study Taiwanese vegetation “seriously”. The first year I had hard time to adjust to awkward university bureaucracy and environment which is practically entirely Chinese spoken, but eventually I got over it and also managed to convince students not to be afraid of me as a “white hairy monkey”. I also learned that the lack of vegetation ecologists in Taiwan, which I originally thought is a result of the generation gap, is in fact mostly caused by a fear of students (and their parents) that to study ecology will not bring good job and money. Students are smart and genuinely interested, but frustrated from the lack of job opportunities in the field. Taiwanese government is riddled by party fighting, with most of other energy spent toward technological innovations. At the same time Taiwan is facing serious environmental challenges, like air pollution, non-regulated land use changes, more frequent drought events and typhoon-induced damage as a result of climate change. Government needs to realize that if Taiwanese people want live in clean, save and pleasant environment, ecologists will be desperately needed. Hope that parents will then not push their children to study either medicine or law, and support them to become ecologists.

SW: What did you like most about the first IAVS symposium that you ever attended?

My first one was in Crete in 2009, where I had my first oral presentation at so big meeting. I remember that Crete was truly nice place to visit, with pleasant weather and sea close to the conference venue, allowing to go swimming even during the coffee breaks. Conference was organized in a Mediterranean style, which means that it was cheerful, happy and a bit messy at the same time; I remember a senior Turkish scientist presenting a talk twice longer than was the assigned 20 minutes slot, with session chair desperately trying to lead him to conclusion (unsuccessfully), while audience was either sleeping or laughing. But overall it was a great experience; first time in my life I see that those famous scientists I knew only as authors of papers I read are in fact just ordinary people like anybody else. Since then, I went to almost every IAVS meeting, if time and money allowed, and eventually found IAVS to be my scientific home (as Monika once nicely said about herself).

JL: What do you think about the current trends in Vegetation Science after your experience in attending the Symposia and reading IAVS journals?

A year ago I made (mostly for fun) an analysis, in which I downloaded titles and abstracts of all papers published in JVS and AVS since the beginning, and run the ordination on them using the linguistic analysis (imagine that every word is like a species, and every paper is like a site; if you sort articles according to the time of their publication, you can see which words are occurring more frequently now and which are dissapearing. Vegetation ecology, at least as published in JVS and AVS, is a dynamic field, with new terms arriving and old terms dissapearing the published articles. Perhaps its time to find that analysis and make the use of it as the blogpost for www.jsavsblog.org.

PM: What is your favourite plant community and why?

I have two, geographically far from each other and physiognomically completely different. One is dry acidophilous grasslands, occurring at the agriculture landscape north of my home city, Třebíč, in the Czech Republic. That’s a place I learnt determining plants when I was grammar school student, and whenever I go back home, I will surely visit there. These grasslands are creating small diverse “islands” surrounded by the “sea” of agriculture fields with monodominant crops, and the rules of island biogeography apply to them as they do to true islands. The second type is the cloud forest in Taiwan. First time I hiked there in 2005, during my first visit of Taiwan, and since then I like it more and more, and eventually made it a central topic of my
Taiwan's cloud forest dominated by *Fagus hayatae* (Lalashan, 2017, above) and *Chamaecyparis obtusa var. formosana*, covered by epiphytes (Smangus, 2009, below).
current research. The cloud forest has many faces, from depressively dark and wet letting you feel you must get crazy, to optimistically cool and comfortable letting you feel like that is the best place in the World.

AF: You had the experience to be the Chair of the Global Sponsorship Committee for some time. How was your experience and what advices can you give to students and researchers who want to apply for travel grants?

It was an interesting experience and I liked that, although it includes also a lot of repetitive tasks. Our committee currently has a great team of people, willing to help and constructively discuss, which is very useful when the time is short during the pre-symposium application period. And although there were some bumps on the way (including an unpleasant cheating case by one of the applicants), I appreciate this opportunity. My suggestions to applicants are several, and we actually (together with Alessandra) recently wrote an article about this, published in this Bulletin issue (pages 14-16). Welcome to read it!

MD: How tough was it to learn the Taiwanese flora?

