FarmBioNet

Farmer-focused biodiversity and agricultural knowledge network

# Alpine hay meadows: natural value and traditional management

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**Geographical location:**
Romania / Transilvania, montane and subalpine zones across Europe including the Alps, Carpathians, and Scandinavia

*Photo credit: Ben Mehedin*

Alpine hay meadows are one of the most valuable semi-natural ecosystems in Europe. They are not just natural landscapes, but rather the result of a continuous interaction between nature cycles and human activities. These habitats are being lost at alarming rates. Agricultural intensification, rural depopulation, farm abandonment, and low economic returns are amongst the threats causing these declines.

Alpine hay meadows are home to countless numbers of plants, insects (bees, butterflies, hoverflies, beetles), birds, reptiles and small mammals. They contribute to cleaner air, water conservation, and carbon sequestration. Additionally, they provide seasonal jobs in terms of tourism and labour (e.g. scything) and are an important source of income for local communities.

## Practical Recommendations

Mow late in the season after mid-July, and once per year to allow plants to flower and set seed. Mowing, with scythes or light machinery, will contribute to population stability. Practice fauna-friendly methods of mowing, start in the centre and move out to the edge. This provides protection to wildlife as they retreat to field edges. Leave all cut plant material in place for a minimum of two days to allow seeds to fall into the soil, then remove. Retain and share traditional knowledge relating to the meadow e.g. optimal time of mowing, livestock density, and seasonal pasture use. Celebrate meadows annually, either during peak flowering, grazing, or cutting to showcase the value that these habitats have for the whole of society. This can be through community projects or through national cultural events.

**Further Information on farmbionet.eu**

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