

Thematic index

Introduction

9

Temperate steppes and dry prairies

13

1. A dry sea of low grass	15
1.1 The harsh continental climate	[V.G. Mordkovich] 17
1.1.1 Grasslands stretching to the horizon	17
The concept of steppe and prairie	17
The decline of the continental grasslands	17
1.1.2 Continental anticyclones and heat gradients	18
The Siberian anticyclone and the Eurasian steppes	18
The gradient of continentality in North America	20
1.1.3 The apparently capricious climate	20
The reasons for the dryness of the steppes	20
Rainfall in the prairie	22
The irregular climate	22
1.2 The dark deep soils.	[V.G. Mordkovich, R.M. Poch and J. Porta] 25
1.2.1 The soil components and processes	25
From loess to chernozem	25
The accumulation of organic matter—the rhizosphere effect	26
The accumulation of calcium carbonate	26
The accumulation of clay	26
Sodication	26
1.2.2 The rich variety of steppe soils	27
• Chernozem	[V.G. Mordkovich] 28
Chernozems	32
Kastanozems	32
Solonetz	33
Phaeozems	35
Greyzems	35
1.3 The steppes and dry prairies	[V.G. Mordkovich, R.H. Braun W., R.T.Coupland, D.R. Given, and J.M. Camarasa] 36
1.3.1 The Eurasian steppes	[V.G. Mordkovich] 36
The steppes of inner Asia	36
The steppes of western Siberia and Kazakhstan	37
The steppes of eastern Europe	38
The steppes of central Europe	39
The steppes on the loess highlands of China	40
1.3.2 The North American Prairies	[V.G. Mordkovich and R.T. Coupland] 40
The typical prairies	40
The northern fescue prairies	42
1.3.3 The Southern Hemisphere prairies	[V.G. Mordkovich, R.M. Braun W., D.R. Giben, and J.M. Camarasa] 43
The South American pampas	43
The prairies of the High Veld in southern Africa	45
The New Zealand prairies	46

2. Life on the steppes and prairies	47
2.1 Ecological functioning of the steppes and prairies	[V.G. Mordkovich and S.A. Balandin] 49
2.1.1 The kingdom of the grasses	[V.G. Mordkovich] 49
The trees of the steppes: marooned in a sea of grass	49
The triumphant grasses	50
2.1.2 Efficient primary production	[V.G. Mordkovich] 51
The abundance of leaf litter and dry grass	51
The demands made by herbivores	52
The regular turnover of the above-ground plant biomass	53
Solid assets in the underground plant biomass	54
2.1.3 The privileged consumers	[V.G. Mordkovich] 55
The almost unlimited supply of fresh grass	55
From coprophages to mineralizing microorganisms	56
2.1.4 The efficiency of recycling and the rapidity of succession	[V.G. Mordkovich] 57
Highly mobile nutrients	57
Acceleration of the processes of succession	58
2.1.5 Water, a constant struggle	[S.A. Balandin] 59
Barriers to evaporation	59
Saving water by producing small or succulent leaves	59
2.2 The plant life	[S.A. Balandin, R.H. Braun W., J.M. Camarasa, R.T. Coupland, D.R. Given, and V.G. Mordkovich] 61
2.2.1 The importance of a shared history	[S.A. Balandin, R.H. Braun W., and R.T. Coupland] 61
The relatively young steppe vegetation	61
The floristic diversity and the dominant families	62
2.2.2 The floristic composition of the steppes and prairies	[S.A. Balandin, D.R. Given, and V.G. Mordkovich] 64
The ever-present grasses	64
Nongraminoid herbaceous plants	68
Woody plants and subshrubs	71
Exotic invaders	73
2.2.3 The vegetation of the Eurasian steppes	[S.A. Balandin, J.M. Camarasa, and V.G. Mordkovich] 73
The meadow steppe	73
The typical steppe	75
The dry steppe	76
The cryophilic steppe	76
2.2.4 The vegetation of the North American prairies	[S.A. Balandin, J.M. Camarasa, R.T. Coupland, and V.G. Mordkovich] 77
The eastern moist tallgrass prairies	77
The wet northern fescue prairies	79
The southern coastal wet prairies	80
The western dry lowgrass prairies	81
The central mixed prairies	83
2.2.5 The vegetation of the pampas grasslands	[R.H. Braun W., J.M. Camarasa, and V.G. Mordkovich] 84
The undulating pampas	85
The inland pampas	86
The depressed pampas	86
The southern pampas	86
The Mesopotamian pampas	86
The campos of Uruguay and Rio Grande do Sul	87
2.2.6 The grasslands of New Zealand and southern Africa	[D.R. Given and J.M. Camarasa] 88
The tall tussock grasslands	88
The short tussock grasslands	92
The lowland sward grasslands	93
The High Veld grasslands of southern Africa	93
2.3 The fauna and animal inhabitants	[V.G. Mordkovich, C. Harcourt, D.R. Given, and J.M. Camarasa] 94
2.3.1 The kingdom of the herbivores	[V.G. Mordkovich and C. Harcourt] 94
The changeability of a relatively new environment	94
The pronounced stratification of habitats	94
• Mustangs, broncos, and <i>cimarrones</i>	[V.G. Mordkovich and R.H. Hart] 96
The rhythm of animal life	100

