



STEPPES



Nature of Steppes

The concept of steppes refers to flat areas covered with grass and have very few trees. Such areas have grass- like species with fewer than 10-15 trees per hectare. They are subject to periodic drought. These areas are known by different names in different parts of the world :

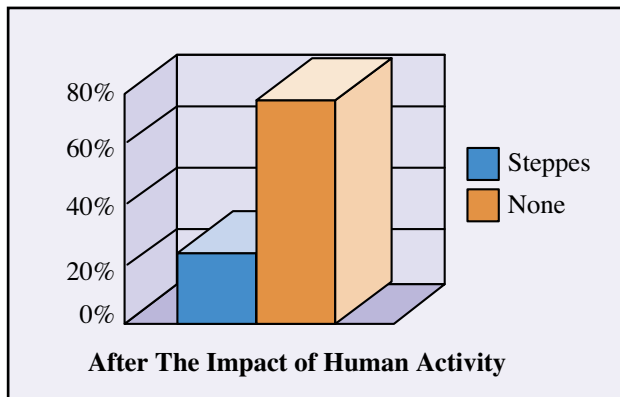
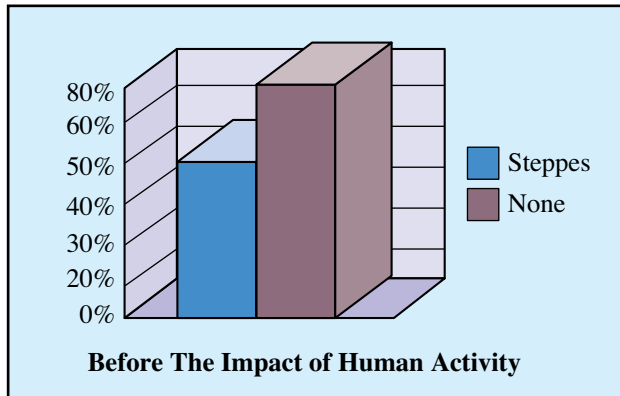
savannahs in Africa, rangelands in Australia, prairies in North America and cerrados or pampas in South America. Generally, they are called grasslands.

Steppes and Biodiversity

Steppes can be natural, semi-natural or cultivated. Natural steppes are unsown and man has not significantly affected the balance between plant species, or between plants and animals. Cultivated steppe is entirely sown by man and intensively managed, such as the short-term rye-grass ley of Western Europe. This type of steppe plays no part in the maintenance of biodiversity. Between these two extremes are a range of semi-natural steppes which, although unsown, are highly modified by the grazing of domestic livestock. They are important parts of the world's steppe in biodiversity.

Threats to Steppes

Steppes covered about 40 percent of the world's surface before the impact of human activity. Today they cover only about 16-24 percent, and their diminishing continues as they are overgrazed by domestic animals and converted to arable uses.



In Australia, 40 percent of the region was grassland before Europeans settled in the state of Victoria. Today, little remains. That is which makes it one of the most threatened ecosystems in the state. At least 31 percent of Victoria's endangered plant species are confined to grassland, and 8 plant species and 26 vertebrate species have already become extinct. Forty percent of threatened or extinct species of vertebrates are also associated with the grasslands.

Habitat loss has occurred because of agricultural development by early settlers. The rich soil of Victoria was ploughed, re-seeded and overstocked with sheep and cattle, with disastrous effects on the native flora and fauna. The loss of grasslands is so great that only 0.3 percent of the original area was incorporated in the major national parks established in the 1970s.

Do You Know?

- That less than 5 percent of birds at the international level and 6 percent of mammals are dependent on steppes.
- That the level of diversity in plant life related to natural and semi-natural steppes reaches that of tropical forests.

Realised by : Prof. Dr. Mohamed SABER SELIM
Prof. Dr. Kamal El-Din Hassan EL-BATANOUNY
Academy for Scientific Research and Technology,
Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt.
Tel and Fax: (202-5) 71 58 85
E-mail: batanouny@frcu.eun.eg



Ain-Shams University



Academy for Sc. Research
& Technology

Coordinateur Régional : Prof. Dr. Abdelhamid BELEMLIH
Société Protectrice des Animaux et de la Nature «SPANA» 41, Résidence Zohra, Harhoura
12 000 Témara - Maroc - Tél : (212-7) 74 72 09 - Fax : (212-7) 74 74 93 - E-mail : spana@mtds.net.ma