SUCCESSFUL COLONIZATION OF FOREST STEPPE SPECIES IN DIFFERENT AREAS ABANDONED FROM TRADITIONAL CULTIVATION

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The Eurasian forest steppe belt stretches between closed forests and steppe zones. It is a complex and diverse vegetation type providing an important habitat for many endangered species. Over the centuries, among others historical land use practices played a major role in shaping the appearance of the forest steppe zone. At international level in nature conservation the fragments that remained in their natural state are considered of high importance. There was relatively little information available about the recolonisation ability of forest steppe species. Therefore, we examined changes in texture and structure in these species during secondary succession in different abandoned areas in the Carpathian Basin. Forest steppe species mainly from *Festuco-Brometea* group had significant species number, cover and diversity values in all three investigated types in the oldest fallows. The increase in the number and cover of forest steppe species in abandoned grasslands revealed that the replacement of the species pool of these grasslands is not necessarily only accompanied by degradation, but also by the appearance and spread of valuable natural species given the habitat is sufficiently patchy. As abandonment progresses, the proportions of species habitat categories diminish in abandoned vineyards and arable land. Three decades after abandonment, the cover rates of disturbed habitats species were negligible for all three types examined, indicating a change in the quality of the species pool.