2.3.2	The large four-legged nomads	[V.G. Mordkovich, C. Harcourt, and J.M. Camarasa]	101
	Always on the move		102
	Predators and prey		102
	The herd strategy		103
2.3.3	The burrowers of the steppes	[V.G. Mordkovich, C. Harcourt, and J.M. Camarasa]	104
	Subsoil inhabitants		104
	Life in a burrow		106
	A passion for hoarding		108
	Colonial strategies		109
2.3.4	The birds of the open spaces	[V.G. Mordkovich and C. Harcourt]	110
	The relatively poor bird fauna		110
	Running birds: galloping feathers		110
	The flying birds: between the earth and the sky		112
2.3.5	The reptiles of the steppes	[V.G. Mordkovich]	114
	Crawling along on one's belly		114
	The lizards and snakes		114
2.3.6	A wide range of insects	[D.R. Given and V.G. Mordkovich]	115
	A little-known world		116
	The kingdom of the insects		116
2.4	Life in rivers and lakes	[A.M. Ghilarov, C. Harcourt, and J.M. Camarasa]	117
2.4.1	The waters of the steppes and prairies	[A.M. Ghilarov]	117
	The watercourses and the water table		117
	The water regime		118
2.4.2	The aquatic organisms	[A.M. Ghilarov, C. Harcourt, and J.M. Camarasa]	118
	• The Volga	[A.M. Ghilarov]	120
	The vegetation of the wetlands		124
	The fish fauna		124
	The water birds		127
3.	Humans in the steppes and prairies		129
3.1	Human settlement of the steppes and prairies	[V.N. Basilov, J.M. Camarasa, C. Junyent, R.H. Braun W., R.H. Hart, and V.G. Mordkovich]	131
3.1.1	The remote origin of the people of the steppes and prairies	[V.N. Basilov, J.M. Camarasa, V.G. Mordkovich, and R.H. Hart]	131
	The period of major extinctions in Eurasia and the Americas		131
	Neolithic agriculture and stockraising in the Eurasian steppes		131
	The Copper Age and the domestication of the horse		132
	The arrival of the Indo-Europeans and the invention of the chariot		133
3.1.2	The colonization of the Eurasian steppes in historical times	[V.N. Basilov and J.M. Camarasa]	135
	The first horsemen of the steppes		135
	The domain of the Turkish peoples		136
	The expansion of the Mongols		140
	The legacy of Genghis Khan		141
	Russian colonization		144
	The Soviet and post-Soviet period in Kazakhstan		146
	The precarious independence of the former rulers		146
3.1.3	The settlement of the prairies in North and South America	[C. Junyent, J.M. Camarasa, R.H. Braun W., and V.G. Mordkovich]	147
	The arrival of modern humans		147
	The origin of the peoples of the Americas: genes and languages		148
	The inhabitants of the American prairies before the arrival of the Europeans		149
3.1.4	The conquest of the prairies of North and South America	[V.N. Basilov, R.H. Braun W., and J.M. Camarasa]	150
	Horse-based cultures		151
	• Tepees and yurts	[V.N. Basilov]	152
	The British and U.S. colonization of the prairies of North America		159
	Hispanic and Creole colonization of the prairies of South America		161
3.1.5	The current population of the steppes and prairies	[V.N. Basilov, J.M. Camarasa, and C. Junyent]	163
	The inhabitants of the Eurasian steppes		163
	The inhabitants of the North American prairies		165
	The inhabitants of the prairies of South America		166
	The inhabitants of the prairies of southern Africa		166

