

Report

European Champion Tree Forum 5th Meeting held in Gemenci Erdő, Duna and Dráva National Park, Hungary Thursday, 7th to Sunday, 10th May 2015



Every ECTF meeting has its own character and its own flavour. This is especially true for this year's meeting in Gemenc, a large forest in the southernmost part of Hungary, some 150 km from Budapest. The meeting was planned by György ("the dendromaniac") as a special excursion with no or little time for plenary session discussions and presentations. And indeed, we did a lot of walking in the woods looking at giant black poplars, majestic oaks and willows of distinction.

Thursday, May 7th

Most of us met at a ferry at the southern tip of an island in the Danube. While waiting for more arrivals from the airport we did our first little walk, guided by László Zoltán. We saw some remarkable willows and poplars. From nearby puddles we heard frogs and toads, including the bell-like call of the fire-bellied toad.



The official group photo taken in front of the Real Big Poplar

When György arrived with passengers from the last flight, we started our trip down to Gemenc. There is a hunting lodge with nice guest rooms and all necessary facilities. Our most caring host and excellent cook there was Ildikó.

Besides quite a number of Hungarian friends we had, again, a strong Spanish party of three, plus Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland and the UK were represented.

After dinner that evening we saw a presentation by Ervin on the modelling of beech populations under the conditions of climate change.

The rest of the evening was spent chatting about trees and other matters.



One of the big oaks in Small Gemenc



The poplar at the access road

Friday, May 8th

On Friday morning we started for a first walk in a part of the forest called Upper Gemenc. It is in the very vicinity of the Lodge, so we had a rather relaxed stroll. Tomas, a young forester, and Ferenc, tree expert of the area, guided us.

In the afternoon we had a longer walk to the Small Gemenc part of the forest with quite a number of big willows, oaks, elms and – of course – black poplars. We were given an introduction into current forest practices.

In the evening we went to the Heimann Winery in Szekszárd, the next bigger town from Gemenc. It was a most exceptional evening with Zoltán, the owner, himself explaining the secrets of wine production. Those who were probably not convinced by his words were won over by the wines we tasted.

Saturday, May 9th

That day saw us in the southern part of the National Park, called Black Forest. Here we finally saw the biggest poplar of them all, a four-stemmed giant with a girth of 12 m (see list of details in the appendix). Along the way there were many more impressive trees, some poplars around 8 m of girth, willows and oaks.

Some of us observed quite a number of wild boar, deer, a hare and a weasel. From an outlook platform next to a lake we detected some kites, at least one black stork, herons and egrets and plenty of more common birds.

The Danube had taken a lot of water from the snow melt in the Alps and other mountain ranges and was considerably above mean water level. That made it difficult to go to some places since they were cut off by water.



ECTF members standing in awe in front of the Real Big Poplar (or The Patriarch Tree)

In the late afternoon one more big poplar standing next to the access road to the Lodge was visited.



The Real Big Poplar seen from the ground below

Back in the Lodge we had another wonderful dinner. Afterwards we heard some talks, starting with Roel who made some comments on the difficulties he encounters when dealing

with European institutions. Mar will look for ways to find some funding for our travel expenses to ECTF meetings. Sophie pointed out that trees are under threat if their roots damage buildings or infrastructure. Joseph commented that trees along roads are under threat too. On a lighter mood, Marc and Rob presented this year's Belgian Tree of the Year contestant, a 200+ years old sweet chestnut which is the "last living survivor" of the Battle of Waterloo. Luboš presented a short introduction to Brno and the surrounds, where we will meet in August / September 2016. Dates are to follow. Gordon, finally, gave a few impressions of big trees in Cuba.

Late in the evening there was another highlight: Aubrey had found a giant peacock moth with a wingspan of approximately 12 cm which had found its way to one of the lamps near the Lodge.

Sunday, May 10th

Another hearty breakfast and time to say good bye. We all thanked György and his friends for the excellent planning and managing of our meeting. Every minute was sheer pleasure.

On the way north to Budapest, some of us stopped at the wood pasture of Bogyzslo with oaks and wild pears.

Appendix: Measurements

Aubrey very kindly provided the following measurements made during our stay (all at 1.5 m above ground if not otherwise stated).

LOREV

Salix alba	5.57 x 26
Populus nigra	5.57 x 36
Populus nigra	7.29 x 31
Populus nigra	6.69 x – [at 5 m ... 500 m north of above]
Populus nigra	7.44 x –
Populus nigra	7.70 x –

GEMENC FOREST

Ulmus laevis	5.40 x 36 [5.67 at 1.3 m]
Populus nigra	7.27 x –
Salix alba	5.99 x – [at 1.0 m]

GREBEC

Populus nigra	8.09 x – [2nd tree in line]
Populus nigra	7.65 x – [3rd tree in line]
Salix alba	8.53 x – [at 1.3 m; twin stem, one dead]
Populus nigra	11.97 x 36 [at 1.5 m; Patriach Tree]
	12.03 [at 1.3 m]
	12.18 [at 1.0 m]
Populus nigra	9.50 x – [150 m away]
Populus nigra	7.45 x – [at 1.1 m; 50 m west of above]
Populus nigra	8.60 x – [at 1.2 m]

MARICA-FOK

Populus nigra	9.78 x –
Pyrus pyraeaster	2.96 x 7 [hollow]