When I first time came to Taiwan 14 years ago, I had a feeling that all trees look almost identical. Now, after so many field trips and learning the plants, it’s better, although still far from perfect. I have quite good sense in recognizing herbs (ferns, forbs, even grasses), but not much trees and shrubs, perhaps because I didn’t really need this back in Czech. For foreigner, learning Taiwanese flora has some specificities. Although the Flora of Taiwan is written in English, the determination key is often based on characteristics which are not available in the field (e.g. flowers of trees), so it may not always be too helpful. Also, Taiwanese students and researchers are good in plant determination, but they don’t have the habit of learning and using the Latin names. It became much easier when I printed Taiwanese checklist of vascular plants with Chinese and Latin names, translated the pronunciation of Chinese characters into pinyin, so as I can read them, and started to bring it with me to the field to ease communication. I am also convincing my students that, if they want to study plants and vegetation seriously, it’s really important to learn Latin names. I introduced a short „Latin moments“ in the research seminar of my lab, where we discuss the meaning and pronunciation of selected Latin names, and where students, in return, teach me the meaning and pronunciation of Chinese names. It quite works, for both me and students.

Alessandra Fidelis

MJ: You travel a lot and I have seen your map of visited countries. Could you list some countries which you still did not visit and which you plan to visit in the future?

I really love traveling and trying to visit the different vegetation types. I have many countries in my bucket list, that I still want to visit, but I really wanted to see the savannas in Asia and other savannas in Africa, like in Tanzania (Serenguetti National Park). My plan is to visit Russia (for the IAVS symposium in 2020) and be able to visit the vegetation there, which is totally unfamiliar to me!

SW: What did you like most about the first IAVS symposium that you ever attended?

My first IAVS was in Freising, 2001. And this IAVS really changed my life ("scientific life") because there I met my two future supervisors (Prof Dr. Jörg Pfadenhauer and Prof. Dr. Valerio Pillar). What I liked the most was that people were always so friendly and easy to reach and talk. I had just finished my undergraduate studies and I had the opportunity to have lunch together with Dr. Eddie van der Maarel, who explained me passionately about the IAVS, and to chat with Dr. David Goodall for hours during the Mid-Symposium excursion. Because of these impressions, I kept trying to attend the IAVS Symposium when I was a student and it became my scientific home, I must say.

JL: What do you think about the current trends in Vegetation Science after your experience in attending the Symposia and reading IAVS journals?

One of the trends that just popup in my mind is Dark Diversity (which I think is so exciting!) and also using functional traits to analyse and explain patterns and vegetation responses is still the main trend in every Symposia and we always have exciting papers at the IAVS journals about this.

DZ: Whenever I hear about fire, you just popup in my mind. I wonder, how did you get to study this environmental factor, and how is the feeling to setup experiments where you use “live” fire to see its impact? Do you feel scared while seeing fire, or excited?

Alessandra with one of her favorite plants - Actinocephalus sp. (Eriocaulaceae)
I must say it was an accident (a real one!). I was starting my Master thesis and I was supposed to study population biology of a rosette species and the effects of grazing. But one of the areas where some colleagues were working burned and they observed this species re-sprouting a lot, so I decided to add this to my question. I was so excited when I went to the area and saw how vegetation was regenerating after fire, that I decided to change subject for my PhD project and study the effects of fire on plant communities. And indeed – it is super exciting! It is not easy to study fire, because usually people associate fire to destruction and getting permits to do fire experiments can be very hard in Brazil. But it is totally worthy, because doing prescribed burns can be fun! But yes, wildfires can be quite scary, depending on the type of vegetation that is burning. I imagine that these wildfires that happened in the last years in Portugal and California were quite scary!

**PM:** What is your favourite plant community and why?

I have to admit that all open ecosystems are my favorite! Mostly tropical savannas and grasslands (the type of plant community I work with). They are so rich in species and you can find the most interesting small plants. I learned to “look down” to the ground to find plants and mostly the belowground part of the plant community is very interesting!

**MD:** How much time do you spend each year for field work? And is there a place in the Cerrado that you haven’t seen yet?

I wish I could spend much more time in the field. I go to Central Brazil at least 3x a year (it is about 2000 km away from my university!) and we spend at least 5-7 days in the field (in July and January we spend usually 10 days there). We have other study sites and one of them is very close to the university, so we can go and come back in the same day. And there I go more often.

Yes!!! I have never been to the Amazonian part of the Cerrado (but we have some experiments there, I am planning to go next year) and other areas in the northeastern part of Brazil.

**Peter Minchin**

**MJ:** I was impressed by the social events during the Bozeman symposium. What is the role of music in the university studies in Montana or the U.S in general?

Thanks. Dave Roberts organized the music events at the Bozeman symposium. I don’t know much about music at Montana State University but my university, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE), has a very active and highly rated music program (http://www.siue.edu/artsandsciences/music/). We also have a radio station operating from our campus, WSIE 88.7 FM (https://www.siue.edu/wsie/) that mostly plays jazz, R&B, blues, and soul music. Over the past 15 years, several of the students that have done ecological research in my lab have also done some music courses and played various instruments.

**SW:** What did you like most about the first IAVS symposium that you ever attended?

The first IAVS symposium I attended was the Working Group for Theoretical Vegetation Science symposium in Uppsala, Sweden in 1985. I liked the relatively small size, so that there was a chance to meet and get to know people, including some of the “big names” in my field. I also liked the mid-symposium excursion, which provided not only an introduction to some of the vegetation types in Sweden but also an informal atmosphere to interact with other participants.

**JL:** What do you think about the current trends in Vegetation Science after your experience in attending the Symposia and reading IAVS journals?

I think that Vegetation Science is in good shape, with lots of interesting developments. We have many smart young scientists, ensuring a great future for our science. Given my research interests in developing and evaluating methods of data analysis, I am particularly impressed by new approaches incorporating plant functional traits and phylogenetic relationships into vegetation analysis.

**DZ:** At the Bremen conference, I was truly enjoying your talk about spending your sabbatical by resurveying the Tasmanian vegetation you surveyed when you were PhD student. I wonder, how were your feelings and emotions when you walked the same places you walked those 40 years ago? And now I mean feelings both about changes in vegetation and changes in you personally?

The site of my sabbatical research, Mt. Field National Park in Tasmania, Australia, has been a special place for me since I spent a week-long botany field course there
Mt. Field National Park in Tasmania.

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in 1975 as an undergraduate student. That course, led by the late Prof. Bill Jackson, really solidified my interest in plant ecology as a career. I immediately fell in love with the glacial topography, the flora (with many endemics), and the montane plant communities. I returned in 1976 as an Honours students and did a research project on line transect sampling in dwarf coniferous forest (dominated by two endemic species of *Athrotaxis*) on Tarn Shelf, one of my favourite places in the park with a string of small lakes (tarns) surrounded by vegetation that looks like it has been laid out by a very talented landscape gardener. When I planned my Ph.D. project with Prof. Jackson as my advisor and decided to collect a large data set to test hypotheses about how plant communities vary along environmental gradients, Mt. Field was the obvious choice for a study site. I spent most of the summers of 1980-1982 collecting vegetation data from a network of 438 100-m² plots. I worked mostly alone (without a safety plan) and really got to know the area and its vegetation, working off trails on traverses that covered about 16 km² of the plateau. Returning to resample a large subset of the plots in January—May 2019, brought back many happy memories of my time there almost 40 years ago. The flora, communities, and landscape were like old friends (though quite a few species had changed their names) and this time I worked with an old friend from graduate school, John Davies, who was an excellent companion and colleague. The vegetation was very familiar and did not seem to have changed dramatically. Surprisingly, we found 7 of my original plastic plot markers. Mentally I did not feel much older than when I did the original sampling but my body, especially my knees, made it obvious that I was, in fact, considerably older. Both John and I had to see a physical therapist about knee problems but we managed to persevere and completed the resampling of 234 plots. It was a great experience.

**AF:** What was the most amazing excursion you ever participated?

That would be the IAVS Excursion to Western Australia in September, 1990 led by Dr. John Beard. My friend and collaborator, Jari Oksanen, whom I had met at the IAVS Working Group for Theoretical Vegetation Science symposium in Vienna, Austria in 1988, was on sabbatical in Australia at the time and also came on the excursion. The 2-week trip spanned the rainfall gradient in southwest Australia, allowing us to see an enormous range of vegetation types, from tall eucalypt forests, through very diverse shrublands, to semi-arid and arid vegetation. It was on that trip that I met Javier Loidi.

**MD:** You are so skilled in statistical analysis of vegetation data. Do you prefer sitting at the computer doing ordinations, or spending time out in the field?

I have to admit that I love data analysis and modelling but I also love spending time in the field. It is hard to say which I prefer, since both activities are very enjoyable for me. As a Ph.D. student, I became the second biggest user of the University of Tasmania’s mainframe computer (after a guy in physics), developing software for the simulation of community data and performing an extensive comparison of the performance of ordination techniques. The other part of my Ph.D., which I mentioned in answering the question from DZ, was a field-based project for which I collected a large vegetation data set at Mt. Field National Park. As I was preparing for my first field trip, I had unrolled a 50 m nylon rope down the corridor of the Botany Department in order to remove kinks. A Professor of Genetics saw me as I passed his office and joked “Hey look. Peter Minchin is in the field. Once he is more than 20 m from a computer he calls that field work”.

**Javier Loidi**

**MJ:** What is your favourite text book of botany, ecology or vegetation science, which you would recommend to young IAVS members?

I have been always influenced by the Strasburger’s text-book of Botany, an ever renewed text book that started in 1894 and still has a recent version re-edited by modern specialists. It has been translated to many languages from the original German and has a comprehensive concept of the plant science, encompassing all aspects of Botany sensu lato: physiology, morphology, systematics and phylolgeny, ecology, etc. Nowadays it exceeds the requirements of the current programs of the botanical subjects in the academic curricula, but still is somehow a little encyclopedia of the plant science. Concerning vegetation science I still stick to the book Phytosociology by Braun-Blanquet, which is a complete treaty of Plant Ecology although it is a bit old. Another two books of great interest in this field are: Archibold, O.W. -1995- Ecology of world vegetation. Chapman & Hall. and Gurevitch, J., Scheiner, S.M. & Fox, G.A. 2002. The ecology of plants. Sinauer.

**SW:** What did you like most about the first IAVS symposium that you ever attended?

The first I attended was in 1977, which was held still in Rinteln (Germany) and was organized by Reinhold Tüxen. It run basically in German but I was impressed by the international vocation of that meeting. In spite
of all the difficulties of that time (cold war and Iron Curtain), huge efforts were made to make possible all colleagues, particularly those from the eastern countries, to attend and participate. Such a broad internationalist spirit in the frame of a friendly atmosphere and the intense scientific dedication, convinced me that it was worth to join such organization, ... although there was no social dinner and meals were not included in the fee.

DZ: I am always impressed by your broad knowledge not only about vegetation, but also about history and politics. What is your favorite activity outside the professional career of vegetation ecologist?

Thank you. There are two areas that arouse a special interest in me: nature and the social sciences, in particular history. When I was a teenager and I was about to decide which of the two I was going to dedicate my professional life to, my father, as a result of his own experiences, gave me some advice: “don’t dedicate yourself to politics, it’s too dangerous ...” and I listened to him and dedicated myself to the study of Biology and nature, which I congratulate myself greatly because I have had enormous satisfactions in my life as a botanist and vegetation scientist. Nevertheless, history and politics continue to exert an irresistible attraction on me and I do not resist reading with passion the books and articles that fall into my hands; I have a predilection for reading historical novel. In addition, I find it very rewarding to walk in the countryside, particularly in the mountains.

PM: What is your favourite plant community and why?

This is the most difficult question, because I like them all. Perhaps it is the European Atlantic heathlands that have the greatest attraction for me, because I have devoted much study and effort for many years. Temperate deciduous forests attract me a lot too; their color in the different seasons is captivating to me.

AF: I have the impression you already have been everywhere, and that you have visited all vegetation types! Is there one in particular that you have never visited but you really want to?

It is not so much, but it is true that I have visited many places in the world and have known its vegetation. However, there are many ecosystems that I know little or nothing, such as the Arctic tundra, the steppes of Central Asia, the New Guinea with its forests and mountains, the northern Andes paramo or the southern forests of Patagonia and Tasmania

MD: How many languages do you speak (I sometimes have the feeling that you know them all)?

I have always dreamed that there was a pill that, when taken, you would understand all the languages of the world and you could communicate with everyone. I have always had a great desire to communicate with my peers around the world, feeling an unstoppable curiosity for other nations’s cultures. As there is no such pill, there is no choice but to learn languages. The atmosphere of my home of origin is already bilingual because it speaks Basque and Spanish, so I had to deal with both languages. Of course, the proximity to France made French a very popular language, and I got used to understanding and spoiling it. English has been the language I have studied most in my life and in which I find more resources in my expression, it is like the pill of my international dreams. Then I studied German when I lived in Germany during my stay with Tüxen, and, although I have few opportunities to exercise it, I try not to forget what I learned. Finally, there is the series of Latin languages close to Spanish: Portuguese, Italian and Catalan, which are relatively easy for us because of their linguistic proximity. So it is not so much.

Martin Diekmann

MJ: What are your favourite destinations for mountain walking?

At least once a year I go to the mountains, being a change to the flat landscape of my home town Bremen where the highest elevation is the local rubbish dump. I like the mountains for their stunning views, variety of different ecosystems and high plant species richness. My favourite location in the European Alps are the Dolomites in South Tyrol where I spent many summer holidays in the surrounding of Bolzano. The weather here is often fine, the floristic diversity fantastic and the food delicious.

SW: What did you like most about the first IAVS symposium that you ever attended?

My first IAVS symposium was the meeting in Warsaw in 1990 where I was allowed to present a poster. I remember the friendly atmosphere and that I for the first time met many famous people I knew from books and papers, but had never met in person. Another lasting memory was my visit to the Białowieża National park with its beautiful and impressive forests.

JL: What do you think about the current trends in Vegetation Science after your experience in attending the Symposia and reading IAVS journals?

What I have always liked about IAVS symposia is that they offer such a large variety of topics in special and open sessions. Often I sit in a lecture and think „What a great idea, I could have thought about this myself!“. As I work with permanent plot data and time series
Beautiful montane grasslands in the Basque country – Javier’s home.
analyses I especially welcome the foundation of the „Historical Vegetation Ecology“ working group.

DZ: One of my early references I was reading was your review paper about Ellenberg indicator values (Diekmann 2003), and it truly influenced my future thinking. I wonder, do you remember when did you encountered Ellenbergs for the first time, and how did it happen that ended up writing a review paper about them? And more personally – do you “like them”, or you merely consider them as a (possibly useful) tool for vegetation ecologists?

One of the greatest things with vegetation ecology is that it trains you to use plants as indicators for the environment. If you know your vegetation well, you can tell a lot about a site’s soil, its pH, water and nutrient availability, or about its management. To capture the ecological responses of plant species in numbers is simply a brilliant idea, and my particular interest in Ellenberg indicator values arose when I moved to Sweden and realized that some species behaved differently with respect to pH compared to their responses in my home country Germany. That triggered some projects and papers about the ecological responses of plants along environmental gradients, which were based on true measurements but also compared these responses to the Ellenberg numbers and what this implied for their usage. After having worked so much with this topic I knew the literature well, which finally gave rise to the review paper. For me, Ellenberg numbers are no truth, but an indispensable instrument for vegetation science, especially when working with historical data.

PM: What is your favourite plant community and why?

I have lots of favourite plant communities, including those I have worked with: different types of forest, alvar and other dry grasslands, and acidic grasslands. However, if I have to choose, nothing compares to a species-rich broad-leaved forest in spring, with a still rather open canopy full of fresh green leaves and a dense carpet of colourful vernal geophytes, preferably on a sunny day!

AF: How was your time as the President of the IAVS?

My time as a IAVS president was great! I enjoyed working with so many nice people in the Governing Board and Council. The IAVS is MY society in the sense that it is this association I want to engage with and spend my time in. Over the past 2-3 years I sometimes felt that the time that my university work with teaching, research and administration leaves me for additional activities is too short to do a proper job.
Thanks. I really love species-rich grasslands of all types, not only because they are pleasant to sit, lie down, have picnic or relax, but also because they are colorful, odorous, not boring at all, and because they are a challenge for a vegetation ecologist to reveal all the species and their mutual relationships. Unfortunately, species-rich semi-natural grasslands are rapidly declining and I am sometimes afraid that I gradually will lose my study objects. Since several years I study Carpathian traditionally managed meadows and pastures. During my trips to Romania and Ukraine I am never disappointed.

PM: What is your favourite plant community and why?

A species-rich semi-natural meadow, such the one in Ponoara, Apuseni Carpathians, Romania (the picture below). Because it is beautiful, fragrant and full of life.

AF: I had the best time going to the field with you and learning so much about plants in the Carpathians! Is there a vegetation type that you want to visit and learn more about?

Yes, I was very impressed by kwongan vegetation, which we observed during the IAVS excursions in SW Australia. I would like to return to some places, such as Lesueur or Stirling Range National Parks. I also would like to see the South African *fynbos* one day, which is another extremely species-rich shrubland or heathland vegetation with fascinating plants, that look like they’re from another planet in the eyes of the European. And if I would have an opportunity, I would like to come back to cerrado, nowhere in the world have I seen more beautiful trees than those that resisted repeated fires in cerrado. And more lush floods of flowers, and more funny plant shapes, ...

MD: Where do you get your inspirations for compiling such a nice material for the IAVS Bulletin?

Most of the inspiration comes directly from the vegetation and the vegetation scientists: when I look at them, I immediately have a bunch of questions. Fortunately, I usually find someone to answer ☺.