3.1.6 Health and illness in the steppes and prairies	[V.N. Basilov and C. Junyent]	167
• Endless trains	[V.N. Basilov and M. Vigo]	168
The diseases of the nomads of the steppes		172
The illnesses of the nomads of the prairies		172
3.2 Collecting wild plants and catching wild animals	[V.N. Basilov, A.A. Tishkov, V.G. Mordkovich, R.H. Braun W., C. Harcourt, and R.H. Hart]	173
3.2.1 Gathering without planting	[A.A. Tishkov, R.H. Hart, and R.H. Braun W.]	173
Fruit and vegetables		173
Flavorings, condiments, and honey-bearing plants		174
Medicinal plants		175
Tannin-producing, dye, and fiber plants		175
3.2.2 Hunting on the steppes of Eurasia	[V.N. Basilov and V.G. Mordkovich]	176
Hunting		176
Hunting methods		176
Hunting animals for fur		178
3.2.3 Hunting on the prairies of North and South America	[C. Harcourt, V.N. Basilov, and V.G. Mordkovich]	178
Buffalo hunting		178
Hunting of antelopes and other traditional or modern game animals		179
• The slaughter of the buffalo	[V.G. Mordkovich]	180
Hunting water birds		184
3.2.4 Fishing	[V.N. Basilov and V.G. Mordkovich]	185
Fishing in the steppes of Eurasia		185
Fishing in the prairies of North and South America		186
3.3 Stockraising and agriculture	[V.N. Basilov, A.A. Tishkov, R.H. Braun W., R.H. Hart, J.M. Camarasa, R.T. Coupland, D.R. Given, and V.G. Mordkovich]	187
3.3.1 Grasslands and their exploitation	[A.A. Tishkov, R.H. Hart, R.H. Braun W., D.R. Given, and R.T. Coupland]	187
Grasslands and grazing		187
Cutting hay		187
The grasslands in the steppes and prairies today		189
3.3.2 Important livestock animals	[V.N. Basilov and V.G. Mordkovich]	190
Horses		190
Camels		190
Cattle		191
Sheep and goats		191
3.3.3 Nomadic and sedentary stockraising	[V.N. Basilov, R.H. Braun W., J.M. Camarasa, S. Frade, V.G. Mordkovich, and A.A. Tishkov]	193
The seasonal cycle of nomadism in the steppes		193
The adoption of sedentary stockraising in the steppes		194
• Life on horseback	[V.N. Basilov]	196
Raising horses among the Plains Indians		200
Stockraising by the colonists on the North American prairies		201
Stockraising in the pampas of South America		203
3.3.4 Agricultural activity	[A.A. Tishkov, R.H. Hart, R.H. Braun W., and J.M. Camarasa]	205
The different forms of agricultural exploitation		205
Cultivation of cereal and fodder		206
Agriculture in the Eurasian steppes		207
Agriculture in the North American prairies		208
Agriculture in the South American pampas		210
3.4 Management conflicts and environmental problems	[V.G. Mordkovich, R.H. Hart, R.H. Braun W., D.R. Given, A.A. Tishkov, S. Frade, C. Harcourt, R.T. Coupland, and S.A. Balandin]	212
3.4.1 A cultivated biome	[V.G. Mordkovich, S.A. Balandin, and S. Frade]	212
Little remains of the natural landscape		212
Precariously balanced agricultural systems		213
3.4.2 Disturbances to the fauna	[V.G. Mordkovich, C. Harcourt, and D.R. Given]	214
Species in decline and recent introductions		214
The changes in the insect fauna		216
Habitat loss and the deliberate extermination of species		217
3.4.3 Problems related to grazing	[A.A. Tishkov, R.H. Hart, R.T. Coupland, D.R. Given, R.H. Braun W., and S. Frade]	218
The evolution of steppes and prairies under grazing pressure		219
Grazing management in the steppes and prairies		220
The meadows and grasslands of New Zealand		222
Moderate grazing, a factor that conserves pastures		222

3.4.4 The impact of agricultural activity	[A.A. Tishkov, S. Frade, and R.H. Hart]	223
The transformation of the landscape		224
The potholes		224
3.4.5 The impact of industry and mining	[V.G. Mordkovich]	225
The effects of industrial pollution		225
The effects of extractive activities		226
The impact of hydroelectric power stations		227
3.4.6 Alternative uses of the steppes and prairies	[R.H. Hart and S. Frade]	228
Recreation and the collective imagination		228
The conservation of biodiversity		228
 4. Protected areas and biosphere reserves in the steppes and prairies		229
4.1 The world's protected steppes and prairies	[S. Frade]	231
4.1.1 General considerations		231
4.1.2 The parks and protected areas		231
The protection of the open spaces		231
Protecting the large animals		232
4.2 The UNESCO biosphere reserves in the steppes and prairies	[S. Frade and R. Pesci]	233
4.2.1 The biosphere reserves in the steppes and prairies	[S. Frade]	233
Conservation and conflicts in the Eurasian biosphere reserves		233
Research in the North American biosphere reserves		235
4.2.2 The biosphere reserves in the Eurasian steppes	[S. Frade]	236
The Chernomoskiy (Black Sea) and Askaniya-Nova Biosphere Reserves		236
4.2.3 The biosphere reserves in the North American prairies	[S. Frade]	239
The Central Plains Biosphere Reserve		239
4.2.4 The biosphere reserves in the South American pampas	[S. Frade and R. Pesci]	241
The Parque Costero del Sur Biosphere Reserve		241

The boreal conifer forests or taiga

245

1. The kingdom of the conifers		247
1.1 The cold forests	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott]	249
1.1.1 The concept of taiga	[D.A. Petelin]	249
What is and what is not taiga		249
The true taiga		249
1.1.2 Snow almost all year round	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott]	249
The cold and the tree vegetation		250
The availability of water and the decisive role of the snow		251
The different degrees of climatic tolerance among the conifers		252
• Fjord	[X. Campillo]	254
1.2 Inhospitable, cold, half-formed soils	[D.A. Petelin, R.M. Poch, and J. Porta]	258
1.2.1 Soil components and processes		258
Soil texture and acidity		258
Podzol formation		258

Gleying	259
Bog formation	260
1.2.2 The different types of soils in the taiga	261
Podzols	261
Podzoluvisols	262
Histsols	262
Gleysols	263
Permafrost and podburs	263
1.3 The taiga in the world	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott] 264
1.3.1 The Eurasian boreal conifer forests	[D.A. Petelin] 264
The taiga in northern Europe	264
The taiga in Siberia	264
The Far Eastern taiga	266
1.3.2 The boreal conifer forests in North America	[G.A.J. Scott and D.A. Petelin] 266
The curious distribution of the North American taiga	267
Latitudinal zonation	267
1.3.3 The subalpine conifer forests	[D.A. Petelin] 268
The Eurasian subalpine taiga	270
The North American subalpine taiga	270
2. Life in the taiga	271
2.1 The ecological functioning of the taiga	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott] 273
2.1.1 The key role of the tree layer	[D.A. Petelin] 273
The dominant role of the trees	273
Low diversity under the canopy	273
The mosaic distribution of the lower layers	274
2.1.2 Primary production and biomass	[D.A. Petelin] 275
The accumulation of biomass	275
Nutrients and productivity	276
The abundant herbivores and detritivores	277
Saprophytes and other consumers of dead biomass	278
The essential role of the mycorrhiza	279
2.1.3 Adaptations to the boreal environment	[D.A. Petelin] 280
The xeromorphic adaptations of the conifers	280
A liking for shady woodland habitats	281
Reproductive adaptations	281
2.1.4 Changes and disturbances	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott] 283
The seasonal cycle	283
Fire in the taiga	285
Succession and maturity	286
Forestry pests	286
• <i>Linnaea borealis</i>	[D.A. Petelin] 288
2.2 The plant life	[D.A. Petelin and G.A.J. Scott] 292
2.2.1 The same trees everywhere	292
Low floristic diversity	292
The dark conifers: spruces and firs	292
The light conifers: pines and larches	295
The boreal deciduous trees: birches, aspens, and poplars	298
2.2.2 The sparse acidophilic flora of the understory	299
Small trees and large shrubs	299
The small shrubs and clumps	300
The herbaceous plants	301
2.2.3 The rich flora of mosses and lichens	302
Mosses and other bryophytes	303
Lichens	305

2.2.4 The different taiga landscapes	306
The dark taiga	306
The light taiga	308
The boreal peat bogs	309
2.3 The fauna and animal life	[B.I. Sheftel and C. Harcourt] 312
2.3.1 Animal life in the taiga	312
The origin of the animal population	312
The large herbivores and carnivores	312
• The hyena of the taiga	[B.I. Sheftel] 314
The small mammals	318
Birds, amphibians, and reptiles	319
The ever-present mosquitoes and other insects	320
2.3.2 Seasonal rhythms and periodic fluctuations	321
How birds overwinter	321
Mammal migrations	324
Demographic cycles	325
• Dams made of trunks	[D.A. Petelin] 326
2.4 Life in rivers and lakes	[A.M. Ghilarov] 331
2.4.1 The waters of the taiga	331
Rivers and lakes	331
The water regime	331
2.4.2 Life in the lakes	332
Ice formation and vertical mixing	332
The primary producers	333
The consumers: from zooplankton to seals	333
2.4.3 Life in rivers	334
Nutrient-poor waters with few primary producers	334
The consumers: salmonids and other fish	335
• Lake Baikal	[A.M. Ghilarov] 336
3. Humans in the taiga	343
3.1 The human population of the taiga	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, C. Junyent and J.M. Camarasa] 345
3.1.1 The difficulties of settling the boreal forest	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, C. Junyent and J.M. Camarasa] 345
Human settlement of the Eurasian taiga	345
Human settlement of the North American taiga	346
3.1.2 The shaping of the taiga culture taiga	[V.N. Basilov and Z.P. Sokolova] 347
The hunter peoples of the Eurasian boreal forests	348
The fishing peoples of the Eurasian boreal forests	349
The hunting and fishing peoples of the North American taiga	349
• The bear feast	[Z.P. Sokolova and V.N. Basilov] 350
3.1.3 The current human presence	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, and J.M. Camarasa] 355
The population of the taiga in Eurasia	355
The taiga population of North America	356
3.1.4 Health and illness in the taiga	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, and C. Junyent] 358
Poor hygiene and extreme fatigue	360
Imported diseases	360
3.2 The use of plant resources	[G.A.J. Scott, V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, and D.A. Petelin] 362
3.2.1 The taiga larder	362
Wild salads and greens	362
Wild or Indian rice	362
Wild fruits	363
Tree sap as a sweetener	366
Ferns and edible or hallucinogenic fungi	366

3.2.2	The wild pharmacy and chemicals of the taiga	367
	Medicinal plants	367
	Fibers and dyes	369
3.2.3	Forestry	369
	Wood quality	369
	• Birch bark canoes	[Z.P. Sokolova, V.N. Basilov, and D.A. Petelin] 370
	Timber dwellings	374
	Wooden boats and tools	375
	Commercial forestry	376
3.2.4	The use of grazing land and agriculture	378
	The scarcity of grazing land	378
	Agriculture in the Eurasian taiga	379
	• Architects or carpenters?	[Z.P. Sokolova and V.N. Basilov] 380
	Agriculture in the North American taiga	384
3.3	The use of animal resources	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, C. Harcourt, and G.A.J. Scott] 387
3.3.1	Hunting	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, C. Harcourt, and G.A.J. Scott] 387
	The role of hunting in the taiga peoples	387
	Big game: the large ungulates, bears, and seals	388
	Small game: small mammals	390
	Fur-bearing animals	391
	Hunting birds	393
	• Sable	[B.I. Sheftel] 394
3.3.2	Angling and fishing	[Z.P. Sokolova and V.N. Basilov] 398
	Fishing techniques	398
	The fish species caught and their uses	401
3.3.3	Stockraising activity	[V.N. Basilov, Z.P. Sokolova, C. Harcourt, and G.A.J. Scott] 401
	Raising reindeer	402
	Extensive stockraising	403
	Intensive stockraising	403
3.4	Management conflicts and environmental problems	[Z.P. Sokolova, V.N. Basilov, G.A.J. Scott, and J.M. Camarasa] 405
3.4.1	The collapse of a cultural universe	405
	Myths that have died	405
	The arrival of the Russians in the taiga	406
	Cultural changes associated with the fur trade	406
3.4.2	The gradual loss of the fauna	408
	The historic consequences of the hunting of fur animals	408
	The effects of modern hunting	409
	The decline in fish stocks	410
3.4.3	Forestry: between sustainability and overexploitation	411
	Prudent forest management in Scandinavia	411
	The breakdown of forestry in the former Soviet Union	411
	The uncertain future of forestry in Canada	411
3.4.4	The effects of mining and industrial activity	412
	Mining-related environmental problems and impacts	412
	The impact of hydroelectric installations	415
	Industrial pollution	415
	• Uranium City	[M. Beck] 416
4.	Protected areas and biosphere reserves in the taiga	421
4.1	Protected areas in the taiga	[K. Fuller and J.M Camarasa] 423
4.1.1	General considerations	423
4.1.2	Protected parks and areas	423

4.2 The UNESCO biosphere reserves in the taiga area	[K. Fuller, A.M. Ghilarov, and J.M. Camarasa]	424
4.2.1 The biosphere reserves in the taiga	[K. Fuller, A.M. Ghilarov, and J.M. Camarasa]	424
4.2.2 The biosphere reserves in the Eurasian taiga	[A.M. Ghilarov , K. Fuller, and J.M. Camarasa]	424
The Pechoro-Ilychskiy Biosphere Reserve.		425
4.2.3 The biosphere reserves in the North American taiga	[K. Fuller and J.M. Camarasa]	429
The Charlevoix Biosphere Reserve		429
Bibliography		433
Indexes		437
Species' index		438
Thematic